

In the previous chapter an angel was showing John the judgment of Babylon from the perspective of it being the center of false religion in the world. In this chapter John sees the city's judgment as the economic center of the world as God puts it in the heart of the ten kings under the Antichrist to destroy Babylon (Rev. 17:17).

¹ And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

Immediately after hearing the angel describe the meaning behind the vision of the woman identified as "Babylon the great" riding on the scarlet beast in the previous chapter, John now sees another angel coming down to the earth to announce the imminent destruction of the city. The angel is described as having great power (strength; authority) and his glory will illuminate the earth. If the plague of darkness is still in effect at this time (Rev. 16:10) then there is little doubt that this angel will get the attention of the entire world.

² And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. ³ For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

"And he cried mightily with a strong voice" - All on earth will be able to hear the voice of this angel.

"saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen" - The angel declares the doom and imminent destruction of Babylon. We know its destruction has not yet happened at this point because v. 4 calls on God's people to leave the city in order to avoid its judgment.

"and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird" - The words "hold" and "cage" are the same Greek word which refers to a prison or a place where someone stands guard. It appears that after the destruction of Babylon it will be the dwelling place of demonic and foul spirits, perhaps as a confinement. The mention of "unclean and hateful" birds likely refers to carrion birds like vultures who gather to feast on the dead. It is a picture of the desolation left in the aftermath of Babylon's destruction.

"For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" - Because they succumbed to her influence the nations of the world will also suffer God's wrath because of her fornication (turning from the genuine worship of God to engage in idolatry).

"and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her" - World leaders will indulge themselves in the benefits of their association with her by taking part in her sins.

"and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies" - The merchants of the earth will condone her practices because they will become rich through buying/selling the goods associated with her sins.

⁴ And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. ⁵ For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

This next voice that John hears appears to be God's because it calls to "my people." He calls on His people to leave and disassociate themselves from Babylon so that they will not suffer when judgment falls, much like Lot who was living in Sodom (Gen. 19). The warning is given that God is preparing to judge the city because her sins have accumulated to the point that it is time for judgment. The sins of Babylon have piled up to heaven and so now God remembers all her iniquities as He moves to judge her. This picture could also reference the tower of Babel (the origin of false religion and a monument to man's rebellion against God) where men intended to build a tower that reached into heaven. Their tower failed to reach heaven but the sins they began accumulating there eventually do.

⁶ Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. ⁷ How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

The angel from v. 1 seems to resume speaking as he calls on God to punish Babylon according to her sins.

"Reward [to pay what is owed] her even as she rewarded you" - God will repay Babylon for all the blasphemy, for denying God of His rightful worship, and all the sins that she has committed.

"and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double" - Under OT law a thief was to repay double what he had stolen (Ex. 22:4-9) which implies that the riches of Babylon were gained dishonestly. The cup may refer to the golden cup the woman (Babylon) was holding in the previous chapter that was "full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" (Rev. 17:4). The sin she had accumulated in her cup will come back on her in a double portion.

"How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her" - The angel says that Babylon should suffer torment and sorrow to the same extent that she has glorified herself and lived in luxury. Notice that she lived as an example of the exact opposite of humility and repentance before God. Time after time the scripture tells us that those who humble themselves before God in repentance will find mercy. Babylon will exalt herself and will find no mercy. **Matt. 23:12** "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." **Isa. 2:11-12** "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low:"

"for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow" - The evidence of her pride and perceived self-sufficiency is that she considers herself a queen, an exalted position. In John's day most widows lost their main source of income when their husband died and it became a struggle to make ends meet. However, Babylon believes she will never be in such a situation and will "see no sorrow" because she is wealthy enough to provide for all her own needs and desires.

⁸ Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

The “therefore” indicates that judgment of Babylon will be a direct consequence of the sins described in the previous verses. This judgment will not happen gradually but suddenly. The phrase “in one day” could either refer to one literal day or an expression meaning a short time. There will be death, mourning and famine as a result of Babylon’s destruction because so many kings and merchants will depend on her for their financial livelihood. The Greek wording behind “utterly burned with fire” indicates complete destruction. There will be nothing worthwhile left in Babylon because “strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.” Babylon pridefully thought nothing could take away her power, wealth and prosperity but she could not escape the wrath of God.

⁹ And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, ¹⁰ Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

“And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her” - This refers to the leaders of all the nations of the earth who have taken part in and benefited from Babylon’s fornication. They accepted her sins because of the financial and other benefits.

“shall bewail [mourn; weep for] her, and lament [to beat one’s breast] for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning” - These kings are not merely saddened for a temporary setback. The words used here indicate their intense and open expressions of grief when they see the destruction of Babylon. They have lost more than a business partner for their relationship was more intimate.

“Standing afar off for the fear of her torment” - Commentators disagree on whether or not the Babylon of chapter 17 is the same as the one here in this chapter. In chapter 17 God will cause the ten kings under the Antichrist to burn the woman (Babylon the religious system) with fire (Rev. 17:16). Babylon the commercial system in chapter 18 is also burned with fire. Assuming that both fires are the same event, it’s possible that these kings are “standing afar off for the fear of her torment” because Babylon has been destroyed by a nuclear weapon. Such a weapon would destroy the city and prevent it from being salvaged because of the radiation. On the other hand, the destruction described in this chapter could easily come directly from the hand of God.

“saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come” - The kings of the earth mourn over the swift destruction of Babylon because they will no longer benefit from their association with her. Babylon’s greatness and strength in their view is indicated by the kings’ description of Babylon as a “great city” and a “mighty city.”

¹¹ And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more:

Babylon will be an economic powerhouse because the merchants of the earth will also mourn the destruction of the city. They had become wealthy through buying and selling within the city but the its destruction effectively kills the market for their goods. Apparently they had become dependent on Babylon for their livelihood for it says that after the destruction of Babylon no one was interested in their merchandise. Perhaps Babylon houses the database that Antichrist uses to ensure that no one buys or sells without his mark and is also destroyed with the rest of Babylon. All financial records would be gone, making it impossible to buy/sell within the Antichrist’s system.

¹² The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, ¹³ And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.

These verses list the merchandise these merchants sold to Babylon and it’s worth noting that all of them are luxury items. However, the last two items listed are interesting: slaves and souls of men. Apparently the Antichrist will legalize human trafficking or else it will be a flourishing underground market. The Greek word for “slave” means “body” and can indicate a human body or an animal. Slaves are listed along with livestock animals, implying that these slaves are considered to be merely “bodies” that can be bought or sold and not true human beings. The Greek word for “soul” refers to “breath” or “life.” Some translations render this as “lives of men.” Perhaps the very lives of men will be bought/sold. It could indicate murder-for-hire or merely the total control exercised over these slaves.

Verses 14-24: These verses describe the reaction to the destruction of Babylon from two different points of view. First, in vs. 14-19 the description continues of the mourning of merchants and crews of ships who have become rich because of their trade with Babylon. They are heartbroken over the desolation of what they consider to be a “great city” as well as having lost their main source of wealth. Secondly, vs. 20-24 display an opposite point of view as God’s people in heaven are called on to rejoice over Babylon’s destruction for God has avenged their blood that was shed by those in the city. These verses go on to describe the permanence of Babylon’s destruction using imagery such as music no longer being played there, no more manufacturing will be done, and there will no longer be the happiness of people getting on with their lives through marriage. The reason for the destruction of Babylon is given in vs. 23, 24: the city’s merchants had become powerful men through the trade described in v. 3, the city had deceived the world through its “sorceries” (drugs, particularly in association with witchcraft), and the blood of God’s people was on its hands.