

Revelation Eighteen

Revelation 18 continues a parenthesis (17.1-19.10) which describes the divine judgment of Babylon (cf. 14.8, 16.19).

Comparing New Babylon

- Babylon is a literal city (cf. 17.18). This city will likely be the administrative centre of the kingdom of the Beast, until its destruction at the end of the Tribulation (18.5, 8). Ron Rhodes says, “At the midpoint of the tribulation, the religious capital of the antichrist will be Jerusalem, where he will set up an image of himself in the Jewish temple. Meanwhile, his economic and public capital will be the city of Babylon, which will become the commercial centre of the world.”
- Revelation 17 deals with religious New Babylon and therefore uses figurative language which requires interpretation. Revelation 18 concerns commercial New Babylon and uses literal language which requires no interpretation.
- In fulfilment of 14.8, religious New Babylon (the harlot) will be destroyed at the midpoint of the Tribulation by the ten kings and the Beast (17.16). Their motive is to establish their own global system of idolatry – the worship of the Beast.
- In fulfilment of the seventh vial judgment (16.19), commercial New Babylon is destroyed by fire (18.8-9). This fire possibly falls from heaven like at Sodom & Gomorrah. This will take place at the end of the Tribulation.

Commercial New Babylon

- The movement of world commerce back to Babylon is foretold in Zechariah’s prophecy of the ephah (5.5-11).
- Commercial New Babylon is connected with the monarchs (v.9), merchants (v.11) and mariners (v.17) of the world. The long list of goods and cargo associated with the city makes it an ‘economic juggernaut’ (18.11-13).
- The guilt of Babylon’s commercial system is anti-God materialism. This is a philosophy that says that an accumulation of wealth and living in luxury are what give people meaning in life. Humans are pictured as lusting after material possessions (18.14). The passage does not condemn trade or possessions as such, rather, it is the human tendency to make material possessions the object of the soul’s desire (Luke 12.15-21). That is idolatry.
- The earth-dwellers of the Tribulation will be ‘citizens of Babylon’ even though they may not live in Babylon itself. They are citizens because they live according to its philosophies and imbibe its spirit of anti-God and materialistic values.
- Believers today live across the world but ultimately have their “citizenship” in heaven (Philippians 3.20). We are to behave on earth below as citizens of the heavenly city above.
- Another lesson from this chapter is that wealth is fleeting and temporal. “Riches are not forever,” (Proverbs 27.24). “I came to hate all my hard work here on earth, for I must leave to others everything I have earned,” (Ecclesiastes 2.18). “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out,” (1 Timothy 6.7).

Cashless Society

- To understand the size and extent of Babylon’s commercial system during the last half of the Tribulation, we should remember that buying or selling will not be possible without receiving the mark of the Beast (13.16-17).
- During the first half of the Tribulation, the world will experience hyperinflation (6.5-6). Because of this, people will not be able to buy much food and there will be hunger (6.8).
- At the midpoint of the tribulation the False Prophet will force people to receive the mark of the Beast. Only those who receive the mark will be permitted to work, to buy, or to sell – the mark will be like a commerce passport.
- All who trade with New Babylon will have received the mark of the beast. No sales will be permitted without that mark. Hence, the Antichrist will control the commercial success of New Babylon.
- All who trade with New Babylon will be judged by God as those who have the mark of the Beast. Receiving the mark of the Beast is an unpardonable sin (14.9-10) and an irreversible decision. Receiving the mark is to bow the knee to the Devil as lord, and Antichrist as leader.
- This will likely be a cashless society. If the world was still using cash during the Tribulation, it would be difficult to enforce the rule that no one can buy or sell without receiving his mark. It is easier to do this in a cashless society where every seller and buyer has a distinct account number and digital footprint.
- It is possible that chip implants, scan technology, and biometrics will be used as tools to enforce the policy.

The Summary of Babylon’s Fall [vv.1-3]

v.1. After these things [*meta tauta*] is a phrase that occurs ten times in Revelation. The words generally introduce a new subject and often the events described are chronologically *after* what has gone before (cf. 4.1; 9.12; 20.3). This is the case here with a change in focus from *religious* to *commercial* New Babylon – an aspect of the kingdom of the Beast that dominates the last half of the Tribulation. This is further suggested by the fact John saw **another angel**, that is, a *different* messenger from the one who introduced the judgment of religious New Babylon (17.1). This angel comes **down from**

heaven suggesting the importance of his special mission as one sent directly from the throne of God (cf. 10.1; 20.1). Though the angel is impressive in authority and appearance, he is not Christ. The word “another” [*allos*] means he is another of the same kind or type as the angel of 17.1. This angel has **great power** [*exousia*] because he has delegated authority to act on God’s behalf. Having come from the presence of God, the angel reflects and radiates divine glory in “a broad belt of light over a darkened earth,” (R L Thomas). The earth was therefore **lightened** (illuminated) with **his glory**. It is likely the kingdom of the Beast is still shrouded in darkness following the fifth vial (16.10) making the appearance of this angel even more striking.

v.2. The angel **cried mightily with a strong voice** or “shouted with a powerful voice” [NET] confirming his authority and the importance of his message. All on earth are compelled to listen. The fall of Babylon is so certain, the angel’s message describes the judgment as if it has already been accomplished, “**Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great!**” [NET]. The repetition of the verb “fallen” emphasises certainty and finality. The cry recalls the language of the watchman in Isaiah 21.9, “Babylon has fallen, fallen! All the idols of her gods lie shattered on the ground!” [NET]. Isaiah’s prophecy (given 175 years before the event) anticipated the capture of Belshazzar’s Babylon by Cyrus in 539BC. This was, of course, but a mere foreshadowing of Babylon’s final destruction in the Tribulation. Often in Scripture, “coming events cast their shadows before them,” (John Riddle). Following its destruction, Babylon will become the **habitation** (abode) **of devils** (demons). This will be a place of incarceration for demons during the Messianic Age. The “physical ruin (of Babylon) will become the place of confinement of satanic powers awaiting their final judgment and thus will be the one geographic location on the millennial earth under a divine interdict,” (Jim Allen). During this same period, the Devil is confined to the bottomless pit (20.1-3). The abandonment of Babylon to evil spirits was prophesied in Isaiah 13.21 where the LXX uses the word ‘demons’ [*daimonia*] in place of “satyr” [AV]. We must remember that the earth will be overrun by demonic activity in the Tribulation. Not only have locust-like demons been released from the abyss under the fifth trumpet (9.2-3), but a further invasion of 200 million demons occurs at the Euphrates under the sixth trumpet (9.13-16). These will all be gathered and bound in the rubble of Babylon, perhaps deliberately for Satan’s use in deceiving and gathering the nations for the final rebellion against God at the end of the Kingdom (cf. 20.7-9). Babylon will also become the **hold** [*phulakē*] **of every foul** (unclean) **spirit**, where *phulakē* denotes a prison. Finally, Babylon will be **a cage** [*phulakē*] **of every unclean** (foul) **and hateful** (detested) **bird**. This could describe Babylon as a haunt for scavenger and carrion birds (cf. Isaiah 13.21; Jeremiah 50.39) thus symbolising the desolation of the city. The presence of these kinds of birds is an OT indication of abandonment and desolation (Isaiah 34.11). Alternatively, the use of the adjectives “unclean” and “hateful” (despised) may suggest these birds symbolise evil spirits as those who once scavenged on the souls of men.

v.3. The conjunction **for** gives *three* reasons for the fall of Babylon:

- First, **all nations** – the scale of the influence of Babylon is universal – **have drunk of the wine** of her **fornication**. Similar language was used of Babylon in 14.8 as a harlot (cf. 17.1-5) intoxicating her victims (the nations) with fine wine and thereby seducing them into committing spiritual fornication (idolatry). With religious New Babylon having been destroyed, this spiritual unfaithfulness and idolatry now takes the form of the worship of the Beast (cf. 13.4) *and* materialism (13.16-17) in the form of commercial New Babylon. Worship of the Beast will be the only way to survive and prosper materially in these last days. Buying or selling (trading) will be impossible without taking the “mark” of the Beast. In this way, commercial New Babylon will entice the unbelieving world into anti-God, humanistic materialism. Babylon will instil an “unquestioning faith in her supposedly inexhaustible resources, thereby discouraging any sense of a deeper need for God,” (R L Thomas). All such spiritual fornication invites the fierceness of **the wrath** of God (cf. 14.10; 16.19).
- Second, the **kings** (rulers) of these nations **have committed** the same **fornication** with Babylon. “Because of the commercial success of this city, merchants and political leaders around the world will become very wealthy,” (Ron Rhodes). The *aorist* tense “have committed” suggests this was not just the matter of a moral slip but the practice of a deliberate policy over the whole period (Jim Allen).
- Third, **the merchants of the earth are waxed rich** through the **abundance of her delicacies**, or “extravagant luxury” [NLT]. Merchants [*emporoi*, lit. ‘in a journey’] are those who travel to conduct the business of buying and selling. They will become filthy rich through the vast quantity and range of luxurious goods in which Babylon trades (cf. vv.12-13).

The Summons to Separation [vv.4-8]

v.4. With the preview of Babylon’s awful desolation, John is given to hear the summons of heaven to separate from the city and all it represents before judgment falls. John heard **another** [*allos*] **voice from heaven** which distinguishes this voice from that of the angel (vv.1-3). This voice probably continues to speak to v.20, addressing the people of God (v.4), God Himself, as the agent of Babylon’s judgment (v.6), and the inhabitants of heaven (v.20). Whilst the voice could be that of Christ, it is more likely to be the voice of an angel speaking forth a warning from God Himself. The word *allos* (another of the same kind) suggests that the speaker is another angel like the one in v.1. **Come out of her, my people** is an *aorist imperative* demanding obedience and emphasising urgency. The language is reminiscent of Isaiah (48.20; 52.11)

and Jeremiah (50.8; 51.6) when he called the people of Israel in Babylon at the close of the captivity to “Remove out of the midst of Babylon.” Undoubtedly this is a call to leave a literal city, but also to morally and spiritually reject the enticements of the idolatry of the Beast and his materialistic society. The reason for separation from the city and its commercial system is so God’s people do not become **partakers of** (sharers in) **her sins** by accepting her principles and following her practices. Separation is also vital to escape **her plagues** of divine judgment that will inevitably follow (v.8). Jim Allen says, “It can be inferred from this call that some true believers, while refusing the mark of the Beast, are resident in the city itself or at least are associated with the commercial empire of the Beast even in the last months of the tribulation. Just before the judgment falls Christ summons His own to leave the city and the system it represents.”

v.5. Babylon is ripe for judgment because **her sins have reached unto heaven**, or “piled up all the way to heaven” [NET] – an obvious allusion to the tower of Babel whose top was designed to “reach unto heaven” (Genesis 11.4). Commercial Babylon thus has a tower of sins which demand divine action. Consequently, **God hath remembered her iniquities** (cf. 16.19), a Hebraism which does not mean God is forgetful, but describes the time for taking action (cf. Genesis 8.1). The word “iniquities” describes unrighteous acts or matters of legal wrongs (crimes, cf. Acts 18.14; 24.20). The time has come for God to call Babylon to court – justice must be done; she must be punished for her misdeeds. **v.6.** Now, in the divine courtroom, there is an appeal to God to mete out proportionate and just recompense for all Babylon’s works – particularly her persecution of the saints (v.24). This is an example of *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation. The Lord Jesus said, “For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you,” (Matthew 7.2 [ESV], cf. Galatians 6.7). The call is to **reward her even as she rewarded you**, or “repay her [Babylon] the same way she repaid others,” [NET]. God’s judgment is perfectly righteous and proportionate – the punishment fits the crime (Jeremiah 50.29). The phrase **double unto her double** is probably not a request to inflate or double the punishment (cf. Exodus 22.4). Rather, to ‘double the doubles’ is a phrase used in the LXX to mean ‘to produce a duplicate’ and therefore to ‘give the exact equivalent’ or requite in full (completely). This is in keeping with the phrase that follows, in **accordance to her works**. Again, the **cup** which **she hath filled** (or ‘mixed’) with fine wine to seduce the nations into committing spiritual fornication (idolatry), the **double** (i.e. equivalent) is to be mixed for her. She mixed a drink for men; now God orders another mixing of a very different kind – the mixing of undiluted divine judgment (14.10). Christians never seek for personal vengeance. Instead, in this day of grace, believers bless their persecutors (Matthew 5.43) and do not repay evil for evil (Romans 12.14, 17). Retaliation belongs to God alone (Romans 12.19).

v.7. This verse gives further reasons for the judgment of Babylon. Ron Rhodes says, “Though Babylon will be proud, she will go on to be humbled. Though Babylon will enjoy great glory and luxury, she will be brought exceedingly low in torment and mourning. Though Babylon will feign queenship, she will be brought low by the royal King of kings. While Babylon will seem superior in every way, her moral inferiority will be judged. Self-delusion is a wretched state.” Note the correspondence of **how much** with **so much**. In other words, ‘the extent to which she glorified herself... to the same extent give...’ Again, the punishment matches the crime. Babylon’s chief crime is her pride, **she hath glorified herself** – she exalted herself and her achievements rather than glorifying God (cf. Isaiah 42.8). What a contrast to Christ who “glorified not Himself,” (Hebrews 5.5). Babylon will glorify herself by living **deliciously** – to indulge oneself extravagantly and sensually. She is self-absorbed and finds satisfaction in luxury. In place of such luxuries, the justice of God will give her an equivalent and corresponding amount of **torment** (the experience of unbearable physical pain and extreme mental distress) and **sorrow** (the grief and anguish brought by such pain). For the believer, sorrow will be forever removed in heaven (Revelation 21.4). Babylon is then personified as a **queen** speaking quietly to herself **in her heart**. In arrogant self-confidence she says, “**I sit** (rule) **as a queen and am no widow** and shall **see no sorrow**.” Though Babylon is a harlot, she views herself as a queen ruling over the nations of the world. She has no fear of losing her status or power (no widow) and sees herself beyond the reach of judgment (no sorrow). She is extremely confident of her future security using an emphatic negative, “**I will never experience grief!**” [NET]. All is a quiet but deliberate challenge to God to fulfil the OT prophecies about the destruction of Babylon (cf. Isaiah 47.1-9).

v.8. This verse records the plain fulfilment of Isaiah 47.9, and God’s response to her quiet arrogance (v.7). **Therefore shall her plagues come in one day** – describing the sudden and intense judgment of God on the city of Babylon, quite possibly in a literal 24-hour day (cf. Isaiah 47.9). Her three plagues are described as **death**, in response to her scorn of the prospect of widowhood, **sorrow**, which she believed she would never see, and **famine**, in response to her luxurious, self-sufficient wealth. The means of God’s judgment is **fire** which will **utterly burn** [*katakaiō*] the city to the ground at the end of the Tribulation (16.19). No source is given for such a fire, but the unexpected ferocity of the event, and devastation it causes suggests this could be supernatural fire from heaven, as with Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19.24). Belshazzar’s Babylon fell in one night (Daniel 5.30), but it was never destroyed like this; the prophetic word awaits fulfilment in this end time city. The reason Babylon has become a smouldering ruin is because of the **strong Lord God**. The “mighty” city (v.10) is no match for the strength of God! No one can frustrate His plans or keep Him from accomplishing what He purposes to do. In fact, He is “Lord, the God” [*kyrios*], a reminder that He and no other has supreme authority over the earth.

The Sorrow of Babylon's Worshipers [vv.9-19]

v.9. Three groups of people mourn over Babylon. The sudden overthrow of this financial centre causes a wail of anguish to rise from earth (Jim Allen). Their lamentations are recorded in vv.9-19. First, the **kings of the earth**, the political rulers of the world (vv.9-10). Second, the merchants (vv.11-17a), followed by the mariners (vv.17b-19). The lamentations closely follow the pattern of mourning for the city of Tyre (the great commercial capital of the Phoenician empire) in Ezekiel 27.

The **kings of the earth** is a general term which no doubt embraces the ten kings of the Beast (17.12), but more widely includes all the governing heads of the nations of the earth. These kings have **committed fornication** with her (cf. v.3) by worshipping the Beast and joining his commercial empire. Whilst they have become rich and lived in extravagant luxury as a result, they now **bewail** (a loud expression of pain or grief) and **lament** (to beat one's breast as an act of mourning) **for her** when they **see the smoke of her burning** ascending (cf. Genesis 19.28). Their sorrow is not so much for Babylon, as it is for themselves having lost their most profitable market and primary source of wealth. **v.10.** The kings can see the smoke of her destruction (perhaps via social media), but do not rush to help for **fear** of the same **torment** (judgment) falling on them. Thus, they are **standing afar off**, supporting the idea that this is a real city acting as the administrative centre of a global commercial system. The lament of the kings is, "**Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city!**" The word "alas" is an expression denoting pain or displeasure. But the great source of surprise for the kings, as well as the merchants (v.17) and mariners (v.19), is the suddenness with which Babylon is destroyed – "**for in one hour is thy judgment come**", it was in a 'single moment' and there was no time to prepare for such a calamity.

v.11. The **merchants of the earth** will also lament over the fall of commercial New Babylon. The universal, cashless system of commerce will collapse overnight potentially evaporating digital bank accounts and virtual wealth, leaving businessmen all over the world unable to buy or sell their goods. Economic ruin will come quickly. The wail of the merchants is more extended than that of the kings or mariners because their loss is greater. The word **merchant** [*emporos*] describes those who travel to conduct the business of buying and selling. In these latter days, the word may well represent the managing directors of great multinational companies, as well as world financiers and stock market traders. They will **weep** (to cry freely and profusely from sadness or distress) and **mourn** (grieve) over Babylon for their own selfish reasons, **because no man buyeth their merchandise any more**. The word 'merchandise' refers to the 'freight of a (sailing) vessel' or bulk cargo in general, the specific items of which are listed in the next two verses.

vv.12-13. These verses list the principal commercial products traded in New Babylon. 28 items are given which categorise into eight groups covering a remarkable array of fine goods as well as basic trade commodities. Many of these items are recorded in the merchandise list of Tyre (Ezekiel 27) and are apparently very similar to the trade of Rome in John's day. The descriptions of these items (below) are largely taken from R L Thomas, "Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary".

Category	Item	Description
Precious Metals and Stones	1. Gold	Rome imported its gold especially from Spain.
	2. Silver	Silver typified luxury through its common use for silver-plated couches, baths, and implements for serving food.
	3. Precious Stones	Items in which wealth was stored and transported.
	4. Pearls	Low-grade pearls came from the Red Sea and the highest quality from the Persian Gulf.
Luxury Fabrics	5. Fine Linen	Refers to a garment made from Egyptian flax. It was quite expensive and delicate.
	6. Purple	Fabric treated with purple dye extracted from a shellfish one drop at a time. Synonymous with extreme luxury. Caesar wore an imperial robe of purple.
	7. Silk	Silk came from China. Alexander obtained the fabric when he invaded India. Used for garments.
	8. Scarlet	Luxury material for garments (Proverbs 31.21).
Furniture	9. Thyine Wood	Sweet-smelling North African citrus tree valued because of its colouring. Used in costly doors and dining tables.
Vessels	10. Vessels of Ivory	Romans used ivory for all sorts of purposes, e.g. chairs, beds and chariots. It was a mark of luxury that ivory had replaced wood.
	11. Precious Wood	Used to make vessels. Included maple, cedar, and cypress and possibly ebony from Africa and India.

	12. Vessels of Brass	Corinthian bronze was the material of expensive works of art.
	13. Vessels of Iron	Iron was the material of cutlery, swords, and other implements of warfare.
	14. Vessels of Marble	Marble was part of the rich royal surroundings of the palace in Susa (Esther 1.6). The reign of Augustus marked the beginning of the lavish use of marble in Rome.
Perfumes	15. Cinnamon	Made from the bark of a tree. Used for incense, medicine, perfume, and as a condiment in wines.
	16. Odours	“Spice” was from the seeds of a fragrant shrub. Its main uses were as a valuable perfume and an aromatic balsam for the hair.
	17. Ointments	A general term for sweet-smelling ointment.
	18. Frankincense	A fragrant gum-resin imported from South Arabia and used as a perfume for the body.
Food	19. Wine	Producing wine was very profitable in first-century Rome.
	20. Oil	Africa and Spain were the chief sources of the vast quantities of olive oil used in the Roman Empire.
	21. Fine flour	Refers to the finest grade of wheaten flour.
	22. Wheat	Rome imported wheat from Alexandria for the use of the rich. Egypt was the granary for Rome’s wheat.
Livestock	23. Beasts	Cattle were used primarily as working animals and for the supply of milk.
	24. Sheep	The import of sheep was probably not for food but for breeding purposes, to improve the quality of Roman wool.
Transport	25. Horses	Merchants brought horses from Africa, Spain, Sicily and parts of Greece. Mainly used for chariot racing.
	26. Chariots	Four-wheeled carriages that furnished transportation for the rich and Roman senators.
Slaves	27. Slaves	The slave merchant viewed slaves as ‘human livestock’. Slaves staffed the large households of the rich.
	28. Souls of men	“And” [<i>kai</i>] should be translated ‘even’ – “slaves, even the souls of men.” Babylon has complete control of men, both the physical body [<i>sōma</i>], and the non-physical soul [<i>psuchē</i>].

v.14. This verse appears to be an interjection from heaven to address Babylon directly, summarising all she has lost. The wealth of goods just described (vv.12-13) are the ripe **fruits** Babylon greatly desired – “the fruit for which your soul longed,” [ESV] or “the fancy things you loved so much,” [NLT]. Now they have all **departed** (gone). These are the goods for which the **soul** of Babylon **lusted**, which phrase seems to identify the root cause of Babylon’s sin. Fanning is worth quoting in full, *“the list of ‘cargoes’ just cited is not intended to condemn trade or commerce per se, nor are the luxury goods included in the list regarded as sinful in and of themselves. The problem specified in this verse is the tendency to regard material goods, especially luxury goods, as the goal and focus of life. Human existence does not consist of the material things people possess. To make them the ‘soul’s desire,’ as Babylon did, tragically misconceives what is most central in human identity and prosperity. It worships and draws meaning from a false god instead of the true One.”* The luxurious opulence (**dainty**) and splendid ostentation (**goodly**) of the goods of Babylon has **departed** in the fire of divine judgment, burnt up never to return. Babylon would **find them no more at all** – just like Enoch (cf. Hebrews 11.5), no amount of searching would ever bring them back. As believers we do not “trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy,” (1 Timothy 6.17, cf. Proverbs 23.5).

v.15. The dirge of the merchants is resumed from v.11 after the digression to describe Babylon’s merchandise. Like the kings of the earth (v.10), the merchants also **stand afar off**, distancing themselves from the scene for **fear** that the same **torment** (cf. v.7, 10) may fall on them. Their fear indicates they are aware that they cannot dismiss this catastrophe as a natural disaster; they know that this is from God (Jim Allen). Their **weeping** and **wailing** have already been described in the same terms in v.11. **v.16.** As the kings (v.10), the merchants likewise lament the **great city** using the word **alas** as an expression denoting displeasure – not in repentance, or over the loss of life, but rather because of the wealth that has been lost. These same merchants describe Babylon in similar terms to the harlot – she was “arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls,” (17.4). The similarity is not surprising as both the religious and commercial aspects of Babylon are centred in the same city and marked by the same great extravagance and

ostentatious material wealth. The **fine linen** (only mentioned elsewhere in Revelation in connection with the righteousness of the saints, cf. 19.8, 14), **purple** and **scarlet** align with Babylon's claims of royalty (v.7), whilst the adorning (gilding) with **gold**, **precious stones** and **pearls** emphasise her grandiose display of opulence. **v.17a**. Again (cf. v.10, 19), the mourning of the merchants is rooted in dismay over how quickly **so great riches is come to nought** – made desolate (cf. v.19) or “destroyed” [NET].

v.17b. The last part of this verse introduces the third and final group who benefitted from their association with Babylon – mariners, and those linked with the shipping industry. Captains of merchant ships, with their crews, as well as shipowners will all serve as channels for the movement of commercial goods to reach Babylon – a city located on many waters (cf. 17.1). There are **shipmasters** (a person who steers a sailing vessel, the ship's captain), **all the company in ships** (the ship's passengers), and **sailors** (any member of a ship's crew). The “sailors” [*nautēs*] are part of those who **trade by sea**, or ‘work the sea’, so as to earn a living from its resources (such as fishermen). Collectively, they too (as the kings and merchants) **stood afar off** and lamented the destruction of the city. **v.18**. The imperfect tense suggests they “began to shout” (**cried**) and continued shouting (v.19) when they **saw the smoke of her burning**. In an echo of the question asked about Tyre (Ezekiel 27.32), the mariners say, “**What city is like unto this great city!**” In their minds, there was no comparable city – Babylon epitomised all that men could wish for of wealth and luxury. The same question was posed about the Beast following his pseudo death and resurrection (13.4). **v.19**. In an expression of great grief the mariners **cast dust on their heads** (cf. Job 2.12), symbolising the hopelessness of a situation. In very similar terms to the monarchs and merchants before them, the mariners **cry with weeping** (cf. vv.9, 11, 15) and **wailing** (cf. vv. 11, 15), “Woe, Woe, O great city – in which all those who had ships on the sea got rich from her wealth – because in a single hour she has been destroyed!” [NET].

The Symbol of Babylon's Doom [vv.20-24]

v.20. The last five verses of the chapter provide a change of scenery, moving from the perspective of earth to heaven. Whilst three groups are *mourning* on earth (monarchs, merchants and mariners), three contrasting groups are *rejoicing* in heaven – saints [JND], apostles and prophets. The angelic voice (v.4) exhorts **heaven** and her inhabitants to **rejoice** or ‘make merry’ (cp. 11.10). Likely, the heavenly songs of 19.1-5 are in response to this invitation. The overflow of joy is because the wicked city of Babylon – the very centre of satanic opposition to God – has been destroyed. The inhabitants of heaven are the **saints** [JND], **holy apostles** and **prophets**. The “saints” describe all the people of God in a general way, from OT saints to church saints, and those martyred in the Tribulation. The “apostles” are the twelve apostles of the Lamb (cf. 2.2; 21.14) with “prophets” likely referring to NT prophets. The mention of “apostles and prophets” in that order (cf. Ephesians 2.20) strongly suggests this is partly a reference to the glorified church in heaven. The source of their rejoicing is that **God hath avenged you on her** – ‘exact judgment’ or ‘penalty’ for the persecution and martyrdom of God's people through the ages (v.24).

v.21. The chapter closes with a dramatic and graphic object lesson to illustrate the finality and totality of Babylon's destruction. The scene is very similar to Jeremiah 51.60-64. There, Jeremiah wrote and recorded on one scroll all the judgments that would come upon Babylon. When Seraiah arrived in Babylon, he was to read the prophecies aloud, then tie the scroll to a stone and throw it into the Euphrates. In the same way, Babylon would “sink and never rise again” (v.64).

A **mighty angel** (cf. 5.2; 10.1) is summoned on behalf of the *mighty* Lord God (v.8) to deal with this *mighty* city (v.10). The angel took up a **stone** (boulder) **like a great millstone** and **cast it into the sea**. In Bible times, millstones were huge stones used to grind grain (4-5ft in diameter) weighing thousands of pounds. When such large and weighty stones are thrown into the sea, they never rise again. All they can do is sink. The same is true for New Babylon. The same figure is used in Nehemiah 9.11 of the destruction of the might of Egypt at the Red Sea. The message of the imagery is given in plain language by the angel, “With this kind of sudden violent force Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and it will never be found again!” [NET]. The adverb **with violence** (cf. Mark 5.13) portrays the crash of Babylon as it falls under the judgment of God. Jim Allen says, “A study of the history of Babylon shows that no judgment of this character has yet overtaken the city of Babylon.” This disappearance will not be temporary for she will **be found no more at all**. The emphatic negative, ‘in no way’ indicates permanence.

v.22. The resulting desolation of Babylon (cf. Jeremiah 51.62) is given by vividly comparing the former hustle and bustle of the city to the quiet scene of dereliction that follows its judgment. Jim Allen says, “all normal noises of life are stilled. Even in the happy days of millennial peace, one site on earth will remain ominously and eerily silent; a site that God leaves as a silent witness to His judgment of sin. God had meant Jericho to fulfil this role in Canaan (Joshua 6.26).” So, the **voice** (sound) of **harpists**, **musicians** (players of all kinds of instruments), **pipers** (flute players) and **trumpeters** will never be heard in Babylon again. The music of entertainment and celebration has gone. Likewise, no **craftsman** of any trade (whether a silversmith, stone mason or potter) will labour to produce merchandise for sale in Babylon any longer. Even

the domestic **sound of a millstone** grinding grain for bread will be forever stopped. The word for millstone here refers to a hand mill largely used by female slaves. **v.23**. The **light of a candle** (lamp) refers to even the smallest illumination in people's homes at night. The normally sun-drenched city of Babylon had been shrouded in darkness since the fifth vial judgment (16.10) so lamps were vital, but never again would a lamp shine in Babylon. The **voices of bridegroom** and **bride** were an evidence of happy domestic and family celebrations, such as were happening in the days of Noah before the flood came (Matthew 24.38). Now these have ceased forever.

Three final reasons for such complete divine destruction are given at the end of this verse and in v.24.

- First, her pride. Babylon's **merchants** were the **great men** [*megistan*] **of the earth**. These merchants were 'lords' (Mark 6.21), persons of high rank, VIPs, 'magnates' [NRSV] and 'tycoons' [NET]. The word conveys a tone of arrogance. The merchants had not only gained wealth but had also imbibed of Babylon's wanton pride. Pride has been a familiar theme in the history of Babylon, from Nimrod to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4.30).
- Second, her power. Babylon had engaged in **sorcery** [*pharmakeia*] to **deceive** the **nations**. All nations were drugged by New Babylon. She will deal in satanic deception and witchcraft to allure the nations into her web of religious and commercial idolatry. *pharmakeia* refers to the practice of magic and the mixture of drugs to make potions. Babylon will be the source of hallucinatory drugs making people an easy prey to deception and demon possession.
- Third, her persecution (**v.24**). Babylon was guilty of the **blood** of the **prophets** and **saints** – probably including believers from both OT and NT periods in its broad scope. Furthermore, she is guilty of "the blood of all those who had been killed on the earth," [NET], which comprehensively includes all who have been slain for the cause of Christ and God beginning with righteous Abel. When Babylon could not deceive and corrupt, she persecuted and slew.