

Flee Babylon!

Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven

Psalter 224

Scripture: Revelation 17:1–6; Rev. 18

Psalter 253:1–7

Sermon Text: Revelation 18:4–5

Psalter 260

Psalter 253:10–12

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

—Revelation 18:4–5

Revelation 18 gives a picture of sudden, complete, and utter destruction of the present sinful world order called Babylon. This present sinful world order which is anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-Christian is represented by the city of Babylon. This is not unique to Revelation. Already in Genesis we see the development of Babel, the city that sought to reach up unto God. That has continued throughout Scripture. In the prophets we often read of Babylon in its opposition and hatred towards God. Babylon's influence is worldwide. Its influence is felt each and every day in our lives and hearts. It is opposed to the Word of God. It is opposed to God. It is opposed to Christ and His rule. That is why we are called to come out of her, to flee that we "be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." God is judging this world, reserving the fury of His wrath against sin. That wrath will be unleashed in a final act of judgment pictured here. Our text is Revelation 18:4–5 within the context of Revelation 18. Our theme is "Flee Babylon," with three thoughts to

consider. First, the picture of Babylon presented. Second, the punishment of Babylon administered. Third, the people in Babylon addressed.

The Picture Of Babylon Presented

In Revelation 17:1–6, an impressive picture begins to emerge of Babylon. The apostle John sees Babylon sparkling in false beauty, yet full of smut and filthiness. He sees her drunk with the blood of the saints and of the martyrs of Jesus. John is amazed at this picture. It is a picture that is attractive, yet at the same time repulsive. It is a picture of a city that is mighty, self-sufficient, a city drunk with the pleasures of this world, satiated yet never satisfied.

Do you recognize this city? You do, don't you? It is the sinful aspect of the world in which we live. It is a larger version of what is in our hearts by nature. We build mighty, self-sufficient cities, Babylons, in our own hearts. We are influenced by this woman, this harlot, this seductive world. We so easily are drunk with the pleasures of this world. We have the wool pulled over our eyes and we become blind to the world and its seduction. We fall into its trap. But I need to warn you that judgment is coming upon this city. Listen to the voice of Christ, "Come out of her, my people, lest ye be partakers of her sins, and her judgments come upon you."

Why should you heed this voice? Because Babylon is *fallen*. It's as good as done. The angel in verse 2, shining with heavenly glory, shouts with a powerful voice, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen." Yes, this sinful world continues on today, but its end is certain. The angel speaks in the past tense, showing that in God's eyes, this city is done, destroyed, and obliterated in the fury of God's wrath.

If you are still in Babylon today, living in the world, seduced and blinded by sin, you are being warned to flee. Flee, or you will face judgment. The world elevates itself

and puffs itself up in sin, but it is fallen. If you live in Babylon, in the world, you serve a fallen god, subject to the eternal wrath and judgment of Almighty God.

Babylon is presented in verse 2 as a rotting corpse deserted of all life. It is only inhabited by devils, wild animals and buzzards that feed off dead flesh. Babylon, this world, is bleak and hopeless. Don't you see it when you look around you? Despite its glamor and seeming wealth, this world is falling apart at the seams. Michael Jackson is dead. Tiger Woods is not a role model, but a moral failure. Lindsey Lohan is known for nothing else but immorality and drugs, not to mention the countless other moral failures splashed across the newspapers. They all claim a life full of happiness, riches, and glamor, but it is hollow. *There is no satisfaction*; without hope and without God in the world, the world is hollow, empty, and shallow without Christ.

The American Dream claims the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but what has it wrought economically? It has contributed to prosperity for many, but for countless others there is only crippling credit card debts, mortgage foreclosures, and economic disaster. The world groans under the effects of sin.

The world in its sinful pleasures is a hollow shell, a rotting corpse, with nothing to offer. Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen! Life without Christ in this world is a miserable existence. But Christ calls, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins and of her judgment!"

Despite its fallenness, Babylon is an *influential* city. Babylon has far-reaching political and economic influence. Verse 3 says it this way, "For *all nations* have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and *the kings* of the earth have committed fornication with her, and *the merchants* of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies."

Babylon has a lot to offer, it seems. There is no nation,

no person untouched by its influence. Kings and rulers have been seduced by the promise of power, pleasure, and wealth. The merchants of the earth are seduced by the economic advantage in this city and have literally become rich through the abundance of her sensual living. This city traffics in all sorts of pleasures and she is the great peddler of sensuality.

What relevance to our day, when we see the rulers of the world, partaking of this city with reckless abandon, grasping its power, pleasures, and wealth. And it seems that the rulers draw the citizens along with them. Nations flock to Babylon to improve standards of life and luxury, living in open immorality in the name of progress.

The businessmen of this world are often influenced by the dollar signs offered by the philosophy of this world. You make it rich and you'll have power and influence and popularity. There is money and pleasure in this city.

This is the general bent of the society in which we live, isn't it? Is this where you are? Babylon can be so influential in our lives, in our way of living, and our thinking. The world encroaches on us and we are seduced, blinded, and swallowed by it. Christ calls, "Flee Babylon, come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins."

Babylon is also a *sinful* city. In verse 5 we read, "For her sins have reached unto heaven." The measuring cup is full. Sin has reached its climax and is literally heaped unto heaven, before the very presence of God. How long can this last before God unleashes His righteous anger and judgment against this world? Are not His judgments already seen in the sins so prevalent in our culture—by and large a culture of death and deviant sexuality?

Have your sins added to this heap? Our society has become largely lawless. Many have become a law unto themselves. We have become lovers of ourselves. We've become enamored with ourselves, with our own sinful image. We've exchanged the truth of God for a lie and give honor to the creature rather than to the Creator.

Have you partaken of the sins of this city? Are you making yourself a subject of God's coming wrath and justice? Is this city where your allegiance lies? Or does it lie with Christ, who satisfied the wrath of God against the sins of His people? Are you still in Babylon today? Christ cries out, "Come out of her, my people. Don't stay; judgment is coming upon this sinful city!"

Babylon is also a *sensual* city. The nations, kings, and merchants have committed fornication with her. Every sensual pleasure can be found in Babylon. The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life can be satisfied here.

Babylon is like Sodom and Gomorrah, full of pride, having fulness of bread and abundance of idleness (Ezek. 16:49). The citizens of Babylon are settled and content, blinded by riches and sensual pleasures, committing fornication with her.

How many of you as Christians are doing the same today? Are you committing spiritual adultery with the world, claiming to love God yet living like a citizen of Babylon? Are you blinded by her wealth and sensual pleasures?

We live in a society obsessed with the sexual to the point where everything is normal. Purity is cheap. Pornography abounds. Adultery is called serial monogamy. Homosexuality is now a lawful way to live in many places. Money is no object to satisfy the lusts that rise up in us. Are you taken in by this culture? How are you being influenced by this world's emphasis in your minds and hearts? Have you succumbed? Come out of her, lest you be partakers of her sins and judgment!

Babylon is really a *God-less and a Christ-less city*. That is why she is so sensual and full of every pleasure of this world. The world seems to be so attractive, "yet Babylon is rotten. This is the sum total of her longing, what she can see and smell and taste and feel and hear. This is the fruit she longs for. She aches for this; she hun-

gers and thirsts for this—the world and the things of this world with God shut out completely.”¹

Babylon, this world, is self-sufficient with no desire for God. She is proud and over-confident, “For she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow” (Rev. 18:7). She is a Christ-less city because she has no room for the people of Christ. Her streets are filled with the blood of the martyrs as we read in verse 24. Her philosophy is anti-Christ, anti-gospel, and anti-God.

This is how the world lives today; full of self, self-assured, anti-God and anti-Christ, confident that judgment will never come. Is that how you are living today? Do you still live in Babylon? Is your heart still there? Do you trust in a false gospel? Do you live without fear of judgment, committing adultery with the world and forsaking God? Or do you sit back to wait for God to work and in the meantime partake of Babylon’s pleasures because God will work when He wants to?

Though you have forsaken God and turned your back on Him, He calls out to you today, “Come out of her. Flee for your life. Judgment is coming on this present evil world. Her iniquities are full. Come out and find safety and rest and peace and complete satisfaction and removal of judgment in Me.”

The Punishment Administered

Babylon is a city under judgment. This is clear from the opening words, “Babylon the great is fallen!”

It is also clear throughout the chapter. Read verse 5, “For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.” When God remembers something, things begin to change. He begins to turn things around. So with Babylon. He will destroy utterly. He will

1. Geoff Thomas, “Overview of Revelation 18,” Alfred Place Baptist Church, Aberystwyth, Wales, www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk, accessed June 19, 2009.

bring judgment upon this city, upon this world. It is foolish to live in such a city.

The judgment that God will administer is *complete*. This is pictured in verse 6, "Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double."

Babylon is to receive a punishment that fits her sins. Her cup of judgment is full and complete and will be poured out completely upon her. God's wrath and judgment hang over Babylon and the world. Will you escape this judgment unscathed? Come out of her to Jesus! Give God no rest till you are free from Babylon!

The punishment will also be *sure*. The mighty angel we've seen speaks in the past tense, "Babylon is fallen!" It's a sure thing in the mind of God because of the awful sins that the world has heaped up to heaven. God will come. He will mete out punishment perfectly!

Do you seek to escape this sure punishment? Then come out of Babylon and flee for your life! Flee to Jesus again! Have you been soiled and sullied by the world? Come to Jesus and find cleansing in His blood and clothing in His righteousness. Flee the sins of Babylon; don't look back, but look to Jesus! His death has removed punishment for sin. Hide in His propitiation!

This punishment upon Babylon will also be *swift*. Her complacency and seeming peace will be shattered by judgment in a single day. Verse 8 says, "Therefore shall her plagues come in *one day*, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her." The world cannot trifle with God, for He is strong and right in His judgment. Praise God from whom all judgment flows!

Those who have benefitted from Babylon will mourn this swift judgment. In verse 10 they cry out, "Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in *one hour* is thy judgment come!" Babylon will be reduced to rubble.

Everything that seems so attractive about this world

in terms of its sin will be destroyed in an instant. In verse 17 we read, "For in *one hour* so great riches is come to nought." The nations, kings, and merchants felt secure in this city within its walls, but destruction comes in one hour! Do you think that you are safe behind the sinful pleasures of this world? Your infatuation with money, sensual pleasures, and power will be reduced to nothing in one hour. Are you secure, thinking that judgment will come much later? Your security can be reduced to nothing in one hour.

Look at the world and how things go awry. This week, a tornado and vicious storm ripped through New York. No one was expecting it. Within minutes an airplane can plunge into the sea. The stock markets plunge within a day. The Twin Towers crash within an hour. An earthquake strikes suddenly. These are warnings, mini-versions of the fearful judgment that is to come on a world that is opposed to God and His King. Where is your security, congregation? Is it in this world or in the voice of Jesus that calls you to come out of this world to Him for eternal security?

We see that punishment is also *victorious*. God's people delight in the judgment upon this great city and what she represents. Everything about this city goes against who God is and what His people stand for. Its wicked culture, its saturation of riches, its emphasis on the sensual, and its God-less and Christ-less philosophy stands glaringly in opposition to the call for us to be separate from the world. The world opposes us and hates us, but the world will be destroyed by God's judgment. The godless world persecutes God's people, but it will be met with judgment. God's people in heaven and on earth will rejoice at this final judgment upon Babylon and its sin.

The Lord says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" (Rom. 12:19). This vengeance upon the wicked is the victory of the saints. The voice commands God's people

in verse 20, “Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.”

This victorious judgment already began on the cross, when Christ crushed Satan’s head. This is brought to a head in the destruction of Babylon and the casting of Satan into the lake of fire. The epicenter of sin will be destroyed, no more to reverberate in our lives. This world which has spouted its hatred and venom towards God and us will be silent. The blood of the martyrs and saints will be paid for in the just and triumphant judgment of God.

Those who grew rich off of Babylon mourn her destruction. Their livelihood is gone. This mourning is pictured in verses 9–20. The merchants and sailors weep and wail and lament, but the destruction of Babylon is God’s victory. It is also the victory of God’s people. Here we see the dual reaction to the destruction of Babylon. God’s people rejoice but Babylon’s friends and inhabitants mourn. What will you do?

This judgment is finally *irreversible*. In verse 21, a mighty angel takes a large millstone and casts it into the sea, picturing irreversible judgment. This is not just a small stone, but a huge stone turned by oxen to grind grain into flour. The angel takes this stone and hurls it into the sea and it lodges there never to appear again.

Babylon will never be resurrected again. It will disappear and be forgotten. This is the end of those who remain in Babylon. There is no future there. There is irreversible and sure judgment coming upon this world.

Her riches will be destroyed. Her economic engine will be silenced as we read in verses 12–14. In verses 22–23, life grinds to a halt as we know it. There will be an eerie silence. There will be no more music. Production of goods will stop, lights will be snuffed out, and weddings will no longer be celebrated. Merchants, the city’s great men, are dead. There will be nothing but complete and utter destruction.

Do you see the futility of aligning yourself with this city, this present, evil world? She rides upon the beast which represents Satan. She is full of wickedness and her fate is sealed in the judgment of God upon her. She will be utterly destroyed. Make no mistake, her judgment is as good as done. Christ calls out again in mercy, “Come out of her and escape the complete, sure, victorious, and irreversible judgment!”

The People Addressed

Christ issues this call to come out of Babylon, to forsake her, in verses 4 and 5, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues; for her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.”

Christ issues this plea to forsake the world and to flee to Him. If we forsake Babylon we can flee to Him by faith. There is no other place to go. We must prepare our hearts to meet God and that includes cutting ourselves off from a world of sin and temptation, a world, ripe for, and perhaps already under, judgment. Where are you taking refuge today? Are you still building your precarious and weak defenses in Babylon or are you taking refuge in Christ, “A habitation whereunto you can continually resort” (Ps. 73:3)?

Look to whom this plea is addressed. Christ addresses His own people, “Come out of her, *my people*.” It is a call today to those who profess faith in Christ to forsake this city. Like the angels came to Lot and told him to flee for his life’s sake, so we are told to flee for our life’s sake, to never look back! Flee, don’t look back!

We are to separate ourselves spiritually from the world and its attractions and amusements. The world tries to numb our spiritual consciousness by satisfying us temporarily with pleasures, but we cannot be part of Babylon and part of Christ. The world wants to amuse us. The word “amuse” is a French word and literally means

“no thinking.” The world wants to stop us from thinking about God and the final judgment that awaits.

I’m afraid many of us, including myself, live too loosely in regards to the world. We think that we can have a foot in both worlds, but Christ calls us out, to renew our allegiance with Him so that we might not be partakers of Babylon’s sins and receive of her judgment. He pleads with us to flee to Him afresh and find in Him what we need to live a life of holiness and thankfulness to Him.

It is a call to watchfulness over our lives to see whether we, perhaps without even thinking about it, have slipped back through the gates of Babylon. Christ says in Luke 21:36, “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

Perhaps you thought you could slip back in just once, but the city’s influence is so powerful that it has dragged you back in. “Come out, break off association with this evil city of sin and wickedness.” Are you looking for an exit?

There is an exit! There is a cross-shaped exit that Christ shows us if we have again been defiled by the sins of Babylon. By issuing this call, Christ displays His merits and righteousness for all to see and hear. Escape through this cross-shaped exit. Leave the sights, sounds, tastes, and smells of this city behind and taste and see that the Lord is good!

Perhaps there are those who have not yet left the city of Babylon before. Perhaps there are times where you felt sick of this world and its pleasures. You wanted to be rid of the dirt and sensuality and you wanted to escape, but you can’t escape in your own power. The city still has its grip on you and yet you search for an exit.

Here is the exit being offered in the invitation and command of Christ, “Come out of her, my people.” Don’t let God alone till you have been set free, delivered from the bondage of Babylon. Christ is calling you to change

your allegiances from being a lover of the world to being a lover of Christ.

You can't find the exit from Babylon? Here is the cross, the exit from Babylon! Christ has provided a way of escape through the cross. Here you can find new life and rest from the pleasure and pride of this world. No matter how the world has ravaged you or attempted to destroy you, here at the cross there is life and restoration from a life of sin. That is what the cross represents, Christ's death and resurrection, a cross-shaped exit from Babylon. Do you find your life in Babylon, or do you find your life in Christ?

Christ calls again, "Come out, come out! Come to Me, come to Me! I will give you rest from sin and temptation. I will shelter you from Babylon's devices. In Me and My Spirit you can find strength to fight against the seduction of this world. Will you not come out and come to Me? There is no sin too great that I cannot forgive."

Have you spent all your capital in Babylon? You can't buy salvation, you say? You are poor and impoverished? Isaiah 55:1-2 says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." There is salvation for those fleeing from Babylon, for those who leave its riches behind!

Perhaps there are those of you who have no desire to leave Babylon. You love its pleasures. You take pride in your own accomplishments and rest in them. You ignore Christ's call to come out. You love it so much and you've become fat and lazy on the world's pleasures.

Do you still ignore the cross, the exit from Babylon? Do you continue saying, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be

merry.” Are you so secure to ignore the salvation that God offers through His Son? Are you flippantly rejecting the gospel, closing your ears to it?

Then God will say, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided” (Luke 12:19–20)? Or is this voice of Christ, this warning to you today just like Lot’s message to his sons-in-law. Lot seemed to them as one who mocked. “And Lot went out and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters and said, Up, get you out of this place: for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law” (Gen. 19:14). Are you mocking and snickering at this warning and call of Christ to come out? Are you so self-assured? Will you lose your soul for a few fading pleasures of this world, only to be judged by God? The call still comes in mercy, “Come out of her my people.”

This plea is urgent because Babylon is as good as fallen. This plea is urgent because judgment is coming. This world’s sins have reached unto heaven.

Where are you finding shelter from judgment? Is it in the blood and righteousness, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Have you exited Babylon through the cross of Christ?

Christ calls once more, full of gospel love and mercy, not desiring that any should perish because of the judgment coming upon Babylon, “Come out of her, my people, and be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” The door has been thrown open to escape from Babylon. I urge you, yes, more, Christ urges you and commands you, “Come out, lest ye perish!” Amen.