

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE REBELLION

The Fall of Babylon
Revelation 18

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After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living." Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.' For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her." And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come." And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls. "The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!" (Rev. 18:1-14, ESV).

As we begin our study of Revelation 18 this morning, I'm going to read four statements, and I'd like for you to consider what they have in common.

- "We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States..."¹

¹ https://billofrightsinstitute.org/primary-sources/declaration-of-independence?gclid=Cj0KCQjAxbefBhDfARIsAL4XLRqlseKKndW1yZD27t4bJ1I28N3w2erPwh4IDzc2DfcRyoRxET98kg4aAvf5EALw_wcB

- “...by virtue of the power and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States and parts of States are and henceforward shall be free.”²
- “We, the Jury, in the above-entitled case, find the defendant not guilty.”
- “By the power vested in me by the State of Indiana and by God, I declare you husband and wife.”

Each of these are declarations. They are official pronouncements that have an effect. The first quotation was the Declaration of Independence. The second is the Emancipation Proclamation. The third is a jury verdict. The final is a declaration of marriage.

Think about those statements with me. At one level, they are just words, right? Yet they are so much more. I’ve often thought about this reality when I’m officiating a wedding. The man and woman walk into a sanctuary single. They leave married. Between those two moments are words—vows that matter in establishing a covenant. Declarations matter.

But do all declarations matter? They do when there is authority behind them, right? That’s part of the challenge with the present age in which we live. We have authorities making bad declarations—like redefining marriage. Or we have people making declarations beyond their authority. For example, at the core of confusion related to gender identity and sexuality is the issue of who has the authority to define both who you are and what is moral. Sadly, our present culture puts individualism at the center of that, which means that everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes. And that’s scary.

Why? Because whenever the created removes identity and morality from the creator, we’re in trouble. Why? Because that move is the essence of the definition of sin.

How does this relate to Revelation 18? Well, this entire chapter is a declaration of the fall of Babylon. It shows us what God sees and what God says about this city which is representative of a spirit of the age. What’s more, it shows us the effect of this divine declaration.

God’s authoritative declaration has a dramatic effect—one that we should notice and embrace. It’s also one that should cause us to ask a broader question: **Can you celebrate what God sees and says about you?**

Let’s take a look at this text through the lens of declaration and effect and then make some applications related to conversion and justification at the end.

The Declaration (vv. 1-8)

The bulk of chapter 18 focuses on unpacking the effects of the fall of Babylon, but the first eight verses feature the declaration. This is another judgment-oriented text, but it’s different in that it’s written like an anthem. It’s still heavy, but this chapter is designed to be more instructive.

² <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/T-00742.pdf>

In verse 1 we see another angel. The previous angels have been messengers of divine judgment. But this one doesn't enact the judgment; the angel declares it. Notice that the angel has "great authority." This is probably a contrast to the fake authority of the Beast. What's more, the brightness of his glory shines on the earth.

With a great voice, the angel makes the declaration: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" (v. 2). In case you've not followed along in our journey, the reference to Babylon is not merely about the ancient city. "Babylon" is a type or a metaphor for a spiritually rebellious city filled with false gods. It has historical roots back to the city of Babel, the nation of Babylon, and the prophetic warnings in Isaiah.

"And behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs!" And he answered, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground" (Isa. 21:9).

Babylon and idolatry are linked. It's more than a city. It's the spirit of the antichrist and rebellion against God. We see this further identified in 2b: "a haunt for every unclean spirit...unclean bird...unclean and detestable beast." Babylon is demonic, rotten, and destructive at the core.

What's more, the ideology seduced the world. Verse 3 expands the scope using language from chapter 17. This is a very important verse:

For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living (Rev. 18:3).

Remember that this metaphor isn't about drunkenness and sexual immorality alone. It's a statement about the systemic presence of evil. Commentator Grant Osborne says this about Rome:

"Rome seduced the nations due to her incredible wealth and the luxurious living it purchased. This bound them to Rome more securely by far than its armies could, for wealth brought them into the Roman fold willingly."³

This is important. The seduction isn't just moral or spiritual; it's financial as well. Military might is one thing. Commercial might is also extremely powerful, but we might not see it that way at first. It's true, however, that conflicts, wars, and the mistreatment of people are often connected to money. Babylon isn't just about religion or military might; it's also about monetization of idolatry. We'll see a lot more about this in the verses to come.

Interestingly, there is a call, in verse 4, for God's people to distinguish themselves from the spirit of Babylon. They were to separate themselves from the moral rot of Babylon. It's a call for God's people to not succumb to the gravitational pull of their society.

³ Grant R. Osborne, [*Revelation*](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 638.

Part of the reason for this is the judgment of God that is being declared. Verse 5 makes it clear that Babylon's sins are "heaped high as heaven." Divine judgment is coming, and her downfall will be great. Luxury will give way to mourning (v. 7a). Pride will be exposed (v. 7b).

Judgment will be shockingly swift—"a single day"—and it will be devastating (v. 8). A kingdom and system that seems so powerful and strong will be toppled and destroyed almost instantly. All the proud pronouncements about glory and grandeur will be silenced. The trust in military might will be shattered. The security of financial systems will collapse. And it will be a stunning upheaval of what human beings trust in.

That's the point. It's stated clearly at the end of verse 8, "for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her."

God declares, "It's over." The world as we know it unravels and collapses. If you've ever played the game Jenga, you know that a tower of blocks is taken down when the wrong block is removed. When that happens, the great power of gravity takes over. That's what happens here.

When God declares, "It's over," it's over.

The Effect (vv. 9-24)

The rest of the chapter shows us the effect of this declaration. It highlights different layers and angles from which to consider the downfall of Babylon. Like other parts of Revelation, this is designed to add color and context to what is happening. This helps us see what is really going on. Once again, the text is designed to draw us in so that we see and feel something here.

There are four groups of people mentioned in verses 9-19. All of them are connected to Babylon in some way or shape. They mourn the loss of the city and its system because of its effect on them.

Kings of the earth

The first group are the kings of the earth who "committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her." These rulers used Babylon for their satisfaction, and they mourn her destruction. Yet it's interesting that they "stand far off" as they mourn the city's demise (v. 10). Commentators see these rulers trying to keep their distance as swift judgment comes. They were "all-in" with Babylon when it was convenient and beneficial. In a classic example of self-interest, they step back out of fear. It's over.

Merchants of the earth

Verse 11 is even more specific. It identifies the other groups that mourn are those who sold goods connected to Babylon. They "weep and mourn...since no one buys their cargo anymore." Notice the self-interested motivation of their mourning. But to make it even more vibrant, verses 12-13 list the things involved. This is here to make "goods" more personal and relevant.

There's even a statement in verse 14: "The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!" (Rev. 18:14). It's over.

Merchants of these wares

The third group is like the previous one, maybe even the same group. But their response is similar to the kings in that they stand aloof from the destruction of Babylon as they mourn (v. 15-16). Verse 17 is telling in that these people grieve the speed of the judgment and the “waste” it creates. It’s over.

Shipmasters and Sailors

The final group are those connected to the transportation of goods (vv. 17-19). It would seem that this is highlighted here because of how vital the sea was for effective trade between kingdoms. These people are not kings nor are they the sellers of goods, but they are still deeply intertwined with the “Babylon system.” It’s over.

After these four groups, there’s an interlude of celebration of divine justice. It sets up the contrast between heaven’s view and earth’s view: “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!” (Rev. 18:20). While the world mourns the fall of Babylon, God’s people are saying, “Finally, it’s over.”

Take note that the effect of God’s declaration is not the same everywhere. If your life was tied to the Babylon system, then its demise is a disaster. But if your life is connected to the King of kings and Lord of lords, you have a very different view of the fall of Babylon. This is really important! Do you know why? Because when the world and its systems start to fall, the majority of people are in a panic, fearful, and mourning. The world as they knew it is collapsing. Christians live for another kingdom, and this becomes very evident when earthly kingdoms totter.

This is what John says in 1 John 2:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:15-17).

What an important reminder! Do we see what God sees when we look at the world? That makes a difference when you consider what you hear with his declaration.

This chapter concludes with another metaphor and a broader description of the effects of the judgment. In verse 21 the angel throws a millstone in the sea. It’s a symbol of judgment as the city sinks. It is “no more.” But that’s just the beginning of the “no more.” John’s vision highlights what is lost. The specifics help us to understand the effects of the declaration, “Babylon is fallen.”

- The music is no more. It’s over (v. 22a).
- The working is no more. It’s over (v. 22b).
- The light is no more. It’s over (v. 23a).
- The weddings are no more. They’re over (v. 23a).

The problem, according to verses 23-24, is the deception embraced by the world and the persecution of the church. This last verse of chapter 18 is not only a description of what is true, it's also a reminder of divine judgment.

If you are a Christian struggling under the oppression of a culture that is anti-god and antichrist, this statement means something: "It's over." The fall of Babylon brings to an end the long, hard battle with evil in the world. The declaration, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great," has the effect of triumph.

To those who know Christ, this is good news.

Applications

Do you know how important declarations are? If they are based upon the authority of God's promises or his character, they are full of hope and joy. And this relates to my first question: What does God see and say about you?

With all this talk about the fall of Babylon, I want to remind you of two other declarations with a powerful effect. They don't result in judgment. They result in forgiveness, grace, and mercy.

Conversion: a declaration with effect

One declaration is conversion. It's the moment when a human being understands that he or she is a sinner and that Jesus Christ is their only hope for forgiveness. It's when you believe that Jesus really is the Son of God. It sounds like this:

...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved (Rom. 10:9-10).

Declaring with your mouth and believing in your heart has an effect! You are saved. But it's not what you have done on your own authority. All of this is only because of the promise of God. It's a declaration with a beautiful effect. What does God see? A child of God who is forgiven.

Justification: a declaration with effect

The other declaration that is incredible is justification. It is the divine clearing of the guilty by the application of Jesus's death and resurrection. To be justified means to be declared righteous. It is the judicial pronouncement based upon the finished work of Christ.

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:23-26).

You see this declaration means that God sees you as righteous because of the work of Jesus. It means that the judgment for sin has been satisfied. It means you are declared innocent because of Jesus.

Revelation 18 is a declaration—“It’s over”—with an effect: mourning.

But for the Christian, God has made another declaration about guilt: “It’s over.” And the effect is incredible: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.”

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