

All Things New: Babylon The Harlot Part II
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Malachi 4; Colossians 3:1-10; Revelation 18

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!" "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more-- cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you." Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."

- Gone in an instant – story of Job – God blessed him with much, only to allow it to be taken away in a heartbeat – yet Job did not curse God and die, as his wife urged him, but he said, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away – blessed be the name of the Lord.”
 - We can think of many moments when our innocence or naivety were quickly stripped away – the Challenger disaster, 9/11, our current pandemic – what we thought we knew proved not to be true in an instant – we can go on the Internet and see sides of people we never expected right now, some calling for safety and security, some for liberty, and sometimes doing it in ways that really betray what they say they believe
 - Such is the fall of Babylon the Great Harlot – it’s an instantaneous fall, one that leaves many weeping in its wake
 - Yet the response of the Christian is far different to Babylon’s fall – we’re going to look at all this today
- As a brief reminder, last week we explored the metaphor of Babylon the Harlot as the luxuries and pleasures of this world which are corrupted and twisted versions of the gifts God bestows upon His people
 - We saw that despite her hatred of the saints and the death she pours out on them, she is very alluring – John was momentarily taken with her until an angel spoke the truth
 - We started to examine ourselves to see what pleasures of the world might be snares for us
 - We recognized that Babylon the Great is not a literal place but symbolizes the way that decadence rules over every human culture as it overlooks God in favor of its pleasures
- This week’s passage continues with the metaphor, but it’s functionally different from a lot of the rest of the book
 - Notice that this time, the vast majority of the chapter are statements, not visions – statements from angels, the merchants, a voice from heaven
 - It’s narrated but not seen by John
 - The angel describes the fall of Babylon in the past tense – in some way, the fall has already happened
 - It is as if the fall happened before anyone realized it, and now we see the aftermath as everyone catches up
 - The picture isn’t pretty – the city is demonized – the terminology here for the place is a keep, a base, a fortress – the idea is that underneath the pleasures of Babylon are a demonic influence – pursuing worldly pleasure and luxury opens us up to spiritual attack – more sin, more influence of the demonic

- Then we hear a voice from heaven, either God or His agent – and His message is, “Come out of her”
 - There’s a specific reason for this – that we won’t be punished with her
 - Remember that Revelation was written either shortly before or shortly after the total destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD – the original readers of this passage would have thought of that, and of Jesus’ own words that Jerusalem would fall soon and to leave the city
 - Over a million people died in the fall of Jerusalem
 - Remember that one of the key issues Jesus had with the Pharisee party was their hypocrisy - their laws that oppressed the poor and they lined their pockets with the money, and while they weren’t idolaters in the strictest sense of bowing down to foreign gods, they bowed down to the privileges their positions bought – pride as God’s people
 - God vows that there will be proper vengeance – the punishment will fit the crime – but that means that the punishment will fall on those who are still enamored with Babylon’s decadence
- Core truth for us this week: “be separate”
 - One key definition of holiness is being separated out for God’s use; coming out of the world and into God’s purposes
 - We must not think this is primarily a physical separation – at times, people have tried to read this passage as a change in Christian denominations (come out of Rome), or a change from urban to rural life (come out of the corruption of city life into a pastoral setting) – but neither of these gets to the heart of the problem, especially now
 - The same passions and desires and luxuries are available in most communities – the Internet can pump the holy word of God in, and it can pump in moral filth – you can order on impulse, order whatever you want, even in quarantine – if you’re like us, you have to be careful what exactly you order (easy to overspend)
 - This is not a choice; it’s a command – the faithful need to leave; just because we are saved doesn’t mean we are immune to the punishments brought upon those who are caught up in her
 - As we talked about in Bible study this week, self-sacrificial love is at the heart of the gospel and at the heart of what we should do as Jesus’ followers – Babylon the Harlot is the opposite of that, it’s intensely selfish love that always wants, always takes
 - We are seeing an amazing wave of selfishness during this crisis – people refusing to wear masks, calling it a hoax, starting fights at stores – we all want life to be back to normal, which for many of us means getting back to our old luxuries and familiar pleasures – I’m excited for getting back to church, but also a safe movie theater, restaurants, shopping for stuff we want

- We might remember our study in Romans and how Paul wouldn't eat meat around those who had conscience problems about eating meat because it was sacrificed to idols – he had no issue, but he gave up his rights for his brother
- We wear masks, we socially distance, we don't wander around needlessly, not because we are in great danger but because we might be, and we need to honor one another as believers in the Lord
- WW has no opening date set but at least through May; when we come back, there will be precautions – because we honor one another and sacrifice some things so that we can come together and honor the Lord
- How do you need to come out of Babylon? How can you live in the world but not be of the world? We have time to ponder that
- If we want a picture of that decadence, we turn to the cries of the tradesman and seafarers – they don't mourn Babylon, they mourn their own loss - self
 - 7 categories:
 - The jewelry department - shiny things that show off wealth
 - The clothing department
 - The furniture and home improvement department
 - The scented candle and perfume department (luxury in the air)
 - The grocery department
 - The stock market and car dealership (cattle and sheep were an investment; horses and carriages were transport for the wealthy)
 - The cheap labor department – wealth off the backs of servants and slaves – before we write this off, how many American companies shifted their manufacturing to places where they could pay virtually nothing? How much of our clothing and electronics are made in sweatshops even today? It's hard to buy without using unjust labor
 - Now wealth is not the problem – many people were blessed by God with wealth – Abraham and his family, David – even Lydia in the NT is a merchant in fine cloth – it's the distortion of the real gifts
 - It's where all this wealth comes from – the final category gives it away – others are oppressed for our luxury – how do we treat waiters and grocery clerks and WalMart employees? Who do we oppress for cheap groceries and clothes? Who suffers for our decadence?
 - If anything, this lockdown can show us that much of what we want is not what we actually need
 - To live in the way of Christ, we forgo what we might want to make sure others have what they really need
 - We must remember that we are the 1% - if you bring in \$32,400 a year, you are in the top 1% of income around the world – it doesn't mean it goes very far, but we are incredibly privileged

- The final thing for us to consider about being separate and living out from under the rule of Babylon is this: *do we rejoice that she will one day fall?*
 - “Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.”
 - Do we long for the downfall of evil – even the evil that tempts us? The saints aren’t mourning the fall of Babylon but cheering
 - How much do we base our lives on the things we have?
 - I was reading about how no one under 50 wants fine china or ceramic figurines or crystal, and it’s become a sore spot in families when downsizing boomers can’t get their children to take their treasures
 - It’s all just stuff – and we forget that we can’t take it with us – my book collection, my comic book collection, my CDs and DVDs and games, they are all going to rot someday
 - What passes with us? The rewards from loving and living a self-sacrificial life on behalf of others
 - The angel who throws the boulder in the sea to symbolize Babylon’s fall tells us that all the decadence and evil of the world will come to a permanent end – none will ever serve the world’s ways again
- We are loved by God, redeemed by His son Jesus, invited into a relationship with Him – God is going to bring an end to all things that separate us from a fulfilling life with Him and in Him and through Him. Babylon the Great will fall – may we be found in the Kingdom of God and not the city of men and its decadence.