

**Revelation as Trilogy**  
**The Return of the King**  
**Chapters 18: The Collapse of the Enemy**

**Introduction:** This chapter is the description of the previously announced judgment of the prostitute (17:1). Babylon has been described as a city/empire which was drunk with power and oppressed the saints. What we discover in this chapter is a broader description of the city/empire. It is depicted as a great commercial enterprise whose wealth was shared by the world. This city/empire made many rich even as it oppressed others. This description would have fit Rome, but also fits all other city/empires across history. What we will find in this chapter is a variety of responses to the collapse and defeat of the city/empire. Each from a different perspective. All of this shows the complex nature of evil and how it works in the world.

**The Story:** The chapter begins with an angel offering the famous words, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.” These words echo Isaiah 21:9 and Jeremiah 51:8 in which we read about the fall of the original Babylon. It is a reminder that all the city/empires that had or would, oppress God’s people (Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome) would one day fall. And not only would they fall, but they would become no more than a wasteland...which is made clear with the references to being a haunt of foul spirits, birds and beasts. The reason for this fall, according to the text, is because the city/empire has led the nations away from worshipping God and caused them to worship not only the city/empire but the wealth and power it offered.

What follows this declaration of destruction is an invitation for people to flee the city even while it is falling. People are invited to “come out of her so that you do not take part in her sins...” which once again reminds us that God desires life and not death. In some ways this is an invitation to believers who had become too enmeshed in the city/empire to extricate themselves from its temptations before it is too late; before God measures out an appropriate punishment for the crimes the city/empire had committed. As an aside the text reminds its readers of the attitude of the city/empire that led to this judgment, that the city/empire believed it would be eternal as the living God. “I rule as a queen; I am no widow and will never see grief.” This belief is in some ways the original sin of Adam and Eve, to be like God.

The focus of the chapter now shifts to a lament offered by those who had been made wealthy by the city/empire. “And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning...and the merchants of the earth (and ships’ captains) weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore...” This mourning is followed by a long list of the articles that will no longer be traded. Almost all those items listed are bought and sold by and for the wealthy, including slaves...or as the writer points out...human lives...which belong in the end only to God. One of the fascinating things about this section is that those who grew wealthy from trade with the city/empire are smart enough to stand far off and watch it burn, while they weep and mourn.

Once again, the perspective of the response to the city’s fall shifts from earth to heaven. Now, rather than mourning there is rejoicing! “Rejoice O heaven, you saints and apostles and prophets! For God has given judgment for you against her.” And with that rejoicing, the end for the city has come, as an angel throws a great millstone into the sea to unleash a tidal wave of chaos upon the city bringing about its final and ultimate destruction.

**Reflection:** The memory that this chapter brings to my mind is of visiting Rome. When my wife and I visited the remains of the forum, it was made clear to us that the ruins we saw had been excavated after being lost in the mists of time. In other words, what was once the heart and soul of the city that once ruled the Mediterranean world ultimately become no more than a haunt for birds and beasts, emptied of trade and void of the sounds of life. It was no more than a pasture upon which shepherds grazed their cattle and sheep. It was a powerful reminder that human arrogance believes that what it creates is eternal, when it is not. Only God and God’s people are eternal.

Questions:

1. Where and how do you see God calling us out of the city/empire in which we live?
2. Where do you see the arrogance of those who believe what they are creating is eternal?
3. Where do you see people today trading in human lives?