

THE DESTRUCTION OF EVIL: PART TWO

Lesson 12

Revelation 18



WELCOME

What is your favorite series (books, movies, television, etc.)?

INTRODUCTION

In the previous lesson, *The Destruction of Evil: Part One*, we learned about the prostitute's downfall and destruction when her ally, the beast, turned on her. This lesson is a continuation of the Lamb's step-by-step victory over evil as the 7th bowl judgment, where Babylon¹ falls, is further explained. "[Babylon the Great] was evil, immoral, and drunk with the blood of the martyrs."² She needed to be destroyed. "This [passage] describes that destruction—how it occurred and its effect upon the inhabitants of the world."³

Tips for meaningful engagement with the Word:

- In Revelation 18, John announces the ultimate demise of Babylon with poetic language that echoes the Old Testament prophets, particularly Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos. He declares a lament over Babylon and warns God's people to flee.
- Historically, it was audacious of John to write this lament since Babylon, in part, symbolically represented Rome. "...Rome was at the absolute height of its power, and had begun to call herself 'the Eternal City.' Her armies had both created her and secured her place of absolute dominion over the Mediterranean world and beyond. Yet here is [John,] an elderly Jewish follower of the Slain Lamb, himself in exile on [Patmos], now facing west and [declaring] a dirge⁴ over the Empire. This is in fact the kind of stuff of which the entire prophetic tradition of the Old Testament was made..."⁵

¹ Babylon symbolically represents Rome, all evil empires and all that is opposed to God and His people. (Duvall, 208)

² Barton, 209

³ Ibid. 209

⁴ "A song or hymn of grief or lamentation *especially*: one intended to accompany funeral or memorial rites." <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dirge>

⁵ Fee, 250

- This chapter will be divided into two sections with questions after each section. The first section announces Babylon’s fall and calls for believers to leave her. The second section is a funeral dirge for Babylon. The verse numbers have been removed from the Scripture passages and footnotes have been inserted. These footnotes are intended to help clarify the passage and provide better understanding.



WORD

As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you. Ask Him to make it understandable and transformational.

Revelation 18:1–8

After all this I saw another angel come down from heaven with great authority, and the earth grew bright with his splendor.⁶ He gave a mighty shout:

“Babylon⁷ is fallen—that great city is fallen!

She has become a home for demons.

She is a hideout for every foul spirit,

a hideout for every foul vulture

and every foul and dreadful animal.⁸

For all the nations have fallen

because of the wine of her passionate immorality.

The kings of the world

⁶ “This angel had great authority, which probably made him even more glorious than the previous angels described in Revelation ... This angel was so glorious that the earth was illuminated by his splendor—he was like the sun, reflecting the glory of God himself from whose presence the angel had come. This angel would be bringing the final message of destruction upon the evil world system...” (Barton, 209)

⁷ Babylon was the empire that destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC and since that time was considered to be a symbol of the enemies of God and His people or “any great center of pagan power.” (Duvall, 208) Babylon is representative of those who would seduce humanity away from their true lover, Jesus Christ, leading them into immorality and idolatry (**Revelation 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; Jeremiah 51:7**). (Duvall, 208) As mentioned previously in this study, the name “Babylon” would have likely been assumed by John’s readers to be Rome. This would have been correct in that Rome was a great pagan world power opposed to God and His people. But, the symbol goes far beyond Rome to a world-encompassing global alliance of evil powers, politics, economics and distorted religion—any system that would be against God and his people. (Barton, 209)

⁸ “The absolute devastation of Babylon leaves her a fitting dwelling place or home ... for demonic spirits, unclean birds, and detestable animals ... a desolate, demonic wasteland, completely devoid of image-of-God life. (Barton, 245)

*have committed adultery with her.
Because of her desires for extravagant luxury,
the merchants of the world have grown rich.”⁹*

*Then I heard another voice calling from heaven, “Come away
from her,¹⁰ my people.*

*Do not take part in her sins,¹¹
or you will be punished with her.*

*For her sins are piled as high as heaven,
and God remembers her evil deeds.*

Do to her as she has done to others.

Double her penalty for all her evil deeds.¹²

*She brewed a cup of terror for others,
so brew twice as much for her.*

*She glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so match it now with torment and sorrow.*

She boasted in her heart,

‘I am queen on my throne.

I am no helpless widow,

and I have no reason to mourn.’¹³

⁹ John condemns not only the kings of the world (which represent military power) but also the merchants of the world who have benefitted from Babylon’s economic power, clearly connecting the two. The military and political power possessed by rulers of the world benefits, both economically and monetarily, those who are willing to align themselves with the prostitute and the beast. (Fee, 246) Therefore, these groups have the most to lose when she is destroyed. (Fee, 250)

¹⁰ “Jeremiah had prophesied regarding the ancient city of Babylon, ‘*Flee from Babylon! Save yourselves! Don’t get trapped in her punishment! It is the LORD’s time for vengeance; he will repay her in full*’ (Jeremiah 51:6). [Now] another voice from heaven warned about this future evil system and called to God’s people, ‘Come out of her,’ warning the people not to share in her sins nor in her plagues.” (Barton, 212-213)

¹¹ “The call for John’s own readers to be prepared to abandon [Babylon] begins with language borrowed from **Jeremiah 51:45**: Come out of her, my people.” (Fee, 247) “God’s people are called to separate themselves—to ‘come out’—for two reasons:

(1) not to share in society’s sins, and

(2) not to eventually share in that society’s punishment by God. Believers must always be aware of when they must not compromise with a godless society.” (Barton, 212)

It is important to note that God is preparing a new place for His people, the New Jerusalem. This New Jerusalem will be seen more clearly and further explored in future chapters of Revelation. (Bauckham, 129)

¹² While the Roman law said a person’s punishment should match their crime, here the angel asked God to double the penalty of Babylon for all her evil deeds. She had given terror and bloodshed to believers; her terror should be doubled. She had lived in luxury, she should be repaid with torment and sorrow. (Barton, 213)

¹³ This language is reminiscent of that found in **Isaiah 47:7–9** regarding the prediction of the downfall of Babylon.

- a. Respond to the following quote: “The people of Babylon had lived in luxury and pleasure. The city boasted, ‘I am queen on my throne... I have no reason to mourn.’ [Many] people of this world are susceptible to this same attitude. A person who is financially comfortable often feels invulnerable, secure, and in control, feeling no need for God or anyone else.”¹⁶
- b. How have you depended on physical things or financial security to feel safe, comfortable or in control?
- c. In contrast to storing up earthly treasures, what might it look like for you to build up treasures in heaven?

Revelation 18:9–24

And the kings of the world who committed adultery with her and enjoyed her great luxury will mourn for her as they see the smoke rising from her charred remains. They will stand at a distance, terrified by her great torment.¹⁷ They will cry out,

¹⁶ *Life Application Study Bible*, 2199

¹⁷ These kings had given their power to, and worshiped, the beast and therefore had committed adultery with Babylon (**Revelation 17:13**). In return, they shared in her luxury. However, as Babylon is destroyed, they are terrified and stand far off. They are unable to rescue her and do not wish to be caught up in the destruction. Without Babylon, these kings will be nothing. While they are terrified for Babylon, more importantly, they are terrified for themselves. (Barton, 215)

*“How terrible, how terrible for you,
O Babylon, you great city!”¹⁸*

In a single moment

God’s judgment came on you.”¹⁹

The merchants of the world will weep and mourn for her, for there is no one left to buy their goods.²⁰ She bought great quantities of gold, silver, jewels, and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet cloth; things made of fragrant thyine wood, ivory goods, and objects made of expensive wood; and bronze, iron, and marble. She also bought cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses, wagons, and bodies—that is, human slaves.²¹

*“The fancy things you loved so much
are gone,” they cry.*

*“All your luxuries and splendor
are gone forever,
never to be yours again.”*

*The merchants who became wealthy by selling her these things
will stand at a distance, terrified by her great torment. They will weep*

¹⁸ The New International Version translates “How terrible, how terrible for you, O Babylon, you great city!” as “Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon!” Woe is an expression of grief or of judgment upon God’s enemies. This is the first in a series of three woes that John pronounces over Babylon. It is reminiscent in both style and language of the prophets of Israel in the Old Testament, specifically Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos. (Fee, 250; <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/dictionary-of-bible-themes/9250-woe>; <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/woe/>)

¹⁹ God brings the destruction of this great city quickly and decisively. What has taken a lifetime to build (material wealth, power, prestige, etc.) will be destroyed in an instant. (Barton, 215)

²⁰ “...John begins this woe over [Babylon’s] collapse by noting that the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, not for [Babylon] itself or its people, but because no one buys their cargoes any more. Thus their sorrow is altogether selfish; it is not the poor and needy they care about, but that ‘no one buys’ from them anymore.” (Fee, 253)

²¹ “The merchants weep because Babylon’s fall means they have lost their primary market. They had become rich from her (**18:15**), and now they mourn since she can no longer buy their products.... this is ‘ironic retribution for those who worshiped the beast that they might buy and sell (**13:17**)!’” (Duvall, 251-252)

Rome’s trade brought enormous wealth to the region. This list, reminiscent of that found in Ezekiel (**Ezekiel 27:4–24**), overwhelms the reader with Babylon’s prosperity and audacious riches and possessions. However, an indictment of Babylon lies last on the list: “human slaves” (**Revelation 18:13**). Babylon’s wealth was generated, in part, at the expense of human beings and by exploiting them. “God’s judgment of Babylon is harsh in part because of the enormous value and worth [God] has bestowed on human beings.” (Duvall, 251-252, 254)

and cry out,

“How terrible, how terrible for that great city!

*She was clothed in finest purple and scarlet linens,
decked out with gold and precious stones and pearls!*

In a single moment

all the wealth of the city is gone!”

*And all the captains of the merchant ships and their passengers
and sailors and crews will stand at a distance. They will cry out as they
watch the smoke ascend, and they will say, “Where is there another
city as great as this?” And they will weep and throw dust on their
heads to show their grief. And they will cry out,*

“How terrible, how terrible for that great city!

*The shipowners became wealthy
by transporting her great wealth on the seas.*

In a single moment it is all gone.”

Rejoice over her fate, O heaven

and people of God and apostles and prophets!

For at last God has judged her

for your sakes.²²

*Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a huge
millstone. He threw it into the ocean²³ and shouted,*

*“Just like this, the great city Babylon
will be thrown down with violence
and will never be found again.*

*The sound of harps, singers, flutes, and trumpets
will never be heard in you again.*

*No craftsmen and no trades
will ever be found in you again.*

*The sound of the mill
will never be heard in you again.*

*The light of a lamp
will never shine in you again.*

The happy voices of brides and grooms

²² “They are not rejoicing at the suffering of the wicked or satisfying any kind of lust for revenge but celebrating God’s victory over evil and his faithfulness to his suffering people. Their faith wasn’t in vain. God is faithful.” (Duvall, 257) God is answering the believers’ cries for vindication.

²³ “The millstone was not a small stone used to grind grain by hand (e.g., **Matthew 24:41**) but a huge stone that weighed several tons and was turned by a donkey or mule (e.g., **Mark 9:42**).” (Duvall, 257) This symbolic act of throwing a huge boulder into the sea illustrates the judgment of Babylon.

*will never be heard in you again.*²⁴
*For your merchants were the greatest in the world,
and you deceived the nations with your sorceries.
In your streets flowed the blood of the prophets and of God's holy
people and the blood of people slaughtered all over the world.*²⁵

3. What stands out to you about the funeral dirge²⁶ sung by the kings of the earth, the merchants and the ship owners in **Revelation 18:9–19**?

4. These three groups of people (kings, merchants, ship owners) lament the destruction of Babylon. What do you learn about their true motivations from **Revelation 18:11–19**?

²⁴ “Six times the phrase ‘never...again’ occurs in [**Revelation**] **18:21–23** to depict what has been taken from the city: music, commerce, food, light, and marriage.” (Duvall, 258) There is now a complete absence of anything good in this wicked city. (Duvall, 254)

²⁵ There are three reasons listed here why God judged Babylon. First, her merchants chose to glorify themselves rather than God, displaying arrogance and a lack of humility. Second, the deception of the nations through her idolatrous materialism (while the word sorceries is used, it likely referred to the “spell” and “enchantment” of the flourishing economy rather than the actual practice of magic). And third, “Babylon has murdered God’s people” as well as unbelievers. (Duvall, 258; Barton, 220)

²⁶ Reminder: “A song or hymn of grief or lamentation especially: one intended to accompany funeral or memorial rites.” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dirge>

In contrast to lamenting, why would God's people be instructed to rejoice? (**Revelation 18:20**)

5. As you reflect on footnote 21 and the fact that much of the wealth, opulence and power of Babylon was made at the expense and exploitation of human beings, what comes to mind?

a. Where do you see society benefitting at the expense of other people?

b. "God [cares about] not only what people do but also who or what they condone, benefit from, and cooperate with."²⁷ Ask yourself, how have I cooperated with the systems of the world where some live in luxury and enjoy power and influence and others are exploited?

²⁷ Duvall, 253



WORSHIP

Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.

At times, Revelation is a book that feels obscure and hard to decipher. We may wonder what is literal, what is symbolic and how we are to respond to Revelation. However, one thing is clear: we are called to worship our God.

One technique to begin expressing our feelings in worship is to use the formula below, which is found often throughout the Psalms. The psalmists didn't hesitate to share their feelings with God, but always expressed their feelings alongside the truths they knew about God.

Fill in the first blank by expressing whatever you are feeling. Then fill in the second blank with truth about God. Finally, fill in the third blank with your praise or commitment. (Perhaps the example below can help you.)

God I feel _____.

But You are _____,

So I will _____.

Example:

God, I feel: sad that my prayers haven't been answered, and if I am being honest, I'm a little angry too.

But You are: always faithful, even when I don't like Your timing. You have proven Yourself trustworthy and the best at timing.

So I will: continue to trust You even in the midst of my sorrow. I will continue to praise and follow You, even when it is hard.



WITNESS

Believers are called to reflect Christ in the world. This section will help you engage with how to be a witness—reflecting Christ—this week.

Our commitment, expressed in the last step of the worship exercise just completed, is one way to be a witness and reflect Christ in the world. Living out the “So I will...,” despite what we feel, can be our act of witness.

How can you specifically live out or share your “So, I will” statement this week?

