

**“Fallen Is Babylon”**  
**Revelation 18:1-8**  
**February 21, 2021**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Eschatology is the theological term for the study of last things. It is hard to understand adequately any teaching in the Bible, including our current topic of the mission of the Church, without a grasp of eschatology. Eschatology gives us an understanding of where things are headed and how it will all end. A grasp of this will guard us from a misplaced mission and encourage us in our proper mission. Here at the end of Revelation is a long section on Babylon (17:1-19:10). As we’re going to see, Babylon is a metaphor for the kingdom of this world. We’re going to explore three questions in our study of this passage.

**I. What Is Babylon?**

The book of Revelation is a type of literature that is intended to be interpreted metaphorically. So, for example, when Jesus is described in chapter one as having a sword coming out of his mouth, we are to understand that not to teach that Jesus has a literal sword extending from his mouth, but rather that the words coming out of his mouth are powerful. It is the same with the identification of Babylon. We should not understand this to refer to a literal city, but to a deeper truth. That deeper truth is indicated from the first mention of Babylon in the Bible. Though the name is slightly different, the Tower of Babel is the first appearance of Babylon. The motivation for the building of this tower is expressed in Genesis 11. **“Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves”** (v. 4). They were seeking to build a new society without God. As one commentator has said, “Babylon is a code word for humanity seeking to build the city without God.”

Babylon, then, is “the symbol of man in community opposed to the things of God” (Morris). It is the opposite of the kingdom of God, which is portrayed at the end of Revelation as another city, the new Jerusalem. So the Bible ends by portraying two kingdoms, each which are described in terms of cities. Babylon is the kingdom of this world, while the new Jerusalem is the kingdom of God. Babylon should not be equated with any specific nation, though there are elements of Babylon in every nation. One commentator says it like this: “the Apocalypse’s Babylon is not just one Satanic nation but a corporate, depraved worldwide system spanning the ages from the cross to the final Parousia” (Beale, p. 924).

It is important that we note the features of Babylon, the kingdom of this world. The most common description of Babylon is that of a harlot. The previous

chapter introduced us to a character referred to as “the great prostitute” (17:1). It says of her, **“On her forehead was written a name of mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations’** (17:5). And then we read in our passage that **“all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her”** (18:3). This is not meant to condemn sexual immorality as the ultimate sin. Rather, sexual immorality is a metaphor throughout the Bible for idolatry. Humanity was created to be faithful to one God, but instead we have given our affections to false gods.

This is the dominant feature of the kingdom of this world. It renounces the true God and gives its allegiance instead to false gods. Sexual immorality and adultery are helpful analogies of this. I have walked with people through the sins of adultery and sexual unfaithfulness, and a common theme emerges. The adulterer says, “But I feel so alive when I’m with her (or him).” If you take a dead frog and hook up a wire to give the frog a shock, the frog will move and appear to be alive. The “life” idolatry gives is just like that, being no real life at all. The idol may make one feel alive momentarily, but in the end it is still lifeless and unfruitful. The greedy person may have a moment of feeling alive as the brokerage statement is opened, revealing a growing portfolio. But the feeling doesn’t last, and in the end such a devotion to money only serves to enslave and kill. The one who makes an idol of food may experience brief comfort and satisfaction, but that is quickly followed by a deep sense of shame at the ill effects of such an addiction, both in one’s appearance and in deteriorating health. This is the case with all idolatry.

The previous chapter reveals the great prostitute of Babylon as a dazzling figure. **“The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls”** (17:4). We are then told something about her that should serve as a warning not to be taken in by such glitz. She is **“holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality”** (17:4). We next read these horrifying words. **“And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus”** (17:6). The kingdom of this world and its idolatry look good on the outside but deliver only death in the end.

The kingdom of this world is like the lifeless frog with a bolt of electricity, giving the appearance and promise of life, but delivering only death. Another way this truth is revealed in our text is in Babylon’s inability to produce love. The Bible’s perspective is that love is at the heart of life, but there is no love in Babylon. When Babylon is judged, the response of three groups is outlined: the kings of the earth (v. 9), the merchants of the earth (v. 11), and the shipmasters and seafaring men who have delivered her merchandise (v. 17-18). It is said of all three groups that they mourned the judgment visited upon Babylon, but also that all three stood afar off. None of these groups did a thing to help. Babylon had brought profit to them all but love to none of them. She is unable to bring

relational wholeness. You can get rich in Babylon, but you can't learn to love. You can also see the lack of life and love in Babylon through the repetition of references to luxurious living (v. 3, 7, 9, 12-13). Such luxury came at the expense of others (v. 13). Babylon has no love, and therefore no real life.

## II. What Is Babylon's End?

The chapter opens with a word of judgment upon Babylon. **"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!"** (v. 2). This word of judgment is announced by an angel from heaven who has been given "great authority" (v. 1). Light emanates from this angel, and it is enough light to illuminate the entire earth because it is the reflected light of heaven's glory.

The chapter emphasizes three points about the judgment of this worldly kingdom. First is the suddenness of the judgment. Judgment comes at the very moment Babylon feels most powerful and secure. **"In her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see'"** (v. 7). But then the next word is the word from heaven announcing her judgment. **"For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her"** (v. 8). The literal Old Testament kingdom of Babylon ended in the same way. Daniel 5 recounts the last day in the reign of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. He held a great feast and invited all the elite of Babylon. After everyone became intoxicated, a hand appeared that wrote words on a wall that no one but Daniel could interpret. The hand scared everyone sober, and Daniel gave the interpretation. Belshazzar's reign and his kingdom would come to a sudden end. Then we read that Belshazzar was slain that very night and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom. That means that the army of the Medes and Persians were just outside the city gates on the very night of Belshazzar's feast. They were carelessly partying while the destruction of their kingdom was imminent. Keep in mind this suddenness of judgment, because it will be important in our application of this chapter to the topic of the mission of the Church.

A second truth about the judgment of Babylon is its completeness. It is reported that it will be burned up with fire (v. 8), which completely destroys. And then later we read that **"a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying 'So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more'"** (v. 21).

All who have put their hopes in Babylon will mourn on that day. We read of the three groups—the kings, merchants and shipmasters—that on this day they are filled with grief and mourning. They were completely invested in this kingdom, and now they are left with nothing.

A heavenly voice gives the application of this reality of judgment upon Babylon. **“Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues”** (v. 4). We are to separate from her. What does that mean? It doesn't mean that Christians are to leave the world. As a matter of fact, the Bible commands just the opposite. Just as Jeremiah called the Jewish exiles in Babylon to seek the welfare of that city (Jer. 29:5-7), so we are to do the same. As the old saying goes, we are to remain *in* the world while being careful not to be *of* the world. Christians are like boats in that boats are supposed to be in the water, but not have the water be in them. So to come out doesn't require a complete separation, but it does require a complete renunciation of idolatry.

### **III. What Does This Have to Do with the Mission of the Church?**

When we understand what the Bible says about the two cities of Babylon and the new Jerusalem, about the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God, it helps clarify what our mission is not and what our mission is. Our mission is not to Christianize the kingdom of this world. Christians who love Jesus have different views of eschatology. Mine is what is referred to as amillennialism, which teaches that the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God will both grow during this current age. They will remain in perpetual conflict with one another until Jesus says “Enough” and comes to put an end to the kingdom of this world and permanently establish his kingdom and his reign.

Notice how this amillennial view is supported in our chapter. When Jesus comes to judge Babylon, he finds a kingdom at the height of its power and influence, not one that is barely alive. She says, **“I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see”** (v. 7). And she says that right before the sudden arrival of judgment. And instead of the kingdom of God having overpowered this earthly kingdom of Babylon, Babylon has such power that it makes martyrs of the citizens of the kingdom of God (v. 24).

This means that our mission is not to Christianize the kingdom of this world. Until Jesus returns, we should expect opposition and injustice to remain in the world. That doesn't mean that we don't do what we can to oppose it. As a matter of fact, it is our effort to oppose these things that often leads to the persecution spoken of in this chapter. But we should realize that it is Jesus' job to establish his kingdom in a permanent fashion.

What is our job, then, according to this chapter? It is to build the kingdom of God by doing what Jesus told us to do in the Great Commission. As we saw in our study of that passage, the Great Commission is very church-centered. We make disciples of Jesus by going, by baptizing them into the life of the Church and by teaching them to do what Jesus has commanded. We invite any who will to come into the life of the Church, a community of love and new life, and a community with a bright future. We give our ultimate allegiance to the kingdom

of God, which in this era is the Church. While it is a good thing to love one's nation, loyalty to Jesus' kingdom should always come first.

**CONCLUSION:**

Why would a person want to be a citizen of the kingdom of God when the kingdom of this world has all the power and glamour? It is because of who the King is in this kingdom. The citizens of the kingdom of Babylon are covered in shame, while Jesus covers our shame. Babylon is all about power, while Jesus came to be victimized by power. But he did so out of love, providing for his citizens forgiveness and new life. Happy are those who are citizens of this kingdom. Will you join us in working to build this kingdom?

**Small Group Discussion Questions**  
**Revelation 18**

1. Babylon is described in our passage as a harlot, which is a metaphor in the Bible for idolatry. Idols provide the allure of making us feel alive, when in fact what they do is like sending an electric shock through a dead frog. What idols do you commonly struggle with, being tempted to think that they can make you feel alive?
2. How do these idols actually lead to death?
3. One commentator defines Babylon in this passage by saying, “the Apocalypse’s (another name for the book of Revelation) Babylon is not just one Satanic nation but a corporate, depraved worldwide system spanning the ages from the cross to the final Parousia (the return of Jesus).” In light of this, how should we think about our own nation, pray for our nation and seek the good of our nation?
4. One of the implications of this passage is to clarify that it is not our job to Christianize the kingdom of this world. It will be judged by Jesus instead of Christianized. What effect does this truth have upon your feelings, your thinking and your actions?
5. This passage reinforces the mission of the church as given in the Great Commission. We are to build the Church as the outpost of the coming kingdom. What part of that calling moves you the most and is the place where God calls you to focus your efforts? For example, I was talking with someone this week who is involved in the music of our church, and he said that God has reinforced in him his calling to labor in this area of worship music. For your pastor, preaching occupies that space in my heart. How about for you?