

THE BIG QUESTION

What if I told you the most important question to your welfare has never been asked? -And least not in this way of Revelation. The question is: **HOW DO YOU COME OUT OF BABYLON?**

You're probably wondering, "*What does that even mean?!*" Well, that's going to take a little explaining. We'll have to get some background from this week's chapter in our Revelation series; **chapter 18**.

So far, we've gone through the **letters to the churches** that **set up a value system** for God's people, and a warning to pull up our "spiritual socks." We've gone through the **Great Tribulation**, explained from three different angles; each angle highlighting a different perspective.

In chapter 18, God steps back and starts painting a picture of the whole. The chapter describes what John calls "**Babylon**." It is a chapter of how and why the "great city" falls, and the aftermath.

In this entire chapter, God's people are addressed only twice; and even then, in two short, but important lines. **In verse 20, there is rejoicing in heaven that the books are finally balanced at Babylon's fall**, and in **verse 4** where God's people are warned to "**come out of her**." **Why?** -Lest they **share in her sins**, which will lead to **sharing in her plagues**. Keep in mind, plagues in the Greek means her *misfortunes*, which are any of the catastrophic events in the tribulation.

EXPLAINING BABYLON

Before any of the chapter can have meaning we have to resolve this question:

JUST WHAT EXACTLY, IS BABYLON?

Even for John, the city was figurative. He lived in the time of the Roman Empire. John was nearly as far removed from the Babylonian empire in time, as we are from the Roman empire. In fact, the descriptions of chapter 18 actually fit the Roman empire of John's time; right down to its fall, which was still in the future for John.

The vision fits the literal Babylon, yet it is a perfect description of Rome in John's present, and fits other great empires yet to come; so what does that tell us? Two things really:

1. The idea of a "great city" is a **metaphor** to a far bigger concept.
2. Not only does history confirm the vision; it gives us **something physical** on which to reflect. Babylon may be a metaphor, but throughout history, there have been **very real examples**. *The principles are very real.*

Since the Roman Empire is one of those very real examples, how did God see Rome? What do we know from history, and what historical facts is God highlighting in this vision? This evening, we'll go into greater detail, but in a nutshell, Rome was:

- Incredible in its **influence and authority**.
- Incredible in its **material wealth**.
- Incredible in its **pride and hubris**.
- Incredibly **doomed**. -Even though there was a feeling of security to that last and sudden hour.

Its wealth was unparalleled in history to this point. The empire had wiped piracy from the seas, so ships sailed into the Roman ports in safety from all over the known world. It was said that if it couldn't be found in Rome, it didn't exist anywhere. The world's wealth poured into Rome; every kind of precious metal or stone, the best wood, ivory, marble, spice or food. Even the "bodies and souls of men."

Last week, we mentioned the **expensive dyes of purple and scarlet**. I've since learned more about the purple dye. In the sea snail, murex; there is a tiny purple vein. It is in that single vein where the dye source is obtained. The vein disappears quickly after death, so not only is there only a tiny amount, it has to be extracted at just the right moment! It was an incredibly expensive process. In modern terms, the dye was worth thousands of dollars!

The governors and senators felt it was their duty to outdo each other in ridiculous extravagance. They would say to each other; **the only purpose for money is to be squandered**. They really felt that to be a good Roman leader, you had to plunder the world and then squander it!

Historians say that many Roman leaders had a yearly food budget in the millions! I wondered how that was even possible until I read about a very popular dinner tradition. They liked to dissolve pearls in wine or vinegar. It wasn't uncommon to have a pearl beside every cup of wine and their lavish dinner parties, which were a routine.

One Roman leader once **dissolved a pearl, worth more than \$80,000 dollars** in a cup of wine, just to see what it was like to drink thousands of dollars at a gulp.

It wasn't just that Rome was wealthy, it was **consumed** with wealth, its indulgence was **so far out of balance** that it was immoral. History shows that there are few things that rot the soul like **self-absorbed materialism**.

Rome obtained its wealth through a brutal mentality of world conquest backed by a military with the muscle to pull it off. The British historian, Lord Acton said, "**Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Even when they [people or cultures] exercise influence and not authority...**"

And that was certainly true of Rome. **Even as they conquered the world, the kings and merchants, and the movers of goods catered to them to make a dollar and get authority of their own**. For as much as they hated the Roman system, it was understood; if there is **no Rome, there is no world**. And of course, that was true, when Rome fell, the world languished in the dark ages for five centuries.

Ancient Rome wasn't just a country or empire, it was a world system. It was what tied everything together. It was how people conducted **commerce**. It defined **art**, and **entertainment**. It was the standard by which **morals, worldview** and **ways of life** were set. It was what we've already defined in Revelation as; a community of civilized humanity *without God*.

HOW DO WE COME OUT OF BABYLON?

And that brings us back to the big question. The Roman system was in **every area of life**, what's more, the Roman system was **everywhere**. In John's time, there was two choices, the civilized world, or the "edges of the world" in the unknown lands of the barbarians. *Physically*, there really was nowhere to go, so the question: **HOW DOES ONE COME OUT OF "BABYLON"; WHEN BABYLON IS THE WORLD SYSTEM?** ...That is the question the first century Christian faced, and in our day, it is even more of a valid question.

First, it can't be a literal command. God hasn't called us to physical reclusion. How do we know? Because we were given a basic command when Christ ascended: Go **into** all the world and preach the gospel to **every** creature. (Mark 16:15, NKJV)

And we are told to do this until Christ returns (Luke 19:13); so we can't physically go into, and come out of, at the same time. The command must mean something else.

We know that “Babylon”, like the “beast”, or the “harlot” aren’t singular places. It is a system based on fallen nature that is everywhere, in everyone. At any point in history, one place or another may be the great example of this system in action, but it is a **system of human community, based on our fallen nature**, none the less.

So, like the Christians of John’s time, we are to **actively “live in Rome”** but **not live by the nature of Rome**. That means, we *value differently, our ambitions are different, our entertainment should be different, our hope is in something different, our responses are different, the power by which we live is different, even our very definition of life is different.*

But we are talking about “Rome” here, that’s an all-encompassing system of life, so in all practicality; **its simply impossible**. -And quite frankly, that’s at the base of Biblical Christianity, “leaving Babylon” is not possible by mere human effort.

Biblical Christianity **isn’t based on you agreeing with God**; it is based on **submitting to God’s** power to transform one’s nature. The Christian concept of **salvation isn’t simply being saved FROM destruction; it is being saved TO transformation.**

When the presence of God is allowed in one’s mind, soul, and heart, our very nature changes. Where there was **hate**, there is now love. Where there was **fear and hopelessness**, there is now joy. Where there was **turmoil**, there is now peace. Where there was a **short temper**, there is now patience. Where there was a **coldness of heart**, there is now kindness, and so on. Not all the time, but there is now alternative nature to nurture. Paul put it this way to the Galatian church: **“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”** (Galatians 5:25)

FINAL CONCLUSION

In the context of everything we’ve shared here; let’s revisit God’s one command in Revelation chapter 18:

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

It’s important we note this: What is highlighted in this chapter isn’t the CONSEQUENCES of Babylon’s sins; it is the JUDGEMENT on Babylon’s sins. Of course, sin has its own aftermath, but what God is pointing out here, is that He plays an active part. He is judging, He is balancing the books from His perfect justice.

There’s an important proclamation here: If we dabble in Babylon’s sins, even as God’s people, we will share, to some level, in its judgement.

We come out of Babylon, not by moving from a location, but by rejecting **the values, lifestyle, and mindset that define that system.**

We reject it by **being absorbed into the nature and power of Christ**. We choose to nurture the new self. You remain WITH God in life’s routines.

It can’t be said any better than this:

(NKJV) ⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. ⁹ The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8,9)

In the workplace, at home, with friends, in our alone time; is ***that*** our way of life? Scripture says, it is either this, or Babylon; so honestly: HAVE YOU LEFT BABYLON?