

***THE PUNISHMENT OF BABYLON
REPRESENTS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GODLESS WORLD***

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PART 1. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE FALL OF BABYLON THE GREAT (18:1-3)

a. Explanation of the symbols

The fall of Babylon is a prophetic announcement of something that must still take place in the future as if it had already taken place: "Fallen! Fallen is the Babylon the Great!" This is done in order to indicate the absolute certainty of her fall and to serve as a warning for every reader.

In Revelation 18:1-7 Babylon is pictured as a woman: the prostitute (17:1,18; cf. 19:2) with whom people commit spiritual adultery (18:3) and a queen or widow (18:7). But in Revelation 18:8-24 Babylon is pictured as a city (17:5,9,18; 18:10,16,18,19,21).

18:1 "After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority."¹ The phrase "after this" is used to introduce a new vision (cf. 4:1; 7:1; 18:1; 19:1). It expresses the thought that John saw this vision 'in time after' the previous vision, 'next' in the order of his visions, but does not express the thought that the events seen in this vision are 'chronologically after' the events described in the previous vision! In Revelation 18:1 John sees another vision, closely connected to the vision in Revelation 17:1, which shows the punishment announced in Revelation 17:1. This angel received great authority, because he had a great task to accomplish, namely, the destruction of the great Babylon.

"and the earth was illuminated by his splendour."² The position of the angel was so high and his task so great that he illuminated the whole world (cf. Ezekiel 43:2 of God).

18:2 "With a mighty voice he shouted: 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!'" (cf. 14:8)"³

Babylon the Great is the same as the great prostitute in chapter 17 and represents *Satan's antichristian world and its seductions*, especially in industry and commerce, business and finance, education and justice, luxuries and pleasures, art and sports, and certainly also in every kind of worldly religion. In short it represents *Satan's antichristian culture* connected to the world empires throughout the period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming.

¹ Μετα ταυτα ειδον (viaa) αλλον αγγελον καταβαινοντα (vraa) εκ του ουρανου, εχοντα (vrra) εξουσιαν μεγαλην

² και η γη εφωτισθη (viaa) εκ της δοξης αυτου

³ και εκραξεν > κραζω (viaa) εν ισχυρα φωνη λεγων (vrra), Επεσεν > πιπτω (viaa), επεσεν Βαβυλων η μεγαλη

'Babylon' in the book of Revelation is not a literal city, but a symbol of the whole literal sinful world, which most clearly expresses itself in the large cities of the world, like ancient Sodom and Gomorra (Jeremiah 50:39-40), ancient Babylon (Isaiah 13:19-22), ancient Nineveh (Zechariah 2:13-15), ancient Edom (Isaiah 34:13-15), ancient Tyre (Ezekiel 28:1-19), ancient Rome (1 Peter 5:13) and in all the cities of the world since then. All these cities are symbols of Satan's antichristian world and its seductions before Christ's second coming and symbols of the eternal damnation and wretchedness of the whole godless and wicked world at Christ's second coming (cf. Matthew 25:41). 'Babylon' before her fall is the symbol of the evil and antichristian culture of this present world. 'Babylon' after her fall becomes the symbol of hell.

The angel shouted with a mighty voice, because the whole world had to hear about Babylon falling. All people on earth are warned. Although the fall of Babylon is not yet a reality on the present earth, in heaven it is already an absolute certainty! Christ communicated this revelation as if it had already taken place, so certain will be her fall! The fall of Satan's evil and antichristian world and its seductions was determined in God's eternal plan. All the people in the world must be deeply convinced of this fact and must take appropriate measures. They must break with Babylon and keep themselves free from it. Otherwise they will fall together with Babylon!

"She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird."⁴ Before her fall Babylon was highly elevated. But at her fall she is deeply humiliated. Previously, Satan's evil and antichristian world together with its seductions reigned freely and influenced much of life on earth (17:18). But at Babylon's fall her evil and antichristian influence on earth will be terminated forever and Babylon will be turned into the prison of hell. Babylon will be the prison of hell for the devil himself, for every evil spirit and for all the godless and wicked people that had lived on earth (Matthew 25:41). The unclean and detestable birds (like vultures and owls) and the unclean animals (like jackals and hyenas) are symbols for evil spirits (demons). Every person who had allied himself to Babylon while he lived on earth will become imprisoned in the hell of fallen Babylon and will share the sins and plagues of fallen Babylon. They will be completely subjected to the terrors of hell.

'Fallen Babylon' is the symbol of 'hell', its utter disappointments, its utter damnation, its terrors and its sufferings. It will be absolutely horrible to dwell in fallen Babylon forever! Fallen Babylon will be the future place of eternal punishment (Matthew 25:41,46). Fallen Babylon will be the fiery lake of burning sulphur (21:8), where the worm of its occupants does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:49) and where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12).

The removal of Babylon from the present earth makes way for the New Jerusalem on the new earth. Satan's antichristian world and its seductions make way for Christ's Christian community with its civilization that God produces through regeneration. The antichristian culture will make way for the Kingdom culture of Jesus Christ. While unbelievers will be imprisoned in fallen Babylon forever, believers in Jesus Christ will live in the New Jerusalem forever (21:1 – 22:5; Hebrews 12:22-24).

18:3 "For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries"⁵ (cf. 14:8). The reason of God's judgement of Babylon is that she herself is godless and wicked and that she draws people from all the nations into godlessness and wickedness. Babylon before her fall represents "all who do evil and everything that causes sin" (Matthew 13:41). She is the great seductress. She particularly directs her wicked influence in three directions: towards the nations, the kings and the merchants. The nations represent the social aspect of this world. The kings represent the political leadership of this world. The merchants represent the economic shakers of this world. Satan induces them to tear themselves loose from the God who has revealed himself through the prophets of the Bible and in Jesus Christ. They have cast away the Bible, which contains God's Word about salvation and judgement, God's laws and God's value system. In short: they have rejected and continue to oppose *God's Saviour and God's kingdom culture*. Take note of the manifests of political parties, the journals of atheistic scientists and the confessions of the religions of the world and evaluate whether they accept or oppose Jesus Christ and God's kingdom culture as revealed in the Bible or not.

⁴ και εγενετο (viam) κατοικητηριον δαιμονιων και φυλακη παντος πνευματος ακαθαρτου και φυλακη παντος οπνεου ακαρθαρτου και μεμισημενου > μισεω (vrrp)

⁵ οτι εκ του οινου του θημου της πορνειας αυτης πεπωκαν > πινω (vira) παντα τα εθνη

First, God himself says that “the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain” (Psalm 2:1). The nations represent the societies of mankind with their institutions, organisations and clubs.

Secondly, “the kings of the earth committed adultery with her.”⁶ (cf. 17:2). The kings represent the governments and leaders of the nations. They have rejected God and his service, have trusted in man and in man’s power and have done what is evil in God’s eyes. Humanity according to their political make-up has taken their stand against God under instigation and leadership of Babylon, that is, under the great influence of worldliness and its seduction. “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One (Christ). ‘Let us break their chains’, they say, ‘and throw off their fetters’ ” (Psalm 2:2-3). The leaders of the governments in the world claim to be the highest and final authority instead of God. They maintain their independence from God. They do this so that they are free to throw themselves at the sinful and evil culture of this present world.

Thirdly, “and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.”⁷ The merchants here represent humanity according to their economical make-up. They too have rejected God. Industry and commerce, business and finance together with their manifold accomplishments bear the stamp of godlessness and wickedness. They bear the mark of the beast out of the sea (13:16-17). The merchants have become rich by means of the power of sensuality (nightclubs, lurid and perverse magazines, videos and TV shows, prostitution, etc), luxury (shopping malls, supermarkets, gas guzzling automobiles, etc), selfishness (greed) and wickedness (using child labour, producing below standard goods, promoting lies and corruption in business). Their desire for living in material abundance (affluence) and sensuality has made them stop at nothing. The businessmen have emancipated themselves from God and his moral laws and have acted according to their own immoral and corrupt desires. They bribe, are corrupt, change labels on clothes, steal the patents of others and lie about their products. The rich become richer at the expense of the poor, who become poorer. In short, they gain success by means of Babylon. But with the fall of Babylon, they too will fall! Jesus asked, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul” (Mark 8:36)?

b. Different views about the fall of Babylon (18:2)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) Babylon is the literal ancient city of Babylon that would be rebuilt somewhere after the rapture and that would be destroyed *at the end of the future tribulation period (before the future millennial kingdom)*.⁸

Second view. (The correct explanation) Babylon is the symbol of Satan’s antichristian world and its seductions *throughout history*. It will fall at Christ’s second coming (cf. 16:17-21).

c. Different views about Babylon being the haunt for every evil spirit (18:2)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The rebuilt city of Babylon *during the second half of the tribulation period* will be the seat of every kind of occultism and spiritism. Demons from the atmosphere and disembodied souls from the Abyss will find in Babylon the opportunity to materialise themselves in human bodies. They will come in countless legions until Babylon will be full of demon-possessed people at the height of its glory. Babylon will be ruled by Satan himself incarnated in the antichrist-beast.⁹

Second view. (The correct explanation) Babylon as symbol of Satan’s antichristian world and its seductions will turn into hell *at Christ’s second coming*. Previously Babylon had much evil influence on earth (17:18). But when Babylon falls at Christ’s second coming her evil influence on earth will be terminated and she will be turned into the prison of hell for every evil spirit and for all the godless and wicked people that had lived on earth. They will be subjected to the terrors of hell (cf. 21:8; Matthew 25:41).

⁶ και ο βασιλεις της γης μετ αυτης επορνευσαν (viaa)

⁷ και οι εμποροι της γης εκ της δυναμεως του στρηνουσ (sensuality and luxury) αυτης επλουτησαν > πλουτωω (viaa)

⁸ Larkin, Revelation pp. 161-162

⁹ Larkin, Revelation p. 163

PART 2. THE CALL TO COME OUT OF BABYLON (18:4-5)

a. Explanation of the symbols

From Christ's first coming until now the fall of Babylon (as Satan's antichristian world and its seductions) has not yet become a complete reality. Therefore, God's people are called to come out of her in order not to share in her sins or to receive any of her plagues.

18:4 "Then I heard another voice from heaven say: 'Come out of her, my people.'"¹⁰ Already during the Old Testament times God commanded his people to come out of Babylon. "'Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians'" (Isaiah 48:20; cf. Jeremiah 50:8; Zachariah 2:7)! "Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure" (Isaiah 52:11)."

This call to leave the world with its seductions is also addressed to God's New Testament people and people in all ages (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16-18)! This is not a call to go out of this present world, but rather not to participate in its evil (John 17:6-19). Coming out of Babylon does not mean that Christians should leave this earth, but rather that they should separate themselves from its antichristian culture: its worldliness and seductions (godlessness, wickedness, luxury and sensuality). It does not mean that Christians should separate themselves from the people living in this world and live in monasteries, but rather that Christians should not fellowship with the antichristian culture, its worldliness and its sins and should not get ensnared by her seductions (allurements and enticements).

This fact also makes it clear that Babylon is not a literal rebuilt city in the end-time, but rather the world as centre of antichristian culture and seduction at any time in history. God's people are the opposite of the pagans and represent all the believers in the God of the Bible and his Anointed (Jesus Christ), no matter whether they were formerly Jews or Gentiles (Acts 15:14-18; Romans 9:25; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, has come into the godless and wicked world, but people love the darkness instead of the light because their deeds are evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth of the Bible comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through the God of the Bible (John 3:19-21). Light and darkness are both realities, but completely incompatible. You MUST choose between them: stay in the darkness or come out to the light!

"so that you will not share in her sins."¹¹ Christians are not exhorted to leave this sinful world (John 17:14-18), but commanded not to participate in the sins of this sinful world (1 Corinthians 5:9-11; James 1:27). Everyone who participates in the sins of this sinful world (Babylon) will perish with the sinful world (Babylon)(cf. Ezekiel 33:12-13; James 4:4).

"so that you will not receive any of her plagues;"¹² The judgement of the antichristian world with its sin and seductions cannot be averted! Throughout history God already brings his plagues consisting of death, mourning, famine and fire (18:8) on Babylon. This happened to Sodom and Gomorra in the past (Genesis 18:26-32). This happened to many cities that collapsed in earthquakes and burned throughout history. And in the future when Babylon (the antichristian world and its seductions) finally falls, every city of every country, including Israel, will fall! No one will escape, except the righteous, like Noah, Daniel or Job (Ezekiel 14:12-21). Everyone that is a part of Babylon (this antichristian world with its sins and seductions) will never enter the new heaven or the new earth (21:27). They will perish forever. All people who do not come out of Babylon *before* Christ's second coming will share in Babylon's punishment *after* Christ's second coming!

18:5 "for her sins are piled up to heaven,"¹³ Babylon's sins stick together and are joined together until the ever growing pile of sins figuratively reaches heaven (just like the tower of Babel) to defy and challenge God (cf. Romans 1:18).

¹⁰ Εξελθατε (vmaa), ο λαος μου, εξ αυτης

¹¹ ινα μη συγκοινωνησατε > συγκοινωνεω (vsaa) ταις αμαρταις αυτης

¹² και εκ των πληγων αυτης ινα μη λαβητε (vsaa)

¹³ οτι εκολληθησαν > κολλαω (viap) αυτης αι αμαρται αχρι του ουρανου,

“and God has remembered her crimes.”¹⁴ The condition of the kingdom of this world with its antichristian culture, sins and allurements (Babylon) will reach a point where God will no longer tolerate it! He will remember her crimes, that is, bring them into final judgement and eternal punishment. Contrast this with Hebrews 10:17, where God promises never to recall the sins of Christians, because all their sins have been forgiven! Christians believe that the death of Christ made atonement for all their sins (Romans 3:21-26; Acts 22:16).

b. Different views about coming out of Babylon (18:4)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) God will mercifully deliver his own people from the literal city of Babylon just before he destroys it *at the end of the future tribulation period*. Just as Sodom and Gomorra could not be destroyed until the righteous Lot had escaped, likewise Babylon cannot be destroyed until all its righteous people have fled.

Second view. (The correct explanation) Jesus exhorts Christians to immediately leave the kingdom of this world with its antichristian culture, sins and seductions in every place in the world *throughout the whole New Testament period*.

Christians are not exhorted to leave this evil world as such, but to separate themselves at all times from the godlessness, wickedness, immorality and corrupt activities in politics, commerce, business and finance, social organisations (clubs) and religious activities in every place on earth wherever it is found. Christians in all ages are exhorted to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16; John 17:14-18; 2 Corinthians 7:1). This fact also makes it clear that Babylon is not just one literal city of the end-time, but the antichristian world as centre of seduction at any time in history.

PART 3 THE COMMAND TO PUNISH BABYLON (18:6-7)

God’s instruments of punishing Babylon, which are not specified, are commanded to recompense her completely. They are also told why.

18:6 “Give back to her as she has given.”¹⁵ (cf. Jeremiah 50:29). The instruments of God’s judgement are commanded to bring retribution on Babylon. Who these instruments of God’s retribution are, is not explained. They are everyone and everything that God employs to execute his judgements. Some judgements are built into God’s creation (Galatians 6:7-8). Some judgements are brought upon the wicked (Ezekiel 14:21). Other judgements are executed by God’s angels (2 Kings 19:9-19; 1 Chronicles 21:14-30; Revelation 8:3-5; Matthew 13:36-43; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9). God has entrusted all judgement to Jesus Christ (John 5:22).

“pay her back double for what she has done.”¹⁶ Literally: “double the double according to her works”. This does not mean that God is unfair and punishes twice as much as people deserve. This expression means *the full equivalent*. Her punishment must be the exact equivalent or equal complement of her sins, like the two halves of a whole. Babylon must receive as much punishment as her sins deserve. This is explained in verse 6b and 7a.

Literally: “Mix for her double in the cup in which she mixed.”¹⁷ The cup may contain God’s fury (14:10; 16:19) or it may contain Babylon’s abominable adulteries (17:4). The word ‘mix’ means that the cup with its contents was made ready. It must be presupposed that Babylon’s cup of sins was full when she had mixed her sins. A double quantity of sins can never be mixed in one cup. Therefore, the meaning of ‘double’ must be that which constitutes the reverse of its contents. The cup of sins and the cup of God’s punishment for these sins must be complete equals. God’s cup of punishments for these sins has the same size. God will be absolutely righteous and fair in his judgement of Satan’s antichristian world and all its seductions (cf. Luke 12:47-48; Romans 2:12). But because these sins are very terrible, their punishment will also be very terrible!

¹⁴ και εμνημονευσεν (viaa) ο θεος τα αδικηματα αυτης

¹⁵ αποδοτε (vmaa) αυτη ως και αυτη απεδωκεν (viaa)

¹⁶ και διπλωσατε > διπλω (to double)(vmaa) τα διπλα κατα τα εργα αυτης

¹⁷ εν τω ποτηριω ω κερασαεν (viaa) κερασατε (vmaa) αυτη διπλουν (double)

18:7 “Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself”¹⁸. This explains the word ‘double’ as meaning the exact equivalent. The word ‘torture’ first means to torment or give severe spiritual distress. This torment lasts throughout the whole New Testament period until Christ’s second coming. The torment is caused by the demons from hell (9:5), by the lawless deeds of godless and wicked people that destroy one another with their deeds (1 Peter 4:3-5; 2 Peter 2:8; cf. Romans 1:18-32) and by the preaching of believers to unbelievers (11:10)!

Finally, torture will be continued in hell after the final judgement day. All people who received the mark of the beast will be tortured in hell (14:11; cf. Luke 16:23). Fallen Babylon (Satan’s antichristian culture with its sins and seductions and all who participated in these) will be tortured after the final judgement day (18:10,15). Satan and his allies: his antichristian governments with their persecution of Christians, his antichristian religious, philosophical and scientific prophets with their false knowledge, and his antichristian culture with its seductions will be tortured day and night for ever and ever (20:10)!

Grief, sadness and mourning are the opposite of laughter and joy (cf. James 4:9).

“In her heart she boasts, ‘I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn’”¹⁹ (cf. Isaiah 47:7-11). The reason of God’s judgement is Babylon’s unrepentant and self-exalting attitude (cf. Isaiah 14:13-14). This inward pride and outward boast is in her heart. She does this consciously, deliberately and wholeheartedly. She thinks she is a queen that can determine her own life and destiny. Therefore she rejects the God who revealed himself in the Bible!

PART 4. THE DESCRIPTION OF BABYLON’S DESTRUCTION (18:8-19)

a. Explanation of the symbols

Again, the fall of Babylon is described as if it had already taken place (cf. 18:1-3). The extent and dreadfulness of Babylon’s destruction is described in three lamentations: a lamentation by the kings of the earth (18:9-10); a lamentation by the merchants of the earth (18:11-16) and finally, a lamentation by the sailors on the seas (18:17-19) (cf. the lament for Tyre in Ezekiel chapter 27). This section is closed by an exhortation to all those in heaven and the righteous on earth to rejoice at Babylon’s fall (18:20).

18:8 “Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning, famine”²⁰ (cf. Isaiah 47:9).

The picture of Babylon changes from a prostitute to a city.

“In one day” refers to ‘the day of the Lord’, which is usually the day of reckoning and punishment for a particular group in history or the final judgement day for the whole world (2 Peter 3:10-13). Thus, such a day may strike anyone at anytime during the whole New Testament period! The plagues that will strike Babylon are death, mourning, famine and fire. These are symbols of Babylon’s destruction. Death means separation and mourning means the absence of joy. Babylon will suffer the loss of all her relationships and accomplishments. She will become like a widow and be childless. Famine means extreme suffering and fire means destruction of the city.

Many of Babylon’s soldiers and citizens will die in the wars (cf. 6:8a; Matthew 24:6) and famines (cf. 6:5-6; Matthew 24:7) that are part of Christ’s judgements on her throughout the whole New Testament period. But all of them will perish in the final battle at Christ’s second coming (19:17-21). Many cities of the world will collapse throughout the history of the world (Sodom and Gomorrah, Nineveh, Babylon, etc.). But all of them will collapse together on the final judgement day (16:19). The picture of the total destruction of Babylon and its inhabitants is a picture of the final destruction of the kingdom of this godless and wicked world with its antichristian culture, sins and seductions on the final judgement day.

“She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”²¹ God had promised never to destroy the whole earth with water again (Genesis 9:11). But God warned that he would destroy the whole earth with fire (2 Peter 3:10-13; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:7) and he would throw all who do not believe in Jesus Christ into the lake of fire (21:8; Matthew 3:12; 13:42; 25:41; Hebrews 10:27).

¹⁸ οσα εδοξασεν (viaa) αυτην και εστηρηνασεν > στηρηνιαω (viaa), τοσουτον δοτε (vmaa) αυτη βασανισμον και πενθος

¹⁹ οτι εν τη καρδια αυτης λεγει (vira) οτι Καθημαι (virm) βασιλισσα, και χηρα ουκ ειμι (vira), και πενθος ου μη ιδω (vsaa)

²⁰ δια τουτο εν μια ημερα ηξουσιν (vifa) αι πληgai αυτης, θανατος και πενθος και λιμος

²¹ και εν πυρι κατακαυθησεται (vifp) οτι ισχυρος κυριος ο θεος ο κρινας αυτην

b. Babylon's doom as a political power (18:9-10)

18:9 “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.”²² The first group who laments Babylon's fall is the kings, the political powers of every kind. They are included in Babylon's fall and judgement. Their sorrow is a worldly sorrow over the political losses they incur (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10)! Seeing the smoke of her burning, weeping and mourning are symbols of personally witnessing and personally experiencing the damnation of Babylon. They will be *fully conscious* of what will happen on their judgement day!

18:10 “Terrified at her torment, they will stand afar off and cry: ‘Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come.’”²³ Standing afar off does not mean that they are not included in this damnation and judgement, but a figurative description of their personal *terror and helplessness*. Like people standing far off from a building on fire because they are terrified and cannot help, so the kings (Satan's antichristian governments with its rulers) will be absolutely terrified on their final judgement day. They not only are included and personally suffer in this judgement, but also cannot help Babylon (Satan's antichristian world with its seductive culture) when it perishes. Everything they had built up during their whole lives is destroyed in one day! Everything of all that they had given their time, money, energy and lives for on earth goes up in smoke and is lost forever! They can only abandon Babylon to its final destruction. That is why Jesus says, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8: 36-37)

c. Babylon's doom as an economical power (18:11-16)

18:11 “The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more -”²⁴ (cf. Luke 12:16-21; 16:19-31). The second group who laments Babylon's fall is the merchants of the earth, the economic powers of every kind on earth. They are included in Babylon's fall and judgement. Their sorrow is a worldly sorrow over the economic losses they incur (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10)! Weeping and mourning are symbols of personally experiencing the damnation of Babylon. They will be fully conscious of what will happen on their judgement day!

18:12 “cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine clothes, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, bronze, iron and marble;”

18:13 “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.”²⁵ This is a summary of all the costly stones in the mineral kingdom; the luxury spices, best drink and food in the plant kingdom; the precious herds and flocks of the animal kingdom; and the slaves of the kingdom of man. None of these things have an abiding value in Babylon (Satan's antichristian world)! The apostle Paul says, “The world and its present form²⁶ is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:31).

Slavery. The merchants have treated their fellowmen as animals and sales goods. Especially the bodies of slaves were valued economically. Even their souls, that is, their highest existence in relationship to God or their invisible being in the likeness of God, was bartered as cargo. The economic powers of this earth manipulated the bodies and souls of their fellowmen. This is a gross violation of the greatest commandment: to love your neighbour (Mark 12:30-31; John 13:34-35). Think of child labour; think of child soldiers; think of prisoners employed as slaves producing cheap goods; think of kidnapping children and women for the sex industry; think of the mafia forcing asylum seekers into the illegal workforce; think of not paying the poor for their hard labour, etc.

²² και κλαουσουσιν > κλαιω (vifa) και κοπονται > κοπω (to beat breast as an act of mourning)(vifm) επ αυτην οι βασιλεις της γης
οι μετ αυτης πορνευσαντες (vraa) και στρηνιασαντες > στρηνιαω (to live in luxury, to live sensually)(vraa)
οταν βλεπωσιν (vsra) τον καπνον (smoke) της πυρωσεως αυτης

²³ απο μακροθεν εστηκοτες (vpra) δια τον φοβον του βασανισμου (active torture or passive torment) αυτης, λεγοντες (vppa)
Ουαι ουαι, η πολις η μεγαλη, Βαβυλων η πολις η ισχυρα, οτι μια ωρα ηλθεν (viaa) η κρισις σου

²⁴ Και οι εμποροι της γης κλαιουσιν (vira) και πενθουσιν > πενθεω (to grieve, mourn)(vira) επ αυτην, οτι τον γομον (ship's cargo,
merchandise) αυτων ουδεις αγοραζει (vira) ουκετι

²⁵ και σωματων, και ψυχας ανθρωπων

²⁶ παραγει > παραγω γαρ το σχημα (manner, fashion, outward appearance and glamour) του κοσμου τουτου

John's picture is of course based entirely on conditions of his time (1st century A.D.), but is essentially the picture of Babylon throughout history! The message he receives and passes on is true of every city (whether Nineveh, Babylon or Rome) and for every age in history.

18:14 “They will say, ‘The *ripe* fruit which your soul desired is gone from you. All your riches and splendour have vanished, never to be recovered.’”²⁷ The final judgement and its consequences are irrevocable. The finality of the final judgement day has been proclaimed since Christ's first coming, but the godless and the wicked will only realise it when it is too late (cf. Proverbs 27:1; James 4:13-15).

18:15 “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”²⁸ See verse 10 and 11.

18:16 “and cry out: ‘Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!’”²⁹

d. Babylon's doom as a maritime power (18:17-19)

18:17 “In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!”³⁰ Every sea captain and all who travel by ship, the sailors and all who earn their living from the sea will stand far off.”³¹

18:18 “When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, ‘Was there ever a city like this great city?’”³²

18:19 “They will throw dust on their heads”³³ 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!’”³⁴

The third group who laments Babylon's fall is the merchants of the sea, the economic powers of every kind on the seas. They are included in Babylon's fall and judgement. Also their sorrow is a worldly sorrow over the economic losses they incur (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10)! They will be fully conscious of what will happen on their judgement day!

“Was there ever a city like this great city?” While they lived and worked on earth, they had made Babylon the goal of their lives. They ignored God, his kingdom and his righteousness (cf. Matthew 6:33). They had set all their hope on Satan's antichristian world and its seductions. They had set all their time, energy, money, goals and plans on what is doomed to pass away. On the final judgement day they will see all this perish forever!

“They will throw dust on their heads”. (cf. Ezekiel 27:30). This is an outward sign of their utter dismay and consternation.

PART 5. THE EXHORTATION TO REJOICE AT BABYLON'S FALL (18:20)

18:20 “Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!”³⁵ The description of Babylon's destruction may cause the reader to forget that this is her *deserved* punishment! Therefore, the

²⁷ και η σπωρα (autumn fruit that is ripe for ingathering) σου της επιθυμιας της ψυχης απηλθεν (viaa) απο σου, και παντα τα λιπαρα (riches) και τα λαμπρα (shining, splendour, the things in which the rich take delight) απολετο > απολλυμι (ruined, destroyed, lost)(viam) απο σου, και ουκετι ου μη αυτα ευρησουσιν > ευρισκω (vifa)

²⁸ οι εμποροι τωτων, οι πλουτησαντες (vraa) απ αυτης, απο μακροθεν στησονται > ιστημι (vifm) δια τον φοβον του βασανισμου (torment) αυτης, κλαιοντες (vrpa) και πενθουντες (vrpa)

²⁹ λεγοντες, Ουαι ουαι, η πολις η μεγαλη, η περιβεβλημενη > περιβαλλω (vrpm) βυσσινον (linen garment) και πορφυρου (purple garment) και κοκκινον (scarlet garment), και κεχρυσωμενη > χρυσοω (decorated with gold) (vrpr) [εν] χρυσιω και λιθω τιμω και μαργαριτη

³⁰ οτι μια ωρα ηρημωθη > ερημοω (turn into a desert, make desolate, devastate) ο τοσουτος πλουτος

³¹ Και πας κυβερνητης και πας ο επι τοπον πλεων και ναυται και οσοι την θαλασσαν εργαζονται (vrpm) απο μακροθεν εστησαν (viaa)

³² και εκραζω > κραζω (viaa) βλεποντες (vrpa) τον καπνον της πυρωσεως αυτης λεγοντες, Τις ομοια τη πολει τη μεγαλη

³³ και εβαλον (viaa) χουν επι τας κεφαλας αυτων

³⁴ οτι μια ωρα ηρημωθη (viaa)

³⁵ Ευφραινου > ευφραινομαι (vrpp) επ αυτη ουρανε, και οι αγιοι και οι αποστολοι και οι προφηται

angels and departed saints in heaven are encouraged to rejoice that finally complete justice is done (cf. 12:12)! Christians described as ‘the saints’ (cf. 14:12; cf. 2 Timothy 3:12), the apostles (cf. 21:14; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-27) and the prophets (cf. 10:7; 16:6; cf. Matthew 5:10-12) had been persecuted by Babylon in a terrible way throughout history (cf. 6:9; 11:7-10; 13:6,15-16).

“God has judged her for the way she treated you.”³⁶ The fall of Babylon is God’s judgement for all the godlessness, wickedness and injustice done to God, to Christians and to other people (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10).

PART 6. THE IRREVOCABLE FINALITY OF BABYLON’S VIOLENT FALL (18:21-24)

Again, the fall of Babylon has not yet become a complete reality (cf. 18:4-8). The fall of Babylon is pictured as an angel throwing a boulder into the sea so that it can never be found again! It is a picture of the certainty, completeness, finality and violence of Babylon’s fall and destruction throughout world history and finally on the final judgement day at Christ’s second coming. Babylon’s fall is thoroughgoing, irrevocable and irreparable.

a. God’s six fold negation (18:21-23a)

18:21 “Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea”³⁷

In the Old Testament the prophet Jeremiah prophesied the oncoming final judgement of the historical city of Babylon. Jeremiah had written on a scroll about all the disasters that would come upon Babylon. He sent it with the staff officer Seraiah to Babylon to read all these words aloud to the people and say, “O Lord, you have said you will destroy this place, so that neither man nor animal will live in it; it will be desolate forever.” Then Seraiah had to tie a stone to the scroll and throw it into the Euphrates and say, “So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall (Jeremiah 51:59-64).

In the New Testament John saw a mighty angel throwing a large millstone into the sea. The millstone was probably the large kind moved around by a donkey. And the angel said:

“With such violence (literally: with a rushing) the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.”³⁸ This is a vision of a symbolical act, depicting the final judgement of Babylon (Satan’s antichristian world with its seductions). The millstone was not simply dropped, but violently hurled down into the sea. This stresses how suddenly and spectacularly the judgement of God will be executed on the entire anti-Christian world in its opposition to God. No one and nothing can avoid or hinder this catastrophe! Satan’s antichristian world with its seductions will never be found again! It is a picture of the final judgement of God.

Six times it is emphasized what will never again be found or heard: Babylon (the whole antichristian world with its seductions), musicians with their music, craftsmen with their skills, workers (millers) with their jobs, lamps with their lights, and people who marry. In short, everything will be dark, joyless, want and hardship. For all eternity, the godless and wicked world will be cast into hell and there will only be darkness, joylessness, shortage and hardship, because God is no longer present with his love and care (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Acts 14:16-17).

18:22 “The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again.”³⁹ This is also said of Judah during the exile to Babylon (Jeremiah 25:10).

“No workman (craftsman) of any trade (skill) will ever be found in you again.”⁴⁰

“The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again.”⁴¹

³⁶ οτι εκρινεν (vrpa) ο θεος το κριμα υμων εξ αυτης

³⁷ Και ηρεν > αιρω (viaa) εις αγγελος ισχυρος λιθον ως μυλινον μεγαν εβαλεν (viaa) εις την θαλασσαν λεγων (vrpa),

³⁸ Ουτως ορμηματι (rushing dat. instrumental) βληθησεται > βαλλω (throw)(vifp) Βαβυλων η μεγαλη πολις, και ου μη ευρεθη (vsap) ετι

³⁹ και φωνη κιθαρων και μουσικων και αυλητων και σαλπιστων ου μη ακουσθη (vsap) εν σοι ετι

⁴⁰ και πας τεχνιτης (skilled worker) πασης τεχνης (skill, craft) ου μη ευρεθη εν σοι ετι

⁴¹ και φωνη μυλου ου μη ακουσθη (vsap) εν σοι ετι

18:23 “The light of a lamp will never shine in you again.”⁴²
“The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again.”⁴³

b. God’s threefold condemnation (18:23b-24)

God condemns Babylon’s great men, magic spells and terrible persecutions.

“Your merchants were the world’s great men.”⁴⁴ Already in the Old Testament God condemned the great men on the earth. Tyre was the city of revelry and the king maker. Her merchants were princes and traders renowned in the earth. But God planned to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth (Isaiah 23:8-9). Also in the New Testament God condemns the great men on earth. The kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich and the mighty are warned together with the slaves and free men that the final judgement day is at hand (6:15). Babylon (the antichristian world with its seductions) is the source of worldly power and worldly wealth. She caused everyone that fellowshipped with her to become powerful and wealthy. Through the political and economic powers on earth, Babylon reigned over the nations and its people. She arrogantly assumed the role and place that belongs only to God!

“By your magic spell all the nations were led astray”⁴⁵ Already in the Old Testament God condemned occultism in its many forms. God commanded, “Do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations... who practise divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or cast spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of these detestable practises the Lord God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 18:9-13).

Nineveh was the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder and never without victims. She possessed the wanton lust of a harlot. She was alluring. She enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft. But God would treat her with contempt and completely ruin her (Nahum chapter 3). Babylon was the queen of the kingdoms. But God challenged her to try and avert her oncoming disaster (viewed as a demon) by means of her magic spells, sorceries and the predictions of her astrologers and stargazers (Isaiah 47:11-13).

Babylon is the source of non-Christian and anti-Christian religions. She caused everyone that fellowshipped with her to become irreligious (secular) or anti-Christian. Magic spells are part of these religions. They are designed to turn the people of all the nations away from the living God and Christ and to do all kinds of godless things.

18:24 “In her was found the blood of the prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.”⁴⁶ This is God’s view of the persecution of his people on earth: all murders on earth have been committed in Babylon, which does not represent one single historical city, but the whole wicked and antichristian world throughout history. Satan himself is a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). Babylon is regarded as the source of every kind of bloodshed, the killing of the Old Testament prophets and believers, the killing of New Testament apostles and believers and the unjust and cruel killing of all other people on earth. Therefore, God’s final judgement of Babylon is completely justified!

⁴² και φως λυχνου ου μη φανη εν σοι επι

⁴³ και φωνη νυμφιου και νυμφης ου μη ακουσθη εν σοι επι

⁴⁴ οτι οι εμποροι σου ησαν (viiia) οι μεγαστανες (the great ones) της γης

⁴⁵ οτι εν τη φαρμακεια σου επλανηθησαν > πλαναω (viar) παντα τα εθνη

⁴⁶ και εν αυτη αιμα προφητων και αγιων ευρεθη (viar) και παντων των εσφαγμενων > σφαζω (vgrp) επι της γης