

# The Fall of Babylon

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[ 0 : 00 ] The reading is from Revelation chapter 18 verse 1 to 19 verse 5. After this, I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority.

And the earth was made bright with his glory. And he called out with a mighty voice, Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great. She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues.

For her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds.

[ 1 : 17 ] Mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed, as she glorified herself and lived in luxury. So give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.

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.

And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her, when they see the smoke of her burning.

They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, Alas, alas, you great city, you mighty city Babylon, for in a single hour your judgment has come.

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

[ 2 : 48 ] The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again. The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud.

Alas, alas, for the great city, that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels and with pearls, for in a single hour, all this wealth has been laid waste.

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors, and all whose traders on the sea, stood far off, and cried out, as they saw the smoke of her burning.

What city was like the great city? And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out, alas, alas, for the great city, where all who had ships at sea, grew rich by her wealth, for in a single hour, she has been laid waste.

Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her. Then 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.

[ 4 : 14 ] And the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more. And a craftsman of any craft, will be found in you no more.

And the sound of the mill, will be heard in you no more. And the light of a lamp, will shine in you no more. And the voice of bridegroom, and bride, will be heard in you no more.

For your merchants, were the great ones of the earth. And all nations, were deceived by your sorcery. And in her, was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth.

After this, I heard what seemed to be the loud voice, of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, Hallelujah, salvation, and glory, and power, belong to our God.

For his judgments are true, and just. For he has judged the great prostitute, who corrupted the earth, with her immorality, and has avenged on her, the blood of his servants.

[ 5 : 17 ] Once more they cried out, Hallelujah, the smoke from her goes up, forever and ever. And the 24 elders, and the four living creatures, fell down, and worshipped God, who was seated on the throne, saying, Amen, Hallelujah.

And from the throne, came a voice saying, Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great. Each year, the Resonance Consultancy Group, lists the world's top 100 cities. And for the sixth year in a row, London comes top, beating New York, Paris, and Tokyo. Great news. Within London, Dulwich is described, by the telegraph, of London's Tuscany, and one of the most desirable places, to live in the UK.

We live, in a place of incredible wealth, great prospects, security, material comfort. And when we hear it put like that, don't we feel slightly warm inside?

Now, you may remember, from Revelation 17 last week, that great city of Babylon, portrayed, if you remember, as a dangerously seductive woman. Verse 4, arrayed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, she was powerful, and confident, through whom, in chapter 18, verse 3, we've read this morning, the merchants of the earth, have grown rich, from the power, of her luxurious living.

[ 6 : 50 ] She's drawn in, even the most impressive, and wise, by her charms. Last week, we read, the kings of the earth, have committed sexual immorality, with her. Indeed, John himself, in 17 verse 6, admits, that he marvels, at her greatly.

Beautiful, confident, attractive, dangerous. Babylon, well, it's symbolic, of course. It's a symbol, for any society, any structure, organized independently, and denying the authority, of God.

It's existed in every age, and in the first century, at the time of writing Revelation, it would have been Rome, that self-important, self-glorifying nation, with the rejection of God, right at its heart. Now, it might be New York, or Tokyo, or Beijing, or here in Dulwich, London. And yet, the call of last week, if you remember, was to watch out, to be awake to her tactics, because these offers of comfort, the promises of wealth, and power, and security, are what Babylon uses, to entice, and to capture, and to keep us, from following Jesus.

I don't know, if you know the story, of Homer's, Odyssey, and if you do, you'll know the sirens, those beautiful creatures, who would seduce, sailors, with their haunting songs, luring them, to their deaths, and the world, and what it offers, seems so great, so attractive.

[ 8 : 25 ] Why would anybody, want to follow Jesus, when those things, are on offer? It's not surprising, says the book of Revelation, that there are so many people, in successful London, or beautiful Dulwich, who choose, not to follow Jesus.

It's not surprising, says Revelation, that Christians, very easily end up, feeling just the same. But the message, of today, is this, whatever Babylon's charms, Jesus is better.

Whatever Babylon's charms, Jesus is better. Firstly then, judgment, on Babylon. Six times, the word great, is applied to Babylon, in chapter eight.

She looks so secure, so permanent, and so would the original city, of Babylon, have looked. But you'll find, no matter how hard, you look in Waterstones, you'll find no rough guide, to the city of Babylon today.

In fact, all we would find, is some ruins, just outside Baghdad, or a series of artifacts, in the British Museum, because it's a city, that has been destroyed.

[ 9 : 30 ] And exactly the same, will be true, of the symbolic, city of Babylon. Have a look down, at chapter 18, verse one. After this, I saw an angel, coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth, was made bright, with his glory.

And he called out, with a mighty voice, fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great. That great city, that looked as if, it would last forever. The city, where God's faithful witnesses, spoke out, and were martyred.

The city, that was so opposed, to God and his people, and to Jesus, will, when he returns, when Jesus returned, will be destroyed. Babylon, everything, that is opposed to God, a self-serving city, that is happy, to steal from the poor, to make herself rich.

A self-serving city, a society, that demands every whim, to be satisfied. An arrogant culture, that laughs at God, and mocks his people. A hypocritical institution, that doesn't care, about justice and fairness, as long as she can have, whatever she wants now.

The city, that has become rich, by the selling, verse 13, of slaves, that is, human souls. That city, that hates God, hates God's people, persecutes, and in verse 24, contains the blood, of prophets, and saints.

[10:48] Well, that city, will be destroyed. Justice, will be done. The justice, that's been yearned for, by the persecuted, the downtrodden, the marginalized, and the forgotten, for millennia.

Verse 5, God has remembered, her iniquities, pay her back, as she herself, has paid back others. Repay her, double for her deeds. Has she glorified herself, the passage continued, and lived in luxury, so give her a light measure, of torment and mourning.

In verse 8, Babylon thought, she would live forever, but death, she'll see. Verse 7, I am no widow, and mourning, I shall never see, she says, but, verse 8, mourning, is exactly what she'll see.

She thought she had great luxury, but, verse 8, she'll see, famine. There'll come a day, when Jesus returns, when the power, and the structures, and the institutions, the organizations, the culture, that opposes Jesus, will be destroyed.

Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great. If there was a risk, that we might read these words, in the abstract, and think that this doesn't apply to me, while the following verses, show very clearly, that nobody is excluded.

[12:05] Look down at verse 9, the kings of the earth, firstly, who committed sexual immorality, and lived in luxury with her, they'll weep, and wail over her, when they see the smoke of her burning.

So, the royalty, the celebrities, the powerful, the strong, the business titans, they'll stand off, and weep, as they see Babylon, that place, that they've been so tied up with, that they've been so bought into, so trusted, so loved, gone.

The place, that was the source of their short-lived authority, crumbled. It's a terrible moment, when they realize, that Babylon's end, spells their own end. Verse 10, in a single hour, your judgment has come.

Then verse 11, the merchants, the merchants of the earth, weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore. All the marketeers, the traders, the sales people, the product managers, the advertising execs, they weep and mourn, as no one buys their products anymore.

All the wealth, the possession, the materials, all that luxury, gone. Amazon, eBay, HSBC, Berkshire Hathaway, Tesco, they all look so powerful, eternal even. But verse 17, for in a single hour, this wealth, has been laid to waste.

[13:22] And then verse 17, the shipmasters, and the seafaring men, and all the sailors, and all whose trade is on the sea, they stood far off, and cried out, as they saw the smoke of her burning, and they threw dust on their heads, and they wept, and they mourned, crying out, alas, alas, for the great city, where all who had ships at sea, grew rich by her wealth.

So, Maersk, BOP, Rio Tinto, shippers and importers, bankers, the city lawyers, the comforts, the security, the wealth, and the power, it all looked like it would last forever.

And yet, here they are, mourning the loss of their wealth, all those things they valued. Verse 19, for in a single hour, she has been laid waste. And then, the final act of judgment is carried out.

Look at verse 21. Then a mighty angel, took up a stone, like a great millstone, and threw it into the sea. So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence.

This is Babylon, the Titanic, considered unsinkable. One moment, the sound of music and partying, then darkness, sunk without trace.

[14:32] Verse 22, and the sound of the harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more. And craftsmen of any craft, will be found in you no more. And the sound of the mill, will be heard in you no more.

The light of a lamp, will shine in you no more. The voice of the bridegroom, and the bride, will be heard in you no more. Culture will go. No more opera, rock, art.

Craft will be gone. No more artists, architects, engineers, graphic designers. Industry will be no more. No more factories, mills, foundries, offices, classrooms.

The 24-hour lights of our cities, will be extinguished. No more weddings. No more celebration. No power structure, institution, organisation, organisation, city, or culture that opposes Jesus, will be excluded, says this passage in Revelation.

Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great. Now, if we live in Babylon, many of us will be right at the very heart of it. We, after all, are shoppers in Babylon.

[ 15 : 35 ] We're clothed by Babylon, we're influenced by Babylon, we work for Babylon, and some of us in this room, might be involved with the governance, of Babylon. Well, what chance, what hope, do we have?

Well, read the call of the second angelic voice, in verse four. Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins. Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins.

Some Christians have taken to doing their best, to leave the world altogether, moving some of them to live in deserts, taking a life in monasteries, setting up their own separated communities, perhaps retreating into a Christian ghetto.

But this isn't a call to escape an earthy city. It's not telling most of us to leave Dulwich or London, as if we'd find greater godliness in Bromley, or Brighton, or Bath.

It's a call to recognise simply where she's heading, to be aware of her tactics, to keep awake, to hold firm to the gospel message, trusting in Jesus, not Babylon, for our satisfaction.

[ 16 : 44 ] And it's a call to flee from her ways, the ways that bring judgement on her, for those sins we see in verse five, that are piled up to heaven. Perversely, therefore, coming out of Babylon, means to actually remain in the world, but to do so as bold witnesses to Jesus, living like strangers and exiles, with the motivation of treasure in heaven, not treasure on earth.

It means, therefore, to repent of that attraction to things of Babylon that take us away from Jesus, to be in the world, not of the world, to be a ship in the water, without water being in the ship.

There's a car bumper sticker, in the US, that says, the one with the most toys wins. And in our culture, materialism and greed is endemic, isn't it?

It seeps into our priorities, and our relationships. And one of the dangers that it is, that it is so hard to spot. It looks so good, so innocent, so normal, so wise even.

We're lulled, drunk-like, into this adultery. And that's what this really is. It is spiritual adultery. So imagine a man and a woman engaged to be married, but while they're engaged, the fiancé sleeps with a prostitute.

[ 18 : 05 ] It'd be horrifying, wouldn't it? Well, as God's people, Christians are engaged to Jesus Christ. We'll see that in chapter 19 next week. And the warning of the passage here is that Babylon, London, wants us to get into bed with her.

Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins. Where is Babylon in Dulwich, or in our home, or in our work?

Consider our conversations. What we talk about, or think about, reflects so much what we care about, doesn't it? We pursue comfort and luxury at any cost. We're ambitious to get onto the housing ladder, to be materially secure and safe, to have a comfortable retirement, to be entertained.

Those nights lying awake about the new car, or that redecoration project we've got in mind, the holiday cottage. Which voice do we follow? Is it the sweet siren song of money?

Bonus salary increase, share options, stocks. Is it the sweet song of security, pension, property, insurance policy, success of our children? Is it the sweet song of entertainment, or toys?

[ 19 : 18 ] Holiday homes, nicer cars, newer carpets, the most powerful gadget. Is it clothes? Is it haircuts? Is it free time? These things, of course, can all be very good, of course.

But these siren songs can so easily draw us further into Babylon. Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins. The attractions of the world may look appealing and secure and permanent, but they're not, they will be destroyed as we've seen, and therefore, they're not as valuable as they appear.

They are ultimately futile. Enron, Lehman Brothers, the Roman Empire, Babylon herself, the most powerful institutions in the world, have come to an end, and the same will be true of all other powers that reject Jesus.

The money we make, the power we achieve, the reputation we gain, the toys we collect, will all be forgotten. You see, the power of Babylon the prostitute is just a facade. Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins.

And this was true of the church in Laodicea, one of the seven churches that the book of Revelation was written to. That church was beginning to succumb to those temptations of Babylon, to trust in her own wealth.

[ 20 : 33 ] And the appeal to Laodicea, and the appeal to us, is to persevere, to overcome, not to be seduced by the prostitute Babylon. Come out of her, the appeal, lest we take part in her sins.

I wonder if you've heard of a Ulysses pact. It's a decision made today that will somehow affect ourselves in the future, and it's named after the agreement that was made by Odysseus with his men as they approached the alluring sirens.

So aware was Odysseus of the temptations of the siren song, that he had his men tie him to the mast of the ship, so that he couldn't jump in after the sirens.

And in fact, he ordered his men to attack him if he broke free from the mast, from the bounds. Now, let me ask, are we doing what is necessary to avoid being led away from Jesus, and from becoming unfaithful to him?

Are there people we need to be careful of? Are there situations we need to avoid? Are there websites we need to stop reading? Sources we know where the voices Babylon is too loud to ignore? Is there a career path that we know that will draw us further into Babylon, lead us further away from Jesus?

[ 21 : 51 ] Are there perhaps decisions we might make for our children that we know will draw us further into Babylon than further away? Are there other habits, aspirations, plans, again, that we know will draw us further into Babylon rather than further away?

Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins. Well, up to this point in the passage, the camera has been firmly on the reactions of those within Babylon, the weeping and the mourning. But from chapter 19, we see an incredibly contrasting reaction. Not weeping and mourning, but praising and rejoicing.

And why? Because Jesus wins. And this is my second point. Have a look down at chapter 19, verse 1. So the angel calls on heaven and all God's people to rejoice that God has judged Babylon. Hallelujah! Praise God, they cry. Praise him for the power and glory that's shown through the destruction of Babylon, that city that opposed God and persecuted his people.

[ 23 : 12 ] It is his kingdom, not Babylon, that will last for eternity. Praise him who kept his word, the true and just judge. Evil and injustice in our world won't escape God's notice and won't continue forever.

Praise him who, through Jesus, promises to save his people, to redeem them from their sin. Rejoice, they cry. Jesus wins. And what great news it is in all the world, for all in the world, who've been downtrodden for the abused, for all victims of injustice.

Rejoice! Jesus wins. So consider the persecuted church in Smyrna. That was another of the seven churches that this book of Revelation was written to. It was a church that was persecuted.

We saw it last summer. Persecuted and marginalized for following Jesus. How long they cried out to God in chapter 6? How long before God will judge and avenge their blood on those who dwell on earth?

Well, now we see the fulfillment of God's promise of judgment for the way Babylon has treated his people. Hallelujah! At last we hear them cry. Rejoice! God has fulfilled his promises and has brought justice.

[ 24 : 27 ] And think about that from the perspective of Christians today, persecuted around the world. Think about Christians in North Korea, worked as slaves, nervously meeting as a church family in a bathroom to pray.

What great news that justice will be done. It's good news for the Sudanese Christians as they're forced out of their homes, desperate for stability and safety. It's the good news for Sri Lankan Christians mourning the deaths of their family members, fearful of future attack.

And it's good news for the 240 million Christians around the world who face persecution for their faith today. Persecution will come to an end. Justice will be done.

Jesus' victory brings evil to an end. Verse 20. Rejoice over her, O heaven. For you saints and apostles and prophets. For God has given judgment for you against her.

Rejoice. Jesus wins. If you're a Christian here this morning, I wonder what your reaction is to this praising. How does the prospect of the destruction of structures that oppose Jesus make us react? [ 25 : 36 ] Do we actually rejoice as the angels appear to us here? Or is there a part of us that actually find that very difficult to hear? Do we look forward to and pray for the day when these things will end?

Well, speaking personally, while it's easy in a sense, I think, to praise God for the coming of his reign, for the wedding of the lamb that we'll see next week, for the arrival of the new and glorious city that we'll see in chapter 21 in a few weeks' time, I find it a real challenge to praise God for the destruction of Babylon.

Why? Why do I find this so difficult? Well, I'm sure the reason is that I'm too wedded to Babylon, more intimate with her than I should be. I read the words of verse 14, the fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and there's a part of me that weeps along with the mourners of the passage.

There is much materially that I long to live for, I long for and live for even, I get that warm, smug feeling, like perhaps many of us did here, when reminded of all we have in Dulwich, and for it to be destroyed is not easy to chew.

Is that the case for you, perhaps? Maybe you're not yet a follower of Jesus. Perhaps you've not yet fully seen through the deceitful charms of the world around us.

[ 27 : 00 ] Perhaps we're choosing to listen too carefully to Babylon's voice, rather than the voice of Jesus. Well, if that's the case, let's pray that we increasingly see the world from heaven's perspective.

Let's pray that our minds become less clouded by sin, and ask that we all be people who do what we can to come out of Babylon, and who praise God as we consider God's judgment, through the risen Jesus, over evil.

Let's pray that we be people whose souls long, not for the fruit of Babylon, but for our Lord Jesus. Because whatever Babylon's charms, Jesus is better.

Chapter 18, verse 2, Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great. Chapter 19, verse 1, Hallelujah. Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for placing many of us here in Dulwich or nearby, and for the warning this morning of the attractions of wherever we are that can so easily draw us away from you.

[ 28 : 10 ] Help us be people who can see through the temporary charms of what the world offers, and to do what is necessary to keep us from being drawn away from you. But we praise you more than anything, Heavenly Father, that salvation and glory and power belong to you.

Amen.