

Study 37: Revelation 18:9-24

9 "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.

10 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!'

- Revelation was addressed to churches that were living under the rule of the Roman Empire. This Empire was increasingly hostile to Christians and had a history of persecution and violence. I have stated repeatedly that Revelation was written first to comfort them in their duress and second to any others in history who would face the same dilemma.
- At the time of Revelation, Babylon did not exist as a physical city. It was purely symbolic of an idolatrous, polytheistic society. Babylon in its prime under Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century B.C. was a magnificent city. The walls were so wide that a chariot with six horses across could ride on them! The Hanging Gardens, one of the ancient wonders of the world, have yet to be replicated, nor is it even known how they were constructed. Babylon was a tremendous city.
- Yet Babylon, in all its splendor, ceased to exist in two generations. Quick was its rise and quick was its fall. That is the message to the reader of Revelation. We are not to be fooled by the magnificence or power of any society, for it is only temporary. The kingdom of God is advancing and it will absorb or overcome any and all opponents.
- This discussion of the city of Babylon precludes the discussion of the heavenly Jerusalem in the last few chapters of Revelation.

11 "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more—

12 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;

13 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.

- Purchasing is usually a self-centered activity and not always in a negative sense. When you buy a suit or dress, you want to make sure that it fits you and that is something you want or need. The focus is usually on you, unless you are buying a gift.

- It seems that when this spiritual Babylon is conquered, people will lose their appetite for purchases and self-centered activity. Kingdom activity, on the other hand, is always generous and has a focus on other people.
- In addition to all the products and commodities mentioned above, it is of note that the merchants of the earth had a business in the “bodies and souls of men.” The Church is competing for the hearts and souls of men, as is every other philosophy, economic system and political structure. I can be a Christian and but still find materialism has a hold of my mind and pocketbook.
- The kingdom of God cannot be a part-time pursuit; it requires a total surrender to Christ and His demands. Are you completely His? Or do you share your allegiance with capitalism, liberation theology, socialism, a political party or educational trends or fads? Remember, we are to be in the world but not of it. Babylon represents this world system. But you and I belong to Christ.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up (James 4:1-10).

14 "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches 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, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!

- Throughout history, there have been many conspiracies with evil that have enriched people. Yet Jesus tried to teach that money is a bad foundation upon which to build a life. I was recently watching an interview on public television with a woman who is a multimillionaire as a pornographer! She was defending herself before the American public as a legitimate businessperson. Yet she has made an alliance with

the great prostitute and one day her riches and fame will fade and die, just like she will.

- I have also watched the rich and powerful be exposed for their duplicity and greed. They made an alliance with the spirit of the age and they were brought to ruin.
- The message of Revelation is that every alliance, except for that between God and His people, will be rendered ineffective. You can put your trust in God! But trust in anything else is like building a house on sinking sand.

17 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.

18 When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?'

19 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!"

- A city is a place where people congregate for purposes of employment, protection or community. This is not a literal city, but a concentration of power that speaks of the grandeur of any world system. Past and present civilizations have built cultural and economic systems that were the marvel of their day. Each one has said in their mind and heart, "Was there ever a city like this great city?" Yet they have all come to an end. One the "city" of God has and will survive.

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you."

- Many economic and political systems have not simply ignored the Church, but they have opposed it. Modern governments make the same mistake to their own demise. Take the Soviet Union for example. They tried to wipe out the Church; instead they were destroyed. China, North Korea and the Islamic countries will meet the same fate.
- The Church has never had to take an active part in overthrowing any oppressive government, although some saints have been martyred while they actively preached the gospel. The Lord has brought down these kingdoms. Our focus is to be on building God's kingdom on earth, not opposing the antichristian forces.

21 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.

22 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.

23 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.

- We serve a mighty God! When He moves, no one can resist Him, not even whole civilizations or armies. The Bible and history are replete with stories of how the mighty have fallen. Nations that were intoxicated with their own heresies and antichristian doctrine have vanished from the face of the earth or reduced to irrelevance.
- Think of what this message meant to the Revelation churches who were under such tremendous pressure from a Roman Empire with powerful armies, a world economic system and common language and justice system. What was the Church compared to that mighty Roman force? Yet in less than 200 years, this Empire was reduced to nothing and the Church was a force to be reckoned with.

24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."

- God is not mocked or fooled. He watches and judges the actions of entire people groups and nations and judges them according to how they treat the Church. He has judged those who have not treated the Church well.
- Jesus warned his followers of what to expect. Do you think you and I are any different?

"Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (Matthew 10:17-23).

"But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I

will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life” (Luke 21:12-19).

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well (John 15:19-23).

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. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world (John 17:14-18).