

# Escaping Babylon

Revelation 17-18 on November 13, 2022

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*Please read Revelation 17:1-18:3 before going further in this transcript.*

Good Morning church! A few of you have asked if I got my deer yet. Unfortunately, I haven't even seen a deer, at least, not while sitting in my deer stand. However, I did have some wonderful extended quiet time with the Lord out in His beautiful creation, as well as some great fellowship with an old hunting buddy.

At the end of last week's message, right after the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl of God's wrath was poured out, Revelation 16:19 said, "...God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath."<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> Revelation 17-18 now give us a much fuller explanation of Babylon, including who or what Babylon is, and why God gives it the cup filled with His wrath. Let's begin with...

**1. Who or what is Babylon?** Babylon is the sinfully corrupt world system personified as the great prostitute. Revelation 17:1 begins, "...Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute...." Revelation 17:5 then says, "The name written on her forehead was a mystery:

BABYLON THE GREAT

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

And Revelation 17:18 clarifies, "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." In the Old Testament, Babylon<sup>3</sup> was the kingdom that overthrew the Hebrew people and took them away into captivity. John's 1<sup>st</sup> century readers would have understood Babylon as the oppressor of God's people. After all, Old Testament Babylon is the kingdom which destroyed God's temple built by King Solomon himself, and which took God's people into exile in Babylon. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, John's vision of Babylon likely represented modern-day Rome. Rome was a lot like ancient Babylon. Rome had, in fact, ALSO destroyed the Jerusalem temple (the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple), and it behaved in similarly wicked and immoral ways.<sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> In other words, referring to Babylon

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<sup>1</sup> "Babylon's punishment...expands upon the seventh bowl (especially 16:19)." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2614 footnote on Revelation 17:1-18.

<sup>2</sup> Let's note that we went from 7 seals to 7 trumpets to 7 bowls. This series of three 7s is now complete, there will not be another 7. We are nearing the end....

<sup>3</sup> The city of Babylon has its origins all the way back in Genesis 11 with the Tower of Babel. After the flood, as Noah's descendants increased, Genesis 11:4 records that some of them banded together and said, "...Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves...." Building this city was motivated by their pride, and it stood as an act of rebellion against God, which is why God thwarts their plan. So He confuses their language and scatters them throughout the earth, and they stopped building the city. See *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 27 footnote on Genesis 11:1-9.

<sup>4</sup> "Babylon was the arch-oppressor of God's people, destroying Solomon's temple and taking Israel into exile. Babylon, or 'Babel,' was the site of ancient humanity's proud idolatry that led to confusing languages and scattering peoples (Genesis 11:1-9). For John's first readers, 'Babylon the Great' likely represented Rome, which like ancient Babylon, destroyed the Jerusalem temple, persecuted God's people, and engaged in flagrant idolatry and immorality." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2610 footnote on Revelation 14:8.

<sup>5</sup> "Ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia was the political, commercial and religious center of a world empire. It was noted for its luxury and moral decadence. The title "Babylon the Great" is taken from Daniel 4:30. According to some it is used in Revelation for Rome as the center of opposition to God and his people. According to others it represents the whole political, economic and religious system of the world in general under the rule of the antichrist. According to still others it is to be understood as literal Babylon – rebuilt and restored." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 2167 footnote on Revelation 14:8.

as “the great prostitute” was likely John’s slightly veiled way of speaking out against Rome, without directly naming the city.<sup>6 7 8</sup> Now, there are a number of scholars who believe that Babylon refers not just to Rome, but more broadly to the sinfully corrupt world system of politics, economics, religion, and so on. Either to a future system in the final days, or to an ongoing system throughout history.<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, John sees this corrupt world system as embodied in 1<sup>st</sup> century Rome, which sheds light on the struggles of believers in his own generation, as well as in every generation to follow, right up to our own current generation of believers.<sup>10</sup>

But why personify this sinfully corrupt world system as “the great prostitute?” Well, prostitution, and the sexual adultery related to it, is a common metaphor in Scripture for sinful behavior and idolatry. So when John uses the symbol of a prostitute to represent Babylon, he is communicating her seductive ways, and her desire to draw people away from God and toward sin.<sup>11 12</sup> Revelation 17:2 says, “With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.”<sup>13</sup> Revelation 17 then goes on to clarify that not only is this world system sinfully corrupt, but it is explicitly Satanic. That’s why John sees the great prostitute “...sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.” (Revelation 17:3) This scarlet beast has the same characteristics as the beast, who came up out of the sea, back in Revelation 13. (In other words, she’s in cahoots with the antichrist.) And the scarlet color also “recalls the dragon’s red color” back in Revelation 12.<sup>14</sup>

In verses 7 and following, the angel then goes into significant detail about the beast, explaining its evil plan to seize authority from multiple earthly kings. Revelation 17:13-14 explains, “They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the

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<sup>6</sup> “To say directly that God will destroy imperial Rome would have been, of course, altogether treasonous in the eyes of the imperial authorities. So, like a prisoner writing in code...John characterizes the power of evil as Babylon. Just as Babylon represented to the Hebrews all that was wicked and symbolized persecution, so for John Rome was another Babylon, the source and fountainhead of all seductive luxury and vice, living in voluptuous materialism and selfishness.” Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 85.

<sup>7</sup> Babylon is “well attested in the early church as a circumlocution [way of being vague] for Rome.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 631.

<sup>8</sup> After all, he was writing down these visions while exiled on the Island of Patmos. So it makes sense that he’d take some precautions to ensure that his letter got out to the 7 churches.

<sup>9</sup> The prostitute is great “because she is ‘Babylon the Great,’ a symbol for Rome and the empire of the beast. [Rome is] leading the world into immorality and religious apostasy/idolatry... The image is always that of not only committing fornication but also leading others into doing the same.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 608. Consider Romans 1:32.

<sup>10</sup> “Some interpreters argue that Babylon refers to the state-sponsored, economic-religious system in the final generation. But Babylon may more generally symbolize the words’ idolatrous, seductive, political economy, the archetypal pagan city, which Rome embodied in the first century.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2610 footnote on Revelation 14:8.

<sup>11</sup> “Symbolizing Babylon as a ‘whore’ connotes her alluring and seductive nature in attempting to draw people away from Christ.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 848.

<sup>12</sup> “Prostitute themselves” is “a metaphor widely used in the OT to refer to Israel’s unfaithfulness to her covenant Lord, who, according to a related metaphor, had become Israel’s ‘husband when he established his special covenant with her. Such unfaithfulness took various forms, but most commonly outright idolatry (worshiping other gods and looking to them for fertility of wombs, fields and flocks, for healing wounds and diseases, for deliverance or security from enemies – thus treating the false gods as their ‘lovers’).” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 148 footnote on Exodus 34:15.

<sup>13</sup> “Signifies Babylon’s corrupting influence, seducing the nations into idolatry and immorality, likely through the empty promise of political power and especially economic gain (cf. 18:2-19).” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2614 footnote on Revelation 17:2.

<sup>14</sup> *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2614 footnote on Revelation 17:3.

beast.<sup>15 16 17</sup> They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.” And so evil is doing a lot of collaborating here: Babylon and the beast and these kings are all working together against Christ. But “the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings,” and His faithful followers will be with Him.<sup>18</sup>

This should bring us great encouragement as we read these chapters today. Revelation 17 makes it clear, stating it two different times, in verses 8 and 11, that the beast will go to its destruction.<sup>19 20 21 22</sup> We shouldn't just be encouraged by the beast's destruction though; we should also be encouraged by yet another reminder of God's sovereign control. When verse 13 says, “they have one purpose,” it's not just the beast's evil purpose at work. Revelation 17:17 explains, “For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God's words are fulfilled.”<sup>23</sup> In all that's going on, we see once again that God is sovereignly in control. Any and all power that's being wielded, is only doing so, under His ultimate authority and control. This evil collaboration hints at the answer to our next question...

**2. Why will Babylon receive God's wrath?** Babylon receives God's wrath because of its evil associations and its spiritually adulterous behavior. But exactly what behaviors are these adulteries pointing to? Revelation 17:4 says, “...She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.” So it wasn't just one or two particular sins, or acts of rebellion, her cup was filled with all kinds of abominable and filthy things. In Revelation 17:6 John says, “I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to

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<sup>15</sup> Verse 16 explains that “Evil will turn against evil as the beast and its ‘ten horns’ will destroy ‘the prostitute’ Babylon, the idolatrous economic system that supports them and whose demise they will mourn in 18:9-10. They despise, shamefully expose, and burn Babylon.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2616 footnote on Revelation 17:16.

<sup>16</sup> You see, they don't care about Babylon, and they don't need Babylon. This great prostitute, this sinfully corrupt world system, is just a pawn in Satan's war against humanity. As always, he deceives them for his evil purposes. But he never cares for them; his only goal is to destroy as many humans as he can. Evil powers are NEVER anyone's friend. Consider Revelation 9:4, 11 where the locusts under the rule of the destroyer tortured the unrepentant sinners who, even after this, just kept on worshipping these same demons in 9:20.

<sup>17</sup> “we see the true attitude of the demonic powers toward their followers as the beast and the vassal kings turn on the woman and destroy her [in verse 16-17]. God causes the self-destructive nature of evil to come full circle...as Babylon the Great is destroyed by the very powers she serves.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 629.

<sup>18</sup> The Lamb will triumph over these kings, the beast, the dragon, Babylon the Great, and any and all other evil powers. This puts an end to the antichrist's 42-month temporary rule back in Revelation 13:5-7 to conquer God's holy people. Daniel 7:21-22 says, “As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.”

<sup>19</sup> See discussion by Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 200, p. 629.

<sup>20</sup> By the way, regarding the seven hills in verse 9, “It is perhaps significant that Rome began as a network of seven hill settlements on the east bank of the Tiber River. Her designation as the city on the seven hills is commonplace among Roman writers [like Virgil and Cicero].” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 2171 footnote on Revelation 17:9.

<sup>21</sup> In verse 10, these seven kings can be “Taken (1) as seven actual Roman emperors, (2) as seven secular empires or (3) symbolically as the power of the Roman empire as a whole.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 2171 footnote on Revelation 17:10.

<sup>22</sup> In verse 11, this 8th king is the antichrist. (*NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 2171 footnote on Revelation 17:11.) “Variously identified as a Roman emperor such as Nero or Domitian, a future antichrist, or a fuller embodiment of Satanic power.” (*NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2615 footnote on Revelation 17:11.)

<sup>23</sup> Remember Revelation 10:7.

Jesus....”<sup>24</sup> So one of the reasons that Babylon will receive God’s wrath, is in payment for the brutal killing of God’s precious martyrs. Men and women who were slain for maintaining their testimony about Jesus.<sup>25</sup> This drunkenness refers not just to getting drunk with alcohol, but even more disturbingly, to getting drunk with power, power to take human life. Babylon’s list of abominations goes on to include:

Sexual promiscuity (Inferred by context, and personified prostitute)

Blasphemy (17:3)<sup>26</sup>

Hosting demons, impure spirits, and other detestable things. (18:2)

Over-indulgence in excessive luxury (18:3)

Self-glory and arrogant pride (18:7)

Human trafficking (18:13, human beings being sold as slaves)

Seduction, leading others astray (18:23)<sup>27</sup>

Slaughtering people, believers AND unbelievers alike (18:24)<sup>28</sup>

And those are just a few of the sins on the surface, that are more easily identifiable. Revelation 18:5 says, “for her sins are piled up to heaven,<sup>29</sup> and God has remembered her crimes.”

And so, in light of all of these sins, God’s wrath is poured out on Babylon, on this city that is personified as the great prostitute. Revelation 18:6-8 says, “Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Pour her a double portion from her own cup.<sup>30</sup> <sup>31</sup> Give her as much torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, ‘I sit enthroned as queen. I am not a widow; I will never mourn.’<sup>32</sup> 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.”<sup>33</sup>

John then writes about how those who were in bed with Babylon, will react to her judgement. He declares that they will be greatly troubled, but perhaps not for the reason we might expect. The following verses describe three particular bedfellows of the great prostitute: Kings, merchants, and sailors. Revelation 18:9-10 continue, “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

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<sup>24</sup> And Revelation 18:24 says, “In her was found the blood of prophets and of God’s holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.”

<sup>25</sup> A non-Christian historian named Tacitus writes about the disturbing brutality of some of the martyrdom that went on in the 1st century. Christians being torn apart by animals or being dipped in tar and set on fire. “Tacitus comments that Nero’s persecution of Christians was so terrible that even non-Christian citizens were horrified and began to intercede in their behalf.” Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> Note the direct connection with Revelation 13:1.

<sup>27</sup> Consider Satan’s description in Revelation 12:9, “who leads the whole world astray.”

<sup>28</sup> See Jeremiah 51:49. Revelation 18:24 most likely means “not just the saints, but all, believer and unbeliever alike, who have died at the hands of the evil empire.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 659.

<sup>29</sup> Right alongside her piles of money, were her piles of sin.

<sup>30</sup> The punishment fits the crime. Double means “in full, sufficiently.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 2172 footnote on Revelation 18:6.

<sup>31</sup> See Jeremiah 50:29.

<sup>32</sup> Not a widow. “A claim that the men of Babylon have not died on battlefields.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 2172 footnote on Revelation 18:7.

<sup>33</sup> Babylon’s opportunity to repent was insolently rejected back in Revelation 16:9, 11, and 21.

torment, they will stand far off and cry: 'Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!'<sup>34</sup> Now when it says, "they will weep and mourn over her," it doesn't specify precisely what they're mourning. It just says, "over her." And although they are "terrified at her torment" and stunned by how quickly her doom has come, their focus seems to be on how great and mighty the city was. A city that no doubt contributed to their own greatness as kings. In other words, they don't seem to be mourning Babylon's wickedness and sin, but rather over their own loss of power and status in connection to her.

This self-serving perspective is even more blatant, as we read the merchants' reaction in Revelation 18:11, "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her BECAUSE no one buys their cargoes anymore." What a pathetic reason to weep and mourn! Again, not over the sin and wickedness that's being judged, but over their loss of trading partners and lost revenue. These merchants had gained the whole world, and they seem to have no inkling that they are about to lose their very own souls!<sup>35</sup> Brother or Sister in Christ, the application here for us is this: are we weeping over the right things? Are we weeping over sin and evil, and the unrepentant, hardheartedness in our world? Or, are we weeping over our struggles with inflation and our diminishing 401k portfolios?

Verse 12 goes on "cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron<sup>36</sup> 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 human beings sold as slaves."

[This reveals just how deep their depravity has gone. By some estimates, around this time in history, "slaves made up almost half the population of [Rome]."<sup>37</sup> And all of these kings, merchants, and sailors had grown rich on the backs of slave labor.

Only through the oppression of others, did they "support such lavish living."<sup>38</sup>

Verse 14 continues "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' 15 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 16 and cry out: 'Woe! Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!<sup>39</sup> 17 In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!' ..." Just like the kings, the merchants are "terrified at her torment" and John says, "they will weep and mourn." But once again, their focus seems to be on how great the city was, and how

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<sup>34</sup> The judgment is a long time in coming, but when it comes, it will come swiftly. Compare verse 8 "one day" with verses 10 and 17 "one hour." Things are really moving along quickly now. In one hour "recalls the kings' brief reign" in 17:12. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2617 footnote on Revelation 18:10.

<sup>35</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."

<sup>36</sup> "SI truhn"

<sup>37</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 86.

<sup>38</sup> *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2617 footnote on Revelation 18:12-13.

<sup>39</sup> Consider how Babylon is dressed in contrast with how the saints are dressed in places like Revelation 7:14.

beautifully and fashionably dressed it was. They also, are stunned by how quickly her doom has come, but they seem to lack any awareness of their own complicity (their own shared guilt) in her human trafficking and other abominations.

Thirdly, and lastly, we come to the sailors in Revelation 18:17-19, “...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?’<sup>40</sup> They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: ‘Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth!’<sup>41</sup> In one hour she has been brought to ruin!’”<sup>42 43 44</sup> If the stock market crashes, or if all of our possessions are suddenly wiped out by some tragedy. If all our accumulated wealth were to be suddenly lost in a single hour, would our response be similar to that of these kings, and merchants, and sailors? Or, would we be content to put our trust in God’s sovereign plan, confident in the hope that our true riches lie in Christ?<sup>45</sup> Most of us listening to this sermon today are middle-class Christians living in the United States. Revelation 17-18 bring us a sobering note of caution about idolizing our national economic power. If there is any hint that we have succumbed to the lure of wealth and possessions, then we best repent of it quickly and wholeheartedly.<sup>46</sup> Brother or Sister in Christ, we need to escape the temptations of Babylon!

Well, other than a few captains and such, many of these sailors are simple blue-collar workers, but their reaction is the same as that of the kings and merchants. How many times had they watched the horizon in hopes of seeing land, and now they see on the horizon “the smoke of her burning.” Babylon is being consumed not just by any old fire, but by the fiery wrath of God. And yet, all they seem to be able to focus on, is how great the city was, and how they’d “become rich through its wealth!”

As all three of these groups, the kings/merchants/sailors alike, all watched God’s judgment being poured out on Babylon, it ought to have caused them to reflect on their own standing before God. Rather than being distracted by their own personal losses of position and power, of wealth and luxury, they ought to have been mourning over any of the ways that they themselves had shared in Babylon’s sins. But, they didn’t.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The smoke of her burning is a stark contrast to the smoke from the incense of people’s prayers back in Revelation 8:4.

<sup>41</sup> There were no semitrucks or trains to transport cargo. In the 1st century, shipping was the primary mover of poundage. That’s where the money was.

<sup>42</sup> Revelation 18 “draws repeatedly on Old Testament prophecies against Tyre (Ezekiel 26-27) and Babylon (particularly Isaiah 13; 21; Jeremiah 50-51.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2616 footnote on Revelation 18:1-3.

<sup>43</sup> “Rome’s downfall is also their own.” Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 87.

<sup>44</sup> When this whole sinful world system crashes, deeply devoted followers of Jesus will not crash with it, because our ultimate citizenship, and inheritance, is in heaven. A place where lasting peace and treasures will abound. From a Christian perspective, “the fall of Rome is cause for rejoicing and praise of God.” Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 87.

<sup>45</sup> Consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:19-21; 16:24-26; and Luke 6:24.

<sup>46</sup> See discussion by Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 88.

<sup>47</sup> The more we read about people who’ve gained the whole world and lost their soul, the more we truly appreciate the saying, “it’s only money.”

Interestingly enough, this is the very thing that God's people are warned about. Perhaps some of you noticed that we skipped over a verse earlier on, in chapter 18. In Revelation 18:4 a voice from heaven warns, "...Come out of her,<sup>48</sup> my people,' so that YOU will not share in her sins, so that YOU will not receive any of her plagues." But is this exhortation really necessary? Does John really think, that knowing what we know about God's holiness and goodness and love, that we'd ever be tempted away by the allure of Babylon? Do "deeply devoted followers of Jesus" really even need this reminder? ...YOU BET YOUR LIFE WE DO! The allure and attraction of the great prostitute Babylon is a very real threat, even still today. And we dare not underestimate it!

But what does it mean to "come out of her"? Other than leaving this world entirely, how exactly do we come out of a sinfully corrupt world system? This leads to our final question: **3. How do we come out of Babylon?** Any one of us can be drawn into the temptations of this world's wealth and power and pleasures. In fact, God may be convicting some of our hearts about this even now. As we prepare to celebrate the Lord's Supper together today, it's important that we examine our hearts and that we're honest before the Lord about any struggles we're having. Coming out of Babylon means that we don't compromise on our biblical convictions. We don't justify or rationalize any sinful attitudes or behaviors. We don't blur the lines between right and wrong. We don't water down our gospel commitment, to make it more acceptable by this world's standards. To be clear, coming out of Babylon does NOT mean that we can somehow leave Babylon. Even though John likely had Rome in mind as he was writing, his words also apply to the world that we live in today, which has aspects of sinful Babylon laced all throughout it. We can't leave this world until the day we die, or the day when Jesus comes back for us. In John 17:14-15, Jesus says, "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." In other words, not forever, but for a short while longer, this world is exactly where God intends us to be. And while we're here, we need to be careful that we don't get sucked into this worldly system of sin, that we don't become like those who are OF this world. So even though we live IN the world, we do not belong TO the world, we belong to Christ.<sup>49</sup> Christ-followers have the challenging predicament of "Escaping Babylon" even as we are called to live right in the middle of it. But here's the good news, since all of this is part of God's sovereign design, we know, that He'll provide us with everything that we need, to find our way through it! The Lord gives us all kinds of help in navigating the temptations of this world:

We can go to the Lord in prayer.

We can rely on the empowering of His Spirit.

We can glean wisdom from His word.

We can lean on our brothers and sisters in Christ for help.

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<sup>48</sup> See Jeremiah 51, especially verses 6 and 45.

<sup>49</sup> See John 15:18-19.

And we can use any number of other tools that He provides. But make no mistake, we are in a battle zone. Our enemy has no incentive to go easy on us, which is why we need to keep our wits about us. 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 begins with a warning, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! 13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” We tend to beeline it straight for verse 13, but verse 12 is worthy of some reflection, especially in light of today’s passage from Revelation. Revelation 18:4 warns us: Don’t share in Babylon’s sins, and don’t end up sharing in her judgment.<sup>50</sup> So let’s all begin by humbly admitting that resisting temptation is not easy. Let’s agree that we need some help. If you’re struggling with some area of sin, I challenge you to talk about it with a fellow believer this week. Don’t put it off. Bring it into the light with someone you trust and let them help you with your escape.<sup>51 52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See 2 Corinthians 6:14 and 7:1, as well as 1 Peter 2:11-12.

<sup>51</sup> See Proverbs 27:17, Galatians 6:1-2, 1 Peter 5:8-9, and 1 John 1:5-10.

<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we weren’t able to cover the last 5 verses of today’s passage. Rather than sharing in the sins of Babylon, and receiving its same judgment, the proper response from God’s people is recorded in Revelation 18:20 which says, “Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you.” This triple call to “rejoice” sets up a contrast with threefold reactions of the kings, merchants, and sailors. They responded with weeping and mourning but God’s people respond with rejoicing. God has answered His people’s prayers for justice back in the earlier chapters of Revelation. (See Revelation 6:9-11 and 8:3-5. See *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2618 footnote on Revelation 18:20.)

Revelation 18:20 is yet another call to worship in Revelation. It’s a call to rejoice for what God is doing to set things right! To be clear, this rejoicing is NOT suggesting that we should enjoy watching the suffering of others. This rejoicing is recognizing that God is bringing evil to justice, and He is lovingly vindicating His people who suffered brutal conditions in Babylon. (See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 660.) Bible scholar Bruce Metzger makes an encouraging observation: “It is remarkable that when John wrote these immensely moving chapters about the fall of Rome, Rome was still very much alive, still enjoying undisputed sovereignty and undimmed prestige. So great, however, is John’s faith in the sovereignty of God and so great is his confidence that the justice of God must eventually punish evil, that he writes as though Rome had already fallen.” (*Breaking the Code*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 87.) “As with so many judgments of God, the fulfilling actually came slowly, but at last suddenly. For centuries Rome decayed and degenerated, moral poison infecting her whole life. Then during a fateful week in...A.D. 410, Alaric, with his northern hordes of Goths, pillaged Rome and laid it waste.” (Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 87.)

John finishes Revelation 18 with one final word picture of Babylon’s certain doom. Revelation 18:21-24 concludes, “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, pipers and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No worker 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 important people. By your magic spells all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of God’s holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.’” Back in Revelation 6:10 the souls of the martyred saints under the altar asked the question: “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Revelation 18 gives the answers, “No longer.” Brother or Sister in Christ, we can have the same kind of faith in God’s sovereignty that John had. We can rest in the confident hope that we will indeed one day make our final escape from Babylon, as the justice of God set things right once and for all.

In the book of Revelation, John is writing down his visions for a few different reasons. He encourages his readers to endure temporary persecution. He reassures them that God is still sovereignly in control, and He will one day set on things right. He reminds them to hold fast to their faith and Christian testimony. But, on top of all of this encouragement and exhortation, there is yet another reason for writing this book: In a very real sense, during our lifetime on this earth, every follower of Christ must live in Babylon, and John urges us to come out of her, to escape the temptations of this sinfully corrupt world system!