

Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great

Revelation 18:1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory.

² 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.

³ 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."

⁴ 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;

⁵ for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.'

⁸ 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."

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore,

¹² 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,

¹³ cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

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!"

¹⁵ The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

¹⁶ "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!

¹⁷ For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste." And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off

¹⁸ and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city?"

¹⁹ And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

²⁰ Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!"

²¹ Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more;

²² and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more,

²³ and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth." (Rev 18:1-24)

The World Sets the Agenda?

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is “a fellowship of 349 churches from more than 110 countries, representing over 500 million Christians worldwide” whose mission and purpose is “Christian unity.”¹ Its formal history goes back to 1937, with roots being laid down in prior decades through student and lay movements which sought a shift in focus from “Faith and Order” to “Life and Work.”² Christianity just wasn’t practical enough. It had become irrelevant. God wasn’t dead, but theology had wounded him badly. It’s fourth meeting in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968 signaled to the world that this change was immanent as a new slogan was adopted, “The world sets the agenda for the church.” Finally, the church would be relevant again.

It was perhaps at this moment in history that the relatively new Evangelical movement³ formalized its split from the Mainline churches. Conservatives like John Stott

¹ “What is the World Council of Churches?” World Council of Churches, <https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc>.

² **Gerald H. Anderson**, “UPPSALA 1968 The World Council’s Fourth Assembly,” *Philippine Studies* 16.2 (April 1968): 391-398. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42720287?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents. Also **George Lindeck**, “The Unity We Seek: Setting the Agenda for Ecumenism,” *The Christian Century* (August 9, 2005), <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/unity-we-seek>.

³ Iain Murray suggests three figureheads of the start of the movement: *Christianity Today* magazine, Fuller Seminary, and Billy Graham. See **Iain Murray**, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000).

and Chuck Colson saw this slogan, I think rightly, as capitulation and even **spiritual adultery**. As Colson said, “**This sounds socially relevant; but in fact it displaces God, who long ago set His own agenda for His church: obedience.**”⁴ According to this new doctrine, theology must always take a back seat, indeed, it must always be changing, to the whims of society. In this we can hear whispers of the meaning of “**heresy**,” which comes from the word *hairesis* meaning, “**to choose**.” Heresy is simply the choice to change the Faith that was once-for-all was handed down to the saints (Jude 3) to something different and new (which is often old).

A **living example** of how this view of missions and theology works itself out in our new postmodern context was made relevant to me when someone sent me a post from a friend who has recently given up Christianity. This person had spent time at a Christian college playing basketball on a scholarship. She posted about another woman who likewise played on scholarship for the same school, a school that in its admission requirements states that you must “**be a professing and practicing Christian**” and “**commit to live by the standards set out by**” the college and its accompanying seminary.

⁴ Cited in **Becky Hobbs**, “RTS/Orlando: They Said It Couldn’t Be Done,” *Reformed Quarterly* 9.4 (Winter 1990), <https://rts.edu/resources/rts-orlando-they-said-it-couldnt-be-done/>. On Stott see, **Christopher R. Little**, “What Makes Mission Christian?” *Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies* 22.2, (Leiden: Brill, 2005): 208-26, at <https://ur.booksc.org/book/42909717/439b42>.

The post was uploaded to a group called “[Do Better Church](#).” In it, she details the “[problematic and damaging](#)” “[emotional manipulation](#)” and “[trauma](#)” that took her years to overcome because she was gay. In her final year, she began to tell her teachers, her RD, her chaplain, was told it went against God’s law, but that she could undergo counseling and “[conversion therapy](#)” (which made her furious). She was eventually told she must leave the school because she would not adhere to their standards, which she herself agreed to. She identified this whole experience as the “[oppression of \[a\] minority \[LGBTQ+\]](#).” The post is filed under “Abuse,” “Sexism,” “Homophobia,” “Discrimination,” and “Manipulation.”

Sadly, it seems to have [never once dawned on this girl](#) or the one who reposted it that God tells us very specifically about what he thinks about this topic in his word, that it is Christianity’s job to uphold God’s word (we don’t have the option not to do that), that *she* swore *she* would abide by the school’s rules, all while she gladly took their money in the form of a scholarship to get free tuition from them. She literally could have gone to almost any other school in the entire country and there would have been no problem as far as these things are concerned. But because in this Brave New World the world sets the agenda for the church, all those

things are taken off the table. All that matters is what the world wants, and the church must conform itself to it or be reprimanded for being intolerant and unchristian.

What strikes me about this for our sermon today is how it **perfectly exemplifies Mystery Babylon**. Recall that we concluded last time that Mystery Babylon is **the world's counterfeit religious and economic system**. It exists throughout the ages, but at its core it is always the same. This counterfeit works in tandem with the **government-political Beast system** to create a great forgery of God's kingdom (beast) and his worship (harlot) by passing it off as the real thing. But whereas the beast commands worship through fear and intimidation, harlot Babylon tempts and entices unsuspecting deceived people into committing spiritual adultery with her. For, Mystery Babylon is a temple prostitute, a whore richly lavished who offers pleasures galore if you will but fall down and worship the Dragon.

Today, we are going to look at why it is such a terrible thing to fall victim to this harlots' wiles, why and how this deception must be overcome with truth from the Word of God, and why all who are tempted to fly to this woman's bosom must flee the Babylon whore before it's too late.

Revelation 18: Context and Structure

Revelation 18 comes as **the middle chapter** of **the sixth of seven cycles** in the book of Revelation. It is the chapter chronicling the **warnings** and lamentations of several groups of beings that sound **the alarm**: Mystery Babylon is doomed. As we saw last time, its first half is connected to **ch. 17** via a chiasm that shows us who Babylon is (see the chiasm in the previous sermon). The chapter itself forms a nice internal structure of **eight “hymns”** which parallel one another:

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| A. Introduction 1: Angel with mighty voice (1-2a) | A. Hymn #1 (2b-3) |
| B. Introduction 2: Another voice from heaven (4a) | B. Hymn #2 (4b-8) |
| C. Introduction 3: Kings stand afar & weep (9-10a) | C. Hymn #3 (10b) |
| D. Introduction 4: Merchants weep (11-13) | D. Hymn #4 (14) |
| D¹. Introduction 5: Merchants weep (15) | D¹. Hymn #5 (16-17a) |
| C ¹ . Introduction 6: Sailors stand afar & cry (17b-19a) | C ¹ . Hymn #6 (19b) |
| B ¹ . No Introduction 7: [Another voice?] (20) | B ¹ . Hymn #7 (20) |
| A ¹ . Introduction 8: Mighty angel (21a) | A ¹ . Hymn #8 (21b-24) ⁵ |

This in turn breaks down into **two halves** which also form chiastic pairs.

⁵ **William H. Shea**, “Chiasm in Theme and by Form in Revelation 18,” Andrews University Seminary Studies 20.3 (Autumn 1982): 249-56. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1559&context=auss>. See also **Kenneth Strand**, “Two Aspects of Babylon’s Judgment Portrayed in Revelation 18,” Andrews University Seminary Studies 20.1 (Spring 1982): 53-60. <https://www.andrews.edu/library/car/cardigital/Periodicals/AUSS/1982-1/1982-1-04.pdf>.

- A. Angelic voice: Fallen Babylon (1-2)
- B. Kings, sexual immorality, luxury (3)
- C. Plagues, iniquities (4-5)
- D. Pay her back as she paid (6a)
- E. Repay her double (6b)**
- E1. Mix a double portion (6c)**
- D¹. Glorified herself, so give like measure (7)
- C¹. Plagues, judgment (8)
- B¹. Kings, sexual immorality, luxury (9)
- A¹. King's voices: Mighty Babylon judged (10)

- A. Merchants (11)
- B. List of luxury (12-13)
- C. Never found again (14)
- D. Torment, single hour (15-17)
- E. Great city (18)**
- E¹. Great city (19a)**
- D¹. Single hour, judgment (19b-20)
- C¹. Found no more (21)
- B¹. List of artists (22)
- A¹. Merchants (23-24)

As always, the literary structure **highlights the central points**. There is **great weeping** among the peoples of the earth over the great city because **God is repaying her double for the sins she has committed**. These peoples of the earth take **center stage in the chapter** as they form their own tri-fold literary parallel in the center of the chapter:

A. Kings of the land

- B. who fornicated and lived complacently with her
- C. stand at a distance when they see the smoke of her torment
- D. Woe woe
- E. great city, strong city
- F. one hour: judgment

A¹. Merchants of these things

- B¹. who became rich from her
- C¹. stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment (weeping and mourning)
- D¹. Woe woe
- E¹. great city, clothed in fine linen, purple, scarlet, gold, stone
- F¹. one hour: laid waste

A². Shipmasters, passenger, sailor, living by sea

- C². stand at a distance crying, seeing smoke of her burning (dust; cry, weep, mourn)
- D². Woe woe
- E². great city, in which ships became rich
- F². one hour: laid waste⁶

⁶ **Peter J. Leithart**, *Revelation*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, vol. 2, The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 226–227.

Seeing them as a **three-fold parallel center** reinforces through the **perfect triple repetition** (think “holy, holy, holy”) that their message, which itself parallels that of the heavenly angel who becomes the fourth announcer of doom is to be taken as seriously as any message in the entire book. It also reinforces the point that mystery Babylon is in fact the religious/economic system that lulls one into false worship through deceit and lust, for those weeping are the very same people who have committed adultery with her.

The Octave Song of Fallen Babylon

C: The Angelic Announcement (1-3)

We looked at **the first ten verses last time**, but it is important to go through them again, this time looking at all of chapter 18 with it. It begins with “**another angel coming down from heaven**” (**Rev 18:1**). This Angel is described in ways that remind us of only one other angel in the Bible: **The Angel of the LORD**. For this angel has “**great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory.**” Can any created being make the whole earth bright with its own glory? Of course not, but in the Johannine parallel (ch. 17), Jesus’ High Priestly prayer repeated says things like,

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see *my glory* that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24; cf. 1, 4, 5, 10, 22). Yes, indeed, Christ himself has come to announce something in his heavenly glory. And John sees it. And when he announces it, the whole world is illumined in his glory.

Do not move past this fact quickly. **Stay here and ponder it.** For in this single fact, we see the answer to why his announcement can be made. This is Christ, he who has died and been raised to life, he who has ascended to the Right Hand of the Father in heaven. This is who makes the announcement. He and no other.

“And he called out with a mighty voice, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!’” (2). This begins **the first of eight hymns** as someone has called them. They are short laments and declarations against the wicked woman. This section of the song comes from **one of Isaiah’s prophecies about Babylon.** Here the religious significance he puts in his prophecy. “Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground” (Isa 21:9). The religious whore who has committed adultery with the kings of the earth (Rev 17:2; 18:3) ... she is fallen. The verb (an **orist active indicative**) could be a prophetic announcement of a

predestined future that has not yet occurred. However, the announcement could very well be related directly to Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension which has somehow toppled her already. That is, **she is already somehow fallen**. These are not mutually exclusive.

But it is what she has become that is truly astonishing. **“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” (Rev 18:2b)**. We saw last time that Isaiah, in prophecies against Babylon (13) and Edom (34) describes what becomes of these two places once God's judgment hits and he describes it using the imagery of mythological hybrids (**“howlings”** and **“monsters”** and **“sirens”** and **“devils”** and **“satyrs”** and **“dragons”** and **“goat-demons”** and **“night monsters”** and **“Lilith”**) and their associated unclean animals and birds. John summarizes these as **“demons”** and unclean and detestable creatures. This is wicked, supernatural, and temple language. Babylon, who prides herself on her ancient worship is unfit for anything but satanic and detestable creatures. There is no holiness here. Only that which is unclean, decaying, dying, and death. And that is true, not merely in the future, but right now.

Therefore, **the warning** must be heeded. These pleasures to be had here come from changelings, beautiful sirens that call sailors at sea, enticing them near with their song only to turn on them, throw their ships against the rocks, and eat them like vampires draining the blood, leaving their corpses cold and rotten. You think they are pleasurable and lead to life, but they are of demonic origin and destination. “**Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead (the Rephaim) are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol**” (**Prov 9:17-18**).

All men have been given over to **her luxury and licentiousness**. “**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**). The **nations**, the **kings**, the **merchants**. Those who embody **economics**. Those who embody **authority and rule**. The totality of power and wealth and people on the earth.

D: Another Voice from Heaven (4-8)

Another voice issues forth **a second hymn**. “**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” (4-5). Though unidentified, this voice is clearly distinct from the first Angel, who I think must be Christ. It is also distinct from “God,” who is often the Father in Scripture. Yet, it calls believers “my people,” so is this the voice of the Holy Spirit?

The singer’s warning is that the people of God must come out of her because she is fallen. How can this apply to anyone prior to the end of days unless Babylon is somehow fallen now? But how do you come out of her? There have been many answers to this question. I want to give us something to think about by contrasting Christians and the church.

The words of Jesus in the parallel from John’s Gospel can start us off. “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). Who are “them?” A few verses later Jesus asks, “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me ... from the foundation of the world.” These are individuals, the elect—chosen and called by God because if they were not, they never would have come out of their own accord. Remember, there is a parallel to this in Revelation 17, “Those whose name had not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world” (Rev 17:8).

This voice is **not calling for Christians** to go live in a desert on a pole, to make for monasteries or castles with huge walls or Christian bubbles where no one can touch them, or for a rapture to escape it all. It is saying the opposite of refusing to live in the world and to participate as members of human culture. There is also a calling in our passage for Christians not to partake in the iniquities of Babylon.

They are **to refrain from religious syncretism**, that is the mixing of the worship of the true God with any form of creation. That doesn't mean Christians can't "eat meat sacrificed to idols." It does mean that the corporate church does not put God to the test by worshiping God with idols, all the more by worship God and the gods together. They are not to make **political alliances** with the world (be in the religious right or the religious left). Again, that doesn't mean Christians mustn't be involved with politics (though they should not be naïve if they do). It means the church is not to become a political action committee, compromising its witness through worldly power and bribery. They are **not to indulge in obvious moral sin**, such as sexual immorality and murder and theft and the church must not teach Christians that this is ok. They are to be very careful of their souls in times of **economic prosperity lest they be deceived** by Babylon, not understanding that they have subtly

exchanged the glory of God for the glory of luxury, money, independence, material possessions, and the like. And the church should go to great pains to ensure that it is not promoting an opposite message with its own power, size, and opulence. Christians and churches are to take care of one another in matters of indifference, forcing someone to call unclean that which God has made clean, forcing someone to live in poverty because God hates money, forcing someone to go against their weak conscience when they cannot yet see all the grace of God.

In light of these things, I would argue that the call to come out of her is more than the law. It is not some list of man-made rules to follow, but a call to **become the other woman of the Bible—Lady Wisdom**. Some people don't like this. They want rules and legislation. But Wisdom is the opposite of legalism that go over and above God's law. She calls out to you, **"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge."** When you fear God, then you will be on the right path to living in the world as Jesus lived in it (**John 17:18**). Together, we will understand that in our mistakes and even sins, God will sanctify us in the truth (**19**). And in our love and help of one another, we may be a witness to the world that Lady Wisdom is not billions of Christians, but One Woman so that the world may truly see

that we are One in Christ (20). This is what it means to believe in the one God has sent.

Now, you must see that **plagues** are upon this evil woman Babylon. Do you see them? The plagues of Egypt. The plagues that strike the body. She is not the Hollywood A-lister beauty queen you think she is. She is a woman full of sores and warts and scabs, ugly and diseased. These are her sins. God sees her for what and who she really is.

And this is **what is right**. We all know what justice is and we know that it is right. “**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**” (Rev 18:6), the song continues. This is the center of the first half of the chapter. **The *lex talionis* returns**. An **eye for an eye**. God is just. If this cup is **a ceremonial cup of satanic communion** full of the bloody wine of the saints that the woman and kings and merchants drink deeply of, then justice demands she be paid back for her crimes against humanity; her crimes against God’s people. This is all the truer given the parallel in John 18 that Jesus has been given **a cup by his Father** (John 18:11). This cup refers to his sacrificial death for his people. The heart cry of the saints, “How long,” is being echoed in the words of the voice from heaven. The Head and the Body together cry out.

The woman has been intent on glorifying herself, not the God of Glory. She is Jezebel. “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’” (8). The woman thinks herself Almighty, the rightful heir of the throne of the world; the ruler of men’s hearts. And nothing can make her sorrowful. She is too opulent, too affluent, too important. The world needs her. There can be no happiness, no positive change, no helping of the world’s problems, no worship without her.

The long song concludes, “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” (Rev 18:8). She is like foolish Belshazzar, king of Babylon, having a drunken orgy in the town center as the hordes of Darius the Mede take the city square, and Babylon fell in a single night. The doom comes quickly, unexpectedly, and yet in the back of the mind, knowingly. Do you really think Belshazzar had no idea that Darius was invading? That’s the sickness, the insanity of committing adultery with this woman. He lived out the final moments of his delusional fantasy against all hopes of his own destruction. And he died.

E: The Kings Cry “Woe” (9-10)

She may not mourn, but we will now see who will. **The kings.** **The merchants.** **The sailors.** All who were foolish enough to lay with this woman in broad daylight. **The third hymn** introduces us to the first of these. “**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**” (9). This burning smoke is both a picture of the **fires of Hades**, afterlife judgment and punishment, and a picture of a **religious sacrifice**. The woman who sacrificed so many of the saints in her religious love feasts will now be sacrificed at a burnt offering for her own sins. She suffers the just consequences of her actions. **And it causes the very kings of the earth to weep** and wail. They thought she was a queen. They thought her a goddess. They thought she was eternal. But she falls and dies and burns such that there is no lasting satisfaction in committing adultery with her. Her religion is useless. Her wealth is fleeting. And all the kings can do is weep at her burning, for they will not repent of their own deeds. All their hopes and dreams have gone up in smoke with her.

They **stand far off**, far away from this woman, distancing themselves as if God might not see them. They

sing, “Alas! Alas!” or “Woe! Woe! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come” (10). It’s utterly hypocritical. A single day has become a single hour. The demise of Mystery Babylon happens so quickly that you can’t really even fathom it. She has stood for so long—thousands of years even. She has seemed immovable, eternal, everlasting. It seems to have made all the sense in the world to run after her. How could anything happen to her? Then, in the blink of an eye, she is gone, dead, destroyed, punished. Justice. Judgment. God will not be mocked. Alliances with the world are a fool’s errand. The world setting the agenda for the church is a deal with Death. This happened in the blink of an eye, legally, when Jesus died on the cross. It will happen in the blink of an eye eternally when Jesus returns.

F: The Merchants Cry “Woe” (11-14)

“And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her” (Rev 18:11). This introduces us to the fourth group of singers, and the central group of the three human singers that now face the reality that the heavenly singers were telling the truth. “Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great.” Whereas the kings had committed adultery with her,

showing the religious-political alliances; the **merchants grew rich from her**, showing the religious-economic alliances. Religion can be very profitable business.

Why do the merchants mourn? “**No one buys their cargo anymore.**” It isn’t that they care about the harlot, *only themselves*. More hypocrisy in their songs. She was a means to an end—their own wealth and prosperity. The song proceeds to list **28 items**, as someone has speculated, 7 (days of creation) x 4 (the four corners of earth).⁷ But this is **not merely a list of commercial items** to be bought and sold at a flea market. These are “**theological, rather than historical.**”⁸ They are things that **represent the luxury of an idolatrous style of living** which was embodied by Rome, its imperial cult, and the lifestyles of the rich and famous in the first century. And while the goods here are not evil in and of themselves, the items of the list conclude with the climactic economic reason they exist—slavery. And you must beware of them. Do not make them your idols.

We can divide them into perhaps seven categories which move roughly from the inanimate to the living but lower forms of life finally to humans, just like the days of creation: **metals** (gold, silver, bronze, iron), **precious stones** (jewels,

⁷ Leithart, 2:227.

⁸ Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (London: SPCK, 2005), 454.

pearls), **cloth** (fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth), **costly articles** (“all kinds of” scented wood, ivory, and costly wood, marble); **food and spices** (cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat), **chattels of animals** (cattle and sheep, horses, chariots), and finally **people** in the form of slaves, “**that is, human souls.**”⁹ These things represent imports from as far away as Spain (gold and silver; perhaps from the New World) to India (precious stones) and China (silk).¹⁰

With the demise of Mystery Babylon, the economy run out of so much religious devotion is destroyed. Thus the song concludes, “**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**). Do you understand the point is to help you see not that the religious economic world will come crashing to a literal end (who knows, it might), but that from any kind of eternal and holy worldview, that came to an end a long, long time ago. You are not to lust, envy, and covet after the luxury this woman can provide you. Babylon is fallen.

This fourth song is **the first of two that form the center** of the eight songs of the chapter. Eight songs. Seven notes,

⁹ Smalley, *ibid.*

¹⁰ See **Richard Bauckham**, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 350-71.

one repeated (C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C). The **octave** returns, just as we saw with seven heads and an eighth that symbolized them all in the previous chapter. This is appropriate. A low C and a high C form the musical completion of Babylon's end. The parallel of the fourth is the fifth, and with it we begin the second half of the chapter.

G: The Merchants Cry "Woe" (15-17a)

A **fifth** song is its parallel center. It speaks about the "merchants of the wares" (**Rev 18:15**) as opposed to the "merchants of the earth." Like the kings, they too "stand far off," but they are "in fear of her torment" and therefore are "weeping and mourning aloud" because "they gained wealth from her." More literally, "wares" is "these things." In this way, the two songs are parallel.

However, a **new list** is given in this fifth song and the ideas seem to come out of Ezekiel 27, this time a prophecy against Tyre, a port city just north of Israel.¹¹ "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls"

¹¹ For example, "Your riches, your wares, your merchandise, your mariners and your pilots, your caulkers, your dealers in merchandise, and all your men of war who are in you, with all your crew that is in your midst, sink into the heart of the seas on the day of your fall" (**Ezek 27:27**).

(16). Tyre was renowned world-wide as perhaps the greatest trade city in the ancient world. They lived in great luxury as they owned the high seas. Now, their own spiritual adultery is pictured as a man with elaborate, extravagant clothing. It is the paradoxical opposite of Jesus who in **John 19:2** is clothed in a purple robe of a king—as a mockery at his death.

However, just like with the previous list, this one has meaning that goes deeper than the surface. Fact is, “The high priest’s garments and parts of the sanctuary [were] adorned with gold, purple, scarlet, fine linen, and precious stones (**Exo 28:5–9, 15–20**).”¹² In other words, we are led right back into the religious significance of the spiritual adultery that is being committed by the merchants. Their wealth and luxury and prosperity is not a blessing from God, nor is it some natural outcome of simply applying principles of economics and capitalism. It is the direct result of its harlotry with Babylon. They have committed spiritual adultery. It is all, ultimately, about the worship of the beast. The Bible knows nothing of a strictly secular, evolutionist, naturalist view of prosperity. It either comes from God or from a forsaking of him and turning to the gods. But, like the song

¹² G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 391.

of the kings, this one ends the same, “For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste” (Rev 18:17a). Therefore, what rational sense does it make to fall under her spell?

A: The Seamen Cry “Woe” (17b-19)

In the middle of vs. 17, we are introduced to the third of the three groups which also introduces the sixth song. “And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning...” (17-18a). This takes us, strictly speaking, away from land trade to those high seas that Tyre was known to rule. Hence, we continue to follow ideas found in Ezekiel 27. This is their song, “What city was like the great city?” (18b). She is called Babylon, but she is related to Sodom, Rome, Tyre, Jerusalem, all the cities of the earth.

Her doom causes them to “throw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned.” If the sailors are throwing dust on their heads, then they must not be at work. They must be land-bound, unable to board their ships. How else can they get dust on their heads? And their song continues, “Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid

waste” (19). The threefold repletion is complete. Because Babylon’s doom is complete. She has been judged and all those made wealthy off of her are reduced to whimpering, blathering, hypocritical, fools who have lost everything.

B: The Unknown Singer (20)

Just here, it is tempting to think that the song of the shipmasters continues, for there is no interruption and **no new introduction**. But it is clearly a song, “**Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!**” (20). While it is grammatically possible that the sailors are singing this, it is **theologically impossible**. These are not redeemed sailors, nor is there any hint that they are being forced to sing this.

This song is an echo of the one in **Jeremiah 51:48**, “**Then the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, shall sing for joy over Babylon, for the destroyers shall come against them out of the north,’ declares the Lord.**” If John means that the same singers are singing, then these would have to be **the redeemed**. However, the singer changes things. Saints, apostles, and prophets are added to Jeremiah’s verse, while it appears that an invisible singer in

commanding them to sing in Revelation. There is no command in Jeremiah.

It seems to me that something else is going on here. We are to understand that this is a seventh and separate song which parallels the second song. Of the eight, only the second and this seventh have unidentified singers. We are not told who they are. I suggested that the second singer could very well be the Holy Spirit, since he refers to “my people.” Given that the Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as the shy member of the Trinity, he might not want to be identified. Yet, this seventh song certainly fits with words that he might sing. He calls for the saints and apostles and prophets to rejoice—he’s the one who fills them to do so. In this, God is beginning to carry out final justice for his people who so long ago in the book were crying out “How long?”

C—The Octave: The Mighty Angel (21-24)

It is clear that vs. 21 introduces us to a final and distinct song. By our count, it is the eighth. The eighth is the octave. Octaves return to the same note as the first (in the arbitrary heading I have here: C and C) but sung an octave higher (or lower). If John is doing what I think he is doing, he is following the lead of David and the Psalmists. For example,

the LXX heading for Psalm 6 says, “For the End, a Psalm of David among the Hymns for the eighth.”¹³ Jerome said of Psalm 5, which is also, “For the End,” that it is about “the Church winning the inheritance at the end.”¹⁴ Yet, Jesus was raised on the Eighth—Sunday (Triumphal Entry) to Sunday (Resurrection). And so the end of one thing is also a new beginning or another. Thus, from Irenaeus, to Origen and Eusebius, Athanasius and Didymus, Gregory the Great and his older brother Basil and their close friend Gregory Nazianzen, there was this consensus about “the octave” meaning “the temporal, making way for the eternal.”¹⁵

How appropriate then that it begins, “Then a mighty angel ...” If the parallels work (hymns 1 and 8), then the mighty angel should be the same one “having great authority whose appearance made the earth bright with his glory.” Christ again. Christ, the one who is alive, is the one to whom all judgment has been given. We will see much of him in Revelation 19.

The focus here is only upon the end, not the new beginning. That is coming soon. But not yet. He “took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea.” As he

¹³ The Sheminith probably refers to “the octave” or “the eighth.”

¹⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 21.

¹⁵ Waltke, 45.

did this he sang, “So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth” (Rev 18:21-24).

This list is a kind of **parallel to the demonic list** of vs. 2. Now, rather than it being a place full of bad things, it is a **place void of good ones**. Curiously, given that we are talking about octaves, the first things in the list are **musical**. No more harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters. No one will ever again sing the praises of Babylon.

Second, we have a list of **cultural achievements**: craftsman and crafts, the mill. Nebuchadnezzar had his wonder of the world, his hanging Gardens of Babylon. No more. There will be no more light of a lamp, referring to what is most necessary for a world power arise. Or, perhaps

it is to **spiritual light**. Its antithesis will come later in Revelation when there will be no more sun, because the light of Christ will shine forever. It refers to **marriage**—the bridegroom and bride. There will be no more weddings, no more children, no more generations of people. The merchants that we have seen will vanish. There will be no more trade, no more buying, no more selling. That which the beast is known by will not be found here with the woman either. Finally, as if tying back to the demonic, he says, “**all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.**” **Witchcraft**. Enchantment. Magic. The smoke and mirrors of the prostitute that emulates the Bride of Christ will vanish into smoke. All because she was queen—of killing “**the prophets and saints and all who have been slain on earth.**”

Compromise with the World

I began this morning thinking about this foolish idea which itself has enchanted so many people in what we call the visible church—**compromise with the world**. These days, Evangelicals and even many Reformed people seem almost hell-bent on following the Liberals down this path. The world sets the agenda for the church. It deeply grieves me when professing Christians give up their faith. But it is

absolutely nonsensical to me that those same people turn around and say that they might have stayed Christian if only the church had let them do the things they wanted to do. **How can you be** angry at a school that has a lifestyle statement that you swore to obey because you decided you would not obey it and expected that they would be totally pleased with your decision, all while you gladly take money from the same institution? **How can you be** angry at a God who tells you what he is like, what you are like, what he does not want you to do (not only because it is wrong, but because it is bad for you), who also sends his Son to die for the world so that it might have forgiveness, all while you disobey him as you breath his air, drink his water, and eat his food? Do better church? No. How about be honest sinner?

We spoke earlier about what it means to have wisdom in a world that you have to be “**in**” but not “**of**.” We must use wisdom as we “**come out of**” Babylon. Christians have taken at least four different approaches to this, generally speaking. They have been detailed by scholars¹⁶ as *Christ over culture*—Christians feel they have to “**Christianize**” **everything** in order to participate in a cultural act; *Christ*

¹⁶ See especially **Richard Niebuhr**, *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Brothers, 1956). For a good Reformed/Lutheran summary see **Gene Edward Veith**, “Christianity and Culture: God’s Double Sovereignty,” *Modern Reformation* 6:1 (Jan-Feb 1997), 15-19, https://www.issuesetcarchive.org/issues_site/resource/archives/veith2.htm.

against culture—Christians feel like they simply have to remove themselves from most things in the culture; *Christ and culture in paradox*—Christians understand that culture is neither good, nor bad, nor neutral and learn to use wisdom accordingly.

While all of these views have things to commend them (though I do think the former two have much more potential problems than the third), there is one view that Gene Veith, and I agree with him, has said, “I cannot find anything ... to respect.” (His list) From the jettisoning of the supernatural for a “rational” religion, to making peace with the various -isms of the last 200 years (Romanticism, existentialism, socialism, communism, feminism, LBBTQRSTUVWXYZism, etc.), to conducting marketing surveys to find out what consumers want church to look like, to throwing away time-tested, indeed biblical liturgies for God’s worship, to feeding people with a social gospel or a gospel of self-esteem or principles for successful living rather than Christ and him crucified, this view which has been called “*Culture over Christ*” is the very heart and soul of Mystery Babylon.

But Mystery Babylon is doom. Indeed, she has fallen. That’s precisely the point of preaching Christ and him crucified—so that people may see this and come out rather

than try to make their peace with her and be seduced by her short-lived pleasures and eternally empty and desolate and demonic ending. When you understand these things, it ought to make breaking with her an easy thing, for Jesus has broken her power already by his death and resurrection. He holds the power over her today and tomorrow. **Don't be seduced** by her any longer. Come out and sing the song of Christ, of his Spirit, and of his people. Babylon has Fallen and she has been repaid for all that she has done. But if you won't heed the word, know that you will still **sing of her demise**. But you will do it like the kings, merchants, and sailors—unrepentant, hypocritical, fearful, because you know that after her doom, comes your own eternal emptiness, with a fate that becomes the same as hers. Let us each ask God for mercy and the power to stand in days like these where mystery Babylon has never been so powerful and seductive. She is fallen. May the Word be the power to overcome.

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The Samaritan Woman	The Bride of Christ
4:29–30 The Samaritan woman calls for the people to “ ‘Come’ ... (and) they came out of the city”	18:4 A voice from heaven calls: “ Come out of her (the city of the harlot), My people”
17:5 (also 22, 24) Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.	18:1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory .
17:15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.	18:4 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.
18:11 “the cup which My Father has given”	18:6 the harlot Babylon has a “ cup of abominations” (17:4)
19:2 “they clothed Him in a purple robe”	18:16 the harlot Babylon “was clothed in purple ”