

**Series:** The Sovereign Slaying of Sinful Systems (a study in Revelation 17-18)  
**Sermon Text:** 18:9-24 Babylon's Funeral (See App for lesson, slides, and to ask questions)

My friend and local funeral director Ed Nurre, once quipped that “*At a funeral, you rarely hear of a bad dead person.*” While I’ve found that to be true, this text is the exception. John was given a prophetic look ahead to when the world system (*Babylon*) collapses and her accomplices realize the depth of her disease. It’s framed as an ancient funeral dirge--a sad song (lament) expressing grief and designed for a memorial service. This text is the final setup for the “*tale of 2 contrasting cities*” (chart in prior notes) depicted by *Babylon, the Great Prostitute and New Jerusalem, the Lamb’s Bride*. The bulk of this section is a recycled prophecy that **Isaiah and Ezekiel gave to Tyre, the economic powerhouse of their day**. John just updated a few terms to unmask the rot of Rome and successive regimes. In fact, these speakers who mourn *Babylon* come from the 3 groups who grieved Tyre (*politicians, merchants, couriers*). **But this isn't a traditional Eulogy** where the best parts of her life are recounted. It's a Dyslogy--a tragic testimony revealing the inevitable fallout when a society attempts to build a world without God at the center.

**3 times (18:10, 17, 19) this passage** prophetically unmask the ultimate cosmic crash--a future when everyone finally realizes they’ve traded their souls for satanic systems that go belly up *in a single hour*. History is littered with seemingly indestructible empires, economies, and institutions that proved fragile (e.g. Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon, Hitler’s Nazi Germany, Gorbachev’s 1991 Soviet Union, 2008’s stock market). Like *Babylon* in John’s vision, their illusion of stability masked the internal rot of systems that grew arrogant and they believed their own permanence propaganda while treating people/resources like disposable cargo. **Verses 9-24** are dark, so why explore them? Well, **Ecclesiastes 7:2 NET reminds us:** “*It is better to go to a funeral than a feast. For death is the destiny of every person, and the living should take this to heart.*” While prosperous times may mask reality momentarily, funerals tell us the truth! So, let’s listen as 3 expert witnesses testify to the malady of God-disdaining cultures to help us see this...

**BIG IDEA:** The way of the Lamb is better than the bankruptcy of Babylon.

Let's first read [the lament of the kings](#) in verses 9-10: *And 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. They 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."* These are local politicians who benefited from *Babylon's* prosperity and power until she crashed *in a single hour*. History attests to how God has overcome the likes of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, plus other massive empires such as Assyria and Rome [leading us to ask](#): "*How does this good news help us put wolfish politicians, rulers, or countries in perspective?*" These *kings* who had colluded with *Babylon* now *stood far off* for fear of *sharing in her plagues* (judgment). Their sorrow, though, was shallow--they *wept* not for their beloved system, but for her sudden inability to feed their greed. We'll circle back to this later, but for now...

[Check out the lament of the merchants](#) in verses 11-13: *And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, cargo 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, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots...* pause and notice how global trade thrived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. But trade isn't the issue, it's when *slaves, that is, human souls* are treated like consumable goods to buy, sell, use, and abuse. No human being should be treated this way! *Revelation 18:14* declares to these dastardly *merchants* "*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!*" Can you see why Revelation depicts *Babylon* as a *prostitute*? It's because something like *prostitution* occurs when we exploit people made in God's image. The world says: "*Grow bigger, produce more, and make us more money while we deny you a livable wage*", or "*We can buy super bowl commercials and get stadium naming rights, but somehow we can't make insurance and healthcare affordable for all.*" We've put other historic examples in our notes, plus [our government's list](#) of

the most-purchased commodities produced by forced or child labor. **But what most believers wonder is:** *“Are we colluding with **Babylon** when we buy certain things, work for major corporations, or do business with government?”* So, let’s be clear...Jesus isn’t necessarily saying we must avoid trade, beauty, and nice things. Looking ahead to **chapter 21**, **Professor J Scott Duvall** (240) pointed out that *“Ironically, the heavenly Jerusalem will also feature items such as gold, precious stones, and pearls, but these items become building blocks for the new city; they are not worshiped, nor are they the center of people’s lives.”*

Here’s the point: Revelation calls us to change our lifestyle, not necessarily our location. It reveals how we enter **Babylon’s** bed whenever we value profit over people, use others as steppingstones for our ambitions, or have consumer appetites that ignore supply chain *slavery*. How do we *exit* (separate from) **Babylon**? Apparently, this involves auditing career ambitions and consumer appetites to ensure we’re not climbing ladders built from the bones of exploited image-bearers. It’s certainly not about hunkering down or sheltering in place until Christ’s return. Instead, we’re to be like the Lamb who brought healing to earth by engaging it with heaven’s values! Consider this gospel reminder from **Professor NT Wright (164-165)**: *“John believed in the God of the Exodus, the God who sets slaves free. A huge amount of his book, as we have seen, was built up on the basis that what God did in Egypt he will do again, this time on a cosmic scale—and that the basic act of slave-freeing has already taken place with the sacrificial death of Jesus. ‘With your own blood you purchased a people for God’ (5:9). That’s Exodus-language, buying-slaves-to-set-them-free language.”* With that in mind...

**Notice also the lament of the couriers** who are lumped in with *the merchants* in *verses 15-19*: *The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! 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 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city?" And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and*

*mourned* (a biblical tradition of grief found in Ezekiel 27:30; Joshua 7:6; 1 Samuel 4:12; Job 2:12), *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."* God's Word reveals that *mourning* is healthy and necessary, but these *couriers*, like the *kings and the merchants*, grieved losing their livelihood rather than the toll it took on human lives!

Now, if these *kings* represent *Babylon's* political power, and these *merchants* her retail wealth, then these *couriers* (shippers) represent the network that distributes *Babylon's* ways all over the earth. Again though, God isn't against authorities, shopping malls, or shipping lanes--the Lord simply hates human exploitation! **Biblical scholars such as J. Scott Duvall (241)** say the point is that "*Those who grow rich through collaboration with the economic sins of the 'great city' will also share her devastating fate.*" What's truly revealing in this text is how *Babylon's* closest partners refuse to enter the burning city to help her. Instead, they just back away to save their own skin! Like a racketeering ring that just received a federal indictment, the co-conspirators *stand far off* and flip on each other to get plea deals. *Babylon* may look attractive, but she has no friends--only accomplices who use her and her other lovers until she burns. My point is that: When the structures of self-glory face their final crash, those who slept with the system are left friendless, but those who are ransomed by the Lamb are set free to build what lasts.

So ultimately, Revelation reveals 2 ways to build a life: Either build on the lasting foundation of *The Lamb's New Jerusalem* or end up sinking in the sands of *Babylon's* exploitive shores. This again is our **BIG IDEA**: **The way of the Lamb is better than the bankruptcy of Babylon.** And because following Jesus in a fallen world is challenging and painful, He offered John's struggling churches this prophetic glimpse **in verses 20-24 and said**...go ahead and *rejoice over her (fate), O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her! 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; 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, 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. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."*

This is good news for all creation, worthy of celebration! The Resurrected Slain Lamb is dismantling and destroying satanically inspired systems of people who think themselves wiser than God. Therefore, Jesus isn't just a better personal choice, He's the Lamb who threw Himself into the sea of God's wrath like a millstone so that we could be fished out of *Babylon's* slave market. Jesus did not just rescue our vertical relationship with God--He entered our broken, predatory world, suffered under a corrupt Roman system, and paid the ultimate price to deliver us from being both the victims and the perpetrators of systemic exploitation. **As you ponder all this with God's people**, remember, next steps need not be taken alone--Christ's church can become your supportive family!

**Sunday to Monday Connection:** This week's passage reminds us that every kingdom, institution, or system built apart from God; political, economic, or cultural is ultimately destined to fall. The kings, merchants, and sailors mourned not because people suffered, but because they lost the power, prosperity, and comfort they treasured most. Their response revealed where their true hope had been placed. In contrast, Jesus invites us to stop using people for gain like Babylon and to embrace His Kingdom which cares about people.

- **Question:** If something you depend on for security, success, or significance were suddenly taken away, what would that reveal about where your trust truly rests?
- **Next Step:** This week, ask the Lord to examine your heart. Consider your finances, career, possessions, and personal ambitions, and ask: "Am I embracing the values of Babylon or the values of the Lamb?" Then take one practical step to reflect Christ's kingdom by honoring and serving someone as an image-bearer of God.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

**Takeaways to discuss with your people** (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. How does seeing the kings, merchants, and couriers as sectors of society make God's warning to come out of Babylon and feel more like a call to change our lifestyle rather than our location?
2. Where is the line between global trade and sleeping with Babylon? How should faith impact the way we buy, sell, consume, and where we live, work and play?
3. Where is this sin of slavery still occurring and how do we partner with God to free those treated like commodities?
4. What happens to our identity when the thing we believed was too big to fail suddenly vanishes?

**Quotes related to this passage:**

- **The Text in Context:** “This passage continues the account of Babylon’s destruction (17:1–19:5) with funeral laments by three groups: the kings (vv. 9–10), the merchants (vv. 11–17a), and the mariners (vv. 17b–19). They grieve not because they are truly sorrowful and desire to repent but because Babylon’s downfall brings disaster for them. They selfishly lament the loss of their economic security and livelihood. (These laments are drawn from Ezek. 27, where we find a lengthy lament by the same three groups over Tyre, the commercial power of Ezekiel’s time.) The mourners abandon Babylon during her downfall and weep from a safe distance, demonstrating once again the fragmentary and self-destructive nature of evil. The list of goods and services in the center of the section (vv. 12–14) illustrates the prosperity and opulence of the empire by sampling what they sold and consumed. The entire scene reminds us that evil has economic consequences and illustrates the effects of sin on those who cooperate with such corruption. The laments of 18:9–19 lead into the final scene in 18:20–19:5, where Babylon’s doom is finalized and God’s people rejoice that he has brought justice at last.” (Duvall, 238)
- **Prophetic Laments:** “The Old Testament prophets sometimes used funeral dirges, the language of mourning, as a creative way of announcing judgment, which could prove a cause of exulting (e.g., Isa. 16:7–11). They similarly reported the mourning of others as a creative way to communicate impending judgment (Isa. 3:26; 19:8; Jer. 48:17; Mic. 1:10). Laments over destroyed cities became a recognized literary form in antiquity. The announcement of an oppressor’s fall was good news (Nah. 1:15), just as the restoration of Zion was (Isa. 40:9; 41:27; 52:7)...Kings of the Earth refers to Rome’s client-kings (17:2, 18; 18:3), though the language is adapted to the Old Testament. It is a common Old Testament expression (used at least fifteen times), but this text recalls a few passages in particular: The Messiah would rule the kings (Ps. 89:27; Rev. 1:5); they would gather against God’s Son and be shattered (Ps. 2:2; Acts 4:26; Rev. 19:19); and they became wealthy through Tyre’s trade (Ezek. 27:33). Their cry of ‘Woe! Woe!’ is repeated by the merchants in Revelation 18:10, 16, 19.” (Keener, 422-426)
- **Patronage in the Roman Empire:** “Roman society was held together by the patronage system, a network of relationships that linked everyone within the empire. Patrons were people of political or economic power who provided

material goods or benefits to clients, who in turn rendered service, honor, or loyalty to their patron. The first-century Roman philosopher Seneca identified the giving and receiving of such benefits as ‘the practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society’ (Seneca, *On Benefits* 1.4.2; cf. 5.11.5; 6.41.2). The patronage system of bestowing favor and reciprocating with loyalty, of giving benefits and responding with service or honor, was deeply ingrained in the very fabric of Roman culture. This system provided security to both patron and client alike and helps to explain why the kings, merchants, and mariners were so dependent upon Babylon in Revelation 18. They were linked through a complex system of give and take so that when the patron suffered loss, the client inevitably suffered as well.” (Duvall, 241).

- **The problem:** “John does not say that the gold, silver, precious stones and the rest were bad things which nobody should have celebrated in the first place. Interestingly, many of them find an honoured place in the New Jerusalem of chapter 21. Rome was able to bring all these fine commodities, listed in verses 12–14, from the ends of the earth. Among the things John mentions are goods that would have come from India, China and Africa, as well as Arabia, Armenia and beyond. This was truly a worldwide trade. But the giveaway point comes at the end of verse 13. John has built up a marvellous catalogue of luxury goods as well as the basics of trade—flour, wheat, cattle and so on. But then, right at the end, we find the horror. Among the goods are bodies—yes, human lives. When you worship idols, the idols demand sacrifices. When you worship Mammon the money-god (or Mars the war-god; or Aphrodite the sex-goddess), they will demand sacrifices all right. And some of those sacrifices will be human. Here, in the middle of this lament over Babylon, we find one of the many places in the New Testament where a small but significant note of implacable protest is raised against the entire system upon which the ancient world was built. Slavery—the buying, selling, using and abusing of human beings as though they were on a par with gold and silver, ivory and marble (except that you could ill-treat them in a way you would never do with your luxury jewels and furnishings!)—was the dark thread that ran through everything else. Slavery was to the ancient world, more or less, what steam, oil, gas, electricity and nuclear power are to the modern world. Slavery was how things got done. Life was almost literally unthinkable without it.” (Wright, 164)
- **Global Trade:** “Rome had developed a far-reaching international trading network that brought in enormous wealth. John draws on Ezekiel’s list of goods (Ezek. 27:4–24) but updates it for his first-century readers. The 28 items are grouped into 6 categories: (1) precious stones and metals, (2) expensive fabrics, (3) costly woods and building materials, (4) spices and perfumes, (5) foods, and (6) animals and human slaves. The list overwhelms the reader with Babylon’s flamboyant wealth and prosperity. What is most indicative of Babylon’s sinfulness appears last on the list: ‘bodies, even the souls of human beings’ (author’s literal translation), referring to human slaves (Ezek. 27:13; 1 Tim. 1:10). Rome imported huge numbers of slaves to service its luxury, with estimates ranging from 10–30 percent of the empire’s population. Such

‘slave wealth’ was generated and sustained at the expense of human beings created in the image of God. But now that God has destroyed the great city, people observe that Babylon’s desires and cravings will never be satisfied again; they are gone forever (cf. 18:11, 21–23).” (Duvall, 239–240).

- **Like prior prophecies:** “Much in this chapter resembles the lamentation in Ezekiel 27–28 over the commercial center and port of Tzor (Tyre). It is highly significant that Tyre is often understood as a surrogate for Satan’s realm of activity and its king for Satan himself (this identification is based especially on Ezekiel 28:11–19). By analogy, the destruction of Babylon in this chapter is really the destruction of Satan’s kingdom; the destruction of Satan himself in chapter 20 invokes Gog and Magog” as described in Ezekiel 38–39, which also resembles Ezekiel 27–28.” (Stern, Re 18:1)
- **Misplaced hope:** “Jesus teaches that those who misplace their hope will be deeply disappointed (Matt. 6:19–20), and that we must choose between serving God and serving money (Matt. 6:24). Rather than divorcing the issue of economics from our ‘spiritual life,’ we are encouraged to see the stewardship of money and possessions as a significant dimension of our walk with God (1 Tim. 6:17–19). Over and over again in the Scriptures we are exhorted to take care of the poor and to honor God with material possessions (e.g., Deut. 15:7–8; Prov. 19:17; Luke 12:33; Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:10; James 2:14–17; 1 John 3:17). Revelation 18:9–19 stands as a stern warning against the ever-present temptation toward materialism, since the heart of materialism is idolatry, which brings God’s judgment.” (Duvall, 241)
- **Just Penalty:** “Babylon, after all, has accused and condemned God’s people, and now God is passing that same sentence on her (verse 20). God is (in other words) allowing the ancient law of Deuteronomy 19:16–20 to come into force in this particular case. The false accuser must suffer the penalty he intended to inflict on his victim... The whole system is built on lies, on false accusations and false claims. So much of Revelation is about being able to tell the difference between the lie and the truth; and so many of the lies appear as accusations. That is why it is so difficult to overthrow the Babylons of this world, unless it is simply by the force of the new Babylon, whatever that may be. In fact, it is impossible—except through the blood of the lamb, and the faithful witness of his followers... Money and power have done their collective worst, and John lumps them together, as we have seen, under the metaphor of fornication. Babylon the whore is gone, and will not return. And we, who live in the shadow of modern Babylons, can and must shudder as we, too, watch the plume of smoke and smell the bitter smell.” (Wright, 165-166)
- **Chapter summary:** “Although John speaks of Babylon (drawing on Jeremiah 51), much of the imagery is drawn from Isaiah’s and Ezekiel’s condemnation of Tyre—the greatest trading nation of Old Testament times (Isaiah 23; Ezekiel 26–28). Tyre, says Isaiah, ‘will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth’ (Isaiah 23:17). John’s focus in Revelation 18 is not on the idolatry of the imperial cult. Nor is it on the persecution of the church (though that is in the background—Revelation 17:6; 18:24 and 19:2). Instead, the focus is on Rome’s excess and exploitation.

She's likened to a prostitute because her association with other nations has as its end only profit (18:3, 19). Many have been seduced—even within the church, as the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 indicate. It is easy (then and now) to get caught up in all that this way of life appears to offer—financial profits, fine buildings, rich food. John himself marvels at the woman (17:6–7). She looks magnificent and desirable. But this is not the full picture nor the true picture. She is guilty of the blood of martyrs, but also ‘of all who have been slaughtered on the earth’ (18:24). Babylon’s wealth has been maintained when possible through seduction and when necessary through violence. There is a dark side to this way of life.” (Chester, 132-1330)

### **Considerations for discussion leaders:**

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

**Other Articles/Songs/Videos:** Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- [5 Strategies for Reading Revelation](#) from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- [Heaven and Earth Theme](#) from the Bible Project
- [Other super helpful Revelation summaries](#) from the Bible Project
- [How Revelation mimics ancient Olympic games](#) by Marty Solomon

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