

The Revelation to John
Chapter Eighteen
The Fall of Humanism and
Its Civil Structures
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Originally written in.2008

The vision continues to describe and amplify the fall of civilization. This is a terribly sad story of the vileness mankind is capable of achieving. The description of the city also seems horribly familiar with the state into which our country is sliding. Readers of the first century would have understood Babylon to be a horribly sinful city because of its treatment of the Jews during their captivity and the actions since then. Some interpreters say Babylon is a singular city and others say that it is representative of many such cities over the world. I will consider that he is referring to Babylon as one specific city but, as we will see, all other cities of the world have participated in the sin of Babylon. This city cannot be the literal city of Babylon of old for God said that it would not exist again:

- *Isa 13:19-22 "And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation; Nor will the Arab pitch his tent there, Nor will shepherds make their flocks lie down there. But desert creatures will lie down there, And their houses will be full of owls, Ostriches also will live there, and shaggy goats will frolic there. And hyenas will howl in their fortified towers And jackals in their luxurious palaces. Her fateful time also will soon come And her days will not be prolonged."*
- *Jer 51:24-26 "But I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all their evil that they have done in Zion before your eyes," declares the LORD. (25) "Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, Who destroys the whole earth," declares the LORD, "And I will stretch out My hand against you, And roll you down from the crags, And I will make you a burnt out mountain. (26) "They will not take from you even a stone for a corner Nor a stone for foundations, But you will be desolate forever," declares the LORD.*
- *Jer 51:61-64 Then Jeremiah said to Seraiah, "As soon as you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words aloud, (62) and say, 'You, O LORD, have promised concerning this place to cut it off, so that there will be nothing dwelling in it, whether man or beast, but it will be a perpetual desolation.' (63) "And as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, (64) and say, 'Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted.'" Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.*

Babylon was founded by Nimrod (Gen 10:8-11) and the name Bab-el means "the gate of God". The famous tower of Babel was an attempt to defy God (Gen 11:1-9). Babylon became a great empire before finally falling to Media-Persia and its influence of being against God has transpired throughout history. The 51st chapter of Jeremiah concerns the fall of Babylon at the hands of Media-Persia. The ruins of the city are about 60 miles southwest of Baghdad. The Parthian empire ruled the region in about 141 B.C. during which time the city and the Marduk temple were rebuilt to some extent but the city fell

into ruin. The Muslim conquest in about 650 A.D. completed the total destruction of the city. In this chapter Babylon represents the world system of the beast, especially in its economic and political aspects.

Rev 18:1 “After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.”

John’s perspective is now from earth since he sees the angel coming down. Seldom are angels described as having great authority but this is obviously a special occasion and a special angel. Some interpreters say that the earth is still dark from the fifth bowl judgment but whatever the current state of illumination on the world the glory of this angel would be quite noticeable. From what he is going to do we will understand that his authority is from God and is great. Some interpreters have equated this glory with the shekinah glory that departed from the temple because of the harlotry of the Israelites and then returned to the restored temple:

- Eze 11:22-23 *Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. (23) The glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city.*
- Eze 43:1-2 *Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east; (2) and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.*

Rev 18:2 “And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

Rev 18:3 "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."”

The angel loudly stated the obvious from God’s perspective. The city had become a horrible bed of sin. Birds are often symbolic of evil and the condemnation states that every sin is present. The demons, every unclean spirit and every unclean and hateful bird covers all bases! When the angel states that the city is a prison for the spirits and birds means that they are constantly present. Saying that demons dwell there means also that they are always present. We see from verse three that the sin has spread to all nations of the world. It seems that the world has reached the same state as that in the time of Noah:

Gen 6:13 “Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.”

We also remember the warning of Jesus:

Matt 24:37-38 “For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and

drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,”

There was a similar condemnation of Babylon told by Isaiah:

Isa 21:9 “Now behold, here comes a troop of riders, horsemen in pairs.” And one answered and said, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon; And all the images of her gods are shattered on the ground.””

However this judgment by God will be much worse as He is ready to destroy all of mankind’s civilization. The spiritual adultery of the leaders of Babylon had spread to all cities of the world and all cities had prospered in their material wealth from taking advantage of all such evils. This system was very attractive to those who love things more than they love God:

2Tim 3:1-5 “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. (2) For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, (4) treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.”

Christians have always had to fight against this evil system:

1John 2:15-17 “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

Rev 18:4 “And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues;”

John heard another voice that was not identified. The warning reminds me of God removing Lot from Sodom:

Gen 19:16 “But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the Lord was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city.”

However it seems now there are no righteous people in the evil cities. Of if there are, we are not told of any leaving. The temptations of the world are just that: tempting! We have to always be on the alert to recognize sin and we do that well when we bath our minds with the Word of God. We should heed all of the verses below:

- Mark 13:35 *“Therefore, be on the alert-- for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrow, or in the morning—“*

- Luke 21:36 *“But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”*
- 1Cor 16:13 *“Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”*
- Eph 6:18 *“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,”*
- 1Peter 5:8 *“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

John reports two reasons why God’s people must separate themselves from this evil system. The first is so that they will avoid pollution as they become “partakers of her sins”. There are good and bad partnerships:

- Phil 4:14 *“Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.”*
- Eph 5:11-12 *“Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; (12) for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.”*

The second reason is so that God’s people will be spared the terrible plagues that He will send upon Babylon. Those sins of Babylon are her immorality (literally fornication) (Rev 18:3) and her idolatry and pride (Rev 18:7). Her other sin is her worship of pleasures and luxury (Rev 18:7) while others are poor.

Rev 18:5 “for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

The sins of this city and its participants were stacked together as a single message to heaven very much as described by Jeremiah and as described of Sodom and Gomorrah:

Jer 51:9 *“We applied healing to Babylon, but she was not healed; Forsake her and let us each go to his own country, For her judgment has reached to heaven And towers up to the very skies.”*

Gen 18:20-21 *And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. (21) "I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know."*

As we have said many times before, God never forgets. When the Bible tells us that God “remembers” something we are being told that God began to act upon that event. People continually store up wrath for themselves individually and they will be judged on a day chosen by God:

Rom 2:5 *“But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,”*

Sometimes God’s judgments work silently “as a moth” (Hos 5:12) and sometimes they are “as a lion” (Hos 5:14). Those whose citizenship is in heaven will rejoice at the judgment of God.

Rev 18:6 “Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.

These words are not spoken to John but to the avenging angel(s). This type of judgment was discussed by Jeremiah and Isaiah:

- Jer 50:29 *“Summon many against Babylon, All those who bend the bow: Encamp against her on every side, Let there be no escape. Repay her according to her work; According to all that she has done, so do to her; For she has become arrogant against the Lord, Against the Holy One of Israel.”*
- Jer 16:18 *“And I will first doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted My land; they have filled My inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable idols and with their abominations.”*
- Isa 40:2 *“Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the Lord's hand Double for all her sins.”*

She must then receive a double portion of wrath. She must receive a double portion of wrath because she has not only participated in heinous sin herself, she has also poured out the drink for many others. Therefore a simple “eye for an eye” (lex talionis) is not sufficient justice. This justice is for God alone:

- Matt 5:38-42 *"You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' (39) 'But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. (40) 'If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. (41) 'Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. (42) 'Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.*
- Rom 12:17-21 *Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. (18) If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. (19) Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. (20) "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." (21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Rev 18:7 “To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.'”

The punishment will come because she glorified herself and lived totally in fulfillment of human needs and desires. Although above the payback was to be double what she had done, here there is a match of degree for degree. The word “degree” is a quantitative measure but, in this case, the measure can only be determined by the one offended, God. She had said that she was self-sufficient since she stated that she was a queen. When she said that she was not a widow she meant that she had always been powerful on her own and not a derived power from a king. She even said that she would not mourn meaning that she had no regrets for anything that she had done! I think it is a terrible thing for

anyone to say that he had no regrets for that seems to be indicative of a totally self-centered perspective. God gave them over to their sins so they reap what they sow just as Paul stated:

Rom 1:24-32 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. (25) For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (26) For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, (27) and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. (28) And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, (29) being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, (30) slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, (31) without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; (32) and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Rev 18:8 “For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.”

The reasons are sufficient for immediate judgment and, when he says that the plagues will come in one day, he means that there will not be a progressive destruction. This is similar to what Isaiah prophesied about ancient Babylon:

Isa 47:9 “But these two things shall come on you suddenly in one day: Loss of children and widowhood. They shall come on you in full measure In spite of your many sorceries, In spite of the great power of your spells.”

The plagues are probably connected with the seventh bowl. What awaits her in that day are pestilence, mourning, famine, and finally fiery destruction. The reason for this destruction is that she has been judged righteously as only can be done by the Almighty Lord God.

Rev 18:9 “And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning,

Rev 18:10 standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ' Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'”

All the cities of the world had been connected with Babylon and they had all committed the same sinful acts as they practiced spiritual adultery and practiced fornication and physical adultery. They will be saddened at the loss of this leader of debauchery as they watch her burning. They will not get too close for they fear that they might also be similarly afflicted. The last sentence emphasizes the immediacy of their judgment and they may even be recognizing that the judgment was deserved. After reading Exekiel 27, one is struck that John must have had in mind the fall of ancient Tyre as he describes the destruction of the great reality of evil, Babylon, the Great. Rome, Tyre, Babylon, and Jerusalem were all centers of prostitution and their characteristics are all based upon the leadership of the queen mother of prostitutes. The kings cry out because their material wealth is directly connected with their part of their adultery. They are standing at a distance because they fear that God will connect their luxury with their taking part in the adultery of Babylon. Stating that their judgment came in one hour is just stating how the judgment came upon Satan's cities without warning. These verses are poetic allegory relating the earthly kings and kingdoms with the spiritual powers that actually rule.

Rev 18:11 “And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more;

Rev 18:12 cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble,

Rev 18:13 and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives.”

Now the people who had prospered commercially from the sinful behavior of Babylon will also mourn. They are not sad for the city but only for their material losses. Their profit center is gone. Included in the list are human slaves as such trading was an important part of Rome in the first century and continued in the U.S. until the Civil War and it still continues in other parts of the world. Child labor is a sort of slavery and is practiced in a lot of countries today. All of these valuable products will no longer be available for the huge profits made by the merchants in cities all over the world. This Babylon will be a very powerful center in the world at this time. The products listed are very representative of typical Oriental marketplaces.

Rev 18:14 “And the fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them.

Rev 18:15 "The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning,

Rev 18:16 saying, ' Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls;

Rev 18:17 for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!' And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance,”

John continues to hear the lamenting of what the merchants have lost. Their cries are like those of the kings as they mourn over their material losses. People transported goods across the sea and every one of them would also stand at a distance as they wondered what would become of them now. Note how selfish the kings and the merchants are as they see their financial losses extending over the world. Certainly Rome is not considered here because it was inland with Ostia as its port city. John's purpose is not to describe any one city but the archetype of the earth's evil cities.

Rev 18:18 “and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?'

Rev 18:19 "And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!'"

The sailors and those who made money from shipping have a different response from the kings and sailors. They mourn in the manner of the Jews.

Rev 18:20 “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.”

Most interpreters think that this verse comes from the angel who began speaking in verse four. It does not seem likely that this pronouncement would come from the sailors. He tells heaven, the saints, the apostles, and the prophets to rejoice because God's judgment has been pronounced on Babylon for them. This is not vindictive but perfect judgment from the only One righteous. John states that this evil worldly system not only was aimed at heaven, but also at the church of Jesus Christ (saints, apostles, and prophets). It is probable that the judgment is for those martyred by the evil influences such as Herod's martyring of James (Acts 12:1-2) and Rome's killing of Peter and Paul. But such activity is not limited to Rome but to all the “Babylon cities” which also killed Jesus (Rev 11:7-8) and Stephen by unbelieving Jews (Acts 7:57-60) and Antipas by pagan cultists (Matt 23:34-37). Thus making up the “Babylon Cities” includes all types of cults against God.

Rev 18:21 “And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.

Rev 18:22 "And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer;

Rev 18:23 and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.”

Another angel who was very strong threw a huge stone into the sea symbolizing the violent destruction of the city. A stone would have sank to the bottom of the ocean and not seen again; so Babylon also would not be found again. People had developed many talents in the city but they would not be heard or seen again. The sound of music, the sound of industry, and the work of craftsmen would also not exist again in Babylon. Hopefully rap will be the kind of music that will disappear! The city lights were exhausted never to be seen again. Also the happy sound of people marrying would not be heard again. He then tells the reason for such losses. The merchants had become great men all over the world but the greatness was born out of their sinful deception of people. The Greek word translated “sorcery” is the same word from which we get the word “pharmaceuticals”. But the meaning is not just in the use of drugs but in any sort of mental deception by sinful means. Babylon is totally destroyed. A giant millstone would be about 4-5 feet in diameter, one foot thick and weighing thousands of pounds. Suddenly she (the entire evil system over the world) as represented by this parable is finally eliminated from the earth (Jer 51:64; Ezek 26:21). A similar destruction is described of Nineveh for her evil influences on other nations : *“All because of the many harlotries of the harlot, The charming one, the mistress of sorceries, Who sells nations by her harlotries And families by her sorceries.”* (Nah 3:4)

Rev 18:24 "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.""

Now we hear that the killing of prophets and saints and all others who had been killed in their climb to worldly success was revealed for anyone to see. Their judgment was righteous. We see from this broad generalization that the judgment is not just on one city but on all cities in the world who owed their worldly success to spiritual adultery and lust of all sorts. The prophets and followers of Jesus had been martyred as well as all others who followed loyally the true God. As stated by John, Babylon the Great is much more comprehensive than ancient Babylon, Nineveh, Jerusalem, or Rome. “She” is representative of all persecution against the servants of God until the final End will come.

There is a wonderful book that I recommend to readers of this material. The book was written by Augustine and is “The City of God”. It was written over 1500 years ago but it is a wonderful reading for today as he contrasts the city of God with the city of man. He wrote it as he contemplated the fall of Rome that was occurring. Rome had ruled for a thousand years and many thought that it would rule forever. It began in about 750 BC with the rule of seven successive kings. The early republic was founded in about 510 BC. The largest physical expanse of its rule was in 116 AD. The collapse started in about 337 AD and the last Emperor was Romulus Augustus in 475 AD. There are a lot of similarities between the decadent Rome and the Babylon of Revelation. Augustine began his writing in about 413 AD and it took thirteen years for him to finish it (dates are approximate). It is a monumental work but reading it will better equip the modern American to understand his country and the spiritual warfare going on within it.