



Fallen, Fallen

(Rev 18:1-3 NIV) After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. (2) With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. (3) For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

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The 18th chapter is a grand bit of poetry; it is of the form known from the Old Testament as a "Doom Song." Several commentators have stumbled in this fact; as we shall see.

A parallel passage is found in Isaiah 13:19-22, as an example of Doom Song. There are some key points:

- The angel is one of obvious power and might, as indicated by the presence of light (symbol of God).
- The tense of his proclamation is prophetic aorist: future, but certain!
- Interestingly, we find the demons (said to be the powers behind the idols worshiped in John's time) returning to the haunt from which they have been expelled. The Gospel has thrown them out. The word "haunt" in the NIV, however, might better be translated "prison" (as in NASV). The domain of the demons on earth is now their prison.
- Fallen, fallen -- the repetition is like Pharaoh's dream interpreted by Joseph, that God has certainly determined. In that sense, the entire chapter is a repetition of the 17th chapter, as if to say that God has certainly determined it.

Some commentators (McGee and Smith) see this as two Babylons: one spiritual (clearly Rome) and one commercial (this chapter, and location not specified). This is a minority opinion; most others see this as Rome, and most specifically the Roman Catholic Church.

Stage direction: exit!

(Rev 18 4-5 NIV) Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; (5) for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes."

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There is a fundamental tension between the “Remnant” -- those who have been faithful to God, not those who merely go to church -- and the world system. The remnant hears the voice out of heaven (Jesus?) and comes out.

It has been so since Abraham; Lot was called out of Sodom. At the rebellion of Korah against Moses (Numbers 16:26-28) Moses told the people to step back (or get fried). Jesus commands the same at the abomination of Daniel (Matthew 24:15-16).

The principle is found here:

(2 Cor 6:17 NIV) "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

Holiness. The idea is that of separation. The separation is not necessarily physical (though in this instance it may well be a good idea!) but it certainly is mental:

(Rom 12:2 NIV) Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

{Side note: this passage is fertile ground for grand conspiracy theorists; see Chuck Smith on the subject}

Vengeance is Mine

Rev 18:6-8 NIV Give back to her as she has given, pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. (7) Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, "I sit as queen, I am not a widow, and I will never mourn." (8) Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning, and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

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Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. It is well that remember that vengeance is truly his, for He alone is capable of righteous judgment.

In this passage we can see some of the principles of this judgment:

- It is from "her own cup." Her grief is "as" her glory and luxury. This is nothing more than the principle laid down by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount:

(Mat 7:2 NIV) For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

The prophet Obadiah explicitly ties this to the Day of the Lord:

(Oba 1:15 NIV) "The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.

The principle of "double" in judgment sounds harsh to us. It is an old principle:

- The thief caught in possession of his neighbor's goods was to return double (Exodus 22:4, 7, 9)
- Jerusalem -- the type of the church -- received double for her sins (Isaiah 40:2)
- The first born heir was to receive a double portion of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17)
- The payment for the wickedness of idolatry is said to be a double payment (Jeremiah 16:18)

Take them all together, and apply them to the Roman Catholic Church. She claims to be the original ("first born") church; her idolatry is well known; she is in possession of what rightly belongs to God (worship) and as "church" the type of Jerusalem applies. God is just.

The last principle is even more important. As you boast, so shall you fall. Can she really fall in one day? In one hour? What about the original Babylon's fall -- see Daniel 5:30-31. (Mene, Mene -- now you see why the scales!).

And who did Christ condemn on this earth? The proud, the hypocrite. This is the prostitute shown here.

(Lindsey sees this fulfilled in the economic fall of the Common Market; Smith sees it as a nuclear blast on whatever city this might represent.)

Dirge of the kings

Rev 18:9-10 NIV) "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. [10] Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!"

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I have separated this text (rather unusual) to show that this is not just “economic” Babylon -- the politicians are here also.

There are four points that say so much about politics:

- Note that they mourn -- but offer no help. Words substitute for action now that Babylon is of no more value.
- Royalty is known for its extravagance (especially in Rome); as the extravagance is, so is the terror of example. (That could have been me!) That, at least, is what I suspect God wants them to learn. This is “one of those examples by which God teaches the law to kings.”
- In chapter 17 the beast (representing the world system) hates Babylon; in chapter 18 the kings mourn her. Having set her up, she now becomes an object of pity. It is one thing to experience misfortune; it is entirely another to be subjected to pity for it. Especially if your chief virtue is pride.
- The entire passage is an example of one attitude: “What have you done for me lately?” Gee, I’m really sorry about what happened; next customer, please.

Dirge of the merchants

(Rev. 18:11-18 NIV) "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over the absence of the goods that were sold to them: (12) cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth, every sort of ivory, ebon wood, balm and myrror, of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; (13) cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrror and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and camels, and bodies and souls of men. (14) "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' (15) The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her downfall. They will weep and mourn (16) and cry out, 'Babylon, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearl!'"

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We begin with the note on the form. Note that there are three repetitions (this is the second) of “woe, woe” -- six in all, the number of man. The poetry is perfect, for it is God’s own.

Look at this list! what a pile of luxuries, and it is this that the merchant laments. Think of the profit margins! Think of the carriage trade! Think of the fools who would rush to buy anything they thought fashionable and rare. Anything that makes me better than the crowd.

The worst of this traffic: the bodies and souls of men. Can this be even today? Surely we have outlawed slavery? Or have we, wage slaves? Have you never seen those so dedicated to their work that they could be said to be slaves to it? Do we trade in them? Why do you think we have employment firms whose nickname is “headhunter?”

The key is selfishness. The merchants care nothing for Babylon -- but everything for the lost customer.

There is a poignant phrase here. It is not so much in the having of luxuries that sin consists -- but in the *longing*. Our Lord put it this way: (Mat 16:26-27 NIV) What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? {27} For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

How do we achieve this? Contentment, says Paul, comes from God’s own strength:

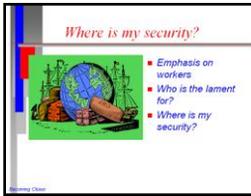
(Phil 4:12-13 NIV) I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. {13} I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Tony Campolo, the “bad boy” of evangelists once proclaimed that no real Christian could ever own a BMW. I wonder how many of us have ever examined our longings as well as our wallets.

Dirge of the workers

(Rev. 18:17-19 NIV) In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin! "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. (18) When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' (19) They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!'

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I separate out this passage to place the emphasis not on the kings or rich but on the worker. We have a tendency to see the poor as righteous. Logic compels one to point out that being the victim of oppression does not necessarily make one righteous; in fact, but for the strength of the Lord to endure, it often has the opposite effect. Rebellions have been made of such.

Rome is not a seaport, by the way (Ostia was the ancient seaport of Rome, and it now is silted up). The emphasis is not on the sea (symbol of all peoples) but rather on the workers.

And who are the workers lamenting for? Not for Rome/Babylon; for themselves. In all three laments we see the same thing: they are astonished at how quickly Babylon is fallen; they lament for their own loss.

Which brings us to the point. Not many of us are rich; but many of us identify with the rich not because we so much long to become rich but rather because we see in the rich (or the company) the continuing source of our security. We are warned; in whom should we trust?

Parenthesis

(Rev 18:20 NIV) Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.¹⁸

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It is interesting to note that as we have seen a threefold division of those who lament over Babylon (kings, merchants and workers) we see a threefold rejoicing (heaven, apostles and prophets, saints). This is a work of art!

More serious, however, to many Christians is the issue of judgment. We have been taught so often that we should not judge that we feel uncomfortable when we see it in this, its most severe form. There are two views of this, however. We have the New Testament view: we see ourselves as criminals before the Lord, asking mercy. The Old Testament often asked for judgment -- but much like we would ask it in a civil case. "Oh, if only I could afford the lawyer and take that guy to court! Then I would see justice!"

God, being perfect, would be perfectly forgiving, we think. But this poses two insoluble problems:

- If God continues to forgive forever (rather than just for a time, waiting for repentance) then we come to the strange possibility that by refusing to repent we can make evil go on forever. As C. S. Lewis put it, we would be granting hell the power to veto heaven.
- We must also remember that the judgment is not upon our enemies so much as on the enemies of God. The principle is this: suppose you read about a crime in which someone, with no apparent motive, is savagely beaten to death. Naturally, you deplore the crime. Logically, you would support the police in their investigation if you could. But how much more strongly do you feel about it if the victim was a little baby?

Why the difference in your feelings? Because an adult is not entirely innocent -- but the sense of outrage grows for the child. The child in our eyes is innocence itself, and therefore there is no possible way in which the baby could have deserved the beating. When we say of an adult, "He didn't deserve that" we are implying (under our breath, of course) "but he did deserve something." Which mitigates our feelings. Our first reaction to a baby killing is, "He couldn't possibly have deserved that!" Innocence, purity, when outraged, provokes our deepest feelings -- and rightly so.

...never shine again...

(Rev 18:21-24 NIV) Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. (22) The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No voices of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. (23) The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. (24) In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."

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The stone here is a another example of a commonplace of the Old Testament: the acted parable. A parallel passage is found in Jeremiah: (Jer 51:63-64 NIV) When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. {64} Then say, 'So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.'" The words of Jeremiah end here.

There will be no more ... in that city:

- No more pleasure (for which some of us live)
- No more work (for which others live)
- No more light (symbolic of thought, for which a few of us live)
- No more marriage, or family (for which others of us live)

The city is clearly not just Rome, or just the Roman Catholic Church. We know this from the last verse. Jesus applied similar words to Jerusalem:

(Mat 23:37 NIV) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

This city represents all those who say they are Christians -- and prostitute themselves in such.