

## Chapter 18

## INTRODUCTION:

*“And after these things ...”* So begins chapter 18. In other words, after the things involving the Harlot and the Beast introduced to us in the previous chapter, and we will learn even more about them in this one. We know who they are and what they represent. Now it’s time to see what’s in store for them. Spoiler alert...it is doom and destruction.

## The Fall of Babylon

*“And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious*

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*wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odors, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”*

As our reading begins, another angel (messenger) is carrying news from heaven, directly from God and backed by His authority. This communication concerns the judgment against Babylon. As this angel descends, *“the earth [is] lightened with his glory,”* a visible manifestation of the great power of the Sender and His message. His words are quite direct: *“Babylon is fallen!”* The structure of this sentence seems to suggest that this is a confirmation of something already “in the books.” That is because when God declares that something will

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happen, it's a done deal. The certainty of it is so complete it's as if it has already occurred. But no, this hasn't happened yet... even though we can certainly count on the fact that it will.

*“All nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her...”* The terms *“All nations”* and *“kings of the earth”* are referring to all the unrighteous individuals who live “worldly” lives, placing all the hope in a place that will soon pass away. They are not God's people. Here is the sobering part: these are not just those individuals easily recognized as “bad” or even “evil.” No, some are unfaithful Christians, those members of His Church who once put on Christ, but have since committed spiritual adultery with the harlot. They too will be numbered among the fallen.

*“...And the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”* We will come back to them later on in this lesson, but for now let's just say they are those who deal in things of the earth meant to lure and entice us.

At this point John hears another voice from heaven, *“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”* This angel is pleading with all the unfaithful Christians, urging them to “*come out of her.*” Quit partaking of the unrighteousness of the world! Leave it totally behind! Its promises are hollow and its future tragic. Remember Lot's wife? She physically left Sodom with her family, but her heart never did. She was turned into a pillar of salt because she truly never “*came out of*” that evil place. She yearned for it and all the pleasures it offered. Learn this from her story: In God's eyes, longing for the ungodly pleasures of the world is the same as actively participating in them. The verse continues, *“For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.”* This is the exact description of the city of Babylon given in Jeremiah 51. The wording of the NIV makes the urgency of the warning very clear: *“Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins... for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as high as the heavens.”*

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The retribution: ***“Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her, double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double,”*** is based on the distribution of God’s vengeance upon the physical city of Babylon given in Isaiah and Jeremiah. The idea of doubling it references the legal limit placed by God in Exodus 22:4 - 7. However, this doubling was ***“according to her works.”*** So, to truly understand the degree of God’s revenge, just look back at verse 5 to see the extent of her works! Remember the cup she was holding, filled with ***“that which is an abomination to God.”*** It includes the ***“wine of her fornication”*** mentioned in verse 3, and now she is to be given a double measure of the cup of God’s wrath because she says, ***“I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.”*** What arrogance! Anyone who believes they are exempt from God’s wrath will be shown otherwise. Verse 8 says, ***“Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire...”*** This is what comes of boasting. Isaiah 47:9 records ***“These two things shall come to thee in a moment, in one day: death and mourning.”*** We’re not to think of a literal “one day” here, but to understand that God’s vengeance will be swift and sure. The ***“burning by fire”*** was predicted in the previous chapter, verse 16. She thought she was untouchable, but the angel says, ***“for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.”***

In the next verses you’ll see that this terrible punishment does not go unnoticed. ***“And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her when they shall see the smoke of her burning...”*** They know why this is happening and where it is coming from. It must also have been obvious to them that, as partakers of her sins, they will also be partakers of her punishment. Notice how they try in vain to disassociate themselves with her: ***“... Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.’”*** Remember the admonition back up in verse 4: ***“Come out of her!”*** You’ve heard the term “guilty by association.” Association with sin brings about death. Don’t think you can love the world and belong to God at the same time!

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***“And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more.”*** Who are these merchants? Verses 12-14 mention 6 categories:

***Group 1:*** Those offering “***gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet.***” Items of personal adornment – very expensive materials used to make clothing reserved for kings and royalty. In fact, silk was so scarce that some kings would ban its use by their subjects in order to have it for themselves!

***Group 2:*** Those selling “***thyine wood, ivory, brass, iron, marble and most precious woods.***” These are all materials used for the making of fine furniture and decorations for the houses. According to Smith’s Bible Dictionary, thyine wood, native to Barbary, was prized by the ancient Greeks and Romans because of its beauty and grain.

***Group 3:*** Those selling “***cinnamon, and odors, and ointments, and frankincense.***” These are all objects of sensual gratification – spices and incense used as fragrance for a person or the home.

***Group 4:*** Those selling “***wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat.***” In other words, things used in the preparation of food.

***Group 5:*** The merchants of “***beasts, and sheep, horses, and chariots and slaves.***” All things they relied upon for transportation or to do their work for them.

***Group 6:*** Those dealing in the “***Souls of men.***” This refers to personal butlers, cooks and servants. The idea of “souls” more correctly means “lives” and could reference either gender. These servants were little more than possessions, to be punished or killed on a whim.

So what is the purpose of this list? To show us all sorts of things valued and sought after by those desiring wealth and power. Things promised by the first beast. Things that now, as the end is near, “***no man buyeth.***” What need of material things does one have if the world in which

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he would use them is about to perish? So, the sellers of these items also stand afar off, fearful as well of being associated with this evil woman.

**Verse 19:** *“And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! For in one hour she is made desolate.”* This reminds us of what Ezekiel said of Babylon. It was once a powerful city where wealth and pleasure reigned, but all was lost in a very short time – never to be revived. That great city came to nothing. The same is true of the promises of the Beast and the Harlot. In the end, they will amount to nothing.

**Verse 20:** *“Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.”* The speaker here could be John or the angel, but that doesn’t matter. The meaning is what we want to know: God has carried out His promise! This is the answer to the cry of those under the altar in chapter 6. Those in heaven rejoice along with the persecuted ones still on earth, and verse 21 continues: *“And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, ‘Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.’”* In Jeremiah 51, he said of the physical Babylon and what she stood for, *“thou shall bind a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates and thou shall say, ‘Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise’...”* Powerful imagery indicating that nothing is left, *“and [it] shall not rise.”* The city is empty: the harpers, musicians, pipers, and trumpeters are all gone! No craftsmen shall be found there. Not even the light of a candle shall shine in that city. *“For by your sorcery were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, saints, and all that were slain upon the earth.”*

At first glance it may be difficult to understand why it is said, *“in her was found the blood of prophets and saints.”* This means that some members of the Lord’s church, formerly counted among the righteous, perished with her. We must remember that he who is guilty of just one commandment, is guilty of the whole law! (*Romans 3:19 – Now we know that what things whatsoever the law saith, it saith to all who are under the law. James 2:10 “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”*)

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This warning is for Christians who would make their decisions about how they live and worship based on phrases that start with, “I think...” instead of “The Bible says...” Here’s a verse we can’t read too many times: “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*” (*I Corinthians 10:12.*)