

In 2008 the world economy faced its most dangerous crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. It began in 2007 when sky-high home prices in the United States turned decisively downward. This spread quickly to the entire U.S. financial sector and then to financial markets overseas. The casualties in the United States included a) the entire investment banking industry; the biggest insurance company, the largest mortgage lender; the largest savings and loan and two of the largest commercial banks. The carnage spread. Companies that normally rely on credit suffered heavily. The American auto industry, which pleaded for a federal bailout, found itself at the edge of an abyss. Banks, trusting no one to pay them back, simply stopped making the loans that most businesses need to regulate their cash flows. Share prices plunged throughout the world—the Dow Jones Industrial Average in the U.S. lost 33.8% of its value in 2008—and by the end of the year, a deep recession had enveloped most of the globe. We felt the effects in Canada as well. The federal government had to bail out our auto industry to save it from collapse. The Toronto Stock Exchange took a plunge. Some people's investments and retirement savings lost a 1/3 of their value.

Further trouble spread around the globe. The most spectacular broke out in the far corners of Europe. In Greece, street riots reflected anger with economic stagnation. People rushed banks to take out their savings. Iceland found itself essentially bankrupt. Its three largest banks had grown too large for their own good, with assets worth 10 times the entire country's annual economic output. When the global crisis reached Iceland in October, the three banks collapsed under their own weight. The national government managed to take over their domestic branches, but it could not afford their foreign ones.¹

The world slowly recovered from the 2008 recession. But then in 2014, we saw an oil price collapse that dramatically affected the Alberta economy. Oil plunged from a high of 112\$ a barrel in June of 2014 to 25\$ a barrel in 2016. Many of you have experienced the fall out of that drop through work stoppages and less jobs. Slowly we continue to recover. But in 2008 and 2014, we tasted what it feels like to see an economy on the brink of collapse. But what if the whole thing collapsed? Our savings would be wiped out. There would be little or no groceries in the

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Financial-Crisis-of-2008-The-1484264>

stores. Maybe the power grid would collapse. Society as we know it would end. What might be your reaction to such a day? I know I would be pretty disturbed.

But something like this will happen one day. The entire world system will collapse or more accurately be toppled by God. When that day arrives, will we rejoice or mourn? Will we celebrate or sing songs of lament?

How do I know that the entire world system will collapse one day? God promises to overthrow it in His Word. God has already overthrown dominant world systems and empires. So He certainly has the power to accomplish this when He decides to do it. Yet we don't have to fear this day. He has announced it and shown what will happen and how we can prepare for it. If we heed His call, when that day arrives, we will rejoice.

All this comes from the next chapter in our study of the book of Revelation. Last week we looked at John's vision of the great harlot named Babylon sitting on the scarlet beast. It reminds us of Satan and his beast. We saw how God will completely overthrow evil in the end. We saw His sovereignty over evil and how he will even use evil forces to destroy one another. But ultimately the Lamb, Jesus will conquer the evil forces because He is Lord of lords and King of kings. We saw how we could live with hope in the present because God will completely overthrow evil in the future.

The next vision given to John announces Babylon's fall and how people respond to it. So today we need to define Babylon and see the certainty of her coming fall. We will look at two different responses to her fall – mourning and rejoicing. We will conclude by thinking about what it might look like for us to come out of Babylon and move into God's kingdom before Babylon falls.

Revelation 18 (ESV)

18 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. ² And he called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

She has become a dwelling place for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

³ For all nations have drunk
the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,

and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

⁴Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;

⁵for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.

⁶Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

⁷As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,
‘I sit as a queen,

I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.’

⁸For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

⁹And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. ¹⁰They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

“Alas! Alas! You great city,
you mighty city, Babylon!
For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

¹¹And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, ¹²cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, ¹³cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

¹⁴“The fruit for which your soul longed
has gone from you,
and all your delicacies and your splendors
are lost to you,
never to be found again!”

¹⁵ The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

¹⁶ “Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold,
with jewels, and with pearls!

¹⁷ For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.”

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off ¹⁸ and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

“What city was like the great city?”

¹⁹ And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

“Alas, alas, for the great city
where all who had ships at sea
grew rich by her wealth!

For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

²⁰ Rejoice over her, O heaven,
and you saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgment for you against her!”

²¹ Then a mighty 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 be found no more;

²² and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,

and a craftsman of any craft
will be found in you no more,

and the sound of the mill
will be heard in you no more,

²³ and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more,

and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,

for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all 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 earth.”

To understand this vision, we first have to define Babylon. **What is Babylon?** Originally, it applied to ancient empire that rose to world domination about 600 BC. The Babylonians defeated the Assyrians. They began to expand their influence and power. This included eventually conquering Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah. Thousands of Jews were taken away to captivity in Babylon like Daniel and Shadrach, Meschech and Abednego. The Babylonians also destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's temple.

But as is the case with every human empire, another one rises up to defeat it. The Persians rose up and defeated the Babylonians. They took over the city of Babylon as well as her provinces. Babylon never rose to empire status again. But it became a symbol of a kingdom opposed to God and His people.

We saw last week that the great prostitute had the name "Babylon" on her forehead in Revelation 17:5. **In Revelation 18 Babylon is portrayed as a great city throughout.** But what does it represent? The simplest definition I could find goes like this – **Babylon is a symbol of the world system opposed to the advance of the kingdom of God.** Babylon opposes the things of God. Christians throughout history have had to deal with the Babylon of their day. The original receivers of Revelation didn't have to look far to find Babylon. Rome ruled the ancient world. They lived in Rome's richest province of Asia. **Rome's symbols, gods, temples, soldiers and priests were everywhere.** Christians in the churches of Revelation had to deal with this empire opposed to God.

Yet Revelation 18 brings the good news of Babylon's impending collapse starting in verse 1. God gives John another vision. An angel comes down from heaven. He has great authority and shines brightly. A Bible commentator from the early 1900's writes "The angel has so recently come from the Presence of God that in passing he flings a broad belt of light across the dark Earth." The bright and glorious angel reminds us that God dwells in unapproachable light and those who come from His presence shine with lingering radiance.

The angel calls out in a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" Now at the moment John receive this vision, Babylon had not yet fallen. But the prophets often talked about future events in the past tense because of their certainty of God fulfilling His Word. Then the angel describes who will live in Babylon after the fall. She will be the dwelling place for demons, unclean spirits, birds and animals. After ancient cities were conquered and burned you couldn't keep the wild animals out. The ancients believed demons dwelt in unsettled and desolate places. The once proud capital city of the empire would become a deserted ruin for demons and wild animals.

This is a prophetic picture of absolute desolation. The proud achievements of man become dwelling places for unclean and horrible creatures. For Christians in the seven churches, it must have been difficult to believe this would actually happen. Rome was so powerful. Yet she began to decline and was finally conquered in 410. Scholars estimate Rome's population at the height of her power to be around 1 million. But after the defeat in 410, maybe 30000 remained. So the angel proclaims that Babylon, the world system opposed to God will certainly fall.

There would be a partial fulfillment of this with the fall of Rome. Therefore, God calls His people to come out of her before it's too late. Verse 4 again – "Come out of her my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues." Though Babylon would certainly fall, she had not yet fallen. But Christians needed to prepare for her fall by leaving Babylon. So come out – "don't live there; don't settle there; don't do things the way they do there." This is a call to separation from the world system opposed to God.

One commentator writes "the persecuted church has always faced temptation to compromise with worldliness and thus ease the tension of living in a hostile environment." Even two of the seven churches in Revelation are warned about compromising.

God calls His people out "lest you take part in her sins and share her plagues." To live in and cooperate with Babylon' means to participate in her wickedness and reap her punishment. Those dwelling in Babylon when she falls will suffer Babylon's fate. But those who come out will be rescued from her sins and plagues. This warns us against any sort of dabbling to compromise with the world. Such a life threatens our souls. This text portrays compromise with the world as fatal. **We must, while playing their full role in our community, hold ourselves apart from worldliness and partnership with Babylon.**

But why is God going to do this? What's wrong with a banking system? What's wrong with trade? What's wrong with human society? Well there's nothing wrong with it if it does not oppose the advance of God's kingdom. But money, profits and human society can bring out the worst in people and the whole system gets completed.

Notice all the reasons given for Babylon's fall. Back in verse 3 the kings committed immorality with her. Immorality is any word, thought or deed contrary to God's moral law. The merchants grew rich and powerful from her luxurious living. And the nations drank the wine of her sexual immorality.

In fact, Babylon's sins are so numerous that in verse 5, the angel portrays them as forming a pile that goes up to heaven. Her accumulated sins would surpass Mount Everest in height. Yet, in verse 5, God's sovereignty over her

is displayed. “God has remembered her iniquities.” Despite a mountain high pile of sins, God remembers all of them. This is the only time in the New Testament when God is the subject of the word remember. He remembers Babylon’s iniquities so He can respond with an appropriate level of judgment. How different than God’s response to our iniquities. Psalm 103:3 – He forgives all your iniquity. Psalm 103:10 – He does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities.

But Babylon will be repaid according to verse 6. She will receive double for her deeds. God determines this appropriate given all the misery she caused. And he will take the very cup in which she mixed her wine of passion and give her a double portion of judgment to drink.

Lest we have any sympathy for Babylon, the angel reminds us in verse 7 of her pride and arrogance. She glorified herself and lived in luxury. She said “I sit as a queen, I am no widow and mourning I shall never see.” Rome inflicted all kinds of suffering on the nations she conquered. She made countless of women widows by killing their husbands in war or enslaving them after a victory. Rome caused widespread mourning through her looting of conquered territories. Rome concluded she would never be conquered. She proclaimed herself a god and had an unquenchable thirst for luxury.

So God will give her a judgment appropriate to her arrogance. Instead of glory she will experience mourning. Instead of luxury she will experience torment. In verse 8, the angel announces the timeline for God’s toppling of Babylon. He will not need years to build up His forces. He will not need months to move his armies into place. “her plagues will come in a single day.” In one day God will strike down the worldly system opposed to the advance of His kingdom. In one day human society that arrogantly dismisses him will be brought low. It will be struck with death, mourning, famine and fire. Mighty is the Lord God who will judge her.

Babylon’s fall will result in two primary responses; mourning and rejoicing. **Who will mourn Babylon’s fall?** **Kings who joined with Babylon’s immorality.** Verses 9-10. They committed immorality with her. They fully bought into her system and values. If she offered sexual immorality, they did it. If she dominated other people with threats, they threatened. If she proclaimed freedom from God’s morals, they held a parades. But then Babylon falls.

The kings or people who completely bought into her values, weep and mourn over the smoke of her burning. They stand far off in verse 10 in fear of her torment. Maybe they think they can distance themselves from her. Yet

they somehow suspect they deserve the same. And they cannot help but mourn – Alas, Alas, You great city, you mighty city Babylon. For in a single hour, your judgment has come.” Instead of humbly bowing before the Mighty Lord God, they continue to lament Babylon’s fall. Notice that God accomplishes His judgment in even less time than a day. “In a single hour your judgment has come.”

The next group of mourners are **merchants who grew rich by supplying Babylon with luxury items**. They also weep and mourn in verse 11. But they don’t mourn for Babylon. They mourn their loss of profit. There’s no more money to be made. The market dries up. The angel lists 29 items of trade sold in Rome’s markets.

What do most of these items have in common? They are luxury goods. There are precious metals like gold and silver; costly stones like jewels and pearls. Expense clothes like fine linen, purple cloth and silk. There’s scented wood, ivory, and other kinds of costly wood. There’s the most expensive spices in the ancient world – cinnamon; frankincense, myrrh.

Much work and effort went into to bringing these luxury items from all over the world. Some ships had to go on 2 year voyages to bring back silk from Asia or woods from southern Africa. One of the most popular luxury items was a scented wood table with legs made out of ivory tusks. The emperors led the displays of extravagance. At one of Nero’s banquets, the Egyptian roses alone cost 100,000\$. One emperor named Vitellius reigned only one year. He had a taste for delicacies peacock brains and nightingale’s tongues. In that year, he spent 20 million dollars on food for the court.

We see grain mentioned near the end of the list. That wasn’t a luxury item. But Rome provided free grain for the citizens of the capital. So they had to import 400,000 tons of grain every year from Egypt, North Africa and the Black Sea region. 200,000 families in Rome received a regular dole of free grain. But someone had to pay for that. Who? The people in the provinces had to pay high prices to subsidize this grain even though the grain was often grown in their provinces. In Asia, most of the landowners got a better price for wine than grain. So they switched their fields to vineyards instead of grain. Eventually, the grain producing region of Asia had to import grain. The landowners grew rich on their wine profits. The rest of the citizens paid inflated prices for grain.

And somebody had to do all the work. How would they pay all these workers? Simple. They paid nothing because they used slaves. Notice the last item at the end of verse 13. Slaves – that is human souls. The backbone of the Roman economy was slave labor. They got slaves from defeated armies and abandoned babies of the poor.

Sometimes, they would just go out on the road or sea and kidnap people to build up their labor force. The lowest estimate of slaves serving Rome is 10 million. Some estimate 60 million.

These merchants grew rich on this trade. Yet it was exploitive, unjust and negligent to the poor. So the merchants mourn at their loss of wealth. They too acknowledge that in a single hour all this wealth is laid waste at the end of verse 17.

The third group of mourners are **Seafaring people who made their living off Babylon's exploitive trade.** Shipping was the major form of trade transportation. Rome was an inland city. So a great port was built where ships could come and unload their wares. But when Rome fell, the shipping industry suffered major collapse. So those who profit from Rome or Babylon will mourn on the day the Lord topples her.

But some will rejoice over her fall

Verse 20 - Saints, apostles, prophets, all in heaven. From a heavenly perspective, the collapse of the worldly system opposed to God is tremendous news. Babylon will no longer exploit or oppress the world's people. She will no longer be able to deceive. Though she rendered harsh judgment throughout history on God's people, God will call her to account.

This vision concludes with another angel. He takes a great millstone and throws it into the sea. This symbolizes that Babylon will be thrown down and will never again rise. When God overthrows the world's system opposed to Him, it will never come back. So this last portion of 21-24 piece serves to warn any of God's people against living as if Babylon will come back. To emphasis her permanent destruction the angel repeats the phrase "no more" six times. The city will be found no more. Music will be heard no more. Craftsmanship will be found no more. The sound of the mill will be heard no more. The light of the lamp will shine no more. The voice of the bride and groom will be heard no more. The only evidence found is the blood of prophets, saints and all who have been slain.

So if Babylon fell tomorrow, how would you respond? If our world system collapsed in an hour, would you mourn or rejoice? God tells us that this will one day happen. He calls us to come out of our Babylon before it's too late. We must not live in that city. We have a different city to look forward to that will be described in detail when we get to Revelation 21 and 22.

What might “come out of her” look like in your life? It might mean to receive Christ as your Savior and Lord for the very first time. God may have revealed to you today that you have completely given yourself over the world system opposed to Him. Yet, you see how it exploits and enslaves. He’s calling you to a new life in a new city. We start our journey there by giving our life over to Christ and learning to live in the kingdom of heaven. If you have questions about how to begin this life or you want to make that decision, please come to the front after the service and we will meet you here to help you.

To come out of Babylon might mean changing allegiances; practices; lifestyles; partnerships. It certainly means to step away from that which God defines as sexual immorality. It may require us to evaluate our career choices or direction. We must ask “why am I taking this degree or that certificate?” Is it only to make money and become rich?

Does our work build up Babylon or the Kingdom of God? Does our business or company exploits other human beings? Are our corporate practices Babylonian or Kingdom of Heaven? What about our spending habits? Do we buy luxury items that are not necessary? Do we spend so much on ourselves that we give nothing to the poor, needy and helpless?

Coming out of Babylon might mean we need to take more risks. Some communication came out this week from our missionaries in Cameroon. That nation is going through a terrible time of strife that may lead to civil war. Many have been killed. Some of the violence has come very close to our Cameroon work. But the missionaries have decided to stay. This is what Cal Hohn, the Field Director in Cameroon wrote on Tuesday. “As missionaries, one of our biggest challenges is knowing the right thing to do. In light of God’s Kingdom ministry, the right thing may not always be the safe thing. Safety and security may be high western values, but it is a value that is often not afforded to our non-western brothers and sisters in Christ. We want to make sure that we do not trade the idolatry of security for the biblical values of the Kingdom.”

Is there some area in your life where God calls you to come out of Babylon and move into God’s kingdom? To live under Christ’s reign recognizing Him as Lord; submitting our plans, directions and career choices to His purposes; working to glorify God; spending to advance His kingdom; putting our faith not in our bank accounts or property or possessions but in God.

We can only come out of Babylon because someone redeemed us from the slave market. We were enslaved to our sin nature. We could not free ourselves from it. We needed someone to pay our redemption price. But it couldn't be just anyone. It had to be someone who was not a slave themselves. Since everyone in the world is a slave to sin, this person had to have no sin. They themselves had to be free from master sin. So Jesus came along. He paid for our release. The price was His own blood; His life.

So we can come out of Babylon because of God's rescuing us from her slave market. Every empire in history has eventually fallen. Rome fell but the church persevered and spread. The British Empire ended. The American Empire will end. God will bring the world's empire to an end one day in a single hour. But we don't have to fear. Because of Christ's death, we have been freed from Babylon's authority over us. We have to take hold of this new life. We have to move out of Babylon by the power of the Spirit and settle in the kingdom of God. Then on that day when God topples Babylon, we will not be standing at a distance mourning. We will rejoice as we enter into the New Jerusalem and God's very presence.