

## Revelation 18

### I. Lamenting the fall of Babylon

- This section of Rev describes the final destruction and fall of Babylon/Rome as an archetype of human arrogance.
- The message is first proclaimed by angels (1-3).
- The message of the angel is followed by instructions of an angel to the Church (4-8).
- Following the angel's instructions, there are lamentations for the fall of the city from those who benefited from its power and riches (9-19).
- Finally, there is a final symbolic casting of Babylon into the sea, as Jeremiah saw Babylon being cast into the Euphrates. (20-24)
- Rev 18 shows the earthly response to the fall of Babylon, while 19 shows the heavenly response to Babylon's fall.

### II. The message of the first angel

- The angel's message is a decisive condemnation of the power of Babylon: it is demonic, unclean, makes the nations of the world drunk with her power, and enriches the world with its corruption.

### III. Breaking down the fourth wall with instructions to the Church

- In somewhat confusing fashion, the messages of the two angels that begin Rev 18 do not follow chronologically. We might imagine the message of the first angel to be a future vision, and the message of the second to be a message to the Church in light of that vision. "This is Babylon's fate...come out of her!"

### IV. Come out of Babylon!

- **What did it mean to come out of Babylon/Rome? What does it mean for us?**
- Jewish Christians receiving the call to "come out of Babylon" might have had an easier time understanding it. They were accustomed to living a kind of civic "double life" between Jerusalem and the Roman city they inhabited. But, surely the destruction of the Temple diminished the importance of the holy city as the symbolic, spiritual center of their faith.
- Rev calls all Christians to see the world with different eyes, and with a unique hope in the future promises of God. This call helps to understand what Rev is doing by calling God's people out of Babylon.
- "If they were to dissociate themselves from Babylon and its corrupting influence on their own cities, they needed not only to be shown Roman civilization in a different light from the way its own propaganda portrayed it; they also needed an alternative...they needed somewhere to go, another city to belong to. It is God's alternative city: the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven. It belongs to the future, but through John's vision it exercises its attraction already." Bauckham
- The symbolic power of Babylon is visible, tangible, and present, while the symbolic power of the holy city of God is invisibly, intangible, and future. This is, for the imaginative world of Rev, the difficulty of Christian life waiting for Christ's return.

- V. The lamentations of those who benefit from Babylon
- The Kings of the earth lament Babylon's destruction. Babylon's fall impacts them because it is the symbolic casting down of the perverse, arrogant power that is easily confused with divine power.
  - Next, we hear from merchants who have lost their livelihoods because of the breakdown of Babylon's economic power.
  - We then hear from sailors who lament for the same reasons.
- VI. A return to a divine perspective
- After the lamentations of those who benefited from Babylon's dominance, we abruptly shift to rejoicing in heaven.
  - Notice the kind of one-for-one justice that marks the fall of Babylon: God has condemned her condemnation of you.
- VII. Allusions to Jeremiah
- Jeremiah wrote in a scroll all the disasters that would come on Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon. And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: "When you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, and say, 'O LORD, you yourself threatened to destroy this place so that neither humans nor animals shall live in it, and it shall be desolate forever.' When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it, and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, and say, 'Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disasters that I am bringing on her.'"
- Thus far are the words of Jeremiah. (51:60-64)
- VIII. The pastoral message of Rev 18
- What do we make of this, as people who live in a "city" by Rev's understanding? To borrow Pauline language, as citizens of the heavenly city, not the earthly one. This is, of course, easier said than done. But the message of Rev is that we should always fix our eyes on God's future promises as our source of hope for Christian life.