

REVELATION

Chapter 18

The Fall of Babylon

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. 2 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. 3 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.” 4 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; 5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6 Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. 7 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.’ 8 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.” 9 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. 10 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.” 11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, 12 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, 13 cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls. 14 “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!” 15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, 16 “Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! 17 For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.” And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off 18 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, “What city was like the great city?” 19 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. 20 Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!” 21 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; 22 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, 23 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. 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth.”

18:1–24† The fall of Babylon. The vision depicts God’s final judgment against antichrist and the destruction of Satan’s earthly agents. It is a dramatic portrayal of the fall of the enemies of the church. (CSB)

18:1 *after this* – After John had seen the awesome picture of the harlot and the beast (which together comprise Babylon, 17:1–14), and then the beginning of her downfall (when the beast turned on her as part of God’s sovereign judgment, 17:15–18), he then sees her total destruction (described in chapter 18). The first two words of chapter 18, μετὰ ταῦτα (“after these things”), are a common formula throughout Revelation for connecting two sections. It is used not only to introduce the next section (or the next item within a section), but also to move the subject at hand to its final conclusion or goal. *In this case it serves as a pointer to John that tells him to expect a conclusion to what he had just seen, that is, the final judgment of the harlot.* (CC)

another angel – Likely different from the angels that poured out the seven bowls of God’s wrath (chs 16–17). (TLSB)

In this concluding scene of the harlot’s final judgment, John first sees “another angel coming down out of heaven” (18:1). This is not the angel who has been attending John through this entire last portion of Revelation (the End, 17:1–22:5); that attending angel (17:1, 7, 15; 19:9–10; 21:9, 15; 22:1, 8–9) is one of the seven censer-angels (17:1; 21:9; the seven censer-angels were introduced in 15:7). Rather, this other angel acts out a role in the visionary scene itself, announcing the judgment of Babylon. He has “great authority,” and his presence lights up the entire earth “by his glory” (18:1). (CC)

earth was made bright. Cf. Ex 34:29–35; Ps 104:2; Eze 43:1–5; 1Ti 6:16. (CSB)

Only one other angel in Revelation has such a commanding presence: the “mighty angel” of Revelation 10, who dominated the earth and commanded John to proclaim the message to everyone (10:1–2, 11). That angel’s face was “like the sun” (10:1) and he “cried out in a loud voice” (10:3). The angel here in Revelation 18 also “cried out in a mighty voice” (18:2), and while he is not depicted with a face like the sun, the brilliance of his glory does light up the earth (18:1). The angel of Revelation 10 was dressed in the majestic insignia of God the Father’s glory (the cloud and the rainbow-like halo) and the glory of Christ (the sun, 10:1). And he also came directly out of heaven, that is, from the presence of God (10:1). He thus stands in for God (particularly the Father and the Son) as his angel in reminding John of the mission that God has given to his church on earth (10:8–11). The angel here in Revelation 18 also comes directly from the presence of God, and, while not described as one dressed in the insignia of God’s glory, he does bear and reflect that glory. For the glory of the angel which lights up the earth is not his own, but that of God. As Swete says, “So recently has he come from the Presence that in passing he flings a broad belt of light across the dark Earth.” Because he came directly and so recently from the holy presence of God, the angel still bears his brilliant glory as Moses did when he came down from Mt. Sinai (Ex 34:29–35). (CC)

Because of these similarities the angel here in Revelation 18 may well be the same as that angel in Revelation 10. This identification is supported by the roles they play, for each has to do with *the mission of the church* as that mission is related to the very presence and glory of God. The seven angels of the seven churches stand in for the churches as the recipients of the message of Revelation (Revelation 2–3); they are also, for the sake of the church, the dispensers of God’s acts of judgment on the earth against those who oppose the mission of the church (the seven trumpet-angels in 8:6–11:19 and the seven censer-angels in 15:1–16:21). But the two majestic

angels of Revelation 10 and 18, on the other hand, stand in for God and his Christ. They do so as *heralds of God, announcing the mission of the church and the final judgment of the enemies of the church*. While they could be two different angels, the fact that they each appear alone, executing a single action on behalf of God as his majestic angel, seems to suggest that they are one and the same. (CC)

This angel then could be the angel of God's presence, or one like him. In the OT the angel of God's presence waited on God, to be sent out by him on a mission—a mission in which the angel in a particular way would represent God with regard to the well-being of his people on earth. For example, the angel of God's presence (מַלְאָךְ פְּנֵי, “the angel of his [God's] face”) is described in Is 63:9 as the angel whom God, in his love and mercy, sent to save Israel in her sufferings and by means of whom God thus redeemed his Israel from Egypt. This seems to be a reference to Ex 14:19, where “the angel of God” moves in order to stand between the Israelites and the Egyptians to protect God's people and thus deliver them from the threatening Egyptian army. The movement of this angel corresponds to the movement of the pillar of cloud, which is the presence of Yahweh, the Lord himself (Ex 14:24). In Ex 33:14–16 God told Moses that “his face,” his presence, would go before Moses and the people in order to lead and protect them. Isaiah, in 63:9, evidently joins together “the angel of God” in Ex 14:19 and God's “face/presence” in Ex 33:14–16 and thus coins the concept of “the angel of God's presence.” (CC)

“The earth was bathed in light by his [the angel's] glory” (Rev 18:1). In Ezek 43:1–5 it is the glory of God that will light up the earth as his glory returns to the temple in Jerusalem. Similarly here in Revelation 18, as the Lord God prepares the way for the coming of the Son of Man at the End to claim his kingdom, God illuminates the earth with his glory as he announces through the angel the judgment of the harlot. (CC)

18:2 mighty voice – The angel “cried out in a mighty voice” (18:2). This is not just a “loud” (μεγάλη) voice, but a “mighty” (ἰσχυρά) voice. Other angels call out in a “loud” voice (e.g., 5:2; 7:2; 10:3; 14:6–7), but this angel calls out in a “mighty” voice like that of God. The word ἰσχυρός (“mighty”) in biblical literature—with the exception of Revelation—is never used of angels but only of God. (On the earthly plane it is used of people.) (CC)

Fallen is Babylon. Cf. Isa 21:9; Jer 51:8. – In John's era, Rome represented “Babylon,” and the Roman Empire finally crumbled away under pressure from various barbarian hordes in the fifth century (CSB)

Echoes what was previously announced at 14:8 and described in 16:19; 17:16. Although this event still lies in the future, John speaks of it in the past tense. The prophetically inspired word stands that certain. (TLSB)

The angel in 18:2 heralds the fall of Babylon. Similar was the prophetic announcement of the fall of ancient Babylon by the prophet Isaiah (21:6–9). In that prophetic announcement the same words appear as here in Rev 18:2: “She has fallen; Babylon has fallen” (נִפְלְאָה נִפְלְאָה בָבֶלְיָהּ, Is 21:9). Isaiah's prophecy of Babylon's fall (cf. Is 47:1–15; Jer 50:1–51:64) did not come to pass until long after the prophet's death. So now John hears the announcement that Babylon, which is composed of the harlot and the beast, will fall, never to rise again as a threat and terror to God's people. In John's era, Rome represented “Babylon,” and the Roman Empire finally crumbled away under pressure from various barbarian hordes in the fifth century A.D. Therefore, John would not live to see his prophecy fulfilled even in the form of Rome's fall, but it would surely come to pass. As the angel's announcement comforted John and his initial hearers with regard to Rome, so also does it comfort Christians throughout the era from Christ's ascension up to his

return at the end of the present world. Though a “Babylon” will always exist to afflict Christians in this life, they know the certainty of her overthrow. (CC)

haunt for – Babylon’s judgment is so destructive that instead of being a house of wealth and pleasure (Rev 17:4; 18:11–18), she becomes a house of destitution full “of demons and ... of every unclean spirit ... and hated beast” (18:2). Isaiah (13:19–22) prophesied that ancient Babylon, once glorious like “a jewel among the kingdoms,” would be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. She would become a dwelling place for jackals and hyenas (cf. Jer 50:39–40). It can be imagined that the prophecy as foretold by Isaiah and the actual destruction of ancient Babylon in history in 539 B.C. came to John’s mind as an example and type as to how the harlot and the beast would be totally devastated and destroyed under God’s judgment at the End. (CC)

While the description of the harlot’s devastation as “a prison of every unclean and hated beast” can be treated as a metaphor as well as something that would actually happen, how is the statement that she will also be “a dwelling place of demons” (18:2) to be understood? A dwelling place that has become devoid of human life because of famine and other disasters is finally occupied only by scavengers as they feed on the corpses (cf. 19:17–21). So total and final will be the destruction of Babylon that only scavengers such as the “unclean bird” and the “unclean and hated beast” are left. This description can be taken either metaphorically or literally. Perhaps the description of Babylon becoming “a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit” is to be interpreted metaphorically and/or literally as well. So destructive and fearful will be her judgment that all that is left within her, together with the jackals and hyenas and the scavenger birds of prey, are the ghost-like memories of all those who once inhabited this house of wealth and sensual pleasure. Terrifying memories of the fallen, decaying corpses now haunt and eerily moan over the rotting corpse of the harlot herself. However, demons and unclean spirits could here be more than merely the memories that haunt the empty shell of Babylon. They could be the actual demons of hell itself which—under the guidance of the dragon, the chief of demons—have been all along the companions of the harlot as they inspired her to carry out her anti-Christian activities. Now at her demise, having used her for their own devilish purposes, all that is left of the once proud city are the demons hovering over her corpse. (CC)

unclean and detestable – Use of OT holiness language not only emphasizes how much “Babylon’s” abominations have corrupted the people of the empire but also how fitting is her punishment. (TLSB)

18:3 *wine of the passion of her sexual immorality*. Refers to a wide variety of moral failures. (TLSB)

The reason for Babylon’s overthrow and judgment is because “from the wine of the rage of her immorality all the nations have drunk, and the kings of the earth committed sexual immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth became wealthy by the power of her luxurious sensuality” (18:3). This describes how all the pagan nations and political and economic rulers and powers shared in her deceptive piety. Sanctioned by her perverted form of Christianity, they received from her license to indulge in and live by filthy lucre and sensual power and immorality (cf. 1 Tim 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7, 11; 1 Pet 5:2). (CC)

Two groups of people in particular are affected by the spiritual and imperial dominance of Babylon: the political rulers and the mercantile class. They are emphasized because nations flourish or diminish by them and through their influence. And as these two classes were

empowered and made wealthy under the license of the harlot and the beast, so their nations also lived by the sufferance of the harlot as dispensed by their rulers and merchants. (CC)

As John views the judgment and overthrow of Babylon, he hears “another voice from heaven” calling God’s people to come out from Babylon so that they would not “participate in her sins” and suffer “from her plagues” (18:4). This voice is not that of the angel of 18:1–2. As happens often in Revelation, the source of the “voice” is not identified. However, the fact that the possessive pronoun “my” (μου) is used to identify “the people” (ὁ λαός) that are being called suggests that the speaker is God himself, if not an unidentified angel speaking on his behalf. More likely it is God, for nowhere else in Revelation does an angel use the possessive pronoun in the first person. And an angel, when speaking for God or representing him, *never* uses first person language. However, as the voice continues to cry out in 18:5, it certainly seems not to be the voice of God the Father, for God is spoken of as distinct from the voice. Could the voice then be that of God the Son, Jesus Christ? Elsewhere Jesus does use “my” (μου) when identifying one of his saints on earth (2:13; cf. 11:3). In any case, the voice speaks for God. Regardless of the source of the voice, “my” (μου) identifies the people as God’s, for they do not belong to an angel. (CC)

merchants...rich – Further underscores the notion that the “sexual immorality” for which the empire is being judged includes a variety of ethical failures, including wanton greed and exploitation. (TLSB)

Such excessive luxury as is incompatible with Christian stewardship; sinful self-indulgence in the lusts and desires of the flesh, whatever they may be; in short, the whole fertile soil which fosters the growth of wantonness, extravagance, and arrogance. (Poellot p. 231)

18:4 *Come out of her.*† A common prophetic warning (cf. Nu 16:23–27; Isa 52:11; Jer 51:45; 2Co 6:17). (CSB)

Not primarily a geographical, but moral-spiritual imperative. Note how it echoes the exhortation appearing in 2Co 6:14–18. Hus: “Let us ask the Lord that He may vouchsafe to preserve us in His communion and guard us against unlawful communion” (*The Church*, p 274). (TLSB)

The voice urges God’s people to “come out from” the midst of Babylon lest they perish with her in her sins (18:4). Similarly, both Isaiah and Jeremiah called upon God’s people to come out from ancient Babylon so that they would escape her destruction (Is 48:20; Jer 50:8; 51:6, 45). In Num 16:25–27 Moses warns the people to move away from the tents of the wicked men, Dathan and Abiram, lest they be swept away with them in their sins. Jesus, just before his own death on the cross, warned his followers that when they saw “the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not be,” they should flee and not look back or go back to rescue anything (Mk 13:14–16; cf. Mt 24:15–18; Lk 21:20–21). And Paul warns Christians not to be in fellowship with unbelievers in their pagan idolatry and manner of living, and then he cites Is 52:11 in urging his readers “to come out from their midst” (2 Cor 6:14–17; cf. Eph 5:6–11). At all times God’s people are to come out of any association or fellowship which denies the truth of Jesus Christ. The pending judgments of God are near. In view of the present world’s end, when the harlot will be made desolate, God’s people are to flee without delay from the terrifying destruction that is to be her end. (CC)

take part in her sins – When Babylon falls, it will be too late to separate oneself from the outpouring of God’s wrath. Luth: “We must be on our guard against those who are thus given over to a wicked disposition, lest we share in their sin and perish together with them. Therefore in

Revelation (18:4) the church is commanded to come out of Babylon; that is, we are commanded to leave the ungodly” (AE 3:285). (TLSB)

18:5 *heaped high as heaven* – Reinforces the idea expressed elsewhere in this Book that God’s patience has a limit and His plan for the end of all things has already been determined (cf 6:10–11; 15:8; 17:17). (TLSB)

The judgment of the harlot must come “for her sins have been piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her crimes” (18:5). So great were the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah that they reached God in heaven (Gen 18:21–22). Jeremiah cried out that ancient Babylon could not be rescued from destruction because her judgment had reached as high as the sky, as high as the clouds (Jer 51:9). In like manner the sins of the harlot—the apostate church, Babylon, the mother of harlots—were so great and horrifying that God would no longer put up with her. She had to be destroyed and would forever suffer God’s judgment in the pit of hell (see Rev 19:20). (CC)

18:6 *double*. In full, sufficiently. (CSB)

God will repay the wicked in kind for their evil deeds, only twice as severely. Note that this sentence echoes the judgment pronounced in Jer 16:18, but ironically contrasts with the gracious promise spoken in Is 40:2. (TLSB)

Hebrews 10:29-31 “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, ‘it is mine to avenge; I will repay’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of God’s vengeance and wrath (see Heb 10:29–31). So John is told that Babylon will be paid back double according to her works, for she will drink of the cup of her evil deeds twice over (Rev 18:6). The cup of poisonous dregs which she mixed for others will be the potion that she herself will now drink. The word is given, “Give back to her as she gave out,” and “render twice the double things” (18:6). (CC)

in the cup she mixed. See 17:4. (CSB)

To whom is the word addressed? Is it God’s own people in her midst who are to pay her back? Most likely not, for (as Heb 10:30 attests) vengeance belongs not to God’s saints, but to God himself. As Swete says, “The command is addressed of course not to the ‘people of God,’ but to the ministers of Divine justice.” Whoever these “ministers of Divine justice” are, they will be of God’s own choosing. As stated in Rev 17:15–18, among these dispensers of God’s justice will be the beast and all that it represents of human structures—in particular, political powers of human governments and societies—as it turns in hatred on the harlot to destroy her. Also involved among these retributive agencies could be the forces of natural elements such as earthquakes and other upheavals and disorders (see 8:6–13; 16:1–11; cf. 18:8). The divine punishments administered by the trumpet-angels and censer-angels, which are aimed especially at unbelievers and the forces of evil (9:4; 16:10), suggest that angels could participate too. Whoever and whatever the agents are, they will act as those described in Ps 137:8–9, which says, “Daughter of Babylon, destined for destruction, joyful will be the one who pays you back for what you did to [God’s people] when he takes your children and dashes them against the stones.” And Jeremiah (50:29) shouts out to those “archers” surrounding ancient Babylon “to repay her for her evil works,” and they should “do to her as she has done.” However and by whomever she is paid

back, she will drink from the “cup which she mixed” (Rev 18:6), for it is now the cup of God’s wrath from which she will drink as she is paid back in God’s judgment (cf. Ezek 23:32–34). (CC)

18:7 *give her a like measure of torment* – Reiterates the idea expressed in v 6 about the punishment fitting the crime. (TLSB)

I am not a widow.† A proud boast which is a delusion. (CSB)

The harlot’s punishment and misery will be in proportion to her self-aggrandizement, for “as much as she glorified herself and lived in sensual luxury,” she in turn is to receive “torture and grief” (Rev 18:7). She boasted that she was a “queen” (18:7), whom all peoples would love and applaud as they participated in her deadly games of wealth and power and immorality. But all the while she was a wicked witch who spun her devilish wiles over the human race, wiles that were presented in sensual and luxurious beauty to make her spiritual dominion attractive and acceptable. Thus all false spirituality—and in particular *apostate Christianity*—presents itself and acts accordingly. For as a harlot in her youthful beauty promotes an arrogance that knows no bounds and still does so even later when her beauty fades, so the *apostate church* which parades herself in the beauty of Christ boasts that she will never be “a widow,” will never be deserted, and “will never see sorrow” (18:7; cf. Ezek 23:11–21). In response to this arrogant boast, Andreas (sixth century), in his Greek commentary, comments, “For it is the custom for those in prosperity to say, unless divine fear is present, ‘I will never be shaken forever’ ” (ἔθος γὰρ τοῖς ἐν εὐθυμίᾳ λέγειν, εἰ μὴ θεῖος αὐτοῖς πρόσεστι φόβος, οὐ μὴ σαλευθῶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). Imperial Rome boasted that she would be ageless and eternal. Though she thus boasted that she would never be a widow and that no one would ever ravage her, yet, as the Sibylline Oracles (5:167–178) predicted, she would be destroyed by God and brought down to hell. And according to Is 47:7–8 ancient Babylon also boasted that she would last forever as an eternal queen and that she would never be a widow. (CC)

Nazi Germany wanted to rule 1000 years. Today, certain Islam groups look to conquer the whole earth.

Mourning I will never see – Babylon’s refusal to repent will remain unshakable to the end. (TLSB)

18:8 The bowl judgments (chs 15–16) were not simultaneous but a series of calamities. This verse stresses the sudden nature of the impending judgment and the final, total downfall of Babylon. Cf 1Th 5:3. (TLSB)

in a single day – But suddenly, “in one day her plagues will come,” plagues such as “death and mourning and famine” (Rev 18:8). In the case of historic Babylon, Isaiah prophesied that “in one moment, in a single day” she would become a widow (Is 47:9), for disaster would suddenly come upon her (Is 47:11). So too in Revelation, Babylon, the harlot and mother of harlots, in one day will be plagued, and “in fire she will be utterly consumed” (Rev 18:8). As Jeremiah (51:1–64) prophesied that the destruction of ancient Babylon would be accompanied by fire (Jer 51:25, 30, 32, 58), so too apostate Christianity and the false church will be destroyed by fire (cf. Ezek 23:25–31).). This reference to fire is affirmed in Rev 19:11–16: when the Son of Man returns at the End, “the beast” and “the false prophet” will be thrown into “the lake of fire” (19:20 (CC)

The time interval of “one day” (18:8) emphasizes the suddenness and completeness of the harlot’s destruction. The “one day” also could refer to the day of Yahweh, also called “that day” (e.g., Is 27:1–2) and by other designations. This is the day in which Yahweh will hold judgment. This

interpretation is somewhat supported by the fact that “mighty Yahweh, the [only] God” (Rev 18:8) will be her judge. While under God’s sovereign will others may initiate and participate in her judgment as “ministers of Divine justice,” at the very End it will be the Lord God who will execute the judgment. However the “one day” in 18:8 is understood, God himself will be the harlot’s judge and executioner. For Jeremiah (50:34) says that “the Redeemer [of God’s people] is mighty” (קִיָּן; LXX Jer 27:34: ἰσχυρός), and he is able “to defend” them as he judges their enemies; “his name is Yahweh Almighty” (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵינוּ; LXX: κύριος παντοκράτωρ ὄνομα αὐτῶ). The fact that John uses “mighty” (ἰσχυρός) here in Rev 18:8 in reference to “Yahweh” (κύριος), as does LXX Jer 27:34 for the Hebrew קִיָּן, “strong, mighty,” in reference to Yahweh, suggests not only that the “Lord” (κύριος) is to be understood as “Yahweh,” but also that the “one day” is the eschatological day of the mighty Yahweh when he will show himself as the Judge. (CC)

18:9–20 Three groups lament: (1) kings (v. 9), (2) merchants (v. 11) and (3) seamen (v. 17). The passage is modeled after Ezekiel’s lament over Tyre (Eze 27). Fifteen of the 29 commodities in vv. 12–13 are also listed in Eze 27:12–22.

Rev 18:9–19 describes the lament and mourning—the dirge—over the judgment and destruction of Babylon. Particular attention is given to the mourning of the political rulers (18:9–10), that of the merchants (18:11–17a), and that of the seafarers and mariners (18:17b–19). These three groups each wail and mourn over her not only because of her end but also because their own luxurious and sensual livelihood would disappear when she lay in ruins. They had depended on the harlot for their power and wealth and commerce and trade, but in the ashes of Babylon lies also the devastation of their own lives and positions. Her end will be their end. (CC)

This dirge is similar to that which is voiced in Ezek 27:1–36, the lament over the judgment and the destruction of the city of Tyre. The prophet proclaimed that the city of Tyre—the queen of commerce and foreign trade, of luxurious living, of wealth and political influence—would soon lie in ruins. Kings lament as they watch in horror her final destruction (Ezek 27:35; cf. 26:15–18). Mariners abandon their ships and in anguish mourn her passing (Ezek 27:29), and merchants watch and turn away in repugnance from the sight of her shameful end (Ezek 27:36). (CC)

18:9 *kings of the earth...weep and wail over her.* Probably because of their own great financial loss (see v. 11). (CSB)

Those who partnered with Babylon in committing adultery and living in luxury do not have true repentance, but rather are disappointed that their opportunities for exploiting others have been cut short. On the distinction between God-pleasing repentance and “gallows” repentance, cf 2Co 7:10. (TLSB)

Standing at a distance on account of the fear of the harlot’s torment, the kings of the earth weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her fiery burning (Rev 18:9–10). Those political powers that “committed sexual immorality with her and lived luxuriously” with her (18:9) witness her terrifying and awesome destruction, and that evokes fear in their own hearts. These kings are most likely not those (symbolized by the horns and the beast in 17:8–17) who turned on the city to destroy her, but rather are those who lived and ruled under her license and prospered and felt secure under her spiritual patronage. Now, as they stand on the sidelines far enough away so as not to be sucked into her torment and fiery ordeal, they perceive that their security and well-being and future may also go up in the smoke of the harlot’s torture. *If “in one moment” (18:10) the judgment of the harlot has come, in what “moment” will their own downfall come?* (CC)

18:10 *alas, alas* – The *kings* mournfully cry a dirge which is that of a husband over a paramour or mistress. It is a cry of sorrow over the loss of a lover; but it is also a cry of fear, for the husband now realizes that his mistress was struck down because of her sins and their illicit affair. The “woe, woe” (18:10) is a wail that voices a feeling of horror over a hopeless situation from which there is no escape. The kings’ lover would never come back, and their love affair with her and the resulting pleasure were now gone forever. The woes also give expression to a fear that strikes their own chests,⁴⁵ a fear which acknowledges that the judgment that hit their lover would sooner or later come to them (cf. Rev 8:13; Mt 11:21–24). In Ezek 16:23 the prophet announces two woes (וֵיכָן וֵיכָן) against apostate Jerusalem, woes which expressed the fear over the certain judgment which was coming upon her. Ezekiel refers to Jerusalem as a paramour who offered her beauty in shameful promiscuity to her illicit lovers, which adulterous acts were her idolatry (Ezek 16:24–26). Apostate Jerusalem carried on her adulterous idolatry under the guise of her pretended righteousness before Yahweh (Ezek 16:1–19, especially 16:15–19). So also the harlot Babylon in Revelation 18 now hears a lament of woes. To apostate Jerusalem, God promised that he would establish an eternal covenant. God himself would make the atonement for her sins, and those who repented would receive forgiveness (Ezek 16:59–63). That atonement was made by Christ on the cross at his first advent. But Babylon here is being judged at the end of the present world, when Christ returns, and the time for repentance has expired. Therefore there is no such possibility for forgiveness for Babylon, the mother of harlots. (CC)

18:11-13 Reinforces the sentiment first expressed in v 9 that Babylon’s trading partners do not regret the excesses they have committed, but rather are sad that their racket has been broken up. (TLSB)

18:11 *merchants of the earth* – The *merchants* join in this woeful dirge (Rev 18:11–17a). Their lament seems to be even more full of hopeless sorrow, for they weep and shed tears over the harlot, because no one any longer buys their merchandise (18:11). She through whom and by whose license they had become wealthy is now gone. And their own wealth disappears because their merchandise and goods are now worthless. James warned that this would happen: the wealthy will weep, endlessly wailing over the wretched state that is coming upon them, because their wealth will rot and their clothing will become moth-eaten and the poisonous ruin of all their wealth will be a witness against them as their ruin devours their flesh (James 5:1–3; cf. Lk 6:25). Thus the lament of the merchants is like that of the political rulers, a lament that voices sorrow over the demise of the harlot, but in addition the merchants lament their own hopeless economic state of affairs. (CC)

19:12-13 Rev 18:12–13 lists the merchandise that no one any longer buys. Similarly, the dirge over Tyre in Ezekiel 27 contains an inventory of merchandise, a list which illustrated the wealth which Tyre had created for herself as the maritime trade center of the Mediterranean world, but that wealth could not save her from ruin (Ezek 27:3–24, 36). The inventory here in Rev 18:12–13 also illustrates the wealth which the merchandise earned for the merchants. The goods listed are of several categories: monetary items such as “gold and silver and precious stone and pearls” as well as objects of ivory and wood and metal; produce of the earth such as cinnamon, spices, incense, and perfumed ointment and “wine and olive oil” and various grains; and finally the category of living creatures, including cattle, sheep, horses, slaves, and souls of people. As ancient Tyre had in the sixth century B.C., so also Rome at the time of John had a bustling maritime trade in goods and merchandise of all kinds. Both were typical of the great trade centers throughout the world and its history up to and including the present time. And the list of the goods, while not the same for all merchants at all times in human history, nevertheless is typical of all trade goods of whatever sort which sustain mercantile wealth throughout the world. (CC)

18:12 purple. An expensive dye since it must be extracted a drop at a time from the murex shellfish. (CSB)

scented wood. An expensive dark wood from north Africa—used for inlay work in costly furniture. (CSB)

marble. Used to decorate public buildings and the homes of the very rich. (CSB)

18:13 myrrh and frankincense. Brought by the Magi as gifts for the infant Jesus (Mt 2:11). (CSB)

slaves, that is, human souls. Slave trade. (CSB)

Lit, “bodies, even souls of people.” God’s original intent for mankind is horribly perverted whenever people are reduced to commodities. *slaves.* Culmination of the merchandise list. The slave trade so flourished in first-century Rome that there was at least one slave for every three free men (TLSB)

Noteworthy in the list are the last two items in 18:13, “slaves, and the souls of men.” The first item is σώματα, literally “bodies,” a word that occasionally denoted “slaves,” especially when used as an item of trade and merchandise. “It is estimated that there were as many as 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire.” In the city of Rome itself in the first century before Christ, there were an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 slaves, a third of the city’s population So prevalent was slavery that “the social structure and whole economy of the Roman Empire were dependent upon the pool of slave labor, skilled and unskilled.” Slavery was not based on race, for slaves often came from the same ethnic groups (including Greeks and Romans) as their owners. Slaves were taken from areas conquered by Rome and included large numbers of Greeks as well as barbarians (from Europe and regions to the east). Besides military conquest, another major source of slaves was piracy, especially in the Hellenistic era. Pirates often attacked whole towns, particularly in the Greek homeland, kidnapping the people and selling them into slavery. Slave traders regarded their human cargo just like any other merchandise to be sold to the highest bidder. In the Greco-Roman world, slavery itself was accepted, but even so trading in slaves generally was regarded with contempt and disgust because of the deceit, fraud, and appallingly inhumane practices that were routine in that industry. Paul lists slave traders (ἀνδραποδισταί, 1 Tim 1:10) in a list of heinous sinners who oppose God’s Law and are contrary to the sound doctrine of the Gospel (1 Tim 1:8–11). Rev 18:13 portrays slavery as an institution that is part of this corrupt world order sponsored by “Babylon” (18:10), which consists of the beast and the great harlot. The harlot is the antichurch, the opposite of all that the church should be and is by God’s grace. Slavery, and the other activities and institutions fostered by Babylon’s prostitution, will pass away forever when this sinful world ends. (CC)

The last item in 18:13, “the souls of men,” is not so easily understood. In Ezek 27:13 the term “souls of men” (ⲙⲁⲩⲁⲓ ⲛⲁⲣⲱⲧⲏⲥ; LXX: ψυχᾶς ἀνθρώπων) appears in the sense of “slaves.” They are listed as items that the Greeks and others traded to Tyre in exchange for her merchandise. Here in Rev 18:13 “slaves” are already denoted by the word σώματα, “bodies.” There might not be any purpose for adding another word or designation that has a similar meaning. However, if “souls of men” (ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων) is taken in apposition to “bodies” (σώματων), then both together would mean, “slaves, that is, souls of men.” This understanding of the two phrases would emphasize the evil of the slave trade in that it expresses the thought that slaves, body and soul, belonged to the master as property. Human slaves were thus considered no different than any other merchandise commodity of value. (CC)

a distance (18:15), as did the kings (18:10), as they watch her demise in her fiery torment. The first part of 18:17 belongs to the conclusion of the merchants' dirge and is the final thought introduced by the two woes that begin 18:16. The shock of the destruction and ruin of their paramour, the harlot of Babylon, was not only evoked by the totality of her downfall, but also by its suddenness, "for in one moment such wealth was incinerated" (18:17). The dirge of the kings ended on the same terrifying note (18:10). There the suddenness of the harlot's "judgment" was noted. Here in 18:17 the suddenness of the destruction of her wealth is marked out. (CC)

18:17 *shipmasters*. The pilot of the ship rather than the owner. Both are mentioned in Ac 27:11. (CSB)

The *seafarers* also take up and continue the dirge over fallen Babylon (18:17b–19). Mariners and all those who worked the ships helped the ancient city of Tyre to become and remain the wealthy trade center of the Mediterranean world (see Ezek 27:25–28). But when Tyre sinks into ruin, those seamen who escape with their lives stand on the shore, after having abandoned their ships, and lament and mourn over the ruined city (Ezek 27:29–32). As John here in Rev 18:17–19 heard the dirge and wailing of the mariners over the destroyed city of Babylon, he must have been reminded of the mariners' dirge over ancient Tyre, not only as a possible type, but also as a confirmation. Just as ancient Tyre was destroyed in God's judgment, John knew the certainty that Babylon the harlot would also be destroyed in God's wrath and anger. So now there rings in John's ears the woeful dirge and wailing of the mariners over the fallen harlot, their paramour. (CC)

Not only the mariners and pilots who actually work and sail the ships wail and lament, but also "everyone who sails for a place" (πᾶς ὁ ἐπὶ τόπον πλέων) joins the lament (18:17). This description is difficult to interpret. Most likely it is a reference to "passengers," in particular "the merchantman who goes with his goods, or the chance passenger." The designation would thus be understood as "everyone who sails for a place," that is, passengers "taking ship for doing business at seaports." These all stand on the shore "at a distance" (18:17) as they watch the smoking ruins of the great city. (CC)

18:18 *cried out* – Rhetorical question emphasizing the grandeur that once was the capital of the empire. (TLSB)

As they watch "the smoke of her conflagration," they cry out loud, "What is like this great city?" (18:18). In similar fashion the mariners of old lamented over ruined Tyre when they cried out loud, "How could Tyre surrounded [by water] be silenced?" (Ezek 27:34), that is, how could it ever be destroyed? So John hears the wail of the mariners, pilots, and sea passengers as they see Babylon's fiery end. (CC)

18:19 *throw dust on their heads*. An act of sorrow and dismay (see Eze 27:30). (CSB)

And as the seamen wailed their dirge over the fallen harlot, "they threw dust on their heads" (18:19), even as the mariners of ancient Tyre also "threw dust on their heads" (Ezek 27:30) as they cried out their lament. Here in Rev 18:19 the seamen also shout out the double woe in their mournful lament, woes that express the shock and fearful awe that "the great city" (Rev 18:19) should be so devastated. But their woes also express the hopeless fear that because "the great city" is gone, their own wealth, which they earned with their ships by carrying and receiving Babylon's goods, would now disappear also and be lost forever. Their dirge concludes with the cry "in one moment she has been brought to total ruin" (18:19). Thus each of the three segments of this wailful dirge—that of the kings (18:9–10), the merchants (18:11–17a), and the mariners

(18:17b–19)—ends with the unbelieving cry “in one moment,” marking the *suddenness* of her judgment and destruction. In the ending of the lament of the kings, “in one moment” emphasizes the suddenness of the harlot’s judgment (18:10). In the case of the merchants, “in one moment” points out the ruin of such “wealth” that the harlot possessed (18:17a). And in the case of the mariners, “in one moment” stresses the suddenness with which Babylon becomes totally ruined (18:19). (CC)

18:20 *rejoice over her* – Doxological words better suited to God and the angels (vv 1, 4) than to unbelieving shippers. Functions as an ironic answer to the plea spoken by the martyrs at 6:9. (TLSB)

The prophetic announcement of the judgment of Babylon, which consists of the harlot and the beast (17:3, 7), concludes with a call to heaven and to the saints and prophets and apostles to break out in celebration (18:20). When this command and invitation is given, an angel casts a millstone into the sea to dramatize the finality and totality of Babylon’s destruction in the judgment of God. And as the angel throws the millstone he proclaims that Babylon will never again arise and never again will there be any sign of life in her (18:21–24). (CC)

“Rejoice in celebration” (εὐφραίνω, 18:20) not only means “be happy, rejoice,” but “be joyful by having a celebration.” This call prepares for the wedding feast in 19:6–9. In contrast to the mournful dirge of the kings and merchants and mariners (18:9–19), heaven and its people break out in celebration. Throughout their earthly lives, the “saints” (18:20) of God had been bedeviled and harassed by the harlot and the beast, even unto death (see 13:7, 14–15; 15:2), but now they rejoice and celebrate over their fallen enemy. The “apostles and prophets” (18:20), the witnessing foundation of the saints (see Eph 2:20; cf. Rev 21:12–14), were mocked and ridiculed (cf. 11:7–10). Now they are vindicated in their testimony to Christ, which vindication they celebrate as they are lifted up before the heavenly throne of God (cf. 7:11–12; 11:11–12). Perhaps John was reminded of the concluding verse of Moses’ song in Deut 32:1–43: “Rejoice, O heavens, with his people, because he [God] will avenge the blood of his slaves” (Deut 32:43). In Is 44:23, a hymn of joy is evoked in response to Yahweh’s promise to redeem Israel, “Rejoice, O heavens . . .” (יִשְׂרָאֵל; LXX: εὐφράνθητε, οὐρανοί, as in LXX Deut 32:43). As God passes judgment on Babylon here in Rev 18:20, his people shout out in praise and celebration, for their Lord has given to the harlot the judgment she executed on his people. (CC)

and prophets. † Thus including antichristian forces at work also in the time of the OT (cf. v. 24). (CSB)

judgment for you against her – When judgment is unleashed against the oppressor—even a harsh one—it is simultaneously vindication and liberation for the righteous. Similar examples of this appear with the OT prophets. (TLSB)

18:21 *mighty angel* – Apparently a different angel from the one mentioned earlier (TLSB)

In dramatic fashion a certain angel illustrates the total and final destruction of Babylon by this act: he “lifted up a stone like a large millstone and he threw it into the sea” (18:21). This is not just *an* angel, but *one* particular angel, a noted angel. For the angel is designated as “one particular mighty angel” (εἷς ἄγγελος ἰσχυρός). The fact that he is called “mighty” (ἰσχυρός) could be a way of identifying him as the “mighty” (ἰσχυρός) angel of 5:2, the angel who helped to introduce the victorious Lamb in the vision of God’s heavenly glory, or as the “mighty” (ἰσχυρός) angel of 10:1, who commissioned John (and through John the churches) to proclaim the message of God and his Christ to all peoples (10:11). The use of this word “mighty” in designating these

angels (or one single angel) suggests that they are particular, noteworthy angels of God's presence, angels who stand before God, prepared and waiting to be sent on a mission. And when they are sent and present themselves, they appear as angels who command attention. (CC)

In Revelation there are five angels who appear with such a commanding presence, because they are called "mighty" (ἰσχυρός, 5:2; 10:1; 18:21), and/or because of their majestic visible appearance (10:1; 18:1; 19:17). All five play important individual roles (5:2; 10:1; 18:1, 21; 19:17). In addition two of them are pointedly marked out as "one particular angel" (18:21; 19:17). Three of the five stand out especially because of their appearance. The angel of 10:1 has a rainbow-like halo on his head, he is clothed with a cloud, and his face is like the sun. The angel of 18:1 has such a glory that the earth is illuminated by it. And the angel of 19:17 stands "in the sun." These three are dressed in these majestic emblems of God the Father and Christ to indicate that they are special angels who represent God as they carry out their missions. The other two (5:2; 18:21), while not described in such terms of God's majesty, also have special missions as they represent God, and so they are called "mighty." (CC)

The five stand out especially *because of the roles they play*. The "mighty" angel of 5:2 in the very presence of God introduces the victorious Lamb to the heavenly hosts. The "mighty" angel of 10:1, dressed in the cloud and rainbow and whose face is like the sun, commands John, representing the church on earth, to proclaim the message of Christ to all people (10:11). The angel in 18:1, whose glory illuminates the whole earth, announces the judgment of God on the harlot Babylon. The "mighty" angel here in 18:21 dramatizes the fall of Babylon by heaving a large stone, like a millstone, into the sea. And the angel in 19:17 stands in the sun and commands the birds of prey to come to the banquet of God at the End and feed on the fallen enemies of God's people. (CC)

The important roles of these angels involve *the church's mission on earth*: commissioning the church to proclaim the message (10:1–11); announcing the final judgment of the great enemy of the church's mission (18:1–3); illustrating that judgment by throwing the millstone-like stone (18:21); and announcing the banquet of God at the present world's end, when the birds of prey will feed on this enemy (19:17–18). While the angel in 5:2 does not immediately affect the church's mission, he does invite the Lamb to open the scroll with seven seals, and that opening of the seals by Christ does directly involve the church's mission. This similarity in the purpose of these angels—each involving the church's mission—could indicate that these special angels are one and the same angel. Whether that is true or not, they have remarkable roles that they carry out, roles on behalf of God and for the sake of his church, and specifically for the sake of her mission. They are not just any, indefinite angels, but definite and particular angels of God's presence sent on his most important missions. For however one relates these five angels of commanding presence, either as different angels or as one angel who appears five times, they represent (or he represents) God and his Christ in connection with the saints on earth and their mission. (CC)

large millstone.† Similar to the large millstone of Mk 9:42, which was actually a "donkey millstone" (one large enough to require a donkey to turn it). This and the concluding verses of the chapter portray the total destruction of "Babylon." (CSB)

Cf Mk 9:42. Both passages describe the particularly harsh punishment reserved for those who do harm to others. (TLSB)

This angel took "a stone like a large millstone and he threw it into the sea" (18:21). The millstone sinks into oblivion, never again to rise to the surface. So the ancient and ongoing enemy of the

church—she who had tormented God’s saints all through the time period from Christ’s ascension up to his return at the End, the harlot Babylon—now sinks forever into the bottomless pit. She is now gone forever and will “never again be found” (18:21). This is reminiscent of the way in which the army of Egypt, the first enemy of Israel, sank in the depths of the sea like a stone and like lead during the exodus (Ex 15:4–5, 10). The angel’s casting of the large stone into the sea, to symbolize the complete disappearance of the harlot Babylon, is also similar to Jeremiah’s casting of a scroll into the Euphrates River to symbolize that ancient Babylon would sink and never again rise to plague God’s people (Jer 51:63–64). Jeremiah had written on the scroll all the punishments that would come upon Babylon (Jer 51:60). Then by God’s command, after having read aloud from the scroll (Jer 51:61–62), Jeremiah was to tie a stone to the scroll and throw it into the river. By the time John wrote Revelation, historic Babylon had disappeared, as Strabo, the Greek author and geographer (ca. 63 B.C.–ca. A.D. 21), testified when he applied a quotation from a comic poet to Babylon: “The great city is a great desert.” (CC)

18:22-23 There will be no more business as usual after the revelation of the judgment here predicted. The normal pleasures of life will have ceased. (TLSB)

As in a ghost town, not a sound will be heard—not a movement of a worker, not the light of a lamp, not the joyful voices of a married couple. No sign of life will ever again be heard or seen or found in this Babylon, the mother of harlots. There will be only deathly silence and total darkness as the demons of hell hover over her rotting corpse (see Rev 18:2). The list in 18:22–23 of activities and sounds that will pass away indicates the hustle and bustle of a lively city. The prophet Ezekiel had prophesied similarly that when Tyre would be destroyed in God’s judgment and the maritime city had become a heap of rubble, the noise of song and the music of harps would no longer be heard (Ezek 26:13). Only a deathly and chilling silence would remain. Also when God would devastate the entire earth (as described by the prophet Isaiah in 24:1–23), a mark of such total destruction would be the silence of musical instruments like the tambourine and the flute together with the complete absence of the sound of noisy revellers (Is 24:8; cf. Jer 7:34). And Jeremiah, when describing the destruction of Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside by the Babylonians (Jer 25:1–11), said that God would completely drive out the noise of joy, the voices of bride and groom, the sound of the millstone, and the light of lamps (Jer 25:10). The absence of light and the resulting total darkness are the final indications that all life and its activities have ceased, especially as this is witnessed to by the fact that “the voice of a bridegroom and of a bride will never again be heard” (Rev 18:23). (CC)

18:24 *blood of prophets*. See 6:10; 17:6; 19:2; cf. Eze 24:7. (CSB)

The martyrs’ prayer is finally answered, as God avenges their blood. (TLSB)

The latter part of 18:23, together with 18:24, gives in summary fashion the reasons for the judgment and devastation of the harlot Babylon. Her ruin came about because her “merchants were the power brokers of the earth” (18:23). Commercial gain and money were the gods that drove and controlled the human race under the license and sufferance of the harlot. In particular, *apostate Christianity* (the most pernicious form of the harlot) encouraged and sanctioned sensual and luxurious self-indulgence gained by power grabs and the love of wealth. Another sin for which the harlot will be condemned is her pseudo-Christianity in the form of her “sorcery” by which “all the nations were deceived” (18:23). “Sorcery” (φαρμακεία) here is understood in its broadest sense as a reference to the harlot’s false spirituality, wonder-working signs, and apparent miracles (see 13:13–14; cf. Mt 24:24; 2 Thess 2:9) by which she deceived and led astray people to believe that they had security through their trust in her. Sorcery can also include the use of drugs and occult practices. As people trusted Rome as “the eternal city,”⁷⁸ so nations trusted the

harlot Babylon for their spiritual well-being. And the final sin for which the harlot will be damned is her persecution and execution of “prophets” and “saints” of God, as well as “all those who were slain upon the earth” (Rev 18:24). Their blood cried out for vengeance (Rev 6:9–10; cf. Gen 4:10; 2 Macc 8:1–4; Heb 12:24), and now God will exact that vengeance in her judgment (cf. Rev 19:1–2). (CC)

who have been slain on earth – God not only punishes the mistreatment of His saints and prophets, but indeed anyone who has shed innocent blood, since the willful taking of life is one of the sins so grievous that it cries to heaven for vengeance. (Other abominations that cry to heaven for vengeance are sodomy [Gn 18:20], oppression [Ex 3:7–10; 22:21–23], and defrauding wage-earners [Jas 5:4].) (TLSB)

Ch 18 John describes the collapse and judgment of Babylon, the great oppressor of the innocent and exploiter of the weak. As modern, Western Christians hear the charges against Babylon, they note that some strike very close to home, especially greed and an addiction to luxury. The Church must remember where its true treasures are to be found. Whoever has Jesus can look forward to enjoying eternal splendor and joy in heaven. • Lord Jesus, turn our hearts away from Babylon and her foul wares so that we remain holy children of Mother Church, Your eternal Bride. Help us to be responsible stewards of the wealth and gifts that You entrust to us, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.