

The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 18:1-24

Topic

An angel announces the fiery destruction of Tribulation Babylon and we see the smoke of her burning

Title

"Burn Notice"

Introduction

I love those scenes in movies where the hero is surrounded, and hopelessly outnumbered, but nevertheless gives his enemies one last chance to surrender.

The Return of the Jedi has to be in the top ten. As he is being made to walk the plank, and is about to be tossed into the Sarlacc in the Great Pit of Carkoon, Luke Skywalker confidently exclaims, "Jabba, this is your last chance. Free us... *or die.*"

To which Jabba answers, (laughing) "Koh nee tah. Teedee Jedi! Sah kootah day. Koos nooma!"

R2D2 then launches Luke his light-saber and, after a harrowing fracas, Luke and the gang do, indeed, escape to fight another day.

We're going to see a group of surrounded Christians. They will be living in Tribulation Babylon. The final version of that city will be the epitome of the evil world system that Satan has been trying to establish for some six thousand years.

Although surrounded, the believers will not be defeated. They will come out of Babylon victorious to their heavenly home and inheritance.

If believers can be surrounded but remain victorious in Tribulation Babylon - **so can we, today, in the world.**

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You're To Remain Separated To Jesus While You Are Surrounded By The World, and #2 You're To Remain Surrendered To Jesus While You Are Stressed By The World.

#1 You're To Remain Separated To Jesus
While You Are Surrounded By The World

(v1-19 & 21-24)

Do we really think there is enough time to rebuild Babylon in Iraq? Yes, we do. Last week I cited several examples of incredibly quick major construction projects in China and in Dubai.

By "quick," I mean major hi-rise buildings built, turnkey, in less than three weeks time.

If you're still not convinced Babylon will be rebuilt, I should point out that both Isaiah and Jeremiah said it would.

Isaiah, in chapters thirteen and fourteen, prophesied that the city of Babylon would be destroyed and then never again be inhabited. It's something that hasn't happened in the past. Isaiah plainly says it will happen in the future Day of the Lord - which is another name for the Tribulation.

Jeremiah, in chapters fifty and fifty-one, confirms this same scenario for Tribulation Babylon.

We saw it as a religious center in chapter seventeen - the headquarters of a global coexistence of man-made religions that would exert power over the world's governments for the first three-and-one-half years of the Tribulation.

In chapter eighteen we see the socioeconomic side of Tribulation Babylon.

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

“After these things” means that the city of Babylon will go on into the second half of the Tribulation *after* the antichrist demands to be worshipped as god and overthrows the religion based in Babylon.

Angels are undoubtedly always busy, but they appear especially busy in the Tribulation, as things come to their conclusion.

“Having great authority” reminds us that God delegates tasks to these trustworthy messengers. All the times they appear in Scripture they faithfully carry-out their assigned duties.

We, too, have been granted authority to proclaim the Gospel by which we are telling people that their sins can be forgiven at the Cross. Let's be busy, and faithful, in our delegated task.

This angel illuminates the earth with his glory. It reminds us that so much is veiled to our perception now. We walk by faith and not by sight.

It will be great in the future to behold things as they are, with unveiled senses. But for now blessed are we who believe without seeing.

Revelation 18:2 And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!

The angel announces what the rest of the chapter will describe - the burning of Babylon by God just before Jesus Christ returns to the earth.

The repetition of "is fallen" may reflect the fact that religious Babylon falls first, mid-Trib, then the city itself falls, as the Tribulation ends.

Apparently Babylon will be used as a prison to incarcerate demons during the one thousand year reign of the Lord.

God has an extensive prison system for demons:

- Earlier in the Revelation we read about a place called the Abyss. Demons were let out from there to plague the earth.

- Demons are also incarcerated near the Euphrates River; we saw that in chapter nine.
- Both Peter and Jude describe demonic holding areas in their letters.

The reference to “every unclean and hated bird” might be a way of describing demons. More likely it is describing the reality that, after its destruction, Babylon will be overrun by scavenger birds.

Revelation 18:3 "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury."

Merchants, merchandise, and luxury are themes that repeat throughout this chapter. Babylon will have all that the world can offer in terms of pleasures and possessions. Babylon will dominate as the go-to location in the Tribulation.

What about this talk of "fornication" with the city? Let me give you a contemporary example.

Businesses and organizations, even government agencies, plan conferences and retreats. I'm always a little taken back when the destination is Las Vegas. Really? Vegas, baby?

It's just wrong, I submit, to plan an event in a place proudly called Sin City.

It all reminds me of Pleasure Island in Disney's version of *Pinocchio*. The boys can drink and cuss and smoke and vandalize and fight all they want.

But in the end they are enslaved as beasts of burden. It's a great illustration of what sin really leads us into - slavery.

Rev 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

Rev 18:5 For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

Just before Babylon is destroyed - **God still has people there.** Right there, in the headquarters of the antichrist, at Satan's earthly throne, God stations His people. It's their spiritual assignment. Incredible.

While we talk about the nuts-and-bolts of the future, we don't ever want to lose sight of God's people in it. It inspires us, and encourages us, as God's people in the world today.

They are godly, because they have not "share[d] in her sins." Are they about to fall into sin? Verse four makes it almost sound like the believers have overstayed, and are about to start "shar[ing] in" Babylon's sins.

I don't think that is what is being said. There is an alternate reading that says what is being communicated is that they are to come out before they "share" in the *punishments* for sin that are about to be meted out.

I like that because it better fits the context. They are stationed there by God, on assignment from Heaven, but before the city is burned, they are called to come out of it. Their work is done.

Lot, in the Book of Genesis, would be an example of that. True, the angels had to drag him out of Sodom; that's not the example. The example is God calling His people out prior to destruction.

I think we miss the point when we think that "come out of her" is a command for us, as believers, to have less-and-less contact with the world. In Tribulation Babylon, the believers stay in her until the final judgment falls.

The doctrine of separation is still best summarized by the old Christian cliché, *Be **in** the world, but not **of** the world.*

Jesus prayed for us, saying to our Father, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

Paul said,

1Co 5:9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

1Co 5:10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

We are in the world, on assignment from God. Hanford is my posting as a pastor. I'm here unless I receive orders somewhere else.

And so are you. Do you want to get out of Hanford? Out of California? I think you need to be able to say, "Jesus is calling me out of here to" wherever. He *sends* you; you don't bring Him along with you.

Do you want to stay in Kings County? That, too, is really up to the Lord.

Rev 18:6 Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her.

The speaker, whoever it is, announces the nonbelievers getting double what they dealt out to believers. This lets us know that it will be very difficult for the believers in Tribulation Babylon.

Revelation 18:7 "In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.'

We get discouraged in our struggle against the world. Nonbelievers seem to prosper, having this world's *good* and *goods*. Just wait. In this life, but especially in the next, sin pays its awful wages: death and eternal conscious torment.

Revelation 18:8 "Therefore her plagues will come in one day; death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her.

Sudden destruction is breathtaking. It is overwhelming. Think Mount St. Helens.

Here is an interesting geologic note. The original building site of Babylon is known to be full of bitumen, a substance filled with hydrocarbons and therefore highly flammable.

As God sends fire down from heaven, the very foundations upon which Babylon will be rebuilt will burn.

Rev 18:9 "The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning,

Rev 18:10 standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

A persons reaction to something says a lot about them. Weeping and lamenting Babylon's destruction says that the world's final rulers will all be wicked, immoral, malevolent men.

Do you have any reactions that are not quite Christ-like?
Probably do. Think about it; talk to the Lord about it.

Revelation 18:11 "And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore:

Babylon will be a commercial hub for the rest of the world. "Merchants" from all over the "earth" will supply her. Some of Babylon's commerce is listed:

Revelation 18:12 merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble;

Revelation 18:13 and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men.

It reads like the various departments of a department store:

- Jewelry - “merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls...”
- Clothing - “fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet...”
- Home Furnishings - “every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble...”
- Cosmetics - “cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense...”
- Food Court - “wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep...”
- Automotive - “horses and chariots...”

What about the phrase, "and bodies and souls of men?" "Bodies" probably means slave trade, including the sex-slave trade. Already rampant today, in Babylon it will be unchecked.

When we frequented the Philippines in the mid- to late- 1980's, it was sadly popular in that country for European men to vacation and purchase the companionship of very young boys.

Disgusting.

How, though, do you trade in the "souls of men?" Well, false religions do this everyday. Let's say you go to confession, and say prayers for penance. You are told your sins are absolved.

Are they? No, of course not. Yet you go on your way thinking your soul is safe when it has just been bartered to Satan.

Revelation 18:14 The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all.

The word rendered “fruits” means *late summer*. In the East this is the season when the fruits ripen, and hence the word is synonymous with fruit.

The reference is to anything that would be regarded as an article of luxury.

This section reads almost like a eulogy at a funeral. The merchants are eulogizing the city of Babylon. They ought to be rejoicing that her evil reign is ended forever.

Revelation 18:15 The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,

When I lived in Southern California, my childhood home in the foothills was often threatened by wildfires. There is a morbid fascination with watching the fire advance and waiting as long as possible to evacuate.

Revelation 18:16 and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls!

Revelation 18:17 For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance

Revelation 18:18 and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?'

A “shipmaster” can be the shipowner or the helmsman. Next, a literal translation of the Greek is “and every one who sails to a place.” It means *every voyager*. It can be a merchant or a passenger. *Think cruise lines.*

Third, the “sailors” are those who make up the crew of a ship, and last, there are the people who gain their living from the sea by fishing, ferrying passengers, or building ships.

Revelation 18:19 "They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.'

Babylon may be only one city, but the rest of the world will be impacted by its fall. But instead of lamenting what they think as an interruption in world commerce, the inhabitants of the earth should realize that their time is short. The seventh and final bowl has been poured-out. Jesus is coming.

Skip verse twenty for a moment.

Revelation 18:21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore.

There is obviously no human way possible to retrieve such a millstone cast into the depth of the ocean. This, then, is the final destruction of Babylon, predicted by Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Tribulation Babylon will also be a cultural center. You see that next.

Revelation 18:22 The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.

Music and art and fine cuisine is being described here. What we commonly refer to as culture. Obviously it, too, will cease once Babylon is burned.

Revelation 18:23 The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.

The reference to “the light of a lamp” would, in John’s day, mean a feast or party - like a wedding reception.

Babylon will be a favored vacation destination for honeymooners and vacationers of all sorts.

It will be lights-out for Babylon.

“For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.” “Sorcery” is *pharmakea*, or drugs.

I wonder just how medicated people will be in the Tribulation? We are dangerously overmedicated now; how much more then, as the nonbelievers try to deal with the judgments of the seven seals and then the seven trumpets that precede the seven bowls?

Revelation 18:24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth."

As the headquarters of the world-dominating, coexist religious system, Babylon will be involved in ordering the persecution and martyrdom of believers in Jesus Christ. It will only get worse for believers once the antichrist declares himself god.

There might be something more. It says "in her was found."
Could it be that in future Babylon executions will take place for those who refuse the beast's mark - who refuse to worship him?

Possibly... Probably.

So how do believers stationed in Tribulation Babylon do it? How do they remain victorious while surrounded by so much evil?

The same way God's people were victorious over Babylon in the past. If you missed Geno's study from the first chapter of Daniel, listen to it online; or download the transcript, and read it.

Back in the sixth century BC, when Babylon was big, Daniel and his three friends - all teenagers - were stationed there by God.

They didn't just survive; *they thrived* - spiritually speaking.

It will be like that again in Tribulation Babylon... Except that the antichrist, indwelt and empowered by Satan, will be much more terrible than Nebuchadnezzar.

In-between the Babylon's of Daniel and the Tribulation, **we can survive and thrive in the world.**

We do it by maintaining spiritual separation. By being in the world, but not of it.

We decide, moment-by-moment, to look the Lord, rather than lust for the world. By the indwelling Spirit, we yield ourselves to God, rather than to the flesh.

#2 You're To Remain Surrendered To Jesus While Stressed By The World

(v20)

One verse left, verse twenty. It kind of stands alone, as I hope to show you.

Rev 18:20 "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"

We mentioned earlier that the nonbelievers in Babylon would receive what they deserved for having mistreated God's people.

Tribulation Babylon will, in fact, receive the punishment that the spirit of Babylon has always, throughout history, deserved.

The ones told to "rejoice over her" are already in Heaven. They are labelled the "apostles and prophets."

"Apostles and prophets" are mentioned together, in the New Testament, as the gifted men God used to begin the church (Ephesian 2:20 & 3:5). This might, then, be a reference to the church, already safe in Heaven before the destruction of Babylon.

In fact we believe the church **will** be safe in Heaven before the Tribulation even begins, having been resurrected and raptured.

If verse twenty is talking about us, then it reminds us that we live in a day of grace in which patience is required as we wait for the Lord. The world around us, influenced by the spirit of Babylon, is an enemy. We face many stresses, and much suffering, from the world on account of being believers in Jesus Christ.

We are to become, and then remain, surrendered to Jesus despite the stresses of our situation.

If you are not yet a believer, surrender yourself to the Lord. Agree with Him, at once, that you are a sinner, and that He your only Savior.

If you are a believer, check yourself by this quote from Charles Spurgeon:

Don't keep back any part of your life. Make a full surrender of every inclination of your heart; work to have but one purpose, and one aim. And for this purpose give God complete control of your heart. Cry out for more of the divine control of the Holy Spirit, so that as your soul is preserved and protected by Him, that it may be directed into one river, and one only, that your life may run deep and pure, and clear and peaceful; it's only banks being God's will, it's only river the love of Christ and a desire to please Him.

"Cry out," Spurgeon suggested. Here is how Jesus put it:

Luk 11:9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Luk 11:10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Luk 11:13 ... **how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"**

Let's cry-out!