

## 18. Babylon is Fallen

### Revelation 18

YouTube Video link: <https://youtu.be/d8utHJs3x9U>

My lifestyle completely changed when I became a Christian at 23 after several years of searching for truth. From then on, I wanted to please the Lord in everything I did, so I began diligently studying the Scriptures to learn how to walk in step with Christ. It was in those early days that I came across a passage that intrigued me. John the Apostle wrote that believers in Christ should “not love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 John 2:15-17). What was on John’s mind when he wrote those sentences? The passage perplexed me because, in my young, untrained mind, I thought John’s use of the word *world* was talking about the world's beauty; the flowers, trees, mountains, and streams reflect God's creativity and perfection, but John wasn't writing about the earth's natural beauty. He was writing about the world system in which we live and must pass through on our way to the promised land of being with Christ.

To help me in my new walk of faith, the church I attended had an elderly couple disciple me by weekly holding me to account and helping me to lay up God’s Word in my heart. This couple had me read a book called *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which was published in 1678. It was written by John Bunyan, a Baptist preacher who was a non-conformist. He was imprisoned for twelve years in his hometown of Bedford, England, for preaching without a license. At that time, the Anglican church was the only legally allowed church. The idea for *Pilgrim's Progress* was written while he was in prison. The original title of the book was “*The Pilgrim’s Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come, Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream.*” (You can see why it was shortened to “*Pilgrims’s Progress!*”)

In that book, John Bunyan tells the story of the travels of a man called Christian, who is on a journey to the Celestial City. He must pass through a town called Vanity, where he and his companion, named Faithful, are tempted. Demons rule in the town of Vanity. They establish a Fair in an effort to divert heavenly-minded pilgrims who are on their way to the Celestial City. Interestingly, no pilgrim could travel to the Celestial City without first making their way through the town of Vanity. The Vanity Fair was quite ancient, almost 5000 years old. There were all types of merchandise, titles, kingdoms, jewels, and even people. Every kind of sin and crime also happened here. Does this place sound familiar? Every believer will encounter the same temptations and the same evil world system on their way to the Celestial City, the eternal home our Lord has prepared for His people. There is no way of getting around it; even our Lord had to pass through this world and suffer temptation, although He never sinned.

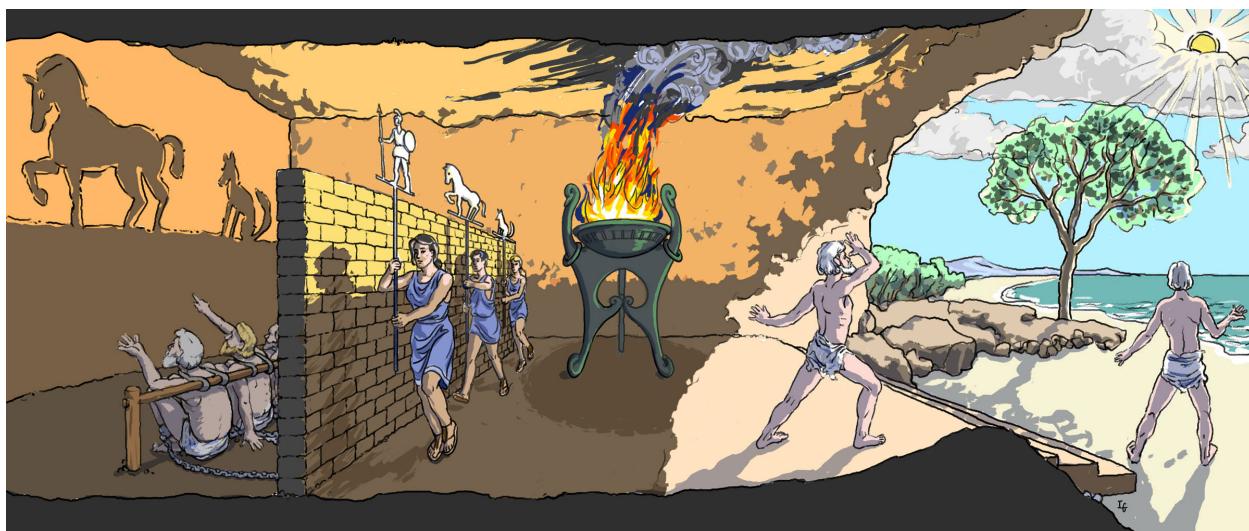
### What is the World System?

Since the fall of mankind mentioned in Genesis, humanity has lived under slavery to sin. Jesus said, “Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin” (John 8:34). Thank God, he whom the Son sets free is free indeed! John the Apostle, who wrote the Book of Revelation, was very aware of this spiritual battle. He wrote in one of his letters, “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John

5:19). As a Christian, you become aware that you are in a battle as you walk through this world. There is a very real spiritual war going on in this world with dark forces that are operating under evil influence. Paul the Apostle wrote about Satan's work in this way: “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). John the Apostle wrote: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8). Christ and His people, the church, are engaged in spiritual warfare to bring about God's freedom to all people.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).

This slavery to sin and servitude to the evil world system has kept humanity captive from a very early age by using our schools and educational facilities to try to keep us from trusting in Christ.



In 520 B.C., the Greek philosopher Plato recorded the story taught to him by Socrates, *The Allegory of the Cave*. The story was about men unable to move and chained in the darkness of a cave all their lives.<sup>1</sup> In that allegory, the manipulators are hidden from view by a wall behind them, displaying images cast on a screen in front of them and showing false images of the world. The chained men only saw the pictures shown on the screen, not knowing that there was a world of great beauty outside of the darkened cave. We have up-to-date movies that offer a similar story about the manipulators keeping humanity in the dark as to the actual warfare now occurring. For instance, there is the man behind the curtain in the movie *The Wizard of Oz* or the movie *The Matrix*, where the leading actor is awakened from a false reality to view the world as it really is by taking a red pill.

Invisible spirits are at work to keep us chained to images we received in our childhood about the world. Many lies and false images are projected into our minds to tempt us to believe that all we see is all there is. Those false images have told us that there is no God and that this life is the only life there is. The enemy of our souls wants us to be blind to our condition, doing everything

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory\\_of\\_the\\_cave](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory_of_the_cave)

possible to keep us from seeking the God who waits in the light outside the cave. Envisioning the perfect totalitarian system, Englishman Aldous Huxley said:

A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of enslaved people who do not have to be coerced because they love their servitude.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus came to set us free from the demonic slavery of Satan and sin. The world system wants to keep us enslaved and to keep the light of the Scriptures from being understood.

At the end of Revelation 17, we learned that Babylon is “the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.” She is a godless empire under the control of the Antichrist. In the last days before the Tribulation and God’s final judgment, Babylon will be the epicenter of the Antichrist’s final world system, which will be in opposition to God and God’s people. Chapters seventeen and eighteen of the Book of Revelation focus our attention on the last world system before the coming of Christ. The Apostle John is given these chapters as an appendix or supplement to provide light to God’s people about the destruction of the world system that has ruled and enslaved humanity. We have not yet seen the ultimate destruction of that spirit, but because of John’s vision, we know that Babylon is destined to fall and never rise again.

### **Babylon Is Fallen**

Revelation chapters fifteen and sixteen focus our attention on the righteous judgment of God, with seven bowls of wrath poured out upon those who worshiped the Beast and his image and took a mark upon their hands or forehead. In our previous study, we looked at the world system in the end times that will be led by a leader called the Antichrist. This worldwide system permeating the world is typified by a ten-headed beast ridden by a prostitute. In the Scriptures, a prostitute is symbolized as a city whose temptations lead people away from God. Five times in Jeremiah 51, Scripture tells us that the city of Babylon would never be rebuilt, leaving us to wonder what city is referred to as Babylon the Great in chapters seventeen and eighteen in the Book of Revelation. I do not believe that the Babylon described in Revelation is ancient Babylon. When it comes to prophecy in the Bible, there is often a near and far fulfillment. That is what we are seeing here. For John, the city of Babylon would have symbolized Rome, whose influence permeated the whole of the Mediterranean world. Yet, Babylon the Great is more than just 1<sup>st</sup>-century Rome. She represents every great center of power whose wealthy and worldly influence restores to life the spirit of ancient Babylon. John’s words extend beyond his immediate setting in history to give us a glimpse of a world system, Babylon, which will provide the social, political, and economic base for the last attempt of the Antichrist to establish his kingdom. The identification of the specific city in the coming Tribulation is less important than the fact that it will be the nerve center of the Antichrist’s final world system.

<sup>1</sup>After this I saw another angel descending from heaven with great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his glory. <sup>2</sup>And he cried out in a mighty voice: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a lair for demons and a haunt for every unclean spirit, every unclean bird, and every detestable Beast. <sup>3</sup>All the nations have drunk the wine of the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/85016-a-really-efficient-totalitarian-state-would-be-one-in-which>

passion of her immorality. The kings of the earth were immoral with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown wealthy from the extravagance of her luxury” (Revelation 18:1-3).

In verse two, we read of Babylon the Great being a lair and a haunt of demons. We refer to a lair as a hideout or a den, whereas a haunt gives us the picture of a hunter waiting for its prey to come close enough for the kill shot. Demonic spirits have made their home in Babylon's modern-day city and influenced those who obey the temptations to sin. Drinking the city's wine speaks of profiting and taking part in evil economic alliances (v. 3).

<sup>4</sup>Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins or contract any of her plagues. <sup>5</sup>For her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. <sup>6</sup>Give back to her as she has done to others; pay her back double for what she has done; mix her a double portion in her own cup. <sup>7</sup>As much as she has glorified herself and lived in luxury, give her the same measure of torment and grief. In her heart she says, ‘I sit as queen; I am not a widow and will never see grief.’ <sup>8</sup>Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and grief and famine—and she will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her” (Revelation 18:4-8).

When the Scripture says, "Come out of her, My people," how do you think we are to respond? How are we to “*come out of her?*” Is this literal, or is this voice from heaven referring to something spiritual, or both?

I can see two different ways we are to disengage from Babylon's influences (v. 4):

1. As the people of God, we are not to take part in any of the temptations to sin and neither give ourselves to traffic in her immorality. We are to be in the world, but not of the world (John 17:14-16).
2. It could mean that we are to come out of this one-world system by not taking the Mark of the Beast and refusing to worship the image set up (Revelation 13:14-18).

### **Lament over Babylon**

<sup>9</sup>Then the kings of the earth who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her will weep and wail at the sight of the smoke rising from the fire that consumes her. <sup>10</sup>In fear of her torment, they will stand at a distance and cry out: “Woe, woe to the great city, the mighty city of Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come.” <sup>11</sup>And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, because there is no one left to buy their cargo—<sup>12</sup>cargo of gold, silver, precious stones, and pearls; of fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet; of all kinds of citronwood and every article of ivory, precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; <sup>13</sup>of cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, and frankincense; of wine, olive oil, fine flour, and wheat; of cattle, sheep, horses, and chariots; of slaves and souls of men. <sup>14</sup>And they will say: “The fruit of your soul’s desire has departed from you; all your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be seen again” (Revelation 18:9-14).

John now writes of a list of commodities bought and sold in the great city (v. 10) of Babylon the Great. Whatever city is named after Babylon, it is a center of world commerce during the end times, with the earth's leaders (kings v. 9) entirely bought into this one-world empire. Merchants from all over the earth will mourn over the loss of revenue, understanding that they will not be able to sell their cargoes after the destruction of Babylon the Great.

In verse 13, John refers to two commodities bought and sold as “slaves and souls of men.” How does this final item of cargo reveal the depth of evil in Babylon?

For centuries, the ordinary person has been kept in a darkened cave in religious and financial bondage by corrupt people who serve demonic spirits. There has been a spiritual longing that has been the struggle for centuries for the tired, poor, huddled masses who are yearning to breathe the free air of liberty. John focuses our attention on the many commodities traded, bringing our attention to the marketing of men's souls. This prophetic Scripture indicates that some people in the end times, perhaps many, will not be free and will be traded as a commodity (v. 13). Slavery still exists today in various forms, such as human trafficking, one of the evils of our day. All of the goods and luxuries and self-indulgent practices have come at a price, and that includes the souls of men.

<sup>15</sup>The merchants who sold these things and grew their wealth from her will stand at a distance, in fear of her torment. They will weep and mourn, <sup>16</sup>saying: “Woe, woe to the great city, clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! <sup>17</sup>For in a single hour such fabulous wealth has been destroyed!” Every shipmaster, passenger, and sailor, and all who make their living from the sea, will stand at a distance <sup>18</sup>and cry out at the sight of the smoke rising from the fire that consumes her. “What city was ever like this great city?” they will exclaim. <sup>19</sup>Then they will throw dust on their heads as they weep and mourn and cry out: “Woe, woe to the great city, where all who had ships on the sea were enriched by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been destroyed.” <sup>20</sup>Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced for you His judgment against her (Revelation 18:9-20).

In a single hour, Babylon the Great is destroyed. How can such a thing happen, some would say? How could something like this happen in such a short time? When John the Apostle wrote the Book of Revelation, only God could destroy a large city, such as Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) or Nineveh (Book of Jonah), but in our present time, science has given the world's leaders great power with weapons of mass destruction. We cannot tell from the passage if God initiates this fire that consumes the city (v. 18) or if this is a result of the use of weapons. Three times, double woes are pronounced against the great city (vs. 10, 16, 19).

Again, we get a description of the fabulous wealth of this end-time city. In the first century A.D., when the New Testament was written, purple and scarlet (v. 16) described rich clothing and riches that only the world's wealthy and powerful could afford.

The merchants that trade in commodities will mourn over the city and stand at a distance (v. 15). Verse 17 indicates that ship owners, sailors, and passengers are on cargo ships watching the destruction from a distance.

Why do the kings and the merchants stand at a distance from her in fear of her torment? (v. 15). Why do you think they mourn?

If a weapon of great destruction is used, some radiation could cause people to stand at a distance. Standing at a distance could describe what we now know as television, surveying things from afar. There will be a sense of awe that arises from the sight of the fire and smoke consuming the city (v. 18). None of the kings or merchants express repentance or are humbled by her destruction. We see that they mourn and lament, all for their own reasons. The lament of the kings is for the “great city.” They still do not see the judgment as the hand of God or recognize the reason for her fall. The merchants lament the loss of goods. Their sorrow is for the loss of wealth that the merchandise brought them. Neither the kings nor the merchants try to help. They have no love for the city, only the wealth and pleasures it brings them. Living for Babylon is all about living for yourself.

### The Doom of Babylon

<sup>21</sup>Then a mighty angel picked up a stone the size of a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying: “With such violence the great city of Babylon will be cast down, never to be seen again. <sup>22</sup>And the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will never ring out in you again. Nor will any craftsmen of any trade be found in you again, nor the sound of a millstone be heard in you again. <sup>23</sup>The light of a lamp will never shine in you again, and the voices of a bride and bridegroom will never call out in you again. For your merchants were the great ones of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.” <sup>24</sup>And there was found in her the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who had been slain on the earth (Revelation 18:21-24).

This is the final judgment for Babylon. She is never to rise again. The mighty angel that appears in John’s vision forcefully plunges a millstone into the sea (v. 21), showing a picture of the finality of God’s judgment. In ancient times, millstones were used to process grains, minerals, and plant and animal fibers. In this passage, we can see an enactment of the warning Jesus gave to those who would harm the innocent, such as children. Jesus mentioned a millstone when He warned those who would harm any little ones, saying, “It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble” (Luke 17:2). The merchants that operate behind the scenes of the Beast system are called the great ones of the earth (v. 23), but God views them differently, for all their crimes will be uncovered: “For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open” (Luke 8:17). God’s people are not to take part with them in their sins.

Babylon the Great is spoken of as a city, but this also represents the entire evil world system set up against God and defying Him. The blood of the prophets and saints and all who had been slain on the earth were found in her. God must destroy this evil system entirely because she has deceived all of the nations (v. 23). As we approach the last days, there will be a more radical distinction between those who love the Lord and those who love the world system referred to in 1 John 2:15-17. The annihilation of Babylon represents the destruction of everything evil and demonic in the present world system.

Why are we told to rejoice over the fall of Babylon? (v. 20).

Have you ever noticed that there is an evil villain or force that must be conquered in all of the greatest fictional stories? The best stories are those that demonstrate good triumphing over evil in the most magnificent way. (Think of Haman being hanged on his own gallows after trying to destroy the Jews in the Book of Esther, or maybe the destruction of the Death Star in *Star Wars* or the destruction of the ring and the dark tower of Mordor in the *Lord of the Rings*.) You can probably think of other such stories. When the world's evil system meets its end, God's people and all who love righteousness and justice will rejoice.

As believers, we do not need to wait for all of the Last Days' events to unfold to begin this rejoicing! We do not need to wonder if justice will finally come, for it will. God has promised it. That does not mean to say that, as the people of God, we have nothing to do. We are to be representatives of the Kingdom of God on this earth. However, we can rejoice now in the knowledge that God is sovereign over the affairs of men. He sees and knows all things. In Him are perfect love and perfect judgment. In Him, righteousness and mercy meet (Psalm 85:10). We can rest assured that God will judge perfectly, and at the right time, He will set everything right. It will be a time when we, as believers, will lift up our heads and welcome His return. The end of the corrupt system in this world that oppresses humanity will be something about which to rejoice! The righteous punishment of the "great harlot" means vengeance for the innocent, the martyrs, and all those who suffered persecution at the hands of this evil world system.

The main takeaway from this chapter is always to be ready to respond to the voice of the Spirit of God as He leads you to "come out of her and be separate" (v. 4). This means that we choose God's way and remain loyal to Him, forsaking sin when we see it trying to ensnare us. This departure from sin starts at our new birth in Christ and continues until our journey home is at an end.

Prayer: Father God, we trust in Your perfect love and Your perfect judgment. We know that You may close some doors for our benefit and open others. Show us Your perfect way. We trust Your guidance, for Your Word is a light to us. We thank You that, no matter how dark the world gets around us, You are our Light and our Salvation. Help us to shine for You in this present world.

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