

# Fleeing Babylon

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**Bible Text:** Revelation 18:1-19  
**Preached on:** Sunday, October 8, 2017

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Well, tonight we are continuing our study and coming back to the book of Revelation. Moving quickly to the end of the book, tonight we come to chapter 18 and we consider the first 20 verses of chapter 18 tonight in the book of Revelation. Last book of the Bible. Again, Revelation chapter 18 beginning at verse 1. Let us hear the word of the Lord.

1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. 2 And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. 3 For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living." 4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; 5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6 Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. 7 As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.' 8 For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her." 9 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. 10 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." 11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, 12 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, 13 cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls. 14 "The fruit for

which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!" 15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, 16 "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! 17 For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste." And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off 18 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city?" 19 And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste. 20 Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!"

And there ends the reading of God's word tonight.

There was a question posed this week in an article in USA Today that said in the title, "Storms, earthquakes, North Korea, and now the Las Vegas massacre. We have to wonder what's next." In the article there was a question, what else needs to get our attention? I thought that was interesting coming from the USA Today that the world is asking that. That the world is asking that. It's getting the world's attention right now, things are. It's getting the world's attention. Who can deny things are happening? Who can deny things are moving? I thought in the midst of that, is it getting the church's attention? Is it getting the church's attention? Are we able to discern the sign of the times as Jesus said when he said to people following him?

Of all the sermons that I've preached so far in the book of Revelation, chapter 18 has one of the clearest statements of direction for us of what the Lord is calling us as his people to do in the midst of all this, as the people of the Lamb, a calling that he has given you to take very seriously, and it is this: come out of Babylon. Did you see it there in the middle? Right in the middle of it you have this amazing call, "Come out of her. I don't want you sharing in her sins. That is not what I have for you. I want you to come out." Now by the time we're done with this sermon, I hope I've helped you to understand exactly what he's saying when he says, "Come out," because obviously we're not saying run to the hills and flee the world, are we? What does he mean by that? What is he saying to us? It's a clear call in Revelation telling us to think about and consider what Babylon is, to consider what is happening, and the function of chapter 18 is to say, and it was very poetic, wasn't it, it was like we turned into a song for a minute in Revelation. A poetic song of justice is to say that the entire system of the world, all of its values, what it offers you, how it's seducing you, how it's trying to hold you is going to fall, and it's going to fall quickly. It's going to come down in one hour. The whole thing. It's a house of cards. It's a paper palace. And it's going up.

Now that message is not new. That message is not new. It was the same in the days of Noah. It was the same message that came in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was the

same message that came to the Babylon of old from which all of this language in Revelation is borrowing to capture the city of man, to capture the city that we are talking about here in contrast to the heavenly city, remember the heavenly Jerusalem. And now we have described the finality of Babylon's fall, the finality of Babylon's judgment, and it's pressing us to come out thinking about what's going to happen to her. That's one of the ways that it's pressing on us. You don't want to get caught up in all this. It's coming down soon. Don't fall for it. Don't fall for its lure. And now we're going to get into what that looks like. I find it a great chapter to do what the Bible has always done as it's pushing us to the end and it's moving us to the end to say what it's always said to us, be awake, be sober, be watching, be separate for the time is at hand.

That's the goal for you in the midst of all of this, that you understand what's happening. You've been told ahead of time. Remember when the Lord came to Abraham and then he was there talking to the angels and he said, "Shall we tell Abraham what we are about to do to Sodom?" And he then told Abraham what he was about to do. Why? Because he spoke to him as a man does to his friends. Well, that's what Revelation 18 is. It's the Lord telling you what he's going to do to Babylon. So think of Sodom sitting there. They don't know what's coming and that's the whole pattern of this, of what this chapter functions as. So you have here, in that way, it's showing us this in three ways, it's showing us the fall of Babylon, it's showing us the mourning for Babylon, and then the call shines in the midst of this to come out of Babylon for us.

In verse 1 of chapter 18, we pick up with it saying, "After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. And he called out with a mighty voice, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.'" Now remember what Babylon represents. We've been looking at this. We had an extensive treatment of that last time in chapter 17 and in the last chapter, we had an entire description of her short history. Remember, she was characterized as the whore, the prostitute. She was pictured as riding the scarlet beast, the beast we studied back from chapter 13. The beast, remember, was given the throne from the unholy trinity, remember, the dragon. And the beast had represented all the antichrist activity throughout history. He is the false Christ. Spiritually, he leads people away from the worship of the true Jesus to want to give him all devotion. The beast is pictured, and this was the tie last time to say, this was Satan's dual way to assault the church, to assault the people of the woman, the holy woman of chapter 12 in contrast to this woman. He has a dual assault. He has the beast, and the beast uses Babylon to seduce, to seduce the peoples of the world to worship him. That's Babylon, represented as a city, represented as a counterfeit church, all in contrast to the heavenly Jerusalem and the people of the Lord.

Babylon is that earthly city in contrast to the heavenly one, and it has great seducing power. All of its forms that it comes in to lead you to false worship, to lead you to the beast. It's represented as a pleasure-mad place, a pleasure-mad city. If I could pick a symbol and you said, well, if you're talking about cities, what symbol if you could sort of capture the pleasure-mad of our society, I would look at Vegas and say, there's the

symbol of it all kind of compact in one. A city of purple. A city of seduction. A city of sexual immorality. A city of whatever happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. All the seduction, all the lusts you can ever fulfill are right there. Go for it. It's inviting. We'll come back to that. It's this lure of Babylon that is trying to make us loyal citizens to it and want us to make this Babylon our dwelling place.

The woman had in her hand, remember the imagery, a golden cup full of abominations. All that seduces us. All that grips us. All that holds on to us. All these things that tempt us. All the sexual immorality. Everything that seduces us away from the worship of Jesus, the enticement of Babylon to the beast, well, it's in a cup, isn't it? That's very interesting because each kingdom has a cup too, doesn't it? We'll come back to that. Chapter 18 begins to describe her judgment. We have for a moment captured for us just what she accomplished in the earth. She accomplished a great thing in the earth, Babylon. Here's the great accomplishment of Babylon's story of her history. All the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury. It's emphasized further in verse 7 that what went along with this was great pride in Babylon. Babylon herself, she was a proudful prostitute, "For I sit as a queen. I am no widow. I will not see sorrow." She's full of the worst kind of pompous pride.

Now, all of this has a long history. This is one of those chapters that's full of the Old Testament, I mean, in so many places. I could be here all night quoting the Old Testament to show you where all this language comes from. But one of the very peculiar and unique places this comes from is describing Babylon of old's judgment in, remember, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, Babylon of old, their judgment in Isaiah 13. I want you to listen to what Isaiah 13 says so you understand the connection here to what's going on in Revelation 18. Listen to Isaiah 13. "I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. And Babylon," here it is, "And Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them." It was that statement that really struck me that he gave us a way to understand it from old when he said that when God judges Babylon, he is going to do it with what we knew about Sodom and what Sodom and Gomorrah was like. He gave us a way to consider it. He said its judgment will be just like Sodom and Gomorrah's.

You know what Sodom was like before it fell? We typically want to talk only about homosexuality but that's unfair. It was much worse. In other words, that was one bad characteristic of the city. Sodomy. Listen to how Ezekiel characterized Sodom and Gomorrah before their judgment and I think this really helps tonight. "Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and her daughters. Neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy, and they were haughty and committed abomination before me. Therefore, I took them away as I saw good." Ezekiel 16. You know what Sodom was pictured as? A pit in the earth. A

pit. A cage. A cage full of every kind of gross lawlessness and immorality that you could ever dream up. This is exactly what's being borrowed here to describe Babylon. It links it together. The Babylon described here is full of pride. It's an abundance of idleness. "We are a city that will stand forever. No one can touch us. No one. We have an offer, the best of food. The best of the foods we have. On every corner you can get the best of foods. You can get the best of wines. You can have the best of it all in Babylon." Her life in this city was filled with such luxury that Babylon was known for amassing and amassing and amassing more wealth and more luxury and more wealth and more luxury and is pictured here in Revelation as becoming rich through the abundance of luxury, creating a complete idle society. The society became full of every kind of lawlessness. Everyone was full of it.

When in history, cities became like this, they all became places of injustice. They became places of injustice as the cycle of iniquity ran its course. This was the description of Isaiah 3, "The LORD has taken his place to contend; he stands to judge peoples. The LORD will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: 'It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?' declares the Lord GOD of hosts. The LORD said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet, the Lord will strike." Revelation 18, why it's pronouncing so much prophetic doom is it's taking all the judgments of history and now culminating them into one as it describes the final fall of Babylon, the city.

It's a description of Babylon now as fallen. Fallen now and ultimately fallen in judgment. And it happens fast. "Alas, alas, the great city Babylon. In one hour, your judgment has come." What's being described here? What is this? What is chapter 18? You've heard it the entire ministry from pastors who've said it to you. We've always said it. What's being described here is what we've always taught in Christianity, that life and history and this world is going to come to a screeching halt when we least expect it. That's what's being described. You know this. Jesus talked about it, the apostles talked about it. I think of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5 when he said, "You yourselves are fully aware, you know this, you know this, that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying there's peace and security, then sudden destruction comes as labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you brothers are not in darkness. That day's not going to touch you. Don't fear. You're protected through this. But you need to know, it's all coming to a screeching halt when people least expect it." When he comes, Jesus gave graphic imagery of the door being shut to his kingdom and it's over. It's over. And this world will be destroyed by fire. That's 2 Peter 3.

Well, what Revelation is doing now is it's giving us two kinds of responses to this. This has now captured here as we have a response from the peoples from Babylon to this, from the city. So you have three kinds of responses that are given here from the kings, the merchants, and the ship masters, you'll notice here. And you'll notice here that all of it is encompassed with a day of great mourning. Notice it here. The kings of the earth mourn. Why? Their city's fallen in one hour. They had given no thought to God and to the future.

All they cared about was the greatness of Babylon. They were tied to Babylon. They loved Babylon. Babylon gave them their happiness. And the same is true of the merchants of the earth. They can no longer buy and sell. In other words, all their stuff has been taken away. It's now profitless. All their stuff. Did you see the list there? I mean, what a list that is given in the midst of this: cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple, cloth, silk, scarlet, cloth, all kinds of scented wood. I mean, it just goes on and on here of all this stuff that is done. Everyone was pictured in Babylon as making lots of money and disregarding the calls of the church for years. They didn't listen to them. For years, the church has been doing what we did this morning. Repent. Believe. Come into refreshment. Enter the heavenly city. Enter in what Abraham looked for. There's something so much better held out for you and people disregarded it and they didn't take it seriously, and all of a sudden now, Babylon's fallen. It's over. It happened. The city being fallen, they have nothing else. This was it. That was all they had. Sad, isn't it? Sad. All taken from them. There's a reason James says, "Look, you who say, come on, tomorrow let's go to such and such a city and buy and sell and make a profit. Fools. You don't know. Your life is a mist. Tomorrow your souls will be required of you." What did James say? Instead, you should say, "If the Lord wills, we'll go and do this."

They're distressed because all their stuff was taken away. Look at the list. Bodies and souls of people are mentioned. That's borrowed from Isaiah 3, and that day, the Lord will take the finery of the anklets, the headbands, the crescents, the pendants, the bracelets, the scars, the headdresses, the armbands, the sashes, the perfume boxes, the amulets, the signet rings, the nose rings, the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, the handbags, the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans and the veils. Instead of perfume, there will be rotteness. It's gone. All of it. Verse 16, "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! In a single hour all her wealth was laid to waste." The ship masters. It's done. Major sources of trade. It was over.

Revelation verse 2 gives this verse that really helped me this week to understand things and this is where I hope it really sets in for you of how wonderful it is God has prepared a city for you. That's the point to interject, God has prepared a city for you. But wait just a minute. Look at verse 2, one more sobering picture of Babylon. "And he called out with a mighty voice, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.'" Certain translations made it very clear what was being talked about here, Babylon was and had become a prison full of demonic activity and luxury. Everyone captured by its luxury. You think of last week when we talked about the perfect illustration being the Playboy Mansion that was full of feces all through it. And Hefner's fall. You see what's being described here?

It's the world as the center of seduction. It has such power and this is where you say if there was a connection to Sodom, I'm thinking a lot about Lot and his wife. Remember what the Lord did for Lot? A righteous man. Lot loved Sodom. Lot loved Sodom so that when the angels came and they said, "You need to get out now, the Lord is going to destroy this city," remember what happened? He didn't go. The angels had to grab Lot's

hands, and the imagery was they had to pull Lot out. I mean, that's how powerful the grip of Babylon is. It says that the Lord rescued righteous Lot, who was, now listen to this, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked of Sodom, what that city had done to his family. They were corrupted. So he was oppressed by Babylon, but he couldn't get out of it.

Isn't that our struggle? Isn't that our struggle? We love that city. We struggle with that, don't we, I struggle with it so much so that Jesus even used it and said, "Remember Lot's wife. She held onto it." It's this picture of a prison. It's the description of a pleasure-mad place that the Lord's going to pull you out of, he's going to take you out of. Let me ask you a question. I asked this this morning, but do you ever feel trapped? Do you ever feel weary from all this? Do you ever stand back and say, "I'm so tired," already? Why? You know it's Babylon. It's the fact that you're citizens of another country and Babylon's pressing on you every minute.

Well, I know you feel it. I know the world feels it. I was thinking this week of the Eagles and their famous singer, Glenn Frey, who died I think it was last year, and that song that I used to listen to, "Hotel California." I don't know if you know that song. It's a song people have never figured out, so they tried to ask Glenn Frey, "What did that song mean, Hotel California? Would you just tell us what it means? There have been all these theories and speculations. What does that song mean?" You know what he said? This is Glenn Frey, "It's a song describing the dark underbelly of the American dream and the life of excess. It's LA at its highest high life, the high life, we lived." Well, now you can understand this lyric, can't you? "We're all just prisoners here of our own device. And in the master's chambers, they gathered for the feast. They stab it with their steely lot knives, but they just can't kill the beast. Last thing I remember, I was running for the door. I had to find the passage back to the place I was before. Relax, said the night man. We are programmed to receive. You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave." You can't make this stuff up, can you? That's unbelievable. That's "Hotel California." Next time you're singing that, think about what you're singing.

This was something Isaiah realized. When he was confronted with the holiness of God, and then he started looking at himself and looking at his place, and he said, "Woe is me. I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in this filth with unclean people!" Think of all the oppression. Look at the abortions. Look at the hatred. Look at the divide. Look at Vegas. Look at the murder. Look at the lawlessness. Look at the rage. Look at the drugs. Look at the violence. Look at the rejection of the elderly. Feel like you're in a cage? Draped in purple it is. I can't even let my children play in the front yard. I worry if my wife goes running down the road just for on a jog now alone. Why? Because of what society is. Any light we've had has been the Lord's goodness in this life of his common grace and his restraining of evil, but you see what Babylon is, don't you? You see what it can become, don't you? You know what God is saying to you tonight through Revelation 18? Verse 19, in one hour, Babylon, your judgment has come, and here's the call, "Rejoice, O heavens, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her." You know what he just said? "I just came to your cause and fought for you."

You don't think of judgment that way. You do not think of Judgment Day that way. The most encouraging comment to me in the book of Revelation as we've been studying this is one of you coming up and saying, "Pastor, I've never looked at the final judgment as a day of deliverance, that it's delivering me. It's rescuing me." That's what this is. "I'm repaying her for all the stress she's put you under. I'm repaying her for what she did to your children. I'm repaying her for everything she's put you through. All the lawlessness you've been exposed to. Everything is pressed down on you. I see it. I see what they're doing to you. And it's murdered the apostles and the prophets. Babylon. It's rejected my people. It's done it for years. And it's time to put this to an end." In the midst of all this, something so beautiful is said, isn't it? The heart of it is found in the call that God gives in the middle of it to you. One of my favorite verses in the book, "Come out of her, my people. Come out. Come out of her lest you share in these sins. I don't want you sharing in these sins and receiving of her plagues. That is not for you. It's not intended for you. Be separate."

What does coming out mean? I don't think it's that hard. You know your bodies are members of Christ. Shall you take your members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? That kind of takes on a whole new meaning, doesn't it? Or do you not know that he who is joined with a prostitute becomes one body with her? You're not married to Babylon. That's not your wife. You're the temple of the living God. As God said, "I will make my dwelling among them. I will walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, go out from their midst. Be separate from them, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will welcome you, and I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and my daughters, says the Lord." That's a gospel call. In a sense, he's saying, come to Jesus. Flee for refuge to Jesus.

I mean, we struggle with all the same desires of everyone else and we've fallen in all the same struggles and sins of everyone else. All the same lusts of Babylon fill our heart. And we are a lot like Lot. But the Lord loved Lot, didn't he, and left him as an example for us to encourage us. Lot held tight, and the Lord pulled him out. It's hard for me to sometimes think, is there anything better than this? Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor entered in the heart of man the things God's prepared for those who love him. So come out. You come out when you listen to his word and don't believe the lie of everything that's being told to you in Babylon. You come out when you say, "I will not accept that cup. What's in that cup? I see what's in that cup." Somebody also said to me, it's such a powerful imagery to think every time I'm tempted to sin this week, to do something I shouldn't, to look at something I shouldn't, to do something I shouldn't, to think that is the cup being held out to me and something being offered to me from this prostitute. It gives you something, doesn't it? We come out when we live as though we're no longer our own. We were bought. We come out when we seek the city that Abraham longed for, the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. We come out when we recognize that the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are not from the Father, but are from the world, and the world's passing away. We come out when we make worship of Jesus the priority of our lives, when we enjoy Christ. You hear what he's saying? Don't love the world. Think of who's speaking to you. You come out when instead of the cup of the filth Babylon's holding out to you, you take the cup Jesus hands



you of the supper of the wine, of the wine of the refreshment of his body and blood for you. He hands you all of that and promises to keep you.

The city here has been persecuting us for a long time, weighing heavy on us for a long time, and God is telling you in chapter 18, "It's time for me to repay. It is time. I promise you the cup of my blessing. Come out. Be separate to me, says the Lord, and I will receive you. I love you. And I gave my Son for you."

Let's pray together tonight.

*Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us such clarity about what you are calling us tonight to come out and be separate to you. We need to hear that today for we've been too tied to Babylon, and we realize that whatever good gift and whatever thing we get to enjoy in this life comes from you, and we use those things to glorify you and advance your gospel and kingdom. But help us never to fall into Babylon or to love Babylon. Keep us from that and let us see all of the seduction. Oh, we pray for our children again tonight, us and our children in the midst of all this. Keep us, Lord. Let us see. Let us not fall prey to this. Let us understand the prison it is. If the world can say it, if Glenn Frey could say it in a song, let us see it and treasure the city that you have prepared for all who love you. May these words be kept in our minds this week, Father, for we're too weak even for a moment to hold our own. Keep them before us, and let us look forward to coming back to worship you next week in spirit and in truth. In Jesus' name we pray.*