

**Series:** The Sovereign Slaying of Sinful Systems (a study in Revelation 17-18)  
**Sermon Text:** 18:1-8 Babylon's Obituary (See App for lesson, slides, and to ask questions)

The Revelation of Jesus includes a *"tale of 2 cities"* (chart in previous notes) depicted by 2 women (Babylon, the Great Prostitute and New Jerusalem, the Lamb's Bride). John's picture of *Babylon*, like a political cartoon, employs satire and exaggeration to express opinions about public figures and issues. Personifying these real ancient cities as *women* helps us recognize that life in cities (anywhere) is always a relationship with a system. Here's the way we've chosen to break down *chapters 17-18*:

<i>17:1-7</i> Babylon's Demise	<i>18:1-8</i> Babylon's Obituary
<i>17:8-18</i> Babylon's Autopsy Eulogy/Sentence	<i>18:9-24</i> Babylon's

After revealing the slaughterhouse vision in *chapter 17*, *chapter 18* shifts to the somber sounds of a funeral home. This is a message of hope from Jesus through an *angel* that systems of people who oppose God will terminate at already determined times (cf. *17:14-18*). It reads like a poem (chart in notes below) having a parallel structure called chiasm where the big idea is in the middle. The center of this text is an ancient funeral dirge--a mournful song (lament) expressing grief and designed for a memorial service. Before we observe her funeral next week in *18:9-24*, we'll unpack *Babylon's* obituary today in *verses 1-8* which contains a biography of the deceased, a list of family members, the service info, and where to send memorial gifts. Using her obituary as our outline, we'll be challenged to see this encouraging...

**BIG IDEA:** To follow Jesus is to bring life where Babylon has extracted it.

*Babylon's* obituary begins with her death announcement and biography in *verses 1-2*: *After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory*. Shifting from "mystery" (*Ch 17*) to "revelation" (*Ch 18*), this *illuminating angel* fulfills his promise from *17:1* to reveal the *prostitute's* punishment. *The angel called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!"* Echoing the prophets Isaiah (21:9) and

Jeremiah (51:8), this repetition underscores the certainty of her demise. While it seemed impossible in the moment, *verse 3* assures us of a future where *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*. To make sense of all this, think back to Genesis where God dreamed of Eden becoming a fruitful garden city and people partnering with Him to fill earth with His glory in at least 3 ways:

1. **As priests who expand God's Sacred Sanctuary**: Eden was like a Holy of Holies for the entire cosmos--the bullseye where heaven and earth overlapped, making everything God's temple. Not wanting His presence confined to one patch of land, God's new people were directed in Genesis 1:28 to "*Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.*" They were to make earth like Eden by pushing her borders outward--renovating raw and untamed wilderness into a seamless, global sanctuary fit for His majestic glory.
2. **As cultivators of creation**: Having left creation intentionally unfinished, God wanted His image bearers to relate with it in ways that helped the planet to flourish with fruitfulness (Note: Galatians 5 presents a stunning contrast between living this way and living the opposite way).
3. **As heirs who multiply His royal image**: God designed people to replicate. Not that we all must have kids, but we all have a familial duty to help children grow into living, breathing reflections of the cosmic King and heirs to all He made. Ancient kings used inanimate statues of themselves to maintain order, but God uses living ones to ensure the spread and endurance of His kingdom.

So, what is *Babylon*? Our previous 2 lessons unpacked the biblical history of literal and metaphoric *Babylon*, and here's what we've deduced about this imagery so far:

- It's bigger than one nation, ruler, or moment in history.
- It's inspired by spiritual evil (cf. Genesis 3; Ephesians 2:2; 6:10-20).
- It's a transhistorical symbol for humanity organized apart from God.
- It's a system/culture of idolatry, exploitation, violence, arrogance, and seduction.

Because humans fumbled the creation mandate, Revelation reveals how the resurrected slain Lamb (Jesus) reconciles the mess and restores us to the position of partner (bride). Professor NT Wright (158-159) noted though that “*For the moment we are shown its opposite: the city which tried, like Babel of old, to make itself The Place, the summit of human achievement, by its own efforts and to its own glory—and which ends up shrinking to a shell, with the wild desert creeping back into its palaces, its temples, its fine streets, shops and courtyards. Creation will reclaim what arrogant humans had thought to construct...And this, John says, is good news—just as the destruction of Babel, and the confusion of tongues (in Genesis 11) was good news.*” For this reason, Revelation doesn’t end with humans floating away to a disembodied heaven but with God’s abode descending upon earth. The New Jerusalem implies that Christ and His Bride (the church) will achieve everything God created Adam and Eve to do!

Next, *Babylon’s* obituary details [her shady family alliances](#) in *verse 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.* When biblical prophets used the imagery of *drunkenness* and *sexual compromise*, it included the idea that people lacked self-control and sound judgment. Mostly though, it unmasked deeper, cosmic treason like the political collusion, corporate greed and structural idolatry of these *kings and merchants*. This imagery reframes how fumbling the creation mandate wasn’t about breaking a few abstract rules--we broke God’s heart by violating our marriage vows! Just as these compromised *kings and merchants* confess later, we often treat the cosmos like it revolves around us and use creation to gratify ourselves. We indulge, idolize, and even worship *Babylon*: a parasitic system that cannot generate true life, culture, or community on her own. As we saw last time, she’s a vampire who sucks the life out of God’s creation to fuel her own artificial splendor. In stunning contrast, Revelation depicts the Lamb (God in flesh) as the unimpeachably faithful Husband who is completely dedicated to reconciling humanity and restoring our dignity through self-sacrifice. In short, *Babylon* uses and

exploits; Jesus sacrifices and gives. These represent 2 ways to live, and the Lamb of God models how His way allows creation to flourish!

Next, *Babylon's* obituary provides [her memorial service schedule](#), but instead of inviting us to attend, *verses 4-5* instruct us to flee while we still can: ***Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities*** (cf. Jeremiah 50:8, 51:45; Isaiah 48:20; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17). ***Babylon's sins are heaped high*** because her luxury is bought at the price of exploitation (Note: [A local nonprofit](#) will soon come to share examples). ***Come out of her*** invites us to deliberately audit our ambitions, budgets, and lifestyle choices to ensure we're making investments in God's kingdom, not her funeral. This prompts a vital question: "If we are secure in Christ, why put in all this effort?" It's because divine protection includes heeding the warnings in God's Word--just as we can't blame God for getting burnt while playing with fire, we mustn't expect immunity from disease if we choose to frolic in *Babylon's* bed. So, ***come out of her*** is a call from our loving Father to be holy, which is more about what we pursue than what we avoid. Holiness is NOT about hiding in huddles and throwing stones at outsiders. It's about infiltrating enemy territory to plant divine seeds that eventually expand heaven's borders to earth's edges. Instead of abandoning culture, we work with Jesus to reshape it through whatever measure of influence we've been given. You should ponder this: "In what ways has my holiness strategy been proactive, and where have I drifted into defensive stone-throwing or apathy?"

In lieu of attending her funeral, *Babylon's* obituary explains where to direct [her memorials](#) in *verses 6-8*: ***Pay her back as she herself has paid back others and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow and mourning I shall never see.'*** Her internal monologue reveals a heart of self-deification (acting like she's God) and false security. Note also that this vindication isn't about *"twice the amount"*, rather it's a punishment equivalent with the harm

she has caused. God is also the one carrying it out, not His people since vengeance belongs solely to Him (cf. Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30). This is underscored in *verse 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.*"

Until then, we're to be a faithful partner (bride) to Jesus--fulfilling the creation mandate the way the Prophet Jeremiah (29:4-7) instructed Israel to in literal **Babylon**: "*Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*" Like the Lamb (Jesus), we're to be agents of healing who entrust ourselves to God's sovereign decree that **Babylon** will eventually self-destruct.

We've been ending each **Revelation 17-18** lesson with questions that open our eyes to ways we can be unwittingly captivated by Babylon's allure. Today's question is: "*Where have I been glorifying God in modern Babylon, and where am I still falling for her arrogant attractions and false sense of security?*" And here's a bonus question: "*What tools and habits are helping you maintain focus on the beauty of Christ?*" I threw this in because, as we know, falling deeper in love with God's Lamb (Jesus) is the only way to resist **Babylon's** deadly allure. As you ponder all this with God's people, remember, next steps need not be taken alone--Christ's church can become your supportive family!

**Sunday to Monday Connection:** Revelation 18 reveals the shock of Babylon's eventual collapse, but we continue to see Jesus shining like a bright Light revealing His ultimate Supremacy and the only way to authentic life. The NLT says "*Come away from her, my people. Do not take part in her sins, or you will be punished with her.*" This is directed to God's people.

- **Question:** Where am I still being shaped by the darkness of Babylon – at home, at work, at school, at play? Thoughtfully examine one area of your life and prayerfully consider where you can bring the Light and Life of Jesus instead.
- **Next Step:** Get with your trusted people and discuss these relevant questions.

- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

Level	Verses	Chiasms: Parallel Verses that Form a Mirror Effect
A	1–3	<b>Angelic Proclamation:</b> An angel announces the fall of Babylon due to her "intoxication" of the nations.
B	4–8	<b>The Call to Separation:</b> God’s people are told to "come out" and the "legal verdict" of double repayment is issued.
C	9–19	<b>The Triple Lament:</b> The world (Kings, Merchants, Sailors) mourns the loss of their wealth and luxury.
B	20	<b>The Call to Celebration:</b> The Saints and Apostles are told to "rejoice" because the legal verdict has been executed.
A	21–24	<b>Angelic Action:</b> An angel performs a symbolic act (the millstone) to show the finality of Babylon's fall.

**Takeaways to discuss with your people** (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. The section above mentioned 3 ways humanity was invited to partner with God and fill earth with His glory. Which of those appeals to you most? Which comes most naturally? Which is more of a struggle and why?
2. The structural power of Babylon is a massive illusion built entirely on the compliance of ordinary people—she only has the power we surrender to her! Over the next week, evaluate whether your use of time, money, and possessions prop up the values of a self-seeking empire or store up lasting treasures in the Lamb’s permanent Kingdom.
3. Texts like 1 John 2:15-17 say, *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life--is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”* While John 3:16 rightly says God loves the world He created, 1 John 2 implies that He does NOT love how it has fallen under the spell of Satanically inspired systems characterized by Babylon. The 2 prominent women in Revelation simplify the dense and complex apocalyptic imagery into a choice based on who or what we love. So, ponder question like: “How do we leave a city when we live in it?”, and “How must our lifestyle and gospel

witness reflect that good and evil are more of a heart problem than an information issue?”

**Quotes related to this passage:**

- **A world of cities:** “The world of Revelation was a world of cities, as it is for us. And cities were often personified as women. Rome was personified as the goddess Roma, and this is how she was worshipped in Asia Minor, where John’s readers lived. But in Revelation she appears not as a goddess but as a prostitute (v 1) who seduces the world, drawing people into her idolatry (v 2, 4, 15). The fact that John is introduced to her by one of the angels who had one of the bowls suggests we are about to see the reason for God’s wrath. Babylon persecutes God’s people (v 6) and wages war against the Lamb (v 13–14). She is the manifestation of the power of the dragon, the beast and the prophet (v 3; 13:1). A name or mark on the forehead in Revelation indicates a person’s true character, and hers is clear: ‘Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth’ (17:5; Daniel 4:30). She is the ‘Mother of Prostitutes’ because her children (her inhabitants) share her spiritual adultery (in contrast to Revelation 12:17). (Chester, 126-130)
- **God’s desire for cities:** “Cities, in short, were often seen as the result of humans extending their civilizing reach into previously uncharted territory. John would have understood this from a biblical perspective: the garden of Eden was the start of a project in which the humans were commanded to bring God’s fruitful rule to bear upon the world. Creation was designed to be a garden city, a place where the delights of human community and the delights of glorious countryside were somehow combined—a balance that has proved harder and harder to maintain. We shall see John’s own vision of this ideal city at the end of the book. But for the moment we are shown its opposite: the city which tried, like Babel of old, to make itself The Place, the summit of human achievement, by its own efforts and to its own glory—and which ends up shrinking to a shell, with the wild desert creeping back into its palaces, its temples, its fine streets and shops and courtyards. Creation will reclaim what arrogant humans had thought to construct. Babylon will become a place for demons, for unclean spirits, for birds and monsters of all the wrong kinds. And this, John says, is good news—just as the destruction of Babel, and the confusion of tongues (Genesis 11) was good news. The angel who shouts out that Babylon has fallen (echoing Isaiah 21:9 and Jeremiah 51:8) is bringing the news that human arrogance and oppression, and the wanton luxury and vice to which they lead, will not have the last word. God will have the last word, and creation itself will hear this word as a word of freedom, a sigh of relief, a flood of glorious light (verse 1) let in upon a darkened dungeon.” (Wright, 158-159)
- **Satan’s counterfeit city:** “Rather than the honorable garden city that God envisions, Babylon has become the exact opposite: a desolate, demonic wasteland, completely devoid of image-of-God life...The reason for her coming judgment lies in her seduction of the nations, kings, and merchants of the world, a list of three that anticipates 18:9–19 with its kings, merchants,

and mariners. In the first century, the surrounding powers became intoxicated with the prosperity and economic security afforded by the Roman Empire, so much so that they willingly participated in the idolatry and immorality necessary to maintain that security (14:8; 17:2).” (Duvall, 233)

- **Verse 4:** “The command is therefore given that God’s people should ‘come out of her’. That, clearly, echoes the summons of Isaiah 48:20 and 52:11–12, and particularly Jeremiah 51:45. But how should John’s hearers apply this message to themselves? The faithful among them have not compromised with Babylon. The unfaithful or compromised (as in the seven letters) have already received stern warnings about the persecution that is to come, and the urgent need to ‘conquer’... Are such people ‘God’s people’? Well, John believes in the God who delights in calling ‘my people’ those who were ‘not my people’. Perhaps there is yet hope—for those who will renounce Babylon, and run from it as from a great fire.” (Wright, 160).
- **Double repayment:** J Scott Duvall (234) wrote, “*To pay her back ‘double’ is perhaps better translated as calling for ‘equivalent’ or full recompense rather than twice the amount. Yet the ‘torment and grief’ she will receive is measured in terms of her treatment of God’s people (i.e., ‘what she has given’) and her own self-deification (i.e., the ‘glory and luxury she gave herself’), which were disproportionately large (v. 18). In this sense the principle of lex talionis holds true. Just as Babylon made the nations drink her wicked brew (14:8; 17:2, 4), so now she will be forced to drink the cup of the wrath of God.*” Tim Chester (132) added that, “*We discover that the fall of Rome will be an act of divine judgment on her economic injustice and exploitation. Her judgment is just—that’s the message of verses 4–8. The word ‘double’ in verse 6 is better translated ‘duplicate.’ Her judgment duplicates her crimes (v 6–7; Psalm 137:8). Just as ‘Babylon’ excluded Christians who refused to participate in the imperial cult, so she will be excluded from economic activity (Revelation 18:22). Her judgment will be sudden (v 8, 17) and final (v 21–23).*”
- **Come out of her:** “...reminds us that we Christians may share in the judgments on our society, in spite of forgiveness for individual sins. Nations and institutions as corporate entities can stand under judgment (e.g., 1 Sam. 15:2–3); we who participate in such institutions share in their responsibility before God unless we explicitly repudiate our complicity with them and declare their activities wrong (Deut. 21:7–9; cf. Amos 4:1–3). Most of all, the summons to ‘come out of her’ reminds believers that we belong to a different city (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:16), whose true wealth is greater than Babylon’s glory for which our neighbors strive (Rev. 3:17).” (Keener, 437)
- **Verses 6-8:** “The judgments articulated in verses 6–8 are carefully structured so as to emphasize that what happens to the wicked city is what she has brought upon herself. These are not arbitrary. Nor will the vengeance be brought about through the agency of God’s people; vengeance is too dangerous a weapon to be handled by the followers of the lamb (Romans 12:19, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35). It is God’s own work, turning wickedness back on itself, allowing arrogance to reach a giddy height from which it can only crash helpless to earth (verse 7, echoing Isaiah 47:8–9).

Babylon is to be given the only medicine she knows, the medicine she mixed for others; she has been using her cup to brew a potion for those she wanted to poison, and she will now have to drink it herself (verse 6).” (Wright, 159-160)

- **Interconnected systems:** “So it is that chapter 18 begins with another angel shouting, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!’ (18:1–2). But the fall of Rome doesn’t just affect Rome. Rome is a city at the heart of a network of cities. The political and economic interconnections were such that, when she fell, the cities of the nations collapsed (v 19). Her economic and political life fuels the prosperity of ruling elites everywhere: “The merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries” (v 3). It’s the same today. Increasingly cities around the world are more similar to each other than to their rural hinterlands. National economies are intertwined. A stock-market fall in Tokyo leads to a fall in London. A recession in the United States hits the world economy. We’re all vulnerable to oil-price fluctuations. As people sometimes say, ‘America sneezes and Europe catches a cold.’” (Chester, 131)
- **Boastful self-glorification:** “Babylon’s sins consist of self-glorification, sensuous luxury, and prideful arrogance, the very opposite of humble dependence upon the Lord and sacrificial love within a community (e.g., Prov. 29:23; Isa. 5:15; 1 Pet. 5:6). Her threefold claim echoes Isaiah 47:7–8, where Babylon boasts, ‘I am forever—the eternal queen...I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children’...Just as the language of boastful arrogance is taken from Isaiah 47:7–8, so the language of judgment comes from Isaiah 47:9: ‘Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood.’ While feeling invincible, Babylon fails to remember that God alone is truly ‘mighty’ and his judgment on her will fall suddenly. Fire is a common symbol of judgment (e.g., Jer. 51:25–28; Isa. 47:14; Rev. 9:17–18; 14:10; 16:8; 17:16).” (Duvall, 234-235)

#### **Considerations for discussion leaders:**

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

#### **Other Articles/Songs/Videos:** Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- [5 Strategies for Reading Revelation](#) from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- [Heaven and Earth Theme](#) from the Bible Project
- [Other super helpful Revelation summaries](#) from the Bible Project
- [How Revelation mimics ancient Olympic games](#) by Marty Solomon

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