

**The Facebook Commentary on Revelation**  
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**Revelation Chapter 18**

**Rev 18 (Introduction)**—In Revelation 11:18 John gave a duodirectional outline of the second half of the book. The anger of the nations finds its counterpart in the anger of the dragon (Rev 12:17, cf. chapter 12-14). The wrath of God (Rev 11:18) is God's response (Rev 15:1, cf. chapters 15-18) to the anger of the nations. See Rev 15-18 (The Wrath of God)—for an excursus on the meaning of the phrase. The end result of God's wrath is the fall of Babylon (Revelation 18). That fall is described now for the third time in the book: 1) End-time Babylon falls in chapter sixteen with the drying up of the Euphrates River; 2) end-time Babylon ends with the execution of the prostitute with fire; and, 3) the fall of Babylon is described in this chapter in terms of the sacking of a city that had grown wealthy through economic alliances. This chapter also includes more details about Babylon's burning (Revelation 18). So in some ways this chapter is the climax of an end-time battle that was introduced in 11:18 and is finalized in chapters 16-18.

There are five parts to Revelation 18:

1) 18:1-3: These verses describe the situation of Babylon just before its destruction. Doom is here being pronounced but has not yet been executed. In terms of sequence, this would be around the same time as the vision of Revelation 17 (3-6).

2) 18:4-8: A divine sentence is passed on Babylon describing the results of a heavenly investigation. That sentence prophesies the consequences of Babylon's behavior and includes an appeal to God's faithful ones to exit Babylon before it falls.

3) 18:9-19: Three scenes combine to describe and mourn the execution of Babylon's doom. The execution itself is not described, but is mourned by kings, merchants and seafarers before, during and after it happens. The phrase "in one hour" is repeated three times as the three different groups mourn Babylon's fall.

4) 18:20: Heaven, along with the saints, apostles and prophets are here described celebrating the fall of Babylon.

5) 18:21-24: The doom, fall, and execution of Babylon is here recounted and celebrated by a mighty angel.

Parts (2) and (4) are like interludes (similar to Rev 7 and from 10:1 – 11:14) which mention the people of God in the midst of the all the fall of Babylon material. The execution of Babylon (part 3) comes in the middle of a preceding scene (part 1) and a concluding scene (part 5).

This chapter concerns one and the same entity as chapter 17, Babylon, here in the form of a great city and there in the form of a woman/prostitute. While Babylon in both chapters has some interesting connections with ancient Rome, it is clearly a worldwide end-time entity that transcends the role that Rome played in the world of John's day. While Babylon takes on more of a religious role in chapters 16 (13-14) and 17 (4-6), here she is a worldwide economic engine that is "exploitative, unsustainable, and doomed by its own inner structure" (Tonstad, 254).

Tonstad also notes that Greek of Revelation 18 is unusual in having fewer grammatical peculiarities and greater use of Old Testament allusions than the rest of the book. Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in particular, get greater exposure here than usual. John mingles Old Testament prophecies of the fall of both Babylon (Isaiah 13 and 47; Jeremiah 50 and 51) and Tyre (Ezekiel 26-28) into a seamless account here. The judgments on these historical cities become types of the judgment of end-time Babylon. The details on this will emerge as we go verse by verse through the chapter.

**Rev 18:1-3 (Introduction)**—The opening three verses of chapter 18 are a distinct unit. “Another angel” comes down out of heaven, carrying great authority and exhibiting much glory. In a booming voice the angel delivers a proclamation to an unspecified audience, presumably the entire world. He proclaims the moral fall of Babylon in advance of its actual fall. The grounds for this proclamation are primarily two. 1) Babylon has become possessed by multiple demons and unclean spirits. Although she wears a Christian face, she is now in full service of God’s ultimate enemy, Satan. While most institutions in the world are a mixed bag of good and bad qualities, Babylon has totally sold out to the dark side in the cosmic conflict over the character and government of God. 2) She has become the primary agent in turning the political and economic powers of the world to the service of Satan. So the opening verses of this chapter are like an indictment of Babylon, explaining the reasons that lie behind the doom she will experience later in the chapter.

**Rev 18:1-- After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority. The earth was illuminated with his glory.** The verse as a whole is a likely allusion to Ezekiel 43:1-5, where the glory of Yahweh, the God of Israel, comes to fill the new temple of Ezekiel’s vision. In this verse the glory precedes the introduction of the New Jerusalem, which is shaped like the Most Holy Place of the Israelite temple.

“After these things I saw” (Greek: *meta tauta eidon*) is the typical way that John introduces a new section in Revelation (Rev 4:1, 7:1, 7:9, etc.). Who is this angel coming down out of heaven? Is it another plague angel (Rev 17:1) or another proclamation angel (like the ones in Revelation 14:6-12 and Revelation 10:1-7)? The plague angel of Revelation 17:1 addressed John directly and is explicitly seen again in 21:9. So the angel here is probably a different one than that. It is more like the angel of Revelation 14:6-7, who was addressing the whole world, as seems to be the case here. But the parallel is even stronger to Revelation 10. The use of “another” (Greek: *allon*) angel here echos the mighty angel of Revelation 10:1 (also *allon*), who may be equated with Christ. Also, in Revelation 10 and 18 the audience of the proclamation is not spelled out. So the angel here is a proclamation angel like the angel of Revelation 10 and to some degree the three angels of Revelation 14. The “light” (see below) offers revelation from God in an end-time appeal to whoever will hear, presumably the whole world.

. . . **having great authority.** . . The concept of authority (Greek: *exousia*) is major theme in the book of Revelation. The word includes the idea of power or capability, but it is distinguished from “power” (Greek: *dunamis*, root of the English word “dynamite”) by the

sense of “right to rule”, the legitimacy that undergirds the power of a ruler. The overcomer will receive authority over the nations (Rev 2:26), while the two witnesses have authority to prevent rainfall or turn water into blood (11:6). In both cases it is assumed that the authority was given by God. On the other side, the beast receives authority from the dragon (13:2, 4) and the land beast carries in its actions the authority of the sea beast (13:12). The ten horns gave their authority to the beast (17:12-13). The second death has no authority over the saved (20:6). The assumption of the wicked is that God’s authority makes Him responsible for the plagues (16:9). Whether or not that is true, all true authority derives from God and nothing happens unless He allows it. Nevertheless, the evils powers in Revelation also exercise a certain level of authority, also under His ultimate control (17:17).

. . . **The earth was illuminated with his glory** . . . This kind of description usually occurs in the presence of heavenly beings in the Bible (Matt 17:2; Luke 2:9; Acts 9:3). The word translated “illuminated” is a Greek verb for “light” (*ephōtisthē*). An interesting parallel to this description is in the last two chapters of Revelation. The New Jerusalem is illuminated (Greek: *ephōtisen*) directly by the glory of God (Revelation 21:23 and 22:5). That suggests that the arrival of this angel is a foretaste of how the whole earth will be illuminated by God’s glory in the end. The very first thing God does in creating the world is to create light and thus drive back the primeval darkness. Here the darkness of Babylon (Rev 16:10) is driven away, so that the inhabitants of Babylon who have not yet sold their souls to Satan will be able to see the truth. In the light of the angel (a message of truth) splendor of Babylon which so many admire is exposed as worthless and corrupt. This illuminating message goes out to the whole earth, a last chance to align with God. So the message of this angel in the verses that follow is both the last positive call to those who profess faith in God and also the last message of warning to the rest of the world.

**Rev 18:2-- He cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the Great has fallen! It has fallen! It has become a dwelling place for demons, and a cage for every kind of unclean spirit and every kind of unclean and hateful bird.** In the book of Revelation, at least, this is the final message of mercy to the world and that message is directed toward Babylon, the title of the worldwide religious alliance in opposition to God. The unique aspect of this message is that while Babylon is evil on an organized religious basis, many of those God counts as faithful are still found in Babylon.

The “loud voice” translates “strong voice” (Greek: *ischura phonē*) in the original. While a loud voice is characteristic of heavenly announcements (see Rev 5:2; 7:2; 10:3; 14:7, 9, 15, 18, etc.) the underlying Greek is usually *megalē* (a word of measurement—large or great). So the use of *ischura* (strong, mighty, powerful) here is unusual. It is likely that the change in wording is merely a synonym due to the proximity of *megalē* in the form of Babylon the Great (Greek: *megalē*). That would sound redundant, as in “cried out with a **great** voice, saying, ‘Babylon the **Great**. . . .’”

That the fall of Babylon is still future at the time of this verse is evident from 18:4, where God’s people are warned to leave Babylon before its destruction. So it is clear that the double “fallen” here (a direct allusion to Isaiah 21:9—“fallen, fallen is Babylon; Hebrew: *naphla*

*naphla Babel*; and also to Rev 14:8) is an aorist indicative pointing forward to a future event, much like the Hebrew prophetic perfect. The fulfillment of this prophecy is so certain that it is portrayed as if it had already occurred. The fall of end-time Babylon is as sure as the historical fall of ancient Babylon, which remains complete. In the words of G. K. Beale, “John believes that God will continue to act in the future as he had acted in the past” (*The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC [1999], page 893). The repetition of the “fallen” may anticipate the idea of Babylon’s double repayment for her deeds in verse 6.

**It has become a dwelling place for demons. . . .** The angel has come down to reveal the truth about Babylon. It is a truth that is not obvious from a human perspective. From its outward appearance Babylon is dazzling and beautiful, spiritually, she seems to serve both God and Christ. Even some of God’s people seem to have been dazzled by Babylon (Rev 18:4). But the startling message from heaven is that Babylon has irrevocably fallen from its original mission. Instead of the godly community it purports to be, Babylon is now possessed by demonic spirits operating in the guise of the Spirit of God. This declaration is about Babylon’s spiritual condition follows up on the original proclamation by the second angel of Revelation 14:8. As with the three frogs of Revelation 16:13-14, there is a strong spiritualistic component to Babylon. Babylon is a godly community that has lost its way and become a home for agents of Satan. The description of Babylon’s physical fall is not given here but comes later in the chapter. The first three verses read like an indictment of Babylon’s fitness for judgment.

**It has become a . . . cage for every kind of unclean spirit. . .** The word translated “cage” (Greek: *phulakê*) can mean prison, but it can also mean shelter. Babylon has become a place where demons feel at home. It is not surprising, then, that this announcement of Babylon’s fall has many echos of the Old Testament texts about the fall of Satan (particularly Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28). Speaking of Lucifer, Isaiah declares that he is fallen from heaven (Isa 14:12). Like Lucifer, Babylon has taken over the nations (Isa 14:12, cf. Rev 17:2-3), and sought to take over God’s throne on earth (Isa 14:13; Rev 16:10). While Babylon’s jewels recall the High Priest’s garment (Rev 17:4), they also recall the garb of Satan (Ezek 28:13). With the language of this verse, the reality of Babylon transcends the earthly realm and assumes a major role in the cosmic conflict. In a sense, Babylon is an earthly counterpart of Satan in the cosmic conflict. The same Satan who was cast out from his home in heaven has now found a home on earth in Babylon. You could say Satan has made his home in the church, a long-term goal of his (see also 2 Thess 2:3-4).

**It has become a . . . cage for . . . every kind of unclean and hateful bird.** The mention of birds here seem out of place at first glance. But like so many places in Revelation, the language chosen deliberately echos the language of the earlier Scriptures. Speaking of ancient Babylon, Isaiah describes a time when it will become deserted of human habitation (Isa 13:19-20). At that time, Isaiah wrote (Isa 13:21, ESV), “. . . wild animals will lie down there, and their houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will dwell, and there wild goats will dance.” See also Jeremiah 50:39 and Zephaniah 2:14-15. Regarding Edom Isaiah (34:11, 15, ESV) says: “But the hawk and the porcupine shall possess it, the owl and the raven shall dwell in it. . . . There the owl nests and lays and hatches and gathers her young in her shadow; indeed, there the hawks are gathered, each one with her mate.” With a simple phrase about unclean and hateful

birds, John has applied the birds of ancient Babylon metaphorically to the condition of spiritual Babylon at the end of time. Just as birds roost in a deserted city, demons come to roost in a context where God is no longer welcome. The idea is of utter desolation.

**Rev 18:3—“For every nation has drunk from the wine of the wrath of her fornication. The kings of the earth have committed fornication with her and the merchants of the earth have become rich because of her large capacity for luxury.”** In this verse Babylon is clearly distinguished from the nations of the world. Its ostensible goals are not political or economic. Yet it greatly impacts those other areas in relation to the nations and the merchants of the earth. The tools Babylon uses to persuade the nations are fornication, wine, and wrath. The language of fornication appears twice in this verse, the first time as a noun (Greek: *porneias*) and the second time as a verb (Greek: *eporneusan*). Images like wine and fornication can seem pleasant in an earthly sense, but wrath is certainly not pleasant. The paths Satan invites people to follow are a mixed bag of pleasant and unpleasant. The pleasant comes at the point of invitation, but the darker side of serving Satan becomes more and more evident as time goes by. To put it in simpler terms, the drunk comes first, then the wrath and the wrath is a natural consequence of the drunk.

Verse 3 expresses the cause of the indictment of verse 2. According to Stefanovic (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, second edition, 539), the cause of Babylon’s fall is three-fold. 1) She has made all the nations of the earth drunk. This would be a metaphor for deception in the end-time. She has deceived the nations to align with the false trinity instead of the true God (see also Rev 14:8; 17:2). 2) She has seduced the kings of the earth to acts of fornication with her. This would be a metaphor for the alliance of the end-time religious confederacy with the political power system of the world. 3) She has made the merchants of the earth wealthy. Although a religious system, Babylon offer economic security as well. Babylon is indicted because she has offered the systems of this world religious, political and economic security apart from that offered by the God of creation. In this chapter all see that Babylon’s road to security will ultimately fail, leaving God as the only source of true security.

. . . **from the wine of the wrath of her fornication.** In the Greek, this extended phrase is a series of seven consecutive genitives (*tou oinou tou thumou tês porneias autês*), all connected to the preposition “from” (Greek: *ek*). According to Stefanovic, this extended phrase combines two Old Testament concepts (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, second edition, 457). First is the image of Babylon seducing a man into immorality through the drinking of wine (Jer 25:15; 51:7). Second is the image of drinking the wrath of the Almighty (Job 21:20). In the text here the wrath is coming from Babylon rather than the Almighty. But in the light of Revelation 17:17, the two concepts can be linked together. God’s wrath is expressed in allowing the natural consequences of human choice to come to fruition.

The language of this verse recalls Revelation 17:2. There the word for “drunk” (Greek: *emethusthêsan*) is in the aorist indicative, a point in the past. The same event is described in the perfect indicative (Greek: *pepôkan*) in 18:3. The actions (fornication and drunkenness) that unified Babylon and the nations are further in the past than they were in 17:2. The early part of Revelation 17 portrayed the grand alliance at its peak. Revelation 18 is now focusing on the

imminent collapse of that alliance resulting in the destruction of Babylon, the religious part of that alliance. The grand alliance is about to break up.

. . . **merchants of the earth.** This concept is a new one in Revelation, adding to the categories of 17:2. The reference to merchants here anticipates the role that the merchants of the earth play in Revelation 18:11-15. The emphasis in Revelation 17 was on the religious-political union but now that union is seen to include the economic realm of human action (Revelation 18). This economic side was hinted at earlier hinted in the boycott against buying and selling for those who don't have the mark of the beast (Revelation 13). It turns out that there will be religious, political, and economic motivations for the unity of world powers. While merchants may be associated with Babylon in Isaiah 47:15, the prominence that merchants have in Revelation 18 is based more on Old Testament accounts of Tyre than Babylon. As usual, John often conflates a number of Old Testament contexts in his description of the visions he received. This interpretation of “merchants” take the image in a fairly straightforward manner.

An alternative explanation has been offered by Andries Van Niekerk. He suggests that Revelation 18:23 associates the merchants with Babylon rather than with the nations. Babylon's wealth should not be taken literally the merchants are “the great men” (Rev 18:23) and Revelation makes a distinction between the “great men” and “the rich” (Rev 6:15). So rather than literal merchants, Niekerk sees these merchants as the prophets of false religion for two main reasons: 1) Babylon symbolizes false Christianity and the merchants are part of her. (2) In Revelation, buying, selling, and wealth may be interpreted in a spiritual, symbolic way (Rev 3:18; cf. Rev 14:3-4; 5:9, also Rev 2:9; 3:17). In this approach religion is something to “sell”. Likewise, Babylon's sensuality (Rev 17:2-5) is not literal but expresses the power that religion has over the minds of people. “Kings” (political authorities) desire this power to strengthen their control over people. There is much to commend in this approach and I am considering it.

. . . **her large capacity for luxury.** The word translated “large capacity” (Greek: *dunameôs*) is a bit strange in this context. It is the typical Greek word for “power” (where we get the English word “dynamite”). A literal translation would be “the power of her luxury” (Greek: *dunameôs strênous*), which doesn't make a lot of sense at first glance. So I am suggesting that the emphasis of this phrase is on Babylon's large capacity or demand for luxury. Because she demands so much “stuff” the merchants of the world are greatly enriched by that demand. Babylon's “needs” result in much commerce and furnish employment to many people, particularly merchants and sailors. The word for luxury (Greek: *strênous*) is found in noun form only here in the New Testament, there are verb forms in Revelation 18:7 and 9 and a compound noun in 1 Timothy 5:11. It is also found in the LXX of 2 Kings 19:28. While luxury is a good English equivalent, the Greek word has overtones of pride, wantonness and insolence.

**Rev 18:4-- And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out from her, my people, in order that you might not participate in her sins and in order that you might not receive any of her plagues. . . .** This appears to be a different voice from heaven, different from the strong angel who pronounces the preceding verses (18:1-3). Some commentators suggest that this is the voice of God or even of Christ Himself, not delegating the very last appeal to the human race to anyone else, but in mercy speaking directly to humanity. Whoever the author of the

voice is, that voice continues to assert itself into the narrative through verse 20 of the chapter. Another mighty angel takes over in verse 21.

This appeal echoes the words of Jeremiah, "Flee from the midst of Babylon" (Jer 51:6; 50:8, cf. also 51:45; Isa 48:20; Zech 2:6-7; 2 Cor 6:17). The appeal flows naturally from the preceding verses in Revelation (18:2-3). It is because Babylon has done what it has done and become what it has become that those who want to remain faithful to God must now come out. Since we have seen that end-time Babylon is a worldwide religious entity, this is not a call to move from one geographical location to another. It is a "coming out" of a more spiritual kind. In situations that have political implications and/or are fraught with personal risk, it is easy to sit on the fence and not make or reveal one's commitments to God. This verse signals a time when it is necessary to take a decisive and public stand on the side of truth and of God. It is a separation from Babylon in thought and deed. Who are the "my people" mentioned in this verse? The similar pronouncement concerning Babylon (Rev 14:6-8) was addressed every nation, tribe, language and people. The audience is not mentioned here but is presumably the same. God is not ruling out anyone in Babylon. The call is address to all who respond to it. In the words of Tonstad, the call is "to whom it may concern" (*Revelation*, 259).

This all is the last act of gathering the end-time alliance of the saints. See Rev 17:1-3 (Excursis on the Three End-Time Alliances in the Final Battle). A strong analogy to this call in the Old Testament is the story of Lot. Lot became attached to Sodom although he was a believer in the true God. When the time came for Sodom to be destroyed, it was imperative for Lot to leave the city so as not to be identified with it in its destruction. In Revelation, this moment is associated with the events surrounding the mark of the beast. This a time when all who linger in end-time Babylon will end up identified with the anti-God alliance. Their hearts may not be persuaded by the deceptions of Babylon, but they will go along out of fear that they will lose personal status or economic benefits. They will receive the mark of the beast on their hand rather than the forehead.

At times, we may condemn a person who is connected to an organization that we suspect is contrary to scripture, but apparently a connection with Babylon before the final appeal does not inherently doom a person. They may still be fulfilling God's true intention for their lives. But at a point just before the closing of probation, people still connected with the organizations of Babylon will lose their place in God's kingdom if they don't act to leave her.

One of the big challenges in making sense of Revelation is that the book is not written in chronological order. One moves back and forth in time and views the closing events of history from a variety of perspectives. For example, within eschatological visions there is a constant oscillation between things that happen before and after the close of probation. There is a gathering of the kings of the earth before the close of probation (Revelation 16:14-16) but it follows the drying of the Euphrates which is after the close of probation and undoes the willingness of the kings to support Babylon (Rev 16:12; 17:15-16). The message of the angel of Rev 18:4 is the last gospel message before the close of probation even though Revelation has already shared many events that happen after the close of probation (Revelation 6:12-17; 7:1-4, 11, 14), including the second coming itself (Rev 6:15-17; 14:14-20). But probation's close is certainly imminent at the point in the narrative where this verse occurs.

**. . . that you might not participate in her sins and in order that you might not receive any of her plagues. . . .** The word translated “that” and later “in order that” (Greek: *hina*) is a strong Greek expression of purpose. The purpose of leaving Babylon is to avoid participation in her sins and plagues. The word translated “participate” (Greek: *sungkoinônêsête*) is a compound word combining “fellowship” or “companionship” (from the Greek: *koinôneô*) with “together” (Greek: *sun*). In its verb form it is found in the New Testament only here and in Ephesians 5:11 and Philippians 4:14. There is also a noun equivalent in Revelation 1:9, John is a “fellow companion” (Greek: *sungkoinônos*) with the seven churches in suffering, the kingdom, and patient endurance. In Ephesians 5:11, Paul exhorts, “do not have fellowship together with the unfruitful works of darkness,” a similar usage to the one here. On the other hand, Paul commends the Philippians for fellowshiping together with him in suffering. In this verse the angel is saying, “If you fellowship together with Babylon, you will end up participating in her sins.” The verse continues with a further threat, those who participate in Babylon’s sins will also receive her plagues, presumably the plagues details in Revelation 16 and reflected upon in Revelation 18:9-19.

**Rev 18:5-8 (Introduction)**-- Verses 2 and 3 offer a general statement regarding Babylon’s negative condition. In that context comes an appeal to part ways with her (verse 4). Since verse five begins with the Greek word for “because” (*hoti*), verse 5 is closely connected with the appeal of verse 4. Verse 5 gives two specific reasons why believers should leave Babylon, 1) her sins have piled up to heaven, and 2) God has remembered her crimes. Verses 6 and 7 seem addressed to those who will execute the judgment on Babylon, which in Revelation 17 is the beast in general and the ten horns in particular (the political powers of the world). Verse 8 reminds the reader that the judgment of God lurks behind this seemingly earthly power struggle (see also Rev 17:17). As seen in Revelation 14:7, the great end-time judgment of the world actually beings before the second advent of Jesus. The crimes of Babylon are assessed and the sentence is given. This list of charges, the results of the pre-advent judgment, are given in these verses before Babylon’s physical fall (stated in 17:16 and lamented in 18:9-19).

**Rev 18:5— . . . Because her sins have accumulated up to heaven and God has remembered her crimes.** As mentioned previously, “because” (Greek: *hoti*) indicates that this verse gives the reasons believers should part ways with Babylon. They are “because” 1) her sins have accumulated up to heaven and 2) God has remembers her crimes. Babylon’s sins “have accumulated” (Greek: *ekkollêthêsan*) up to (Greek: *achri*) heaven. The Greek word *kollaô* has a sense of stickiness, two objects sticking together. A form of this verb appears in the LXX of Genesis 2:24; a man leaves father and mother and “cleaves” (KJV, RSV) to his wife. Babylon’s sins are joined together one on top of the other, towering high as heaven (like the Tower of Babel?). Obviously, this is a metaphor of vast accumulation. Babylon’s sins are the grounds for her judgment (cf. Rom 2:5-6). Jeremiah 51 is again brought into play by John. This clause is a strong allusion to Jeremiah 51:9, ESV: “(Babylon’s) judgment has reached up to heaven.” Once again, historical Babylon is the model for end-time Babylon. There is also a possible allusion to the judgment on Sodom in Genesis 19:13, ESV: “. . . the outcry against (Sodom’s) people has

become great before the LORD.” Cf. Gen 18:20; 4:10.

. . . **God has remembered her crimes.** The second reason to leave Babylon is because God has “remembered” (Greek: *emnêmonousen*) her “crimes” (Greek: *adikêmata*), an echo of Revelation 16:19. The Hebrew background of remembering is not so much recalling something that has been forgotten, rather it is deciding to act upon something that is continually in mind. It is used frequently in the Old Testament for announcements that God was about to act. When God “remembers sins no more” it means those sins have been forgiven (Jer 31:34). When He “remembers” sin, it means He will no longer intervene to save the sinner from the consequences of those sins (Hos 8:13; 9:9). This choice of language here anticipates the judgments announced in verses 6 to 8 and lamented in verses 9 to 19. God knew Babylon’s sins or crimes all along, this verse announces that He is about to act decisively on that knowledge. The great pile of sins reaching up to heaven triggers action on God’s part.

**Rev 18:6-- Treat her the way she treated others. Pay her double according to her works. Mix double for her in the very cup in which she mixed.** Verses 4 and 5 seem addressed to anyone in Babylon who is open to God’s call. Verse 6 and on seem addressed to those who will execute judgment upon Babylon, described as the beast and the ten horns in Revelation 17 (12-16). The divine sentence against Babylon begins here. It is the language of the law court. The theme of this verse is justice and the consequences that fall on Babylon are the natural consequence of her crimes. The language here is rather poetic. The repetition emphasizes the main point, keeping the focus away from the details. The principle upon which this whole verse is based recalls Psalm 137:8 (ESV, cf. Psalm 28:4; Jer 50:9; Matt 7:2): “. . . blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us!”

**Treat her the way she treated others.** The idea of justice that is appropriate to the crime seems to be based on the Old Testament law of the malicious witness. “If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.” Deut 19:16-19, ESV. In modern terms, bearing false witness in court is called perjury. In Deuteronomy, the penalty for the perjury is to receive the punishment that the accused party would have received, if found guilty. One wonders how our court system would be affected by applying a similar rule today.

In Revelation, Babylon has accused the saints in earthly courts, imprisoning and putting them to death. But Babylon will be called into a higher court, the court of heaven. Her judgment there will be according to her behavior in earthly courts. This is not revenge, it is justice.

**Pay her double according to her works.** The “pay her double” (Greek: *diplosate ta dipla*) combines a verb for doubling with a cognate accusative, literally “double her double”. The concept of a double punishment is based most directly on the language of Jeremiah concerning the original fall of Babylon (Jer 16:18; 17:18). But the concept goes further back into the Pentateuch. People who were convicted of stealing property were required to pay back twice as

much as they stole (Exod 22:4, 7, 9). The idea, perhaps, is that the thief should suffer for his offence and make full restitution for that which has been stolen. This principle of justice is echoed regarding the sins of Jerusalem in Isaiah 40:2. But when God speaks of Jerusalem's future, the reward will also be two-fold (Isa 61:7; Zech 9:12). Reference to the Old Testament is especially necessary in this instance, since this is the only occurrence of this concept in the entire New Testament.

According to Stefanovic (*Revelation*, 537), however, many scholars believe that the word "double" (Hebrew: *mishneh*) does not mean that the punishment is twice the wrongdoing, it means that it is an exact equivalent. The consequence of wrongdoing is in proportion to the crime (see Jer 51:24). Tonstad (*Revelation*, 259) seems to agree when he says, "As a measure of fairness, giving back "double" is a dubious proposition. The basic premise of *lex talionis* in the OT is proportionality: the punishment must fit the crime (Exod 21:23-25; Lev 24:19-20; Deut 19:21). Moreover, the concern of the OT injunctions is precisely *not* to punish to excess, in a retaliatory spirit." The "double", in that case, could be seen as hyperbole. It is not judicially precise, it expresses a sense of "what goes around comes around." As the verse says, Babylon receives "according to her works."

On the other hand, perhaps this expresses that what Babylon has done will come back to her in double portion, because evil, left to itself, always escalates.

**Rev 18:7-- Just as she has glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give to her torment and grief. Because in her heart she says, "I sit as a queen, I am not a widow, and I will never know grief."** In the words of Stefanovic, this verse restates the principle that Babylon's judgment is according to her sins. The punishment fits the crime (*Revelation*, 540). This is succinctly expressed by the Greek particle translated "just as" (Greek: *hosa*), "in proportion as". In the first half of this verse there are two statements about Babylon (she has glorified [Greek: *edoxasen*] herself and lived luxuriously [Greek: *estrêniasen*]), then there are two corresponding consequences of her behavior (torment [Greek: *basanision*] and grief [Greek: *penthos*]). In place of self-glorification is an awareness of suffering and loss. In the place of luxurious living is the reality of torment. Babylon's expectations are turned on their heads. The verb for "living luxuriously" (Greek: *estrêniasen*) recalls the noun form of "luxury" (Greek: *strênous*) in verse 3.

. . . **she has glorified herself and lived luxuriously.** . . . Babylon's sins are self-glorification and excessive luxury. These are particularly heinous because they came at the expense of others, so that is the basis of her condemnation and suffering. To boast about one's criminal activities is an act of defiance against the God who cherishes every creature He has made. In a sense Babylon challenges God to take away the fruits of her crimes. The background of this text is found in Isaiah. "You said, "I will continue forever--the eternal queen! But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, "I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children. Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells." Isaiah 47:7-9, NIV. Babylon has an unquestioning faith in her own resources and a corresponding lack of faith in God.

**Because in her heart she says, “I sit as a queen, I am not a widow, and I will never know grief.”** What Babylon the queen says “in her heart” (Greek: *en tē kardia*) she is saying to herself. These words express her own inner convictions, her own delusions. She is expressing the illusion of stability and invincibility. She truly believes that her favorable situation will never change. So when Babylon’s consequences come, she will be as surprised as those who mourn her later in this chapter (Rev 18:9-19). God’s judgments are the last thing she expects. Just as Babylon’s consequences are proportional to her crimes, so her surprise is proportional to her delusional self-confidence. But she should not be blindsided by events. After all, in glorifying herself, Babylon claims prerogatives that belong only to God (Rev 5:12-13; 14:6-7; 15:4; 19:1), so it is inevitable that her delusion would come to an end. A premonition of that can be seen in the arrival of the strong angel of verse 1. In the light of that angel’s glory, Babylon’s glory is already starting to grow dim. The grief or mourning (Greek: *penthos*) at the end of this verse is the kind of mourning displayed by a widow over her dead husband. While Babylon in Revelation 17 bears the trappings of the woman of Revelation 12 and Israel’s High Priest, if she were truly married to Christ she would never have to mourn, as He now lives forever. In the words of Gill, Christ is an everlasting and undying husband.

**Rev 18:8-- For this reason, in one day her plagues will come; death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who has judged her.** “For this reason” translates the Greek *dia touto*. This phrase points back to the earlier verses. Verses 5-7 are like a sentence or indictment against Babylon, giving the reasons for her condemnation. In this verse, the consequences of Babylon’s behavior are summarized. It will involve plagues, no doubt the bowl-plagues laid out in chapter 16. There will be death, mourning and famine. Famine, of course, is the opposite of living luxuriously (Rev 18:7). The things that Babylon has inflicted upon others now fall on her. And finally, Babylon will be destroyed by fire (cf. Rev 17:16). The destruction of Babylon is implied in Revelation 14:10-11 and 16:17-21, but is further elaborated in chapters 17 and 18. The last part of the verse brings out the origin of Babylon’s judgment. It is the Lord God, who is stronger than Babylon and greater than Babylon.

**. . . in one day her plagues will come. . .** “In one day” (Greek: *en mia hēmera*) could mean a prophetic year (see Rev 12:14 (Excursus on the Year-Day Principle) or it could mean that at the very time when Babylon is boasting about herself, she will begin to experience the consequences of her sinful choices.

To rightly understand the events in this verse, it is necessary to review the background of the plagues of Revelation. In the second half of Revelation (Rev 11:19 – 22:21) the primary focus is on the final events of earth’s history. Revelation 13 details the end-time anger of the nations (Rev 11:18; 12:17), represented by the beasts from the sea and from the earth. Revelation 14 details the response of the remnant/144,000/the saints (Rev 12:17; 14:1). The final gospel proclamation of three angels (Rev 14:6-12) is countered by the three frogs, which gather the kings of the world to the place called Harmagedon (Rev 16:13-16). When all human beings have chosen one gospel or the other, the temple in heaven is closed (Rev 15:5-8) and the seven last plagues fall (Rev 15:1; 16:2-21). Revelation 17 gives additional information about the final disposition of enemy forces (Babylon and the beast) against Christ and those who are

with him (Rev 17:14). The fate of Babylon is summarized in Revelation 17:16 and detailed further in Revelation 18. God acts against Babylon in the context of Babylon's war against the remnant (Rev 12:17; 13:15-17; 17:14).

. . . **she will be burned with fire.** . . This is said almost as an afterthought and in the passive voice. It directly recalls the burning of the prostitute by the nations of the world in Revelation 17:16. God is not the active agent in Babylon's destruction, but it serves His purposes in the end anyway (Rev 17:17). When God allows the truth about Babylon to be exposed to the nations (that's what judgment does, reveal the evidence of guilt or innocence), they turn on her with fury.

In Rebekah Liu's dissertation, she suggests that Babylon is a continuation of the activities of the image of the beast in Revelation 13:13-17. She notes that in the Ancient Near East battles were fought in the name of a nation's gods. Cult images of those gods would be carried into battle. The winner of the battle would capture those images and either take them home or burn them with fire. So burning with fire would be a fitting end to the image of the beast, which is not included in the destruction of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet in chapters 19 and 20. Since Babylon is not destroyed there either, the burning of Babylon in 17:16 and 18:8 is also the destruction of the image of the beast. Both Babylon and the image of the beast are an end-time alliance of the dragon, beast and false prophet (Rev 16:13, 19) to lead Satan's final attempt to foil the purposes of God for the human race. The collapse of Babylon (the image of the beast) leaves the entities that make up Babylon fragmented (16:19) and exposed to their final destruction in chapters 19 and 20.

. . . **for strong is the Lord God who has judged her.** . . The word "strong" here (Greek: *ischuros*) recalls the strong (Greek: *ischura*) voice of the glorious angel at the beginning of the chapter. This connection heightens the possibility that the glorious angel is a divine figure, likely Christ.

In Greek, "judge" is an aorist participle. An aorist participle depicts past action in relation to the time of the main verb. God's judgment of Babylon occurs prior to the plagues depicted in this verse. The sentence of verses 5-7 was based on the deliberate prior investigation of the facts. Because God has judged Babylon, her plagues will come. The execution of judgment is still ahead at the time that the sentence is pronounced. Many people believe the Bible teaches that the final judgment comes at and after the Second Coming of Jesus. But this verse is strong evidence that the final judgment begins before the Second Coming. At the Second Coming Jesus will bring His reward with Him (Rev 22:12). So the determination of who is righteous or unrighteous (Rev 22:11) must be made before the Second Coming itself. Some have called this the pre-advent judgment. This is one of the few places in the Bible where the great final judgment clearly begins before the Second Coming of Christ. In the words of Stefanovic (*Revelation*, 537), "Babylon has been judged, the investigation has been completed, the sentence pronounced, and the execution is about to take place." In previous verses, Babylon thought herself strong and secure, but she forgot how strong the One who judges her truly is.

**Rev 18:9-19 (Introduction)**—In the third section of chapter 18 we see the consequences of

Babylon's sins. Those consequences go beyond Babylon herself. This section outlines how the fall of Babylon affects even those who assisted in her downfall. So this section contains three litanies of lament about the destruction of Babylon (Rev 18: 10b, 16-17a, 19). Each of these songs of lament begins with "woe, woe" (Greek: *ouai ouai*) and ends with sentences that begin with "in one hour". In the words of Tonstad, "A calamity of this order needs witnesses" (Tonstad, *Revelation*, 260). Babylon is mourned by three classes of people, kings, merchants, and sailors. In each case the mourning is not for Babylon itself, but for what each of these three classes of people have lost on account of Babylon's fall. These three classes of people echo the three classes of people that mourn over Tyre in Ezekiel 26-28. In Ezekiel these three classes are kings (Ezek 26:15-18), tradespeople (Ezek 27:36), and mariners (Ezek 27:29-36). In Revelation 18 there is a corresponding rejoicing over Babylon's fall by three classes of people in verse 20; saints, apostles, and prophets.

The political rulers of the world, represented by the kings of the earth in verse 9, are the ones who caused Babylon's destruction (Rev 17:16) yet they mourn over it. The destruction was done in a fit of rage, but once they are done the resulting loss of power and wealth becomes apparent. Actions taken in lust and drunkenness have a short-lived value and are soon regretted. So it also is with passionate anger.

There seems to be a certain amount of progression as the reader moves through the three songs of lament. When the lament of the kings is introduced in verse 9 (ESV), it refers to an act that is in the future tense, "And the kings of the earth . . . **will weep and wail** (Greek: *klausousin kai kopsontai*) over her when they see the smoke of her burning." The declaration regarding the merchants of the earth is in the present tense, "And the merchants of the earth **weep and mourn** for her" (Rev 18:11, ESV). The declaration regarding the mariners in verse 19 (NASB) is in the past tense, "And they **threw** (Greek: *ebalon*) dust on their heads and **were crying out** (Rev 18:18, NASB-- Greek: *ekrazon*), weeping and mourning. . . ." It is as if the destruction of Babylon is future in verses 9-10, present in verses 11-16b and past in verses 17b-19. The destruction itself is never described, except very briefly in Revelation 17:16 and 18:8. But the reaction to Babylon's destruction is given as if in real time in 18:9-19.

**Rev 18:9-10-- The kings of the earth, who committed fornication with her and lived luxuriously, will weep and mourn over her when they see the smoke of her burning. They stand at a distance, for fear of her torment, saying, "Woe, woe is Babylon, the great city, the strong city, because in one hour your judgment has come."** These two verses are so closely tied to each other that it seems best to handle them together. The scene described here is strongly reminiscent of the lamentation over Tyre in Ezekiel 26:16-18 (cf. also 27:30-35). The fact that there are so many references to Ezekiel 26-28 in this chapter supports the likelihood that John would have had Ezekiel 26 in mind here. Whether Daniel 4:30 is directly in mind or not, Nebuchadnezzar's boast, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built. . . ." (ESV) is certainly a strong parallel to the repeated use of "great" with "Babylon" in Revelation.

. . . **The kings of the earth . . .** The "kings of the earth" (Greek: *hoi basileis tês gês*) committing fornication with Babylon recalls Revelation 17:2 and 18:3. In Revelation 17, Babylon is described as in relationship with the beast (Rev 17:3). In Revelation 18 the kings of the earth

not only commit fornication with Babylon, this verse adds that they share in her luxury. The song of lament they sing in 10b is in the future tense, ([they] “will weep and mourn”—Greek: *klausousin kai kopsontai*). When the destruction of Babylon is complete (when they see the smoke of her burning—see also Rev 14:11) they will realize their own loss and will mourn over it. They stand at a distance from her, wishing to avoid her fate (the burning of verses 8 and 9). The song is triggered by the suddenness and unexpectedness of her destruction, they sing “because” (Greek: *hoti*) her judgment came about “in one hour” (see also Rev 17:12). Something similar is depicted in Revelation 1:7, where the tribes of the earth wail when they see Jesus Christ coming in the clouds.

. . . **Woe, woe.** . . The double shout of “woe” here may be a deliberate equivalent of the doubling of Babylon’s fate mentioned in verse 6. This double woe is repeated in verses 16 and 19.

. . . **Babylon, the great city.** . . “Babylon, the great city” (Greek: *hê polis hê megalê, Babulôn*) blends “the great city” of 17:18 with “Babylon the great” in 18:2. Here it also adds “the strong city” (Greek: *hê polis hê ischura*). The language here may also evoke the angel of verses 1 and 2, which had great (Greek: *megalên*) authority and spoke with a strong (Greek: *ischura*) voice. Babylon presented itself to the world as truly great stuff speaking directly for God, but when God shows up in the form of an angel the world finds out who the truly great stuff is.

. . . **in one hour.** . . The one hour is probably not a prophetic year (see Rev 12:14 [Excursus on the Year-Day Principle]) but simply underlines the suddenness of Babylon’s fall. The destruction of the worldwide religious alliance (Babylon) portends the imminent destruction of the political powers of the world as well. Seeing the smoke of Babylon’s burning reminds the reader of Abraham looking at the destruction of Sodom (Gen 19:28).

. . . **Your judgment has come.** . . Babylon sold the kings of the earth on the idea that she was the true representative of God and, therefore, following her lead would save or protect the nations of the world from the calamities taking over the earth. The phrase “your judgment has come” (Greek: *êlthen hê krisis sou*) suggests that the kings now realize they have been deceived. The judgment of Babylon was not just fate, it was because, while she claimed she was God’s representative on earth, in fact, she had aligned herself against God. They now fear that in aligning with Babylon originally, they have sealed their own fate as well. They hope perhaps that distance will provide some safety from the judgments yet to come. God’s judgment has exposed Babylon for what she really was, the kings of the earth fear that they will be next, and they are right about that (Rev 19:19-21).

In many ways this whole scene is odd. These kings are the very ones who colluded with Babylon to create the great End-time alliance. They are also the ones who decided to destroy Babylon in the End. And now they are mourning the very demise that they themselves planned. The whole piece seems rather insincere and delusional on their part.

**Rev 18:11-- The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her also, because no one buys their cargos anymore.** . . . The fall of great cities, both ancient and modern, affect any whose living depended on trade with that city. All the main verbs in this verse are in the

present tense. The merchants of the world were actively involved in and profiting from trade with Babylon. Many cargos were traded and they mourn over the tremendous economic loss (Revelation 18:11-16). Normally, when a single city collapses, the decline in trade does not put a stop to business in the rest of the world. With the destruction of Babylon the world economy seems to have collapsed. No one is buying their cargos anymore. The decline in trade in one place is often to the advantage of trade in other places. But Babylon is much more than a single city, like ancient Rome, it is worldwide, so the calamity here is clearly worldwide. In the language of Revelation, it is a global collapse. And it is an end-time event, the final economic depression of earth's history.

. . . **The merchants of the earth.** . . The term "merchants" (Greek: *emporoi*—source of the English word emporium, shopping place). These are what we would probably call "wholesalers" today. They are the middle men, who buy up goods from places of production and deliver them to places where locals can sell them in retail locations. These merchants are called "the great men of the earth" in 18:23. See comments on that phrase there. The merchants of Tyre are called "princes" in Isaiah 23:8.

. . . **because no one buys their cargos anymore.** . . The term "cargos" (Greek: *ton gomon*) describes merchandise that was carried on ships, or ship-lading. The mourning in this verse and beyond is clearly selfish. They are not mourning for Babylon, per se, they are mourning for themselves and their own losses. It is not clear if this lack of buying and selling has any relationship with the economic boycott of 13:16-17.

If this trading is metaphorical of spiritual goods, rather than to be taken literally (see next paragraph), the "merchants'" loss would actually be that no one is paying attention to their religious claims anymore, they have lost all intellectual and spiritual relevance in the world.

While the surface emphasis in this verse is on economics, rather than religion or politics, it should not be overlooked that religion, politics, and economics are and have been interrelated power spheres throughout history. So one can read the "merchants" of this verse in two different ways. One is to take the designation at face value and see in Revelation 18:11-16 a straightforward description of economic ambitions facing catastrophic economic losses. The second approach is to see the merchants as the sales people of Babylon's spiritual merchandise. They would be the ones who sold Babylon's doctrines and policies to the "kings of the earth". If this reading is correct, the merchants would be the equivalent of the three demonic frogs of 16:13-14, persuading the kings of the world to align with the unholy trinity (Babylon). That would make them Babylon's evangelists, seeking to bring the world into alignment with Babylon's spiritual agenda. The fact that Rome was not renowned as a commercial city would support the idea that the merchandising here is of a spiritual variety.

**Rev 18:12-13— . . . cargos of gold and silver and precious stone, of pearls, linen, purple, silk, and scarlet; scented woods and ivory objects; and every object of costly wood, of brass, iron and marble; cinnamon, spice and incense, perfume and frankincense, wine and olive oil, wheat flour and wheat grains, pack animals and sheep; horses and carriages and bodies; and souls of men.**

I have grouped these two long verses together because they list a series of products that end-time Babylon is described as trading in. There has been a long, scholarly debate about the significance of these particular products and exactly what ancient product each Greek word here has in mind. In general, I will avoid that kind of detail. For those interested in the intricacies of the Greek, the list is completely dependent on the word “cargoes” (Greek: *gomon*), alternating between genitives and accusatives. In my translation, I signal each shift between genitives and accusatives with a semi-colon. The first part of the list is words in the genitive case: “Cargoes **of** gold and **of** silver, etc.” (Greek: *gomon chrousou kai argourou . . .*), all the way to “scarlet” (Greek: *kokkinou*). Then there is a shift to the accusative case (like a direct object), “scented woods and ivory objects.” Then genitives to the end of verse 12, “**every object of costly wood, of brass, iron and marble.**” With the beginning of verse 13 (cinnamon—Greek: *kinnamômon*), the word endings of the nouns are in accusative case all the way to “sheep” (Greek: *probata*). After this is a shift back into the genitive case, “**of** horses and **of** chariots and **of** bodies” (Greek: *kai hippôn kai raidôn kai sômatôn*). The list then concludes with a mixture of the two cases in a single phrase, “souls” (accusative-- *psuchas*) “of men” (genitive-- *anthrôpôn*). The final shift separates the word “bodies” from the word “souls”. So some scholars feel that “bodies” here refers to the drivers of horses and chariots, with which the bodies are grammatically associated, while “souls of men” refers to human slavery in general.

As you can see from my translation, the shift in the list from genitives to accusatives back to genitives does not make a significant difference in how you translate the words in this list, but the shifts do give some indication of how John might have grouped these objects. The first grouping is objects to decorate one’s person (jewelry and clothing), the next two groupings have to do with items to decorate ones’ home. The fourth grouping involves sensory items to smell and to taste. The fifth grouping is items related to transportation, horses, chariots, and the enslaved humans who drive them in service of their masters. And the final grouping, “souls of men”, stands by itself as a jarring summary in one phrase of everything that is wrong with Babylon. For those who prefer a metaphorical interpretation of this goods list, the summary phrase “souls of men” offers strong support. Earthly merchants could traffic in all the other items in this list, but “souls of men” points to a deeper spiritual meaning to the list. In earlier times scholars often associated this phrase with the pardons, indulgences and dispensations of the medieval church.

There has been a long, scholarly debate about the significance of these particular products and exactly what ancient product each Greek word here has in mind. Stefanovic (Revelation, 544-545), for example, spends no time at all on this list. He simply notes that the “merchants of the earth” could be taken literally or figuratively. He notes that the list of goods here is similar to the one in the doom song over Tyre in Ezekiel 27:5-24. For him this is all to be taken spiritually, to show the comprehensiveness of Babylon’s corrupt doctrines and policies. As we have noted above, the concluding phrase (“souls of men”) provides strong support for such a spiritual reading. But no one has been able to demonstrate a symbolic meaning for most of the items on the list, so the list seems more of a poetic flourish than a large collection of deeper meanings.

Tonstad (*Revelation*, 261-262) has quite a bit more to say about the list. He notes that religion, politics and economics are inter-related spheres, so doesn't see a strong need to spiritualize this list of goods. He sees Babylon trading in luxury goods for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many. The list of goods is "impressive, monotonous, and sleep-inducing" until you get to the end, "bodies-- and human beings" (Greek: *somaton kai psuchas anthrôpôn*) in his translation. "Souls of men" (Greek: *psuchas anthrôpôn*) echos the language of Ezekiel 17:13, where Tyre is said to trade in the "souls of men" (LXX: *psuchais anthrôpôn*). So Tonstad sees "the bodies and souls of men" (my translation—Greek: ) as a powerful metaphor for slavery. It is not clear why two different words for slavery would be used ("bodies" and "souls of men"). Perhaps it is to express that Babylon traded in every kind of slavery.

If the inclusion of the language "souls of men" here is a critique of slavery, it is the closest the New Testament comes to condemning the institution. Any system that trades in human beings can be truly said to be "fallen". Nearly 70% of the inhabitants of Rome were slaves, but the Babylon of Revelation 18 is clearly bigger than Rome, and the end-time is in view, so this needs to be read in the context of the cosmic conflict.

While avoiding a general discussion of the detailed items on this list, a few brief observations may be of interest. Nearly all the items on the list are of highest value in the ancient world. With the possible exception of "**wheat flour and wheat grains, pack animals and sheep**" these are luxury items. This trade is for the purpose of supplying Babylon's pride and display. The first part of the list in particular, the decorative items, has many parallels with Revelation 17:4-5, the jewels and clothing of Babylon the Great Prostitute. So in this list, Babylon is seen as a consumer, not a trading partner. The trade is all going one way.

Costly wood" (Greek: *xulou timiôtatou*), in close proximity with "ivory" (*elephantinon*), may refer to ebony, an African wood as prized for its blackness as ivory is for its whiteness. Used together they provided dramatic accents in ancient houses. In the ancient world, aromatics were not only prized for their perfume, but were widely employed in religious worship. Cinnamon and myrrh, for example, were used in the Levitical rituals (Exod 30:23).

**Rev 18:14— "The fruit of your soul's desires have gone away from you, and everything that was luxurious or radiant has perished from you, and they will not find these things any more."** The text here reads like an interruption in the narrative of Babylon's fall. It shifts from a third person description of the cargos of Babylon to the second person. Babylon herself seems to be addressed here, so I have put quotation marks around this verse. The verse is divided into three parts by the two strategic "ands". One could argue that the third part of the verse (after the second "and"), which switches back to third person ("**they will not find these things any more**"), should be a separate sentence, not included in the quote. But the second use of "and" (Greek: *kai*) strikes me as tying the third part to the rest of the quote, and I have translated accordingly.

**The fruit of your soul's desires have gone away from you. . . .** This strikes me as a strong echo of Genesis 3:6, picking up on the ideas of the earlier verse without using the actual Greek words of Genesis 3:6 LXX. Eve saw that the fruit was good to look at and eat and desirable to make one wise. Here the fruit is metaphorical as the object of Babylon's desires,

which have now moved out of reach. The term for “fruit” (Greek: *opôra*) here actually refers to the late summer “dog days”, when Sirius, the dog star is predominant in the sky. Since this is the season when most fruits in the Middle East ripen, the word has come to mean fruit in general. The late summer fruits of the eastern Mediterranean include grapes, peaches, nectarines, pears, figs, and apricots.

. . . **everything that was luxurious or radiant has perished from you** . . . This reads like a short summary of the earlier list of luxurious items. All the things that Babylon has delighted in have now come to ruin. The word translated “luxurious” (Greek: *lipara*) here is related to the root word for “fat”. Most people in the ancient world barely had enough to eat in order to survive. Only the truly wealthy had the abundance of food necessary to become overweight. The word translated “radiant” (Greek: *lampra*) refers in this context to the brightly decorated furniture and clothing so prominent in the previous verses. In the New Testament, it mostly refers to clothing.

**Rev 18:15-17a-- The merchants of these things, who had become rich because of her, were standing at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and grieving, saying, “Woe, Woe, the Great City, dressed in fine linen and purple and red garments, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls. For in one hour so much wealth has been laid waste.** The verse division in verse 17 is not helpful. The first line of 17 clearly belongs to verses 15 and 16, not 17b. These verses establish continuity with the lament of the kings in 9-10 after the interruption of the sequence because of the cargo list (11-14).

The Greek grammar of this passage is instructive. There is no main verb anywhere in 15-17a. It is a subject, the merchants (Greek: *hoi emporoi*), followed by a series of participles that function as adjectives to the merchants. The merchants are the ones who grew rich (Greek: *hoi ploutêsantes*) previously (aorist participle). They are the ones who will be standing (future participle—Greek: [*hoi*] *stêsontai*) far away out of fear, weeping (present participle—Greek: [*hoi*] *klaiontes*) and grieving (present participle—Greek: [*hoi*] *penthountes*), saying (present participle—Greek: [*hoi*] *legontes*), followed by the song of verse 16. So all of verse 15 is about the merchants, who then sing the song of verse 16, which is all about Babylon, the great city of verse 10, the antecedent of “the great city” (Greek: *hê polis hê megalê*) here. The Great City is the one who is dressed and adorned (present participles—Greek: [*hê*] *peribebêmenê*, [*hê*] *kechrusômenê*). The first line of verse 17 then gives the reason for the song of lament, the destruction of so much wealth.

**The merchants of these things (verse 15).** . . . The mention of “merchants” here (Greek: *hoi emporoi*) picks up from verse 11, with the cargo list and the brief address directly to Babylon in between. This group stands far off like the kings in verse 9 and the song of lament that follows is parallel to the lament of the kings. This song, like the previous one, echoes the laments over Tyre in Ezekiel 26 and 27. The worldwide nature of this catastrophe is further evidence that Babylon is not limited to ancient Rome, but is a metaphor of an end-time, worldwide, religious alliance. The merchants standing far off is for at least two reasons. First, they are in **fear of her torment**, because they know that they were partners in Babylon’s crimes and they are afraid that they will be next. The standing far off also occurs out of the recognition

that they are incapable of doing anything to stop Babylon's destruction.

**“Woe, Woe, the Great City (verse 16). . . .** The double woe may allude back to the “doubling” of Babylon's punishment in verse 6. The Great City is a reference back to **Babylon, the great city** in verse 10. I have chosen to capitalize Great City here because it comes as a title out of the merchants' mouths, a substitute for “Babylon”. In verse 10 great city is an adjective describing Babylon. The “dressed and adorned” of verse 16 refers back to the description of Babylon in Revelation 17:3-4 and also the adornment list in 18:12. This is further evidence that woman/prostitute Babylon in Revelation 17 is the same as Babylon, the great city in Revelation 18. The word “adorned” (Greek: *kechrusômenê*) here literally means “gilded”.

**. . . in one hour (verse 17) . . .** This indicates a brief period of time. The same period of time is described as “one day” (Greek: *mia hêmera*) in verse 10 so we should not take these terms literally or even as prophetic time. Babylon's destruction will be swift and sure. It will be a surprise to all who experience it.

**Rev 18:17b-- And every captain, and everyone who sets sail for any place, and sailors and whoever makes a living from the sea, they all stood at a distance.** Poetic completion calls for a third group, in addition to the kings (18:9) and the merchants (18:11, 15): the sea captains and their associates who transport the goods for the merchants. Babylon's wealth was the engine of their wealth (Revelation 18:17-19). The language of this verse seems drawn from Ezekiel's vision of the fall of Tyre (Ezek 27:29-32). It introduces the song of lament of the seafarers, which has the same three elements as found in the first two groupings, the kings (Rev 18:9-10) and the merchants (Rev 18:11-17a). The seafarers stand afar off from Babylon's destruction, they remember the city's former glory, and they offer a cry of woe over her destruction. Note that the seafarers stood (Greek: *estêsan*) at a distance, while the merchants stand (Greek: *stêsontai*) at a distance and the kings will stand (Greek: *estêkotes*) at a distance. The series move from future to present to past, indicating a movement in time between the three laments.

There are actually four groups in view in this verse. The first group is every sea captain (Greek: *kubenêtês*). This category is perhaps more accurately, the pilot or person who steers the ship in difficult circumstances. The second group is those who travel by sea (Greek: *ho epi topon pleôn*) or literally “sail to a place”. This groups seems a bit redundant with the others, but may refer to a special category of seamen called “coasters”. These are like short-haul truckers, who travel specific routes back and forth along the coast, like ferries. These do not venture far out to sea. The third group is sailors is general (Greek: *nautai*) and the fourth anyone who works (Greek: *ergazontai*) or makes a living in relation to the sea. Like the kings and the merchants, all these groups stand at a distance from Babylon's burning. Like the merchants, these have made a good living trading and transporting goods for Babylon's enjoyment.

**Rev 18:18-- Seeing the smoke of her burning, they cry out, “Who is like the Great City?”** The opening clause of this verse reproduces the exact wording of Revelation 18:9, “the smoke of her burning” (Greek: *ton kapnon tês purôseôs autês*). This connects also with Babylon's fiery end in Revelation 18:8 and 17:16. “Who is like the Great City?” is a fairly literal translation of

the Greek here (*tis homoia tē polei tē megalē*). This short sentence is reminiscent of “who is like the beast?” (Greek: *tis homoiōs tō thêriō*) in Revelation 13:4. This is, no doubt, a parody on the name Michael, which means “who is like God?” See comments on Rev 13:4. See also Exodus 15:11, Psalm 35:10 and Micah 7:18. Since the lament for Tyre (Ezekiel 26 and 27) is such a prevalent background in this part of Revelation, the phrase “who is like Tyre?” from Ezekiel 27:32 is likely in the background of John’s mind here. In Revelation, Babylon is in many ways treated like God and Christ, yet fails the kings, merchants and seafarers of the world, who regret her fall.

**Rev 18:19— They threw dust on their heads and cried out weeping and mourning, “Woe, woe, the Great City, by which everyone who had ships on the sea prospered on account of her wealth, for in one hour it was laid waste.”** Verse 19 offers the seafarers song of lament over the fall of Babylon. The result of Babylon’s fall is a world-wide economic depression, and those who transport people and goods feel the brunt of it. Like the kings and merchants, they are not so much empathetic toward Babylon as they are mourning their own losses as a result of Babylon’s destruction. This verse contains a series of short clauses: 1) the seafarers throw dust on their heads (new to Rev 18:9-19), 2) they cry out weeping and mourning, 3) they pronounce woe on the Great City (Babylon), 4) they confess their own collusion with Babylon, and 5) conclude with the main reason for their song of lament, it’s all over and in surprisingly sudden fashion.

Three of the five clauses in this verse repeat themes that the kings and merchants have earlier expressed. There is much weeping and mourning, there is a double woe on the Great City and there is a lament over its speedy destruction. Two elements in this verse are different from the previous. First is the throwing of dust on their heads, a symbolic act of mourning, and second, a listing of the economic advantage they had gained by assisting in Babylon’s wealth and power through the use of their ships.

**They threw dust on their heads.** . . . This added detail is likely drawn from Ezekiel 27:30 (ESV): “They cast dust on their heads and wallow in ashes.” These actions are ancient tokens of sorrow and humiliation. Casting dust on one’s head usually occurred in a sitting position, leaning forward to scrape up dust and toss it up over one’s head. Lying on the ground and putting dust on their heads was how Joshua and his elders reacted to the defeat and loss of life at the battle of Ai (Josh 7:6). Job 2:8 does not describe Job as casting dust on his head, but he is sitting in ashes. The three friends that come to him, however, do sprinkle dust on their heads at the sight of him in his suffering (Job 2:12). A parallel to this text is Isaiah 47:1, where the virgin daughters of Babylon are invited to sit in the dust to mourn over Babylon’s imminent destruction.

**. . . prospered on account of her wealth . . .** The particular word for “wealth” here (Greek: *timiotētos*) emphasizes costliness or great expense. Babylon purchased many things of high price. As a result, the luxury of the great city enriched many kings, merchants and tradesmen. As mentioned before, trade with Babylon was primarily one way, goods went to Babylon and money returned to others. But the wealth of Babylon did not come from trade, it came through deception and force, it was extracted from slaves and conquered peoples. So the

tradesmen who received her wealth were complicit in her crimes and stand far off for fear that they will suffer similar judgment.

**Rev 18:20-- “Rejoice over her heaven, and also (namely) the saints, apostles and prophets, because God has judged her in the same way she has judged you.”** This verse interrupts the fall of Babylon narrative in chapter 18 and anticipates the rejoicing of 19:1-10. Not everyone mourns the destruction of Babylon, in this verse “heaven”, the saints, apostles and prophets, are invited to rejoice. This is not vindictive rejoicing over Babylon's fall but the joy of injustice being reversed. It is like being acquitted in a higher court after being condemned in a lower court. Babylon had delivered unfair and unjust verdicts, jailing those who were unjustly accused. Those injustices were reversed by the judgments of God described in the rest of the chapter. It is appropriate to rejoice when an oppressor loses power. The kind of rejoicing called for her is reminiscent of the rejoicing over Old Testament Babylon's fall in Jeremiah 51:48-49. This is not rejoicing over Babylon's misfortune so much as it is rejoicing at the glorious rescue of God's faithful ones from her hand, it is vindication and liberation for the oppressed.

**Rejoice over her heaven and also (namely) the saints, apostles and prophets. . . .** The verse opens with a Greek imperative (*euphrainou*), a command or exhortation to rejoice. A major exegetical issue arises from the use of “and” (Greek: *kai*) in this verse. The Greek “and” can be additive; “heaven, and also the saints. . . .” In that reading the exhortation to rejoice is given to both heaven and earth. Babylon's fall is to produce rejoicing in heaven, and also among the saints, prophets and apostles on earth. It would imply universal rejoicing among all who have not yielded to the deceptions or force of Satan, whether in heaven or on earth. This would be a parallel with Revelation 12:12, where both heaven and earth are addressed. But there is another possibility for the “and”. It could mean “namely”, in which what follows the “and” elaborates on what precedes it. In that case the saints, apostles and prophets are being depicted as in heaven spiritually, as one finds in Ephesians 1:3 and 2:6. Since “those who live on the earth” in Revelation are always the unrighteous, those who live in heaven would be their righteous earthly counterparts. Grammatically, it could go either way. In favor of the former is that the rejoicing in heaven in 12:12 is literal, as is that of 19:4-5. On the other hand, the “you” of the following clause would seem to be addressing only the righteous on earth. I haven't made up my mind on this one yet.

**. . . because God has judged her in the same way she has judged you . . .** The Greek word translated “because” (*hoti*) gives the reason for the command in the previous clause of the sentence. Literally, “God has judged your judgment against her” (Greek: *ekrinen ho theos to krima humôn ex autês*). God has judged Babylon in the same way she judged “you” (Greek: *humôn*). Babylon has not literally judged the inhabitants of heaven, she has judged those that threatened her position on earth. This could not be said about the unfallen worlds in heaven. So this is a strong piece of evidence that the address to heaven at the beginning of the verse is an address to the “saints”, who are not part of “those who live on the earth” (Rev 6:10; 11:10; 13:14). God has reversed the judgments of Babylon on the saints (Rev 17:6), apostles and prophets. It is to them this command seems to be addressed, the same group as is addressed in 18:4, “Come out of her my people.” While the fall of Babylon is bad news to those in rebellion

against God, it is good news to those who resisted her. The rejoicing called for in this verse is portrayed in Revelation 19:1-10.

Tonstad draws an intriguing conclusion out of a puzzling turn of phrase in the final clause of this verse. As mentioned above, the clause is literally, "God has judged your judgment against or out from her" (Greek: *ekrinen ho theos to krima humôn ex autês*). The Greek word I translated "against" is literally "ex", "out from". Tonstad sees God's judgment not so much against Babylon as "out from" her. Babylon in some way makes the case against herself. This is parallel to a straightforward reading of Ezekiel 28:18, where the fire that destroys the rebellious covering cherub is drawn out "from within you". Babylon does not fall because God vindictively strikes her down, but because she contains within herself the seeds of her own destruction. The same glory of God that brings life to the saints is a destructive fire to those in rebellion against God. Due to God's patience, this outcome has been long deferred, but the saints rejoice to see that day.

**Rev 18:21-24 (Introduction)**—These four verses form the fifth part in the structure of Revelation 18. See **Rev 18 (Introduction)** for a summary of the structure of the chapter. They contain a rhythmic song of doom introduced by a symbolic action. The section is divided into three parts. The first part is verse 21, which is an acted parable of Babylon's fall. Then verses 22-23a offer a graphic, poetic description of the silence that will follow Babylon's destruction. Verses 23b-24 lay out the main reason for Babylon's guilt and her subsequent destruction.

**Rev 18:21-- A mighty angel picked up a stone the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea saying, "Thus with violence the Great City Babylon will be thrown down and it will not be found anymore.** This seems to be a very direct allusion to Jeremiah's instructions to a staff officer of Zedekiah when he was taken off to Babylon: "This is the message Jeremiah gave to the staff officer Seraiah son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went to Babylon with Zedekiah king of Judah in the fourth year of his reign. Jeremiah had written on a scroll about all the disasters that would come upon Babylon--all that had been recorded concerning Babylon. He said to Seraiah, 'When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud. Then say, "O LORD, you have said you will destroy this place, so that neither man nor animal will live in it; it will be desolate forever.'" When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, 'So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.'" Jeremiah 51:59-64, NIV. In the case of ancient Babylon, it was a simple stone wrapped in the pages of a book, in the case of end-time Babylon, it is a stone of massive proportions.

Stefanovic notes (*Revelation*, 547) that this verse also echoes Matthew 18:6, where Jesus warns those who would harm children that their fate will be worse than having a millstone fastened around your neck and being drowned in the depth of the sea. Babylon has used its power and deception to lead "little ones" into sin. Now she will sink helplessly by "the law of her own weight" (Ellicott). Like the prince of Tyre, she is destroyed to some degree from within (Ezek 28:18), but the throwing down of Babylon is done "with violence" (Greek: *hormêmati*) indicates that external forces will play a major role as well.

The “strong” (Greek: *ischuros*) angel here recalls the angel with the “strong” (Greek: *ischura*) voice in Revelation 18:2, but the use of the number “one” (Greek: *eis*) is unusual. It is used here in an indefinite sense. He is “one” strong angel, suggesting that the angel here and the angel of 18:2 are not the same. A similar grammatical use of the number “one” (Greek: *enos*) is found in Revelation 8:13, where an indefinite eagle/vulture is mentioned. The strong angel takes a large stone the size of a millstone (Greek: *mulinon*-- which could weigh more than a thousand kilograms) and casts it into the sea (Greek: *ten thalassan*), presumably a reference to the Euphrates River that flowed right through ancient Babylon. As was the case in Jeremiah 51, the angel then makes a pronouncement regarding the way that Babylon will be thrown down and the results of that action. If the “sea” here is the same as the “waters” of Revelation 17:1, 15, it again makes the point that Babylon will be destroyed by the very same political powers of the world that allied with her in 17:2-3. The use of the future tense for “will be thrown down” (Greek: *blêthêsetai*) lets the reader know that the time of the pronouncement is before Babylon’s fall (as in verses 9 and 10). The time sequence of chapter 18 is not chronological here, this pronouncement precedes Babylon’s fall, while verse 20 comes after.

The pronouncement at the end of the verse makes it clear that the fall of Babylon is its final fall. It will never be found again. The destruction of end-time Babylon will be as complete as was the eventual fall of Old Testament Babylon. It continued on as a major city of the Persians, and Alexander the Great considered making it the capital of his expanded Macedonian Empire, but it eventually fell into complete ruin, as it continues to remain today. In the song of lament that follows (Rev 18-23), the repeated chant of things that will not be seen, heard or experienced in Babylon anymore confirms the completeness of end-time Babylon’s extinction.

In one final note on this verse, Tonstad (*Revelation*, 263) points out that to be “thrown down” (Greek: *ebalen*) is a recurring scenario in the cosmic conflict (Isa 14:12-15; Rev 9:1; 12:7-10). Babylon’s fall on this earth will be a foretaste of the final resolution of sin in the whole universe.

**Rev 18:22-23-- “The sound of harpists, musicians, flute players and trumpeters will not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft will be found in you anymore. The sound of a millstone will not be heard in you anymore. The light of a lamp will not shine in you anymore, the voice of a bridegroom and a bride will not be heard in you anymore, because your merchants were the great men of the earth, because with your sorcery all nations were deceived, . . .”** The use of second person singular throughout indicates that this is a direct address to symbolic Babylon as a woman/prostitute and the great city. The lyrical poetry here can be expressed in verse lines:

The sound of harpists, musicians, flute players and trumpeters  
will not be heard in you anymore.

No craftsman of any craft  
will be found in you anymore.

The sound of a millstone  
will not be heard in you anymore.

The light of a lamp  
will not shine in you anymore,  
The voice of a bridegroom and a bride  
will not be heard in you anymore,  
because your merchants were the great men of the earth,  
because with your sorcery all nations were deceived.

**The sound of harpists, musicians, flute players and trumpeters will not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft will be found in you anymore. The sound of a millstone will not be heard in you anymore. The light of a lamp will not shine in you anymore, the voice of a bridegroom and a bride will not be heard in you anymore. . .** This address to Babylon begins with a series of five negations, utilizing the Greek language's strongest expression of negation (Greek: *ou mê*) each time. These negations are combined with a five-fold "in you anymore" (Greek: *en soi eti*). There are five things that will not be heard, seen or experienced in Babylon any more. The first is the sound of musicians and their instruments. The sounds of mourning, celebration and triumph cease. In ancient times flutes were often played at times of mourning, while trumpets were more associated with joyful occasions. Harps, on the other hand, were commonly associated with singing. So the general term "musicians" (Greek: *mousikôn*—only here in the New Testament) probably referred to singers. The second is the reality of construction, there will be no building up any more, neither is there a basis for making a living any more. The use of "found" here echoes Revelation 18:14, 24. The third is the sound of grinding grain, an ancient indication of general prosperity. Whereas music was affordable only to the wealthy, the trades people made up the middle class in the Greco-Roman world, and grinding was an occupation for slaves. All social classes would be affected by Babylon's fall. In Babylon there will be no grain to grind and no inhabitants to eat the bread. The fourth is the light of a lamp, which makes human activity possible after dark. This is a representation of total darkness. This is in stark contrast with Revelation 22:5, where the light of the lamp is no longer needed in the New Jerusalem, because the presence of God is there. The last is the voice of the bridegroom and the bride (again contrast with the New Jerusalem—Rev 19:7, 9; 21:2, 9). The sounds of domestic joy and special social occasions will be silenced.

This poetic series of lines powerfully makes the point it is all over for Babylon and it will never rise again. The Great City is now completely silent. There is no more music, no more industry, no more food production, no more artificial lighting. Hearing the millstone in the morning and seeing the lamps in the evening are indicators of a flourishing domestic life. These are now gone from Babylon. Even social relationships like marriage have come to an end. The fall is total and complete. Not a trace of Babylon will be preserved for posterity. This underlines the important concept that sin will not last forever. In Revelation, God deals with sin fully and finally. It will not rise again.

Tonstad (*Revelation*, 263) points out an interesting element of this passage. Many of these descriptions are found in the Old Testament, but there they are not descriptions of the fall of Babylon, rather they are descriptions of the fall of Jerusalem (Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; Ezek 16:10, cf. the desolation of the whole earth in Isa 24:8). Israel's apostasy from God becomes the model for end-time Babylon's apostasy. This is further evidence that the woman Babylon, in

spite of her rebellion, bears a strong resemblance to the people of God in the Bible. Stefanovic notes (*Revelation*, 547) that along with references to Jerusalem, there is also an echo of Ezekiel's prophecies against Tyre (Ezek 26:13).

**. . . because your merchants were the great men of the earth . . .** Calling the merchants "the great men of the earth" seems odd at first glance. One would think the kings (Rev 18:9-10) would be called the great men of the earth rather than the merchants. But once again the Old Testament roots of this passage can help explain. Isaiah 23:8 makes reference to the merchants of Tyre, which were princes (Hebrew: *sarim*; LXX: *archontes*). The Greek equivalent, *archontes*, has the connotation of rulers or "leading ones". In Ezekiel 27:21 Tyre is said to have traded with the princes (LXX: *archontes*) of Kedar. So the association of merchants and princes is not foreign to the Old Testament. The "great men" of this passage (Greek: *megistanes*) is a different word than *archontes* but parallel in meaning. The honor in which the merchants are held here recalls the great luxury of Babylon, one of the reasons for her condemnation (Rev 18:7, 9, 14). In a spiritual reading, Stefanovic (*Revelation*, 547) see these merchants as the sales people (preachers?) of Babylon's "corrupt doctrines and policies".

In the latter part of verse 23, we move from the silence of Babylon's demise to an explanation for that demise. There are three reasons for Babylon's destruction in verses 23b and 24. 1) Babylon is condemned for her excessive indulgence in luxury, which so enriched the merchants that they became the "great ones" of the earth (Rev 18:23b). Her extravagance resulted in their wealth. 2) She is also condemned for being the one who deceived all nations through her sorcery (Rev 18:23b). This is parallel to the intoxicating wine of the prostitute (Rev 14:8; 17:2). 3) And finally, she is condemned for her implacable and bloody hostility toward the saints (Rev 18:24; 13:15-17; 17:6).

**. . . because with your sorcery all nations were deceived."** Two key words in this clause cry out for closer inspection, "sorcery" (Greek: *pharmakeia*) and "deceived" (*eplanêthêsan*). The Greek word translated "sorcery" is from *pharmakeia*, which is where we get the English word "pharmacy." Ancient sorcerers used herbal potions to create various effects, hence the Greek word *pharmakeia* can have both a medical meaning and an occult meaning. In this case the occult meaning is clearly indicated. "Sorcery" is part of the "wow factor" that Babylon uses to attract the political powers of the world to her side (Rev 13:14; 16:13-14; 17:2). This is a way of describing the world-wide deception at the end of time. Elsewhere in Revelation, the survivors of the sixth trumpet plagues refuse to repent of their sorceries (Rev 9:21). So sorcery is a practice that keeps people out of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:8; 22:15). Sorcery is one of the works of the flesh that Paul lists in Galatians 5:19-21. Isaiah mentions sorcery as one of the sins that doomed ancient Babylon (Isa 47:9, 12).

While the occult meaning of *pharmakeia* is the primary one in the Bible, it would be an inappropriate totality transfer to assume that this is somehow a critique of the modern pharmaceutical industry. That industry is certainly not without its flaws, including corporate greed, but it has also been a great source of healing and blessing in today's world. And "magic" or "sorcery" has nothing to do with that.

In Revelation "deception" is based on the Greek verb *planaô*. In this verse it is an aorist passive third person plural (Greek: *eplanêthêsan*). The third person refers to the "all nations"

who were deceived by Babylon. They were represented by the Euphrates River, the beast, the seven mountains, seven kings and ten kings of Revelation 17, and the kings, merchants, and seafarers of Revelation 18. Other references to deception in the book of Revelation are Jezebel's teachings (Rev 2:20); Satan (Rev 12:9); the actions of the land beast (Rev 13:14), who is also the false prophet (Rev 19:20); and the actions of Satan after the millennium (Rev 20:3, 8, 10). Here we once again see the spiritual side of the trade that Babylon was engaged in. Satan was a liar from the beginning (John 8:44). So the entities that serve him trade in falsehoods and have become very good at it. The nations will be led to buy into falsehoods that they have been deceived into treating as truths. Through "sorcery" and deception, the entities that make up Babylon deceive the nations of the world into Babylon's service for a time. But her actions have now come under full and final judgment.

**Rev 18:24— . . . and in her was found the blood of prophets and saints and of all who were slaughtered upon the earth.** There is a shift here from second person (addressing Babylon directly) to third person, as if describing Babylon to someone else and reflecting on the ultimate ground for God's judgments upon Babylon. This is also the third in a series of three indictments against end-time Babylon. The first two (Rev 18:23b) were introduced with "because" (Greek: *hoti*), this third indictment is introduced with "and" (Greek: *kai*). The first two grounds for Babylon's destruction are her illegitimate wealth and her deceptions. The third ground for Babylon's destruction is how she treated the "saints". Force, lies and wealth are the satanic alternatives to the blessings of heaven. They tend to be very attractive to the human gaze, but they never truly satisfy.

A thematic parallel to this verse is Jeremiah 51:49, ESV: "Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel, just as for Babylon have fallen the slain of all the earth" (cf. Jer 51:24) Just as ancient Babylon killed and persecuted the people of Judah, and came under God's judgment as a result, so end-time Babylon is here judged for her treatment of God's end-time remnant (Rev 12:17, 17:6; 18:20). Stefanovic notes (*Revelation*, 548) that this verse and the ones that follow are an answer to the cries of the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9-10. Tonstad (*Revelation*, 265) notes that the "was found" (Greek: *eurethê*) echoes the language of Ezekiel 28:15. The guardian cherub there was blameless in all his ways until unrighteousness "was found" (Hebrew: *nimtza*-- LXX: *eurethê*) in him. Babylon bears the image of the dragon/Satan (Rev 12:9). The mention of "prophets" (Greek: *propheton*) is noteworthy since John is considered one of the prophets (Rev 22:9).

Tonstad (*Revelation*, 264-265) notes that this conclusion of the reasons for Babylon's fall undermines that argument for Babylon as a symbolic name for the Rome of John's day. Leonard Thompson (*Apocalypse and Empire*, 95-115) recounts in detail the relative lack of evidence for state-driven persecution of Christians in John's day. The reports of Domitian's (reigned 81-96 AD) cruelty stem largely from historians beholden to Trajan's court. Trajan (reigned 98-117 AD) and his adoptive father Nerva (reigned 96-98 AD) gained the throne in the wake of Domitian's assassination in 96 AD. The historians of Trajan's court had every reason to write the history of Domitian's reign to make him look bad and Trajan look good. Hence, evidence for Domitian's systematic persecution of Christians is at least suspect. The Babylon of Revelation 18 is way

bigger than ancient Rome. It is part of Satan's final attempt to defeat God's purposes in advance of the Second Coming.

. . . **of all who were slaughtered upon the earth** . . . This is a remarkable statement. Certainly end-time Babylon itself is not directly responsible for all those who have meet untimely deaths by violence in the course of human history. This seems like a bizarre exaggeration at first glance. But then one is reminded that Jesus made a similar statement in front of the Pharisees: "Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,<sup>35</sup> **so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth**, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.<sup>36</sup> Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation." (Matt 23:34-36, ESV). Both statements make sense in that both examples of blood violence were motivated by the same Satan, who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). The actions of end-time Babylon are evidence of the kind of character that results from rebellion against God. Just as Jesus was a demonstration in human terms of what God is like (John 14:9), so Babylon is a demonstration in human terms of what Satan is like, and what the whole universe would be like if Satan were in control. In her conduct, Babylon, motivated by Satan, has approved, imitated, and exceeded all the persecuting powers that preceded her. Ellicott commented on this verse: "In the earthly view, we are guilty of the acts we do: in the heavenly view, we are guilty of all that the spirit and sin of our conduct tends to do."

**Rev 18 (Conclusion)**— According to Tonstad (*Revelation*, 265-266), the true introduction to chapters 17 and 18 is Revelation 16:19. There one finds a nutshell summary of the two following chapters: "God remembered Babylon the Great" (Rev 16:19, ESV). In chapter 17 we see Babylon at her peak of attractiveness and power (Rev 17:2-5) followed by the chain of events that led to her destruction by the political powers of the world (Rev 17:14-17). This latter scene becomes the centerpiece of Revelation 18, which details the reasons for Babylon's fall and also the results of it. Chapters 17 and 18 seem to blur the lines somewhat between the dragon and the beast, but go out of their way to distinguish the woman from the beast (Rev 17:3, 7). The woman and the beast here echo the earlier story of the woman, the dragon, and the beast in Revelation 12 and 13. But while the beast is the center of attention in Revelation 13, the woman/Babylon is the center of attention in chapters 17 and 18. Like the beast earlier, the woman/Babylon combines seductiveness/deception (Rev 17:2-5) with force and violence (Rev 17:6; 18:24). The overall picture is of a religious community (woman/Babylon) entwined with the power of the state (beast/kings/nations). Religion often sees the state as its protector, but ends up being compromised and ultimately destroyed by that union.

As we have seen, chapter 18 seems to divide naturally into five parts: 1) 18:1-3, which describes the situation of Babylon just before its destruction. Doom is here pronounced but that doom has not yet been executed. 2) 18:4-8, which contains a divine sentence on Babylon, describing the results of a heavenly investigation, but also an appeal to God's faithful ones to exit Babylon before it falls. 3) 18:9-19, which is made up of three scenes that describe and mourn the execution of Babylon's doom. The execution itself is not described, but is mourned

by kings, merchants and seafarers before, during and after it happens. 4) 18:20, which depicts great rejoicing among all those who have not given their allegiance to Babylon. 5) 18:21-24: The doom, fall, and execution of Babylon along with three reasons for its destruction, is here acted and recounted by a mighty angel. Parts (2) and (4) are like interludes (similar to Rev 7 and 10:1 – 11:14) which mention the people of God in the midst of the all the fall of Babylon material. The execution of Babylon (part 3) comes in the middle of a preceding scene (part 1) and a concluding scene (part 5).

The song of Babylon's doom, that takes up the last four verses of this chapter (Rev 18:21-24), is followed by a great outburst of heavenly celebration (Rev 19:1-8) which takes up what Revelation 18:20 began. The casting down of Satan (Rev 12:12) at the ascension of Jesus was celebrated with heavenly song. Similarly, the "casting down" of Babylon at the conclusion of the earthly conflict is celebrated in heavenly song. This is followed in chapter 19 by a figurative description of the Second Coming of Jesus. (Rev 19:11-21). As noted earlier in the commentary (Rev 15—[The Wrath of God]), one of the main reasons God sometimes intervenes in judgment actively is in order to rescue His people. That is the frame in which Revelation 18 needs to be seen. Babylon falls because she has oppressed the saints, and Babylon's fall means deliverance for those who have been faithful to God.

**Rev 18 (Spiritual Lessons)**—This chapter has not been filled with a lot of devotional material, but there may be a few personal spiritual applications that we can make.

The first is the concept of a higher court. In the United States, court systems operate at many levels. Decisions at the lower levels can be appealed to higher levels. The highest of all judicial levels is the United States Supreme Court. But according to Revelation 18, even the decisions of the Supreme Court can be appealed to the higher court of God's end-time judgment, and that is a point made in texts like Revelation 18:20: "God has judged her in the same way that she judged you." Babylon's harsh judgment of the saints comes back upon her in the final judgment. In this there is hope and comfort for the oppressed. Justice is coming even if we find ourselves in a situation where nothing seems right. In the end, God will set right everything that has been done wrong.

A related text to Revelation 18:20 is James 2:13, ESV: "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy." In other words, the conditions for Babylon's fall were set by her own behavior. She is treated the way she treated others. In a sense, James 2:13 tells us that God allows us to set the standard of our own judgment. The one who is merciful to others will receive mercy (cf. Matt 5:7). The one who is harsh and judgmental toward others, will be judged on the same standard they themselves applied. This motivates me to be gracious and kind even under mistreatment, because that is the kind of treatment I'd love to receive from God.

We often don't appreciate it today when someone rejoices over someone else's misfortune. But the situation in Revelation 18 is different from that. The fall of Babylon is the fall of an oppressive system. You can feel sorry for individuals who are part of an oppressive system, but it is appropriate to rejoice over the fall of a system that has hindered human flourishing. For example, there are ex-Communists who have sympathies with some of the

tenets of Communism, but they nevertheless rejoiced in the collapse of a system that made it impossible to speak your mind and forced you to live in fear. Similarly, in Revelation the rejoicing is not a sadistic glee, but joy over the fall of a system that had been hurting God's people. To live in freedom and without fear is precious and plenty of reason to rejoice.

One message that comes through more clearly in this chapter than anywhere else in the Bible is the importance of breaking off our relationship with any system that opposes God and His people, particularly at the end of earth's history. It is always wise to examine your religion and test it by the Word of God. But that is particularly important as humanity approaches the end of history. Revelation makes clear that systems can name the name of Christ and proclaim to follow Him, yet in their beliefs and actions they are animated by another spirit. The sea beast is a counterfeit of Jesus Christ, and the land beast is a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. Babylon is a woman like the faithful one in chapter 12 and is dressed like the High Priest, yet is clearly working against God in the earthly domain of the cosmic conflict. So those committed to the Scriptures and the cause of Christ would do well to examine their institutional relationships and be sure that those institutions are being faithful to the mission they proclaim.

**Rev 12-18 (Excursis on the Order of End-Time Events)**— In Revelation 19 the story begins to move beyond the End, although earlier characters and events are also mentioned (Revelation 12-18). But the central event of Revelation 19 is the Second Coming of Jesus. The chapters that follow definitely move beyond the End (Revelation 20-22), dealing with the Millennium and the New Earth. So this seems to be the right point in the commentary to reflect on the order of end-time events as described in the book of Revelation. This Excursis will not primarily look at the question from the standpoint of the entire Bible, the focus here is particularly on the order of the end-time events as described in the book of Revelation. What are the things Revelation describes as happening before the Second Coming of Jesus? In what chronological order do these events take place? The attempt here is to answer that question based on the exegetical evidence in Revelation itself. This calls for a short break from our verse by verse study.

In Revelation, there are a series of twelve end-time events that happen in a fairly discernable order. That there are twelve of them is purely by chance and not planned or required by the book of Revelation.

**1- World-wide proclamation of the gospel.** This is stated explicitly in Revelation 14:6-7 (NIV): "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water.'" The eternal, everlasting gospel is proclaimed by the remnant of the woman's seed (Rev 12:17). Just like the remnant of a carpet is made from the same material as the rest of the roll, the gospel of the end-time will not be something totally new or radically different than the New Testament gospel proclaimed since the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It will be essentially in harmony with earlier presentations of the gospel but uniquely packaged for the end-time in a context of pre-advent judgment.

In Revelation 14:6-7 the gospel is summarized in three statements: 1) "Fear God." This

does not mean to be terrified of God, the biblical meaning of the term is to take God seriously and make Him your ultimate priority in life. Such a commitment will be very important when facing the challenges of the End. 2) "Give Him glory." I understand this to be more than just a tag line for a worship service. It means to put God first in every thought and action, including what you eat and drink (1 Cor 10:31). 3) "Worship Him." Worship means to honor and admire God as the one who made us and the one who continues to be our source of life. Honoring God includes a willing obedience to all His commandments and a rejection of all counterfeit gods and gospels.

This final proclamation of the gospel is parallel to Matthew 24:14 and Mark 13:10, where Jesus says that the gospel of the Kingdom must be preached in the whole world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come. So the worldwide proclamation of the gospel is a necessary starting point for the final events of earth's history. It is the precipitating factor that sets the end-time events in motion.

Passages other than Revelation 14:6-7 give additional aspects of the final proclamation of the gospel. One of these is Revelation 3:17-22, which the parallel in 16:15 suggests is directed to the end-time people of God. The end-time gospel will not only be directed to outsiders, but will be relevant also to those proclaiming it. That message is to be cleansed of inauthenticity and receive the gold, clothing and eye salve, so that the message being proclaimed can be clear and compelling. Revelation 7:1-4 also seems to refer to the end-time proclamation of the gospel. The stormy winds of end-time trials are restrained so that the final message of the gospel will not be hindered, and all who are open to it can make their decisions and receive God's end-time seal. The sealing is a symbol of the character the end-time gospel will produce in those who receive it. Revelation 11:11-13 indicates that many in the Great City will "fear God and give Him glory", perhaps the great majority. This implies that the final message will be effective even among many that have opposed it. Parallel to this, Revelation 18:1 depicts the final proclamation of the gospel as a great shining of God's glory that lightens the whole earth and calls people out of Babylon (Rev 18:4).

The outcome of this final proclamation of the gospel is a world-wide alliance of the saints which is called by many names in the book of Revelation. God's end-time faithful are called the remnant (Rev 12:17), the 144,000 (Rev 7:1-8 and 14:1-5), the great multitude (Rev 7:9-17 and 19:1), the saints (Rev 14:12; 17:6), the called, chosen, and faithful followers of the Lamb (Revelation 17:14), and the ones who are both watchful and hang on to their garments (Rev 16:15, cf. 3:17-18). While it might be tempting to apply these various titles for the end-time people of God to different entities, there are numerous correlations in the text (the heard and saw in Rev 7:4,9; the allusion to Joel 2:32 in Rev 14:1, the 144,000 and the saints—Rev 14:1, 12) that inform us they are different ways of describing the same group.

What is it that brings gospel to universal attention at the End? If the core of the gospel is the same at the End as it was in New Testament times, the decisive turn in the world's interest is due not so much to theological innovation as to God's orchestration of events in a way that will place the New Testament gospel and those who proclaim it at the center of the world's attention. That is not the case now but Revelation projects that it will be so at the End. Those who care about the gospel need to be prepared to deliver the end-time gospel with power and

clarity.

**2- World-wide counterfeit of the gospel.** In the context of the end-time proclamation of the gospel, there arises a worldwide counterfeit of that gospel. Like the proclamation of the genuine gospel, this will likely have a lengthy prehistory, but it will come to worldwide attention in order to blunt the compelling power of the truth about God. It is not explicit in the text of Revelation whether the true or the counterfeit comes first. But I am suggesting that the genuine gospel must come first. Just as a counterfeit piece of currency is only effective in comparison to the genuine, so the counterfeit gospel would make the most sense in comparison with the proclamation of the genuine gospel. But as such events actually occur, the order of the first two events may not always be clear.

The worldwide counterfeit of the gospel can be seen in a number of passages in the book of Revelation. The centerpiece is located in and around chapter 13. There one finds a counterfeit trinity in the person of the dragon along with the beasts from the sea and earth (Revelation 12-13). That unholy trinity appears again in Revelation 16:13 and is there called the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The counterfeit trio sends out three demonic spirits, symbolized by frogs, to gather the kings of the whole inhabited world to the great end-time battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:13-14). It uses both force and deception in order to bring most of the world into compliance with its program (Rev 13:13-17).

Parallel to the activity of the dragon, beast and false prophet in Revelation 16 is the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:13-21). The sixth trumpet seems to portray the rise of end-time Babylon, whose operation is expressed in military terms (as is the 144,000). Since end-time Babylon is essentially the same thing as the unholy trinity (Rev 16:13, 19), the sixth trumpet portrays the end-time counterfeit as well. This is confirmed by the relation of the sixth trumpet to the final gospel proclamation of Revelation 10-11 and also the 144,000 of Revelation 7 (compare 9:16 with 7:4). So the sixth trumpet as well as Revelation 16 depicts Satan's gathering of earthly powers to combat the final proclamation of the gospel of Revelation 14:6-7. The final counterfeit of end-time Babylon is further elaborated in Revelation 17. There prostitute Babylon uses "fornication" and "drunkenness" as tools to bring the kings of the world to its side. That these nations are deceived becomes clear in their reaction to Babylon after the deception is exposed (Rev 17:16).

There are contrasting pairs of angels just before the End in Revelation. The four angels that bring a counterfeit gospel to the world (Rev 9:14-16) contrast with the four angels that come from God and extend the sealing opportunity to the world (Rev 7:1-3). The three demonic angels that gather the kings of the inhabited world to Armageddon (Rev 16:13-14, 16) contrast with the three angels that carry God's last day message (Rev 14:6-12). Just as there are contrasting pictures of God at the End (true Trinity vs. counterfeit trinity), these sets of angels represent contrasting gospels. Likely the true gospel revival comes first with the counterfeit right behind, but the order of these two is not clearly stated in Revelation. The result of the true gospel proclamation is a worldwide alliance of the "saints" (Rev 14:12). The result of the counterfeit gospel is a world-wide confederacy of religion in opposition to the True God. It is named by many names in Revelation: unholy trinity (Revelation 16:13); prostitute Babylon (Revelation 17:1-6); city Babylon (Revelation 17:18 and 18:1-24); and the great city (Revelation

11:8; 16:19; and 17-18).

An interesting parallel to Revelation's counterfeit gospel theme is found in the "Little Apocalypse" of 2 Thessalonians 2, one of Paul's earliest letters. In that chapter the mystery of iniquity (Greek: *anomias*—which literally means "lawlessness") is the proclamation of a satanic message that continues throughout the Christian age, although it is restrained for a time (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). This restraint is reminiscent of the four angels holding back the four winds in Revelation 7:1-3). In the end the Lawless One (which seems to represent at different points in the passage an earthly agent of Satan and Satan himself) is fully revealed, causing a great end-time deception, which includes an impersonation of Jesus' earthly ministry and also His Second Coming (2 Thess 2:8-10). That deception is permitted by God to expose the inner rebellion of all who have not received the final gospel message (2 Thess 2:10-12). The deception ends when the Lawless One is destroyed by the brightness of Jesus' coming (2 Thess 2:8—perhaps a reference to both before and after the millennium). Paul's outline here has many similarities with what we are seeing in Revelation. For much more on 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 see my chapter on it in the book *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*.

Let me summarize the first two events leading up to the return of Jesus. First is the worldwide preaching of the gospel that gathers a worldwide alliance of the saints, kindred spirits from every nation, tribe, people and religion, possibly not entirely visible to those on earth but certainly known by God. Second comes a world-wide alliance of religious institutions. This is in opposition to the genuine gospel message and is more public and obvious. There is also a third major development at this time, which we will begin addressing tomorrow.

**3—Development of a worldwide political alliance.** The third major event in Revelation's account of the final crisis of earth's history is a world-wide civil, political, military, economic, and secular unity. Like the worldwide alliance of the saints and the worldwide alliance of religious institutions, the political alliance is named by many names in Revelation: the Euphrates River (Rev 16:12 and 17:15); the kings of the whole inhabited world (Revelation 16:14); many waters (Revelation 17:1 and 15); the kings of the earth (Revelation 17:2 and 18:3-9); the earth-dwellers or inhabitants of the earth (throughout Revelation); the beast (Rev 17:3); the ten horns (Rev 17:12-13); the cities of the nations (Rev 16:19); seven mountains (Rev 17:9) and seven kings (Rev 17:9). This end-time development is not spelled out in much detail, but it's heritage can be seen in earlier world empires like Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome (Rev 17:10-11).

The end-time worldwide political alliance is activated when a significant sub-group of nations decides to join and support the "beast" (Rev 17:12-13). This detail illustrates a difficulty of Bible prophecy. It is critical that followers of God know the prophecies ahead but it is very difficult to apply them ahead. There is nothing in the "ten kings" prediction that can enable anyone to specify the details ahead of time. But if the text is known and understood in context, readers of Revelation can recognize the fulfillment when the moment comes (John 13:19; 14:29). Many readers of my work are disappointed that I don't choose to be more specific about unfulfilled prophecy. But as I have studied 2000 years of prophetic interpretation I notice that virtually all attempts to specific prophetic fulfillments before the time of fulfillment have been flat-out wrong, and the ones that got close were almost always missing some details. To

over-specify one's prophetic projections can do as much damage as ignoring the prophecies. What we do know is that the end-time political alliance will be activated when a significant subgroup of nations (like NATO or the G7) signs on to the alliance. Telling us exactly which nations ahead of time does not appear to be a purpose of John's prophetic vision. We are not there yet.

The worldwide end-time political alliance is in opposition to God and the "saints", yet it is part of the plan and action of God. God, Himself, plays a role in its formation (Rev 17:17). While God's operations always respect the freedom of His creatures, He is powerful enough and wise enough maintain control of the situation all the way through: bringing world-wide attention to the gospel; flushing out the great end-time counterfeit; and precipitating the political confederacy.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, Paul addresses the same end-time situation, but from an individual perspective. He implies that there are three groups of people at the End: 1) those who love the truth, 2) those who hate the truth, and 3) those who neither love it nor hate it. These three correspond to the "saints", Babylon, and the beast/ten kings of Revelation 17. None of the actions of Babylon and the beast are completely outside of His control. He uses the end-time deception (2 Thess 2:11) to expose the true spiritual condition of all. In the end, though, there will only be two groups: 1) those who love the truth and 2) those who love a lie, represented by the woman/prostitute sitting on the beast (Rev 17:3). The two gospels of Revelation 14:6-12 and 16:13-14 bring the whole world to a final decision.

The first three steps in the order of final events are the development of three great world-wide confederacies. None are currently in place, although all three are likely in process of development.

**4) The Valley of Decision.** At this point in the end-time scenario of Revelation, there are three worldwide alliances coming together; an alliance of the "saints", and alliance of religious institutions, and an alliance of secular, political power. Both the saints and the religious alliance are working to gain adherents from the secular center which is not aligned with either side in the religious polarization. This is the time of the loud cry calling the uncommitted to leave the emerging Babylon (Rev 18:4). This final proclamation of the gospel is assisted powerfully from heaven (Rev 18:1). Many people respond positively to the proclamation, even among those identified with the great city, Babylon (Rev 11:13). On the other side is the alliance of religious authorities, represented in Revelation by the unholy trinity, which is Babylon (Rev 16:13, 19). The "gospel" of Babylon is spread by the persuasive eloquence of the three frogs whose job it is to gather the nations (Rev 16:13-14); by the miraculous deceptive spectacles of the false Mount Carmel (Rev 16:16; 13:13-14); by the great counterfeit of the second coming (2 Thess 2:8-10); and, when all else fails, increasing coercion (Rev 13:15-17).

At this point in the course of the final events of human history, two developing worldwide religious alliances seek to draw the uncommitted portion of humanity (represented by the worldwide political alliance) to their side. There are dueling gospels being proclaimed by three angels (Rev 14:6-12) and three frogs (demonic angels-- Rev 16:13-14). Those who respond positively to the three angels of Revelation 14 join the alliance of the saints. Those who respond positively to the three frogs, join Babylon directly (persuaded by spiritual power) or indirectly

(forced by political control). Many will commit to Babylon in action even though they are not persuaded in mind and heart. This is represented by the symbol of the mark of the beast, which can be received in the mind (truly committed to the false religion) or in the hand (committed for economic reasons—see Rev 13:13-17).

**5- The world's secular and religious confederacies unite.** In Revelation a number of unifying forces that bring Satan's agencies together are presented. These precipitating factors can be seen in a variety of symbols. One of these is the three frogs (Rev 16:13-14), which represent the spirit of demons going out to gather the kings of the earth. The unholy trinity's gospel will be accompanied by spiritual power, which will help convince the more secular and non-religious portion of humanity to co-operate with the worldwide religious alliance. Earlier commentators would have labeled such spiritual power "spiritualism". The mixing of religions that has resulted from the mass migrations of the last few decades, means that many ideas from east and west can draw people together on issues of common interest. Secular people who used to not be interested in religion of any kind can be attracted through new ideas, the seance room, or the experience of spiritual power that accompanies the spectacular false Mount Carmel experiences (Rev 16:16; 13:13-14) Revelation projects.

Another precipitating factor in the worldwide end-time unity of all religious and political powers is likely ecological. The secular and political powers of the world perceive a planetary crisis that could end human existence unless drastic measures are taken. If the seven last plagues are taken literally, at least in part, the world may have a total ecological breakdown. And as is usually the case, opponents of God blame Him for the actions of Satan and the consequences of their own choices and actions (Rev 16:9, 11, 21). So it makes sense that the secular side of the world at the time may look to the religious side for solutions to "the judgments of God". Unless everyone is brought into line with the religious confederacy, God will cause even worse things to happen. Drastic measures in law and order to compel people to follow the religious confederacy will seem reasonable. Those who oppose the religious confederacy might be seen as the ones bringing the calamities in the environment. It would be seen as ecologically sound to support Babylon. And those who oppose this unity will be seen as "enemies of the state".

The worldwide end-time unity of religion and political power is symbolically portrayed in Revelation as being precipitated by "fornication" between prostitute Babylon and the "kings of the earth" (Rev 17:2). As a political symbol "fornication" suggests an alliance that is based mutual self-interest. When two people engage in sexual immorality it is usually because both parties feel that they will be better off as a result of that interaction. The metaphor sexual attraction and engagement describes that both the religious and political confederacies expect to gain something from their relationship with each other. In light of the ecological breakdown of the planet, that something would include seeking to restore "law and order" with unity propaganda (Rev 13:13-14-- deception) and force (Rev 13:15-17). One way to produce order and accomplish political goals is to reduce human freedom.

A series of images in Revelation show that the religious and political alliances succeed in uniting in the course of the final events of earth's history: Babylon sits on the Euphrates River (Rev 17:1, 15); the woman sits on the beast and the seven mountains (17:3, 8). Times of

seeming unity in the world may indicate Satan's uniting his forces against God and those who serve God in this world.

**6- The saints are singled out for destruction.** When the religious and secular powers of the world are united by the counterfeit trinity, those who do not conform (haven't received the mark of the beast) will be singled out for destruction (Rev 13:15). Using the language of Revelation, the dragon is angry with the woman and goes away to make war with the remnant of her seed, using the help of the sea beast and the land beast (Rev 12:17, cf. chapter 13). Like the war in heaven (Rev 12:7-8) this "war" is much more ideological than military, although force will certainly be applied. At some point, a death decree is pronounced on all who genuinely obey God and defy the demands of the unholy trinity (Rev 13:15). Economic sanctions are also declared against those who refuse to conform (Rev 13:16-17). This is the time when the restraining influence of God is taken away and the four winds of the earth are released (Rev 7:1-4).

There is not much detail in Revelation regarding nature of the death decrees and its timing. There are three situations in the Old Testament that may add color to the account in Revelation 13:15-17. The most obvious parallel is the story of the three Hebrew "worthies" on Daniel 3. When the decree goes forth that all must worship the king's image or be killed, they refuse to bow down and are immediately marked for execution. Another parallel in Daniel 6 sets a period of time in which the command that worship should be directed to the king alone. Daniel defies the decree in a public manner and is immediately marked for execution. A third parallel situation in the Old Testament is in the book of Esther. There a death decree is proclaimed widely around the Persian Empire with a date set when all the Jews were to be killed. The latter parallel seems the most pertinent to a worldwide spiritual conflict like that of Revelation 13. Setting and proclaiming a date gives allies around the world time to act efficiently when the date arrives.

**7- The close of human probation.** When the opponents of God have sealed their opposition to the gospel by condemnation all genuine believers to death (Rev 13:15), there is no further purpose for gospel proclamation. All the world's uncommitted people either offer allegiance to God and His Word or go along with the opposition (marked on the hand—Rev 13:16-17). The close of human probation is simply the moment when everyone on earth is firmly committed either for or against the gospel message. God is still willing to rescue and to save, but no one is listening to His appeals. The unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31-32) does not change God, it forever changes us.

The close of human probation is mentioned in several different ways in the book of Revelation. The first of these is in Revelation 10:7. The "mystery of God" (one way the New Testament refers to the gospel) is "gospelized" (or "preached as gospel") until the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet. The sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15) signals that human probation has closed. Revelation circles back to this theme later on. The gospel continues to go forth while Babylon is gathering the nations (Rev 16:14), unites with the beast (17:2-3), and singles out the saints for destruction (13:15—assuming that Babylon and the image of the beast are two ways of describing the same entity). When everybody on earth has made their settled decision the heavenly temple is empty because it is not needed anymore

(Rev 15:5-8). From that time on the righteous will still be righteous and the filthy will still be filthy (Rev 22:11). From that time on, people will either remain what they are spiritually or change further in the direction they have already chosen. If they change at all, they will simply become more and more what they already are (cf. 1 Thess 4:1, 12—where Paul applies this principle to the believers in Thessalonica).

**8- The opposition powers seek to destroy the saints.** The united religious/political alliance (Babylon and the beast) seeks to make war with the Lamb and those with Him (Rev 17:14) by executing the death decree on earth (Rev 13:15). The battle of Armageddon is first of all a battle for the minds of everyone on earth before the close of probation. After the close of probation it includes the religious/political alliance's attempt to carry out the death decree.

In Isaiah the rising waters of the Euphrates River symbolize the Assyrians' attempt to destroy the people of God (Judah). "The LORD spoke to me again: 'Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty flood waters of the River--the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks, and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!'" Isaiah 8:5-9. The threat to God's people at that time was called the rising floodwaters of the Euphrates River. It is the image of flood waters covering the whole land right up to the mountain top of Jerusalem.

The story of Assyria and Judah in the time of Isaiah represents the kind of threat that God's people will experience at the time of the end. No doubt many of God's faithful ones will lose their lives in these persecutions before the close of probation. The religious/political confederacy will shed the blood of the saints (Rev 18:5-6, 20). But, as we will see, after the close of probation, no such event will happen again.

**9- Christ intervenes in behalf of the saints.** At the very moment when the united worldwide religious/political alliance is about to act on its murderous intentions (Rev 13:15), God intervenes to deliver His "saints". In Revelation, this intervention is seen in two particular images. One is the drying up of the Euphrates River (Rev 16:12). The political powers of the world, motivated by Babylon seek to sweep away God's faithful remnant with a metaphorical flood of water (cf. Isa 8:5-9). God's intervention in behalf of the saints is represented by the drying up of those flooding waters. The murderous intentions of the religious/political alliance are thwarted by God's intervention. The other image of this intervention is found in Revelation 17:14. The grand alliance is portrayed as making war with the Lamb and His called, chosen and faithful followers (Rev 17:14). It is a war they cannot and will not win.

In Revelation the final "battle" is portrayed on a worldwide, international scale. For those interested in how Ellen White portrays these final events, she offers a localized portrayal. She envisions communities where God's faithful ones are outside of town hiding from the police forces which are tasked with implementing the death decree. When these police forces, motivated by religious authorities, go out to kill the believers, miraculous intervention make God's favor on them clear and the police forces return to town without completing their mission. See Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 655-656). That narrative comes in the context of allusions to the seven plagues of Revelation 16 and corresponds to the sixth plague

(Rev 16:12), so there is a direct correlation between Revelation and the *Great Controversy* account. The drying up of the Euphrates River represents God's end-time deliverance of the saints.

**10- The worldwide political alliance changes its mind and attacks Babylon instead of the saints.** When God delivers the saints, Babylon is exposed as a deceptive fraud. The worldwide secular/political alliance realizes that they have been deceived, that Babylon's claim to represent the true God in the world is a lie. In fury they turn on the religious alliance (Babylon) and destroy it. "The beast and the ten horns hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire." Rev 17:16, NIV. So in the end, Babylon is destroyed by the very powers she depended on for support. And God is revealed as being in control of the process all along (Rev 17:17). The religious alliance itself is shattered into three parts, corresponding to the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (Rev 16:13, 19). Ironically, when the secular/political alliance finishes its destruction of Babylon, they will come to regret what they have done. The mourning of those complicit in Babylon's fall is described in Revelation 18:9-19. The kings, merchants, and seafarers mourn, because when Babylon falls they too are losers.

As noted earlier, in Revelation the movement from the close of probation, to an effort to destroy the saints, to Christ's intervention, to people turning on the religious entities that deceived them is described from a global perspective. In Ellen White's writings, the same movement is described in terms of its local impact (*The Great Controversy*, 653-656). She speaks of bands of saints huddled together in remote places all over the earth and being pursued by police forces acting in behalf of local ministers.

The alliance of saints at this time will not be formally organized as such organizations will either be co-opted by Babylon or be destroyed. But they will recognize each other in their common devotion to a true picture of God and their opposition to Babylon. Military and police forces will seek them out in remote places to carry out the death decree at the appointed time. God's intervention in behalf of the saints will awaken the authorities to the fact that they have been deceived by their religious authorities. They change course and instead seek out the religious leaders who have deceived them.

In both Revelation and *The Great Controversy*, God intervenes at the very moment when His people are about to be destroyed all over the world. Then Babylon falls and splits into its three constituent parts (Rev 16:19). The Lamb will overcome the powers that threaten the saints (Rev 17:14); the deception is revealed and the Euphrates dries up (Rev 16:12); and the nations come to hate the whore (Rev 17:16). The more secular powers of the world now see that they have been deceived, give up their focus on the death decree and instead destroy the religious alliance that has deceived them (Rev 17:16).

**11- Christ finishes the destruction of evil at His Second Coming.** After the political alliance begins the destruction of Babylon, the return of Christ brings an end to anything left of the unholy trinity and also the secular-political alliance. In Revelation this destruction of evil is described in a number of images, most or all of which are not to be taken literally.

In Revelation 6:15-17 the elites of the world along with everyone else who has rejected God's mercy find the "face" of the One sitting on the throne so terrifying that they lead the rest

of humanity in a mass suicide wish. There is no need for God to “punish” the unsaved, they reap the consequences of their own rejection of His presence. They would be miserable in an eternity run by divine principles. This description may be the most literal of the passages that relate to the destruction of evil at the Second Coming.

In Revelation 14:17-20 the destruction of evil is described in terms of the harvesting and crushing of grapes, resulting in rivers of blood as deep as a horse's bridle. In Revelation 16:17-21 this destruction is described in terms of great hailstones and a global earthquake as part of the seventh plague (Rev 16:17-21). The final collapse of Babylon is included in this description. Revelation 17:14 focuses on the outcome of the “battle”, a complete defeat of the ten horns (political alliance) as the Second Coming approaches. Revelation 19:11-21 also describes the final defeat of the enemy forces in terms of warfare, but here the imagery concludes with the striking images of a bird supper.

The bottom line of all these passages is this. After the worldwide political alliance changes its mind about Babylon (worldwide religious alliance) and begins the process of Babylon's destruction, the Second Coming completes the process of defeating evil. Revelation uses many images to describe that defeat.

**12- Christ gathers His saints.** The last of the twelve end-time events in Revelation is the positive side of the Second Coming. Jesus comes to be re-united in person with those who have followed Him on earth. A number of passages in Revelation address this. First is Revelation 7:9-17. While this passage does not portray the Second Coming itself, it shares the outcome, a great multitude rejoicing before the throne of God and serving Him day and night in His temple. The location of this last scene (Rev 7:17) is confirmed in Revelation 21:4. In both passages God wipes away every tear from their eyes. Revelation 21:4 is in the context of events at the end of the Millennium (Rev 21:2).

A more direct reference to the gathering of the saints at the Second Coming is in Revelation 14:14-16. There John uses the metaphor of a farmer using a sickle to gather up the wheat harvest. At the Second Coming Christ gathers His saints up to Himself. Revelation does not address where the gathered saints go, but this is clarified in John 14:1-3. Jesus goes to prepare a place for His disciples, in His Father's house (heaven). Upon His return Jesus collects the disciples so they can be where He is (in heaven), He does not come down to join them on earth, as many believe. So at the Second Coming Jesus Christ gathers His saints to Himself and takes them up to heaven with Him.

Revelation 19 also seems to be a reference to the Second Coming, with Jesus riding out of heaven on a white horse with the armies of heaven following Him. The first part of the chapter (Rev 19:1-10) is parallel to Revelation 7:9-17, where the positive outcome of the Second Coming is portrayed. There is much rejoicing along with the marriage supper of the Lamb. One final reference to the positive side of the Second Coming is in Revelation 22:11-12. When He comes He will bring His reward with Him, both positively and negatively (22:12). Those who remain righteous will spend eternity with Jesus.

As I have outlined them, there are twelve major movements in the order of final events in the book of Revelation. You could probably make a somewhat different list with anywhere from ten to fourteen items. But the overall order is reasonably clear. Prophecy is not given to

satisfy our curiosity about the future. Its primary purpose is to motivate our response to God in the present. But God's people do need to have a basic sense of what is coming, so they can be prepared to meet Jesus when He comes. It is to that end that I have developed this list.

**Rev 12-18 (Order of End-Time Events Spiritual Lessons)**— 1- The great precipitating factor in the order of end-time events is the gospel which is spread clearly and powerfully throughout the world. One wonders how this might happen in a world that has so many contradictory voices. But the environment in which Jesus came the first time also had many contradictory voices. But God used the process of Hellenism (more and more of the world becoming Greek in thought and expression) to create the environment for a rapid spread of the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world. A single language and a single over-arching philosophy loosely bound the world together and the followers of Jesus gave the message of God's revelation clearly and powerfully to that context. Once again we have a single worldwide language in which the majority of business and communication functions. All that is needed is a common philosophical thread to which and through which the gospel can universally spread.

1b- How can we prepare to share the gospel when that time comes? I remember the book *How to Be a Contagious Christian*, by Bill Hybels, which addressed that issue. Hybels suggested that the formula for maximum gospel impact is a combination of three things. 1) A high potency Christianity with life-changing power, 2) brought into close proximity with the lost, and 3) communicated clearly in a way that makes sense in a secular world. Maximum impact can happen when followers of Jesus have a living relationship with Him, when they are more engaged with the world than they are with each other, and when they have learned to communicate the gospel in terms that actually make sense in the real world.

2- In any given culture or situation there are things that are compatible with the teachings of the Bible, things that contradict the teachings of the Bible, and things are relatively neutral, which can be used for either good or evil. For example, there is communication media, like the internet, radio, and Facebook. These media can be used to promote the gospel and encourage right living. They can also be the means of new forms of addiction, misinformation, and a whole lot of stress. Sports can be the context in which people socialize and get exercise, they can also be an obsession that destroys lives or distracts from more productive pursuits. The desire to preserve the environment can be a way of exercising care for the earth, as mandated in Genesis 1 and 2. Environmentalism can also be a form of nature worship, similar to ancient idolatry. Peace and unity among the nations is God's ultimate goal for this world (Rev 22:2), yet Revelation teaches that wicked people can make peace in order to destroy the righteous (Rev 16:13-14; 17:2-3). Even spiritual interest can be used for good or for evil (Rev 17:4-5). While some things in spiritual life are "black and white", there are many things that require discernment and reliance on the Spirit to navigate successfully in today's world. All the more at the End of time.