

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 13: The Fall of Babylon the Great -- Revelation 17:1–18:24

An angel takes John by the arm and leads him out into a wilderness to see something he will never forget. There, glittering against the barren sand, sits a woman draped in purple and scarlet, dripping with gold and jewels and pearls, lifting a golden cup to her lips. She is breathtaking. She is also a prostitute, and the cup in her hand is full of abominations. She rides a scarlet beast bristling with seven heads and ten horns, and she is drunk, swaying, intoxicated, but not with wine. She is drunk on the blood of the saints. On her forehead is written a name that is a mystery: Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations. This is the seductive face of the world that hates the Lamb.

Babylon is not first of all a place on a map. Babylon is a spirit, the spirit of godless human civilization organized against God, glittering with luxury and humming with power, and she knows how to make herself attractive. To John's first readers she wore the unmistakable face of Rome, the great city seated on seven hills, ruling the kings of the earth, growing fat on the trade of the nations while the blood of Christians soaked into her streets. But Rome was only the latest in a long line, and not the last. Babylon is every empire and every culture that says: bow to me, buy from me, live for me, and I will give you comfort, and you must not be so narrow as to insist there is only one Lord.

Then the tone shifts, and a mighty angel comes down from heaven, the earth lit up with his splendor, and he cries with a loud voice the words that change everything: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" She looked invincible. She looked eternal. She is already as good as gone. In a single hour her judgment comes, and the kings who committed adultery with her and the merchants who grew rich off her stand far off, weeping, watching the smoke of her burning rise into the sky. Heaven, meanwhile, erupts in praise. The same fall that breaks the world's heart fills heaven with a roar of hallelujahs, because God has judged the great prostitute and avenged the blood of His servants.

And right in the middle of it all comes a voice from heaven aimed straight at you: "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues." This is the pastoral heart of the whole vision. It is not a call to pack a suitcase and flee a city. It is a call to come out of Babylon while you still live in her, to refuse her idolatry, to keep yourself unstained by her immorality, to stop letting her define what success and safety and happiness must look like. The question this lesson presses on every one of us is simple and searching: when Babylon falls, and she will, will you be found weeping with her merchants, or singing with the saints?

Group Discussion: Babylon is pictured as beautiful and intoxicating, not ugly and obviously evil. Where do you see the world-system around us using luxury, comfort, status, or acceptance to allure Christians into compromise, and why is that kind of seduction harder to resist than open hostility?

Personal Reflection: Is there an area of your own life where you have quietly accepted Babylon's values, what success looks like, what is worth worrying about, what you cannot live without, and what would it mean for you to "come out of her" in that specific place this week?

Read Revelation 17:1–18:24

Study Questions

1. John is shown "the great prostitute who is seated on many waters" (17:1), arrayed in luxury yet drunk "with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (17:6). Looking at the whole portrait, who and what is Babylon meant to represent: the seductive, idolatrous, persecuting world-system, and how does the angel's own interpretation in 17:18 ("the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth") anchor that?
2. Babylon makes herself beautiful, purple and scarlet and gold (17:4), so that her cup of abominations goes down easy. Where has the world's beauty and comfort most successfully dressed up compromise as something attractive in your own life, and how does seeing the abomination inside the golden cup change the way you look at it?
3. The angel explains that "the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated" and also "seven kings" (17:9–10), and the beast "was and is not and is to come" (17:8). Reading this symbolically rather than as a calendar, how does the vision point to Rome (the city on seven hills) while also describing the recurring pattern of beastly imperial powers across history?

4. The text says these powers “will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings” (17:14). When the world-system seems to hold all the power and the church seems small and threatened, how does this verse steady your heart, and where do you need to believe it this week?

5. Strikingly, the ten horns and the beast turn on the prostitute and “make her desolate” (17:16), and verse 17 says God “put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose.” What does it teach us about Babylon’s fall, and about God’s sovereignty, that the world-system is finally devoured by its own and that even this serves God’s will?

6. A second angel cries, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great” (18:2), announcing as already accomplished what has not yet visibly happened. How does living as though Babylon has already fallen, because in God’s verdict she has, free you to loosen your grip on what she offers right now?

7. The command “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues” (18:4) is the pastoral center of the passage. Since the saints are not told to leave the city geographically, what does “coming out of her” actually mean for Christians who must still live, work, and shop inside the world-system?

8. The kings and merchants and sailors stand “far off” and weep over Babylon’s smoke, mourning that “in a single hour” all that wealth “has been laid waste” (18:9–19). When you imagine yourself among those watchers, what would you grieve losing if the world-system collapsed tomorrow, and what does that reveal about where your treasure really is?

9. This is the heaviest question of the lesson. Babylon is the whole godless world-system under God’s certain judgment, first-century Rome and every successor empire and culture after her, and “come out of her” is the timeless call to holy non-conformity. Working from 17:18, 18:2–4, and 18:24 (“in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints”), how do we teach Babylon’s fall as certain and total without falling into date-setting or pinning “Babylon” on one modern nation, city, or political party, and why does the symbolic reading actually make the warning sharper, not softer?

10. Heaven answers Babylon’s fall not with mourning but with a thunderous “Hallelujah” (19:1, the celebration this vision is building toward), because God has avenged the blood of His servants. Looking back across these two chapters, name one specific way the Lord is using the certain fall of Babylon to loosen the world’s hold on you and to form His likeness in you, what is one concrete step of “coming out of her” you will take?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Jeremiah 51:6–9, ancient Babylon’s fall and the call to flee from her; James 4:4, friendship with the world is enmity with God; 1 John 2:15–17, do not love the world,

for it is passing away; 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1, come out from among them and be separate; Hebrews 11:13–16, the faithful confess they are strangers and seek a better country.

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