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## ***Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation***

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### **Revelation 18:1-24: “Judgment on Babylon”**

**General idea:** John is guided by another angel to see more of this harlot, Babylon, and the hope of the Bride. He sees the earth grow bright while shouts are heard that Babylon has fallen and is no longer oppressive or even a problem for the faithful. It was once a hideout for all kinds of evil; now, its evils will crush upon themselves, taking out all the evils that followed. Those who have grown rich by fanatical evil will now become poor beyond measure; those who drank of adultery and immortality are ripe for judgment and punishment. At the same time, another angel, perhaps God Himself, calls to those of evil, those of deceit, the manipulative, the greedy, the cunning, the murderers, and those who refuse God, giving them a chance to repent and be saved. A stern warning reveals that their sins will cause their ruin. Their sins are piled high and God wants to remove the sin. But, instead of seeking God’s grace and mercy, they pile on more sin and seek the evils of pleasure without responsibility, which will bring them torment, sorrow, and extreme helplessness. Those who sought favor and wealth from sin will mourn, but those who are righteous will be joyful and jubilant. Those who trusted in luxury and splendor will mourn; those whose trust was/is in Christ will praise God. In a single moment, what they thought was important will be gone; what really is important will remain and increase. God’s glory and eminence is steadfast and proclaimed; the hope of the faithful comes to its fruition!

**Vs. 1-24, Contexts:** This passage is written in the style of a first century Jewish funeral dirge (elegy), as Jeremiah mourned over the destruction of the cities of Israel and the captivity of her people by Babylon and Ezekiel’s oracle on the fall of Tyre in chapters 27 and 28. Yet, this was an “ironic dirge,” meaning a sarcastic prophecy meant to curse instead of praise, saying “you get what you deserve.” John, who is imprisoned on a small island for defying Rome, is showing his contempt for oppression and evil and his faith as a mighty man who is humble before God.

John is starting to get an answer from the angels as to whom the “harlot” and “bride” are. It seems clearly that they have been referring primarily to *apostasy* in general, discord in the church, and perhaps to evil Jerusalem and Rome. Or, the revelations to John are showing Rome as an example of apostasy and faithlessness and its pending judgment and doom as a result of the consequences of sin. The bride is goodness, charity, “heavenly Jerusalem,” and the Church, as depicted by the life and work of Christ. Christ is the ultimate Bride, whom we are to seek and pursue. It shows a contrast of what we seek and place first in our lives—will it be evil or good, the harlot or the Bride? Christ is eternal and offers eternal salvation; the harlot, Satan and evil, offer fleeting, temporary pleasure that only ends in self-destruction, destitution, and helplessness, followed by judgment and eternal despair (Rev. 21:9).

This passage also is about judgment and how people living in the ways of the world lament and panic while those who are faithful rejoice! This is because most

people seek only self-gratification and pleasure without accepting cares or responsibilities, and thus are not concerned with God or His Way and Love—even those in the Church. They would rather die hopeless than be filled with love and be saved for eternity!

### **Word and Phrase Meanings:**

- *By his splendor/glory.* ..perhaps referring that this angel is reflecting the glory of God or represents God with a mighty voice and eminence (Ex. 34:29-35; Psalm 104:2; Dan. 10:6; Ezek. 43:1-5; 1 Tim 6:16).
- *Fallen is Babylon the Great!* “Babylon” was a codeword for early Jews and Christians, referring to Rome and its oppressions, evils, and tribulations. It comes from Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s condemnation of Babylon then and how it became a symbol for evil and corruption. This refers to enmity with God and people’s participation in it, as well as the audacity of mocking God and embracing sin. This theme points to those who follow evil and wickedness and refuse responsibility as doomed. In the first century and in the Old Testament Prophets, this meant to sin and fall into seduction—a warning to those in the world and those who claim Christ as Lord. What lures you away from faith and what replaces faith? There have been many speculations of this over the years, but its meaning is clear from word meanings and context. Application of this can point to how Jesus scorned the Jewish leadership, Rome, apostasy in the Church, the evils such as gossip and manipulations in the local churches, as well as bad character of individual Christians who sought/seek to follow the world and not the Word (Is. 21:9; Jer. 51:7-8; Dan. 2:35, 4:30; 44; Rev. 13:1-18; 16:19; 17:1-5; 18:3; 18:2, 10, 21, also Ezra 4; and Matt. 23). See *Revelation 14:6-13* studies for more information.
- *Fallen.* A pronouncement and perhaps a taunt and lamentation too, in the style of Jeremiah, stating a fact before it actually happened (Is. 21:9; 34:9-15; Jer. 9:11; 49:33; 50:13; 51:8; Rev. 11:8; 14:8).
- *Home/dwelling place.* A person’s residence, meaning (in context) that sin is at home where it is welcomed! Where will one place his or her trust and comfort? Will it be Good or Evil—God or the ways of the world (Jer. 50:39)?
- *Maddening wine/wine of sexual immorality.* Refers to people who are “deranged,” that teach and/or cause people to sin by “seducing” them into sin. The result is the compromising of their faith and the substitution of fornication for faith. This can be obvious, head-on, evil sin such as murder and deliberate false teaching, or subtle, such as greed, manipulation, and/or slander. In any case, it is opposition to God without fear of Him or the consequences (Jer. 51:7; Rev. 2:20; 14:8).
- *Committed adultery.* This refers to the “harlot,” which means “to betray God,” as in betraying Him with occult practices and monstrous evil or petty manipulations and causing others to stumble.

- *Grew rich from her excessive luxuries/delicacies.* Here, it is a form of “insolence” and “wantonness,” meaning people are so addicted to extravagance they are having extreme disrespect and immorality toward God and what is good.
- *Come out.* Means a stern warning of sin and to get away from it now! Those who remain faithful will never be cut off. God is saying in fact, “Come out from it and be pure.” because as Christians, we carry the vessel of the LORD (Is. 48:20; 51:11; 52:11; Jer. 50:8; 51:6, 45; Zech 2:7; 1 Cor. 5:10; 2 Cor. 6:17). Some (and for very good reason) see this as a warning to Christians to flee Jerusalem before its destruction in 70 A.D. (Luke 21:20-23; Heb. 12:25-29).
- *Piled up/heaped to heaven.* This is a sarcastic remark to those who sin in contrast to the Tower of Babel, in Gen 11. Also, the longer that God delays His judgment, the higher the offences will be, thus the delay may not always be mercy (Gen. 11:1-9; 15:16; 2 Kings 22:20; Jer. 51:9; Matt. 23:34-36; Heb, 8:6).
- *Pay her back double.* God’s judgment and retribution is sufficient and fits the offence (Ex. 21:23-25; Neh. 4:4; Esther 9:25; Psalm 7:15-16; 35:8; 57:6; 75:8; Prov. 26:27; Is. 40:2; 51:22; Jer. 16:18; 17:18; 50:15; Rev. 14:9-10; 17:4).
- *Give her as much torture.* John is quoting Isaiah 47:8-9, showing how arrogance will never give anyone true security! As the people said the Titanic was unsinkable and God Himself could not sink her, so people said the same of Rome. Their trust was in wealth and luxury—and that will get us nowhere (Is. 32:9; Jer. 48:11; 49:31; Ezek. 16:49; Amos 6:1).
- *A widow.* Refers to the cost of war and the loss of good men on battlefields, gaining nothing but pride and its resulting destruction.
- *Consumed/burned up by fire.* These judgments affect not just the participating parties, but also resound with an effect on the economy of everyone too. This is a warning to the faithful to be economical and wise, anticipate disaster, and so be prepared, as the early Christians exemplified when Rome marched on Jerusalem. John’s letter was the catalyst to the faithful who heeded his warning and thus escaped harm (Jer. 50:32; Dan. 5:30; Rev. 17:16).
- *No one buys.* A mourning for Rome and its benefits, or sadness for the loss of sin as a drunk might wish for the bottle when he is “dry.” It means seduction by things that are meaningless and thus being distracted from what is really meaningful, such as chasing wealth and forgetting character, Fruit, and faith, or bowing to luxury as your main comfort rather than to Christ.
- *Cargoes/merchandise of gold... articles of every kind ... souls of men.* Means the lament of the missing commodities of luxury. Refers to the ancient luxury trade between Egypt, Rome, India, and the Orient, the focus being on non-essentials while

ignoring the essentials. Their focus was so much on gold that crop planting and harvest were neglected and people were burdened and starved! This was Isaiah's lament to Tyre, saying a city is great because of its opulence while its character is rotten. The human lives refer to slave trade and its extreme evils and gladiator performances (Is. 23:1-8; Ezek. 27-28).

- *Splendor have vanished... weep and mourn/wailing* refers to financial loss from people's careless ease of taking life for granted to being corrupted by greed and the mourning that comes with it. Purple is a very expensive dye, extracted from shellfish one drop at a time. *Citron/thyine* wood is a very rare, dark wood from North Africa used for rich people's furniture. *Marble* was used to overlay and adorn Roman buildings and the homes of the very rich. *Myrrh and frankincense*, famed for the gifts by the Magi to Jesus (Matt 2:11), was very expensive. *Bodies and souls of men* is the slave trade. The greatest fear of the wealthy is to lose their wealth. John is challenging those fears, saying they will come true unless they repent (Ezek. 26:17-18)!
- *Great city... throw dust on their heads*. Another reason to mourn as the merchants will lose their commerce and earnings. Rome was one of the greatest of ancient cities—a hub for international trade and a hot bed of evil activity, thus, both good and bad people will be distressed and disappointed. God is not condemning trade or wealth; He is condemning the evils often associated with them. Ancient writers and orators would praise cities as one today would praise their favorite sports team. God is making a distinction between His splendor and the façade of splendor—wickedness and iniquity. He uses their own words, their rhetoric of praise, to condemn them for following sin. Ironically, Rome was destroyed after it became Christian. Augustine commented it was because of its past sins; others said it was because the Church became corrupted and was heading toward the same faults (Ezek. 27:30).
- *Large millstone... Babylon will fall God will/has seen to it!* This was a very large stone moved by a donkey or team of donkeys, thus never able to be recovered. It is referring that judgment is final and it is vindication for the righteous. In ancient times, *millstone* was also seen as a representation of a capital city, such as Rome (Jer. 51:63-64; Mark 9:42; Rev. 6:9-11).
- *Never be heard* refers to silence as a term for complete devastation (Is. 13:20-22).
- *Voice of bridegroom and bride* refers to the joy and celebration of life and community (Jer. 16:9; 25:10; Joel 1:8).
- *Magic spell* may refer to pagan priests and practices, the mixing in of various pagan ideas and vain philosophies. The trust in the supernatural is not better than the trust in the wealth; both/either the love of money or the occult leaves you broken and then condemned (Is. 47:8; Acts 19:9; Rev. 9:21).

- *Blood of prophets.* God hates those who oppress the innocent or commit perjury (to bring false accusations). Take heed; He will pay back fully to those who engage in evil (Deut. 19:16-19; Jer. 2:3-4; Ezek. 24:7; Matt. 23:35; Rev. 6:10; 17:6; 19:2)!

### Thoughts and Applications:

This passage is a clear warning to both those in the world (in sin), and those who claim Christ as Lord yet want to be in the world. The question is “What lures you away from faith and what replaces faith?” We have to be on guard against sin and its allure. The ways of the world are tantalizing and seductive and will cater to Christians, seeking to entice them away from God and/or compromise their faith—and be gleeful about it (Jer. 50:8; 51:6; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 John 2:15-17)!

God hates compromise and lack of faith! He wants us, as committed Christians, to place Him first and be proactive—to be on the offense, not just the defensive with our faith. He is greatly saddened when we seek to be one with or identified with the world and its ways. This behavior results in the compromising of our faith! This means our spiritual formation becomes a pathetic, weakening of our character and the absence of Fruit, making us neutral, or apathetic, or insulting to God and others as Christians. When we mold ourselves or the church after the world, we create selfishness, pride, and thus discounted and disgruntled Christian lives without purpose or meaning. When we allow Christ to mold us and our church through His Word and Spirit, then we can be change agents to the world, effectively used by God, and pointing others to Him.

At the same time, God does not want us so isolated from the world that we cannot influence it; rather, He wants us insulated from its evils so we can influence it for His Glory. We can be a voice that says “seek Him first” in the midst of evils and not be touched by its evils. The key is where our eyes and trust lie; is it with luxury or with Him? So, who is your Babylon? What entices you, and how can you be on guard? Remember, accountability is key! Do not live for what is fleeting and temporary; rather, seek what is real, effectual, and eternal: Christ as LORD!

### The Four Prevailing Views

**The Preterist view:** This camp is split as to whether the passage refers to Jerusalem or to Rome. Thus, one side sees this passage as the fall of Rome in 476 A.D. while the other viewpoint sees this as another judgment oracle on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. *Being a home for demons* is seen as the unclean practices of Jerusalem or the pagan practices of Rome. The luxury oracle seems to only fit Rome in this view, but those who ascribe it to Jerusalem say it refers to compromise and comfort over honoring God, and uses the same language Isaiah did for the Babylon siege and captivity in 586 B.C. *Come out of her* is seen as a warning to Christians to flee Jerusalem before its destruction (Luke 21:20). *Piled up* is seen as how fast God acted on sin against Jerusalem or how devastating it was to Rome. The laments are seen as the loss of everything in Jerusalem or the economic impact of Rome’s destruction upon world trade.

**The Futurist view:** Most in this camp see this passage as the Lord Himself coming down (some say it is an angel), announcing that the fake teaching of the antichrist is finished, either by actuality or by reputation. Some see it as an actual built or rebuilt city in Rome or Iraq (or both places), and used by the antichrist. Then, after the reign of the antichrist, that city, which becomes the commercial and political hub of the earth, will be destroyed by a nuclear hit. The mourns of this passage represent the impact loss of profit-making upon the world's trade and economic systems, such as the stock market crash or total economic collapse. *Come out of her* is seen as the people who survived the Great Tribulation. Others have seen this as a warning not to compromise the faith by being seduced by the sins of Babylon. *The Blood of prophets* is the angel saying the faithful can not rejoice, as God and the faithful have been avenged.

**The Idealist view:** They see this passage as oracles of judgment upon apostasy, from Rome to the papacy, to church failings, to personal failings, and the lamentations of loss as a result of it. The reason is the seeking of sin, apostasy, and things not of God or goodness—its natural consequences and judgment from God. For the Jews, it was seeking what was unclean and craving it. For the Church, it was discord, rivalry, and apostasy. And, for cities such as Rome, it was paganism, greed, and corruption. *Come out* is a warning to God's people to flee the corruption and pending doom, and not to compromise our faith. This could be applied to the fall of Jerusalem, Rome, or corruption in general. Some see this as being separate from the pagan practices of the culture or separating ourselves from evil people. Babylon is compared to the tower of Babel and how God judges pride and corruption, whether it is social or spiritual. *Blood of prophets* is seen as God's pay-back to those who oppress the innocent, and engage in perjury. *Millstone* is seen as a representation of a capital city's destruction; some see this as the end of the world as we know it.

**The Historicist view:** They see this passage as a declaration from God that Babylon is finished, as in His judgment upon papal Rome. The earth being illuminated by God's *splendor* is seen as enlightenment to the truth of Christ over the previous apostasy. Some have suggested this has not occurred yet, while others point to the Reformation and the down fall of the papacy influence over the Church and world affairs since. Others take a more literal approach to *splendor* as a light-show at the end of days. *Come out of her* is seen that the pagan practices are deranged, odious, and loathsome, and calls the faithful out of it. Again, this view sees it as papal Rome who is pagan and will be ruined because of unfaithfulness and false teachings. *Blood of prophets* is seen as the blood the Catholic Church has spilt over the centuries, killing those who wanted to reform the Church. Thus, most of the people in this view have vast and convoluted theories of how and when Papal Rome will fall—by earthquakes or fire—and how the world will mourn.

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?

3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

### **Additional Questions:**

1. For you, what is the most precious merchandise that you seek and want? How would you feel if you were never able to have or buy it again?
2. How does it make you feel when people grow rich from peddling excessive luxuries and manipulating people to purchase them? Why is God greatly saddened when we seek to be one with, or identified with the world and its ways?
3. What lures you away from being proactive with your faith? What things can replace your faith? How is sin “at home where it is welcomed?”
4. How are the ways of the world tantalizing and seductive to you or to Christians in general? Why would someone who claims Christ seek to be enticed away from God and/or compromise his or her faith?
5. How would you contrast trusting in wealth and possessions to trusting Christ and having faith? Do you think the greatest fear of the wealthy is that they might lose their wealth?
6. How and why can arrogance never give anyone true security? Why would someone seek to be arrogant? (Keep in mind that when Christ walked this earth, He was fully God, fully man, and humble!)
7. What are some of today’s hideouts for evil? How have you seen these crush in upon themselves, taking out the people who followed it?
8. Can you think of a stern warning that would cause people to turn from their sins? Why does God want to remove the sin?
9. How would you contrast people who trust in luxury and splendor with those whose trust is in Christ? What do you seek to place first in your life? Why would a Christian seek to pursue evil? Consider prodigal teens who, though raised in a Christian home, still choose to rebel.

10. Knowing that Satan and evil offer fleeting, temporary pleasure that only ends in self destruction and helplessness, why do people seek them?

11. Have you ever thought that the gossip, power plays, and manipulations in the local church can be evil? Don't think so? Look up *gossip/tongue* in a concordance! How does gossip create bad character? How does the gossip of Christians show that they really seek to follow the world, not the Word? What can your church do to solve and prevent gossip?

12. So, who or what is your "Babylon?" What entices you? How can you be on guard? How can accountability be of help to you? Knowing that God hates compromise and the lack of faith, what can you do to be on guard? What can you do to be on guard against sin and its allure?

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