

The Twitter Commentary on Revelation
Jon Paulien

Revelation Chapter 18

Rev 18 (Introduction)—

Rev 11:18 is a duodirectional outline of the second half of the book. The wrath of God (Rev 11:18) is God's response (Rev 15:1, cf. chapters 15-18) to the anger of the nations. The end result of God's wrath is the fall of Babylon (Rev 18).

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Rev 18 can be structured in five parts: 1) 18:1-3 (Babylon's doom), 2) 18:4-8 (Babylon's sentence), 3) 18:9-19 (Babylon's aftermath), 4) 18:20 (Heaven's rejoicing), 5) 18:21-24 (concluding celebration).

While Babylon takes on more of a religious role in chapters 16 and 17, here she is a worldwide economic engine that is "exploitative, unsustainable, and doomed by its own inner structure" (Tonstad, 254).

Rev 18:1-3 (Introduction)—

The opening three verses of this chapter are a distinct unit. It serves as an indictment of Babylon, explaining the reasons that lie behind the doom she will experience later in the chapter.

Rev 18:1--

The angel here is a proclamation angel like the angels of Rev 10 and Rev 14. The "light" is revelation from God in an end-time appeal to whoever will hear, presumably the whole world.

The word "authority" includes the idea of power or capability, but it is distinguished from "power" by the sense of "right to rule", the legitimacy that undergirds the power of a ruler.

The arrival of this angel is a foretaste of how the whole earth will be illuminated by God's glory in the end.

Rev 18:2--

In Rev this verse begins 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.

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.

The angel has come down to reveal the truth about Babylon. Outwardly, Babylon is dazzling and beautiful, she seems to serve both God and Christ. But in fact, end-time Babylon

has irrevocably fallen from its original mission.

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.

Just as birds roost in a deserted city, demons come to roost in a context where God is no longer welcome.

Rev 18:3—

In this verse Babylon is clearly distinguished from the nations of the world. Its ostensible goals are neither political or economic. It offers an alternative picture of God.

Babylon is indicted in this verse because she has offered the systems of this world religious, political and economic security apart from that offered by the God of creation.

The early part of Rev 17 portrayed the future grand alliance (of religious and political institutions) at its peak. Rev 18 focuses on the imminent collapse of that alliance resulting in the destruction of Babylon.

In Rev 17:2 there are religious and political motivations for a union between Babylon and the nations. To these are here added economic motivations.

Because Babylon demands so much “stuff”, the merchants of the world are greatly enriched by that demand. The Greek word for “luxury” here has overtones of pride, wantonness and insolence.

Rev 18:4--

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.

This appeal echos the words of Jeremiah, “Flee from the midst of Babylon” (Jer 51:6; 50:8). The appeal also flows naturally from the preceding verses in Revelation (18:2-3), addressing anyone who will respond to it.

This appeal is the last act of gathering the end-time alliance of the saints. 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.

Within the eschatological visions of Rev there is a constant oscillation between things that happen before and after the close of probation. But probation's close is certainly imminent at this point.

The word usually translated “that” or “lest” is a strong Greek expression of purpose. The purpose of leaving Babylon is to avoid participation in her sins and plagues.

Rev 18:5-8 (Introduction)--

As seen in Rev14:7, the end-time judgment of the world begins before the Second Advent. This list of charges, the results of the pre-advent judgment, are given in these verses before Babylon's physical fall.

Rev 18:5—

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 remembered her crimes.

In Hebrew remembering is not recalling something that has been forgotten, it is deciding to act upon something that is continually in mind. It is used frequently in the Old Testament for announcements that God is about to act.

Rev 18:6--

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.

“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. Deut 19:16-19, ESV.

The concept of a double punishment is based most directly on the language of Jeremiah concerning the original fall of Babylon (16:18; 17:18). Thieves were required to pay back twice as much as they stole (Exod 22:4, 7, 9).

Many scholars believe that the word “double” 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).

Rev 18:7--

This verse restates the principle that Babylon’s judgment is according to her sins. The punishment fits the crime.

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 (see also Isa 47:7-9).

What Babylon the queen says “in her heart” she is saying to herself. These words express her own inner convictions, her own delusions. She is expressing the illusion of stability and invincibility.

Rev 18:8--

The phrase “for this reason” points back to the previous 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.

"In one day" (Greek: *en mia hēmera*) could mean a prophetic year (see Rev 12:14 (Excursis on the Year-Day Principle) or it could mean that at the very time when Babylon is boasting about herself.

. . . she will be burned with fire. . . This directly recalls the burning of the prostitute by the nations of the world in Rev 17:16.

God’s judgment of Babylon occurs prior to the plagues mentioned in this verse. This is one of the few places in the Bible where the great final judgment clearly begins before the Second Coming of Christ.

Rev 18:9-19 (Introduction)—

This section contains three songs of lament about the destruction of Babylon (Rev 18: 10b, 16-17a, 19). Each of these songs begins with "woe, woe" and ends with sentences that begin with "in one hour".

There is a certain progression in the mourning of Rev 18:9-19. It is future tense in 9, present tense in 11, and future tense in 18. The reaction to Babylon's destruction is given as if in real time in 18:9-19.

Rev 18:9-10--

The scene described here is strongly reminiscent of the lamentation over Tyre in Ezekiel 26:16-18.

This song of lament is in the future tense, the kings of the earth "will weep and mourn". When the destruction of Babylon is complete (when they see the smoke of her burning) they will realize their own loss and will mourn over it.

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.

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 (Rev 17:16). And now they are mourning the very demise that they themselves planned.

Rev 18:11--

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 term "merchants" translates a Greek word for 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.

If this trading is metaphorical of spiritual rather than literal goods, 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.

Rev 18:12-13—

This entire list is grounded in the song against Tyre in Ezek 27:5-24 and each item on the list is completely dependent on the word "cargoes", alternating between genitive and accusative cases.

The grammatical shift in the list back and forth from genitives to accusatives gives an indication of how John might have grouped these objects: jewelry and clothing, home decorations, smell and taste, transportation, slavery.

The concluding phrase ("souls of men") of this long list of goods provides strong support for a symbolic reading. But no one has been able to demonstrate a symbolic meaning for most of the items on the list.

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 all the items on the list, with the possible exception of “**wheat flour and wheat grains, pack animals and sheep**”, are luxury items. This trade is for the purpose of supplying Babylon’s pride and display.

Rev 18:14—

This verse shifts from a third person description of the cargos of Babylon to the second person. Babylon and her humbled condition seems to be addressed here.

A strong echo of Gen 3:6, without using the actual words of Gen 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.

The word translated “luxurious” 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.

Rev 18:15-17a--

There is no main verb anywhere in 15-17a. It is a subject, the merchants, followed by a series of participles that function as adjectives to the word “merchants.”

The narrative pattern of the three groups in 18:9-19 is interrupted by 18:12-14. So verse 15 picks up where verse 11 left off.

The “dressed and adorned” of verse 16 refers back to the description of Babylon in Rev 17:3-4 and also the adornment list in 18:12. This is further evidence that Babylon the woman/prostitute is the same as Babylon the great city.

Rev 18:17b--

Note that the seafarers stood at a distance, while the merchants stand at a distance and the kings will stand at a distance. The series (Rev 18:9-19) moves from future to present to past, indicating a movement in time between the three laments.

There are four groups in view in this verse: 1) pilots or navigators, 2) short-haul sailors, 3) sailors in general, and 4) everyone who makes a living in relation to the sea. All these regret the loss of business due to Babylon’s destruction.

Rev 18:18--

“Who is like the Great City?” is a fairly literal translation of the Greek here. This short sentence is reminiscent of “who is like the beast?” in Rev 13:4. This is, no doubt, a parody on the name Michael, which means “who is like God?”

Rev 18:19—

The result of Babylon’s fall is a world-wide economic depression, and those who transport people and goods feel the brunt of it. The seafarers are not so much empathetic

toward Babylon as they are mourning their own losses as a result of Babylon's destruction.

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.

Rev 18:20--

This verse interrupts the fall of Babylon narrative in chapter 18 and anticipates the rejoicing of 19:1-10. This is not vindictive rejoicing over Babylon's fall but the joy of injustice being reversed.

It isn't clear in this verse if both heaven and earth are rejoicing (as in Rev 12:12) or if the saints, prophets and apostles are seen in heaven spiritually (as in Eph 1:3 and 2:6).

God here reverses the judgments of Babylon on the saints (Rev 17:6), apostles and prophets. They are evidently the same group as is addressed in 18:4, "Come out of her my people."

God's judgment not so much against Babylon as "out from" her. Babylon does not fall because God vindictively strikes her down, but because she contains within herself the seeds of her own destruction.

Rev 18:21-24 (Introduction)—

These four verses form the fifth and final part in the structure of Rev 18. It begins with an acted parable of Babylon's fall, offers a poetic description of the outcome of Babylon's fall, and then gives three reasons that Babylon falls.

Rev 18:21--

This acted parable is a direct allusion to Jer 51:59-64. It also echoes Jesus warning against those who harm children in Matt 18:6.

The strong angel takes a large stone the size of a millstone (which could weigh more than a thousand kilograms) and casts it into the sea, presumably a reference to the Euphrates River that flowed right through ancient Babylon.

The time sequence of chapter 18 is not chronological here, this pronouncement precedes Babylon's fall, while verse 20 comes after.

The destruction of end-time Babylon will be as complete as was the fall of Old Testament Babylon. Though that fall was delayed for a couple of centuries, Babylon's eventual ruin was total until this day.

Rev 18:22-23--

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.

This address to Babylon begins with a series of five negations, utilizing the Greek language's strongest expression of negation each time. These negations are combined with a five-fold "in you anymore".

This poetic series of lines powerfully makes the point that it is all over for Babylon, it will

never rise again. Sin will not last forever. In Rev, God deals with sin fully and finally.

Many of the descriptions in this passage are found in the OT, but there they are not descriptions of the fall of Babylon, they are descriptions of the fall of Jerusalem. Israel's apostasy from God becomes the model for end-time Babylon's apostasy.

Why are merchants called "the great men of the earth"? Isaiah 23:8 makes reference to the merchants of Tyre, which were princes (Hebrew *sarim*). The Greek equivalent, *archontes*, has the connotation of rulers or "leading ones".

In the latter part of verse 23, we move from the silence of Babylon's demise to an explanation for that demise.

The Greek word for "sorcery" is *pharmakeia*, which is where we get the English word "pharmacy." Ancient sorcerers used herbal potions to create various effects, hence *pharmakeia* can have both a medical meaning and an occult meaning.

The goal of the deception here is to bring the nations and peoples of the world into a grand alliance of religious and political power to challenge God's plan for the end-time.

Rev 18:24—

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.

A thematic parallel to this verse is Jeremiah 51:49. 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.

This verse undermines that argument for Babylon as a symbolic name for the Rome of John's day. There is actually fairly little evidence of for state-driven persecution of Christians in the First Century.

End-time Babylon is not directly responsible for all deaths by violence in the course of human history. But in the view of heaven, we are not only guilty for the acts we do, we are guilty of all that the spirit behind our conduct tends to do.

Rev 18 (Conclusion)—

Rev 16:19 is a nutshell summary of Rev 17 and 18: "God remembered Babylon the Great" (Rev 16:19, ESV). A summary in advance of Babylon's fall and the reasons for it.

Rev 18:4-8 and 18:20 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 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.

Rev 18 (Spiritual Lessons)—

The decisions of the highest earthly courts can be appealed to the higher court of God's end-time judgment (Rev 18:20). Babylon's harsh judgment of the saints comes back upon her in the final judgment.

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.

This chapter encourages us to break 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.

Rev 12-18 (Excursus on the Order of End-Time Events)—

What are the things Rev describes as happening before the Second Coming? In what order do these events take place? Follow my comments on this at my Facebook page this next month.

The first event is a worldwide proclamation of the everlasting gospel before the End (Rev 14:6-7). It will be in harmony with the NT gospel, but uniquely packaged for the end-time context.

Rev 14:6-7 is parallel to Matt 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.

The final proclamation of the gospel is also featured in Rev 3:17-22, 7:1-4, 11:11-13 and 18:1. It will bring about radical change both inside and outside of the church.

The outcome of the final proclamation of the gospel is a world-wide alliance of the saints, called in Rev the remnant, 144,000, great multitude, as well as "the saints".

In the context of the end-time proclamation of the gospel, there arises a worldwide counterfeit of that gospel (Rev 16:13-14). It is not explicit in the text of Rev whether the true or the counterfeit comes first.

Within Rev, end-time deception is ground in chapters 12-13, repeated in other words in 16:13-14 and further elaborated in the sixth trumpet and Rev 17.

There are two contrasting pairs of angels in Rev, the four angels of Rev 9:13-16 with the four of 7:1-3, and the three angels of Rev 14:6-12 with the three demonic angels of 16:13-16.

The end-time scenario in Rev has a strong parallel in Paul's "Little Apocalypse": 2 Thess 2:1-12.

The third major end-time event in Rev is a world-wide political unity, which is named by many names, such as the kings of the earth, the ten horns and the beast.

The end-time worldwide political alliance is activated when a significant sub-group of nations (ten horns, ten kings) decides to join and support the "beast" (Rev 17:12-13).

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 (Rev 17:17, cf. 2 Thess 2:10-12).

The "saints" and Babylon use dueling gospels to draw the uncommitted of the world (worldwide political alliance) to their side of the final conflict (Rev 14:6-12; 16:13-14).

In the end-time context, two worldwide religious alliances present dueling gospels that are proclaimed by three angels (Rev 14:6-12) and three frogs (demonic angels-- Rev 16:13-14).

The worldwide religious and political alliances of the end-time are brought together by a number of precipitating factors that Rev implies with symbols.

Among the factors that cause the secular, political powers of the world to support Babylon are demon-inspired miracles and ecological disasters.

Through “fornication” (Rev 17:2) the religious and political powers of the world achieve a temporary unity of purpose at the end of time.

When the religious and secular powers of the world are united by the counterfeit trinity, those who do not conform will be singled out for destruction (Rev 13:15).

Three OT background stories add color to the death decree account in Rev 13:15-17 (Dan 3, 6, and the story of Esther).

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 (Rev 10:7; 15:5-8; 22:11-12).

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).

God’s intervention to rescue His “saints” in the final battle of earth’s history is observed in two images; the drying up of the Euphrates (Rev 16:12) and the battle between the Lamb and the ten kings (Rev 17:14).

In Rev the final “battle” is portrayed on a worldwide, international scale. In The Great Controversy, Ellen White portrays the same events from a local perspective (GC 655-656).

When God delivers the saints, Babylon is exposed as a deceptive fraud. The worldwide secular/political alliance realizes that it have been deceived, turns on Babylon and destroys it.

The battle of Armageddon, the fall of Babylon, the drying up of the Euphrates River, the Lamb overcoming the ten horns, and the beast destroying Babylon are different aspects of the same event.

The most literal passage describing the final destruction of evil before the Second Coming is probably Rev 6:15-17. Their rejection of God’s presence is the cause of their destruction, a natural consequence.

The final destruction of the religious/political alliance in Rev is described in terms of crushing grapes, falling hailstones, a global earthquake, and military action. These are largely metaphorical descriptions.

The primary description in Rev of Jesus gathering His saints at the Second Coming is Rev 14:14-16. Very metaphorical. The outcome of the gathering is seen in Rev 7:9-17 and 19:1-8.

Where the saints go after the Second Coming is not addressed in Rev, but it is addressed in John 14:1-3. They travel with Jesus to His Father’s house.

Rev 12-18 (Order of End-Time Events Spiritual Lessons)—

God used the process of Hellenism to create the environment for a rapid spread of the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world. A single language and philosophical system loosely bound the world together.

The gospel will have maximum impact when (1) high-potency Christianity (2) is in close proximity with the lost and (3) is communicated in language that makes sense in the prevailing culture.

While some things in this world are clearly good or evil, there are many circumstances (especially toward the End) that require great discernment and reliance on the Spirit to navigate safely.