

The Revelation

Lesson 16

9. The History of the Great Harlot (18:1-24)

a) The Teller of Her Story (18:1)

Rev 18:1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.

By 95 AD, when John was writing this story, the city of Babylon had been a *barren hill* for more than 300 years. This angel was sent to John to shed light on the future of this deserted place called the *great city of Babylon*. It will not be deserted in the future. It will be rebuilt and become a major city of the world – the capital of sin we might say! The *great harlot* of immorality – the capital of idolatry! You will not find God in the hearts of the people, you will only find Satan! Remember, you cannot find a sinful city without it being inhabited by sinful humanity. A *barren hill* is not sinful on its own; sin abides only where humans dwell. Without humans, adultery, immorality and idolatry cannot exist.

b) The Warning of Her Story (18:2)

Rev 18:2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird."

First, the angel warns the readers of the REVELATION to stay away from this *Babylon the Great!* Her inhabitants will be the worst kind – demons, unclean spirits, unclean hateful birds. Who would want to live there? Ah, we know! Those who wish to live among the demons and the cages of the unclean spirits and unclean hateful birds. The city will be filled with total depravity and demonism. The city will be rebuilt and the evil worship that began there with the *Tower of Babel* will once again reign on its mountain. We know the evil that will return to this city. Daniel revealed that it was the home of the greatest of all magicians, soothsayers, conjurer and astrologers – all personal assistants to give counsel to the king of the kingdom. We need to translate those names to today's vernacular. They are the participants in the worship of satanism, spiritism, occultism, witchcraft and astrology. Their headquarters began in Babylon and they will make it their capital again. All of them dangle tantalizing curiosities in front of the mind of humans and yet, they fail to ever offer a way to heal the diseases of the soul. Today, the desolate Babylon in Iraq is nothing but a haunt for desert creatures, but in the future, the walls will rise to hide the haunt of evil worship.

c) The Seduction of Her Story (18:3)

Rev 18:3 "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed *acts of immorality* with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."

What kind of person desires to interact with such a person as this *great harlot*? An ungodly person! It will be the haunt of depravity. Such people will drink wine with her,

commit adultery with her and get rich in the relationship with her because she is wealthy, and her suitors will be willing to pay to keep her sin in motion. The great city of this *harlot* will be the attraction of the world, the destination of debauchery. Many years ago, my wife and I traveled to Florida to visit an amusement park. For some reason, we pictured the vacation spot to be the ultimate resort of innocence suitable for audiences of all ages. Why? It touted itself to be the place for children. On the first evening we found ourselves eating on one of its island settings. As the sun set, the vile music began to blast in the streets and by the time we finished our meal the entire island was crowded like sardines with dancing humans from one end to the other. The smells of alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana were choking. The dress of the participants was appalling. We felt like we were in a celebration headed to hell. Before we were able to leave the island, we saw more sin occurring in the streets than we had ever imagined possible. People looked at us like we were prudish religious quacks. So will the sin be in the city of this *great harlot* but multiplied many times over. It will be a city unbound by the limitations God places on those who belong to Him.

d) The Warning about Her Story (18:4-5)

Rev 18:4 I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues;⁵ for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

We must understand that it will take some time for the physical city of this Babylon to be rebuilt, advertised, and become the trusted lust-filled luxury city of the world. Therefore, a warning is delivered by this voice for all of God's people to stay away from this city. We must further understand that this city may become the destination of the world before the Church, the *great multitude with palm branches that cannot be numbered*, arrives in heaven during the *sixth seal*. This sinful city may arise and thrive for several hundred years before she meets her end at the command of the returning LORD. But more than that, while this evil city is thriving in the last days, the believers will be warned to stay far away from this place. Everything about it will be cursed by God. The pile of its sin will reaches to the throne in heaven. Its sin will be worse than all of the sins of the time before Noah's flood, the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah and the great sin of Nineveh combined. Never think that God does not notice! He may be a loving God but He is also a just God. Payment for such sin requires just punishment and this *great harlot*'s punishment will be twice as deadly as her dealings on earth.

e) The Cost of Her Story (18:6)

Rev 18:6 "Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back *to her* double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.

The voice pronounced the judgment, "**give back to her double.**" To this, Dr. John Phillips says the following in his commentary on the REVELATION.

The Babylonians visited upon Jerusalem all the horrors of war, its insensate cruelties, its violent lusts, its horrible excesses. "Lord, pay her back in kind," implored the Jews. Jewish law demanded an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and it was a just and righteous law. The Jews, picking up the broken, lifeless forms of their little babes, held

the shattered shapes toward heaven and cried. "A life for a life, O God of our fathers, a life for a life." But now, with this new Babylon—heir of the sins of Nimrod's Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, it is not justice that is decreed, but vengeance. Not just an eye for an eye, but double—three times in one short verse it is written—for all the infamies practiced on others: double!

f) The Focus of Her Story (18:7)

Rev 18:7 "To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT AS A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.'⁸ "For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.

And here we see the self-absorbed *great harlot*. She sees herself as undefeatable in the city of her birth – Babylon! She sees that her sin is safe from all harm. She sees her life as the *good life*, yet, it is the detestable life. Surrounded by so-called luxury and humanity unnumbered, she sees no heartache. Neither does she see the devastation she has brought to those who have bought into her ways.

She is not safe! The end of this *great harlot* will come – in one day. A set of plagues have been designed just for her. We can only imagine the hurt these plagues will inflict on the participants of her city that day, but all she had rejected in pride thinking she was immune to such things will reign down on her double and by the end of the day, "**she will be burned up with fire.**" Fire purifies all! She will end in ashes, never to rise and afflict her evil again.

g) The Suiters of Her Story (18:9)

(1) Kings, What They Saw and Thought (18:9-10)

Rev 18:9 "And the kings of the earth, who committed *acts of immorality* and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning,¹⁰ standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

Three groups will be horrified when they see the "**smoke of her burning.**" The first will be the kings of the earth. No doubt the kings of the *ten countries* associated with the *Revived Roman Empire* will have great fear when they see the end of this *great harlot*. They ought to! No doubt, Babylon had taken the required *mark* in order to do business with the *Revived Roman Empire*. If the vengeance of the LORD on this city can be this devastating, what could He do to them? The destruction of this city alone will change the economic structure of the *Revived Roman Empire* in a deadly way and that leads us to our next group in this horrific story.

(2) Merchants, What They Saw and Thought (18:11 – 17a)

Rev 18:11 "And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes anymore —¹² cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every *kind* of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article *made* from very costly wood and bronze

and iron and marble,¹³ and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and *cargoes* of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives.¹⁴ "The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and *men* will no longer find them.¹⁵ "The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning,¹⁶ saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls;^{17a} for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!'

What a list! The *great harlot of Babylon* will deal in every commodity in the world. The shipping slip provided in this verse shows the extent of her capacity to buy, sell and trade. No wonder this place will be called *Babylon the Great*. No doubt, once it is established again, it will swell to be the largest and wealthiest city of the world. What Babylon demands, the merchants of the world will deliver to her seaport.

Yet, in one hour, her millionaires will be dead. Ships loaded with goods and nowhere to deliver them which that brings to mind the next group in this dreadful story.

(3) Shipmasters, What They Saw and Thought (18:17b-19)

Rev 18:17b And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance,¹⁸ and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What *city* is like the great city?'¹⁹ "And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!'

As we look, we see the last devastated group to view the burning of this *great harlot*. The shipmasters, sailors and passengers were distressed. The shipmasters would make regular adventures to the port of Babylon, aided by their crews to deliver cruise goers to the port of entry to the *most sinful city of the world* – by the droves. Moored in the distance, they could see the smoke rising. The passengers would not be able to disembark. The goods in the storage bay would not be able to be unloaded. In the hour the ship arrived, its captain, crew and passengers realized that their destination was in ashes. The grief of their loss overwhelmed them. But more than that, in one hour, the *great harlot* will be destroyed in one day. Perhaps the captains, crews and passengers should be thankful to the LORD that they were not in the city when He destroyed it, but that was not their focus of grief because they did not have a relationship with Him. They would rather grieve over the loss of their vacation and sale of goods.

10. The Demise the Great Harlot (18:20-24)

a) The Judgment on Her City (18:20)

Rev 18:20 "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."

Three groups grieved over the destruction of this *great harlot*, but now we come to three groups that are glad. Our attention is turned to the “**saints and apostles and prophets**” in

heaven. They were told to “**Rejoice over her.**” Heaven was still interested in the world. As the saints, apostles and prophets of God’s Word had waited patiently in heaven all these past years, finally, the words they inscribed for the LORD were being fulfilled. What joy that must have brought to their souls! Notice that the LORD God brought the destruction of this *great harlot* on behalf of the saints, apostles and prophets who had died and were with Him in heaven. They were part of His plan; they were soldiers in His plan; they suffered in His plan; they overcame in His plan. Their faithfulness was important in His plan and for that, now from heaven, they saw the culmination of all they had participated in in God’s plan.

b) **The Millstone on Her City (18:21)**

Rev 18:21 Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.

The visual of the angel throwing a “**great millstone**” into the sea was a symbol to John of the ultimate end to “**Babylon the Great City,**” the *great harlot*. That which she represented will never be part of this world again! No longer will such sin be in the world.

c) **The Silence in Her City (18:22-23a)**

Rev 18:22 "And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer;^{23a} and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer;

The doom of this “**Babylon**” will be complete. Nothing in these verses will appear in Babylon because Babylon will not be there ever again. Why?

d) **The Deception in Her City (18:23-24)**

Rev 18:23c for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.²⁴ "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."

The *great harlot, Babylon the Great, the Mother of all Harlots* built all of her industry on deception. From the sin developed at the *Tower of Babel* until her final destruction in the same place, she intentionally built a religious movement based on godlessness, sin and rebellion against everything that was good, holy and godly! For that reason, she hated the servants of the living God and sought to kill the saints, apostles and prophets of the LORD.

I. **The Joy in Heaven (19:1-4)**

1. **Over the Judgment of the Harlot (19:1-2)**

Rev 19:1 After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God;

2 BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and **HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER.**"

We know about this “**great multitude in heaven.**” We were introduced to it in the *sixth seal*. There we determined it was the *Church* which arrived safely in heaven before the beginning of the time of tribulation on earth. This *Church* knows how to sing and what a chorus it sings when the *great harlot* is destroyed. Here is their Hallelujah chorus.

Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER.

2. Over the Smoke of the Harlot (19:3)

Rev 19:3 And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER."

The conclusion of their song is eternal! "**Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER.**" *Forever and ever* means eternally! Never again will she rise from the ashes.

3. Over the Acts of God (19:4)

Rev 19:4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"

As always, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures did what they were created to do, they "**fell down and worshiped God!**" "**Amen. Hallelujah!**" God had acted in His judgement in truth and righteousness to rid the earth of the immorality of idolatry. The *great harlot* will never instigate false worship again.

And this ends the *seventh bowl of wrath*. We cannot allow our minds to slip away from the construction of this REVELATION to John. After the letters to the *seven Churches* were written, the entire vision from chapters 4 – 22 portrayed the events to occur in John’s future. Most of it is still in our future today. This *seventh bowl of wrath* has not been poured; this *great harlot* is still alive and well; the city of Babylon has not been rebuilt, but it will and it will become the capital of the *great harlot* which will be destroyed at the coming of the LORD in order to fulfill the prophecies in this chapter and Isaiah 13 that we mentioned in the commentary of Revelation 16:19.

In the conclusion of the *seventh bowl of wrath* the last participant in the Revelation story is presented as this *great harlot*. In chapter 17, John described her deceptive look and her deceptive power over kings and people through all the seven empires that ruled over the *Nation of Israel* at some time. The message also revealed that the entire story of *great harlot*, *the beast with ten horns and seven heads* as well as all the other participants and events are part of the LORD’s plan by His design. At the end of chapter 17, the angel revealed that this *great harlot* was a great city, *Babylon the great*. In chapter 18, John recorded that the *city of this great harlot* would gain great influence and power over the earth, especially the *Revived Roman Empire* and the LORD would destroy it and all of heaven would rejoice. It has not happened yet! Some time in our future, as the *seventh bowl* is poured, all of evil humanity as well as the *great red dragon* and the *two beasts* with all their following will gather in the

valley of Megiddo. Many kings of the earth with their constituents will voluntarily join in the battle. Into the valley they will take with them their idolatrous idols of their false gods, birthed after the *Tower of Babel* and worshipped through the ages. The practice of the worship of all of the false gods is combined to create the entity known as the *great harlot*.

In the future, when *great harlot's* city of Babylon is rebuilt, the repulsive practices of idolatrous worship of every god in the world will hurl the towns popularity to be known as the most luxurious place on earth. The luxury will resemble the *great harlot*, opulent dress on the surface, disease, filth and death underneath. As the *seventh bowl of wrath* concludes, the corpus of the *great harlot* rests in the hearts of the people gathered in the valley of Megiddo to war against the LORD on His great day. The *great harlot's* city, with all its inhabitants too wealthy to lower themselves to fight in a battle, will be unaware that its destruction will happen in a flash. When it does, the heavens will break forth in a Hallelujah song! Even we must await the coming of the LORD.