

The Commercial Babylon

Revelation 18 Notes

The Fall Of Babylon The Great (vss. 1-8)

- Though Rome had not yet fallen, its fall is spoken of as if it already happened because of the surety of the event (cf. 14:8). The harlot has been identified as Rome, the symbol of lust and seduction in chapter 17. Now God prepares to reveal the total collapse of the harlot, spiritual Babylon, symbolic of that which is full of pride, lust and corruption.
- Instead of being the glorious city that ruled as mistress of nations, clothed in worldly splendor, enticing and seducing kings of the earth, she would become a habitation for devils and a prison for unclean spirits and hateful birds. This stands in contrast to the holy city into which nothing unclean or abominable shall enter (21:27).
- The angel explains the "fornication" more fully. It was an unholy, idolatrous political and economic alliance of kings for business and commercial advantage, through which their pleasures were purchased. Such connections and associations are seen all over the world today.
- The exhortation is to "Come out" from the influence of worldly lust so that there is no partaking of the sins of the world and the flesh (cf. Ephesians 5:11). A complete separation of the Christian from the sins of the world and the corruption in the world by lust is absolutely essential if he is to escape the plagues to be poured out into the earth and upon the harlot city, Babylon.
- As this spiritual Babylon had rendered, so now it would be rendered unto her (cf. Galatians 6:7). She was responsible for woe and destruction in the earth; now that same woe and destruction would fall upon her.
- The judgment is to be compatible with the sin; the scales of justice are balanced. She had glorified herself, but now comes the retribution: torment is meted out to her who is the cause, and mourning comes as the consequence. Boasting harlots of ancient times had been brought low (Isaiah 47:7-8; Ezekiel 28:2), coming to nothing at God's hand; and so would the present Babylon, and all that would come after.
- The guarantee of the end of the harlot rests on the character and power of God (1 Corinthians 1:25).

The Lament Over Babylon (vss. 9-19)

- The kings of the earth helplessly look upon the smoke of Babylon's burning, but they keep themselves at a distance. Like so much of the selfish world, these kings mourn their own loss, not because that Babylon herself has fallen.
- The merchants have cargo and nowhere to sell it. Rome was the center of trade; roads from all countries of the world led to the great emporia of trade at Ostia, the chief seaport of the city, and Puteoli, the seaport for cargos of grain.
- Many of the food items listed were used for the finest banquets of wealthy Romans, and for sacrifices to the gods. No other city and no other nation could compare to the greatness and majesty of Rome and its empire in the first century. No other city or nation could fit this description in the first century than Rome.
- Vs. 14 clearly indicates that this harlot is not a religious symbol but a representation of worldliness and lust. When the harlot lusts for the ripe fruit to fall into her mouth as in time past, she will find that it is gone from her. Never again will she live as she did in the past.
- As with the kings, so with the merchants: they were interested only in the gain derived from their fornication with the harlot. These also stood afar off, helpless to save and fearful of intervening; they could only weep and mourn. As it was with the kings, their grief is selfish; they mourn because of their own loss.
- The kings saw the city as impregnable and indestructible; the merchants saw her as "the great city," clothed in splendor and ruling in luxury -- a constant market for their merchandise. With her fall their market is gone, causing their grief.
- The suddenness of Babylon's collapse is again emphasized. All nautical life, industry and trade are affected by the fall of the great city. Although in 13:1 the sea is a symbol for the mass of humanity in general, in this instance the sea appears to be the lanes of commerce by which the great city was supplied with luxuries gathered from all parts of the world.
- In vs. 19, it is shown that the grief of the mourners was truly selfish; they were thinking of themselves, not of the destruction of Rome. Trade and commerce were not wicked in and of themselves; they are good when they are used for the welfare of humanity. However, when used for selfish luxury and the gratification of fleshly lusts, they become sinful and wicked.

The Voice Of Rejoicing And The Silence Of The Tomb (vss. 20-24)

- This is not an expression of glee over the fall of a great city or people, but a rejoicing over the defeat of evil and the victory of right-

eousness. The ones who rejoice had together fought a bitter battle against the enemy. God has now pronounced their judgment upon the harlot; that is, He has rendered judgment on their behalf. The church has been avenged upon her great enemy and rival, the world, and justice has been fully rendered to that great destroyer of mankind.

- The power is gone from the empire and shall never return (Jeremiah 51:61-64). The destruction of the imperial city of John's day would be as complete as was that of the ancient Babylon in Jeremiah's time. Furthermore, there will not be a resurrected Roman Empire. Many premillennialists suggest that the Roman Empire must rise again and make war with Christians during the Tribulation. However, these verses make it clear that the power of the Roman Empire is destroyed and will not rise again.
- Chapters 17 and 18 set forth the subtlety of Satan's appeal to the flesh, emphasizing the uncertainty of riches and the ruinous end of worldly lust (cf. 1 John 2:15-17).