

Notes On Revelation Chapter Eighteen



By Arthur B. Fowler

This article is from Old Fashioned Prophecy Magazine (OFPM), March-April 1963. It was sent to me by Ron Bullock of [Old Working BOOKS & BINDERY](#). Arthur B. Fowler was Dean Emeritus of Buffalo Bible Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

1 And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

2 And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

3 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.

THE EIGHTEENTH chapter is "The Doom of Rome" though we find the word "Babylon" is used in place of Rome. In the "writing on the outside" this was prefigured very briefly in 14:8 and now the doom is worked out in greater detail. In both cases (14:8 and 18:2) the verb "is fallen" is repeated to add solemn assurance to the warning. We cannot help noticing the change in Babylon indicated in the second verse of the chapter. The ancient Babylon, like the modern New York was preeminently a man's city and was full of evidences of a hard, heartless civilization, but Babylon destroyed was to be the dwelling of inhuman denizens. In the corresponding doom of the literal Babylon, (Is. 13:21,22) Babylon was to become the hold of wild beasts and doleful creatures, ostriches, wild goats, wolves and jackals. So here (Rev. 18:2) the mystical Babylon is to become the habitation of devils, foul spirits and unclean and hateful birds. This collocation of three sorts of unholy beings reminds us again of the three froglike spirits and of their source (16:13). There is a certain parallelism between the dragon and devils; between the beast and every foul spirit; between the false prophet and every unclean and hateful bird.

The next verse (18:3) mentions three classes which have dealt with Rome and gives us in short an outline of the verses that are to come as follows: the nations (18:4-8); the kings of the earth (18:9,10); the merchants of the earth (18:11-20).

Whereas the Gospel message of salvation is strongly individualistic (see Mt. 10:36 for instance) the dealings of the apostate Church have to do quite largely with classes, organizations and governments. The Gospel preacher

reaches out for souls; the Roman church deals largely in political schemes.

4 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.

5 For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

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.

7 How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

8 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 next section (18:4-8) contains first of all, a call to those of the Lord's people who are in the Roman system to come out of her. This intimation (announcement) supports the common-sense view that there are Christians in the Church of Rome. The best way that we can state it is this. **One can be a Christian and a Romanist, but he cannot be at the same time a good Christian and a good Romanist.** Martin Luther, before his conversion, was a good Romanist; from his conversion up to his discovery that the Pope was Antichrist, he was a Christian and a Romanist; from that date on, he was a good Christian but not a Romanist at all. The call here to come out of her is an intimation, we think, that just before the consummation there will be a widespread realization on the part of God's people that Rome is Babylon, such a widespread realization as will wake up any of the Lord's people who still remain in that awful system.

If I am right in my outline (see note on 18:3) this section has to do largely with the nations, though I confess that a first reading of (18:6) would make it seem that it too is addressed to "my people." I do not remember any other passage where in N.T. times the Lord has told his own regenerate people to exercise condign (worthy, suitable) judgment upon an earthly system. Whichever interpretation is correct, either the nations, or else God's people are to be used of God as his instruments of punishment upon the harlot church.

In connection with the boast (18:7) "I sit a queen and am no widow," Elliott quotes an interesting occurrence detailed in a Roman Catholic paper just after the elevation of Pope Pius IX (1846). An abbess spent a whole night in prayer for the Catholic Church and while praying the voice of the Savior addressed her thus: "Fear not, my daughter! I have not left my Church a widow. I have chosen for her a Pontiff after my own heart." And it was this same Pope who made (1870) the blasphemous boast of Papal infallibility!

The next verse (18:8) makes the announcement (thrice repeated in more emphatic form (18:10,17,19) of the suddenness of her destruction. "In one day" later shortened to "In one hour." We cannot tell now just how this awful destruction will be brought about, but we are sure of the certainty of it as though we had read of it in this morning's paper. (Considerably more sure in fact!)

9 And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,

10 Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

There is no intimation in this section (18:4-8) of mourning for the destruction that was announced, but now in the next verses (18:9,10) we are told that the kings of the earth will bewail her. They will perhaps realize that she was one of their ilk, and if God has so judged her, they would best amend their ways. We would like to think that there is to come a great conversion of the statesmen and politicians, but we regret to say that we cannot find it here. We can preach to them, just as we preach to other sinners, and, no doubt, individuals will be saved, but the mass of them seem to be described here as fornicators, who have indeed lived deliciously here, but for whom wrath is reserved. (cf. 19:18,19; 21:8). The destruction of the Romish system is clearly to *precede* the destruction of the political system, as we see quite clearly here.

11 And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more:

12 The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble,

13 And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.

14 And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all.

15 The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,

16 And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!

17 For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,

18 And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!

19 And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

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

The next passage (18:11-20) is the mourning of the merchants of the world over the fall of "Babylon." Very evidently, a large part of the commercial system of this world is tied up with Rome and with the Romish system.

Certainly the ethics of "business" is quite contrary to the principles laid down by our Lord. "Every man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost" contrasts strongly with the sermon on the mount! Verses 12 and 13 give a most interesting inventory of twenty-eight items of merchandise, probably the principal items of commerce in John's day, and the most interesting item, when we think of Rome, is the last. If Rome has had any outstanding object of merchandise, it has been "the souls of men." Was it not principally by the sales of indulgences that the great church of St. Peter's was built? And who of us does not have friends who have almost beggared themselves in trying to buy their deceased friends out of "purgatory."

The sellers of gold bricks are the merest tyros (beginners) in the arts of deception as compared with the great Church of Rome.

The rest of this passage (18:14-20) contain the two contrary effects of the destruction of the great harlot church. The merchants and the mariners who have waxed rich in their dealings with her are lamenting, partly no doubt for her, but largely for themselves as they view their loss of business as a result of the awful judgment. The heavenly groups however (18:20) are told to rejoice, partly no doubt because God's justice is vindicated ("They that take the sword shall perish by the sword") and partly for their own vindication as God has avenged them on her. The passage is so plain that we believe it needs no further elaboration.

21 And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.

22 And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;

23 And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

The remainder of the chapter (18:21-24) is an announcement by some mighty angel perhaps Gabriel "mighty one of God" first, that the destruction of mystical Babylon will be with violence (18:21) and second, that it will be complete. In various denunciations of Israel in the O.T. we have nearly always accompanying the threat, the recognition that in Israel is contained God's faithful remnant, and so a measure of hope remains; but here, as in the prophecies against Babylon in the O.T. there is no hope. The reasons for this complete destruction are first, her deception of the nations by her sorceries (18:23) and second, her oppression and slaughter of the saints (18:24).

As we come to the end of this section of Revelation, we pause just a moment to remark on God's perfect justice. As readers of the daily newspapers and of books and magazines, we are often tempted to be depressed as we see the wicked apparently prospering, and God's own people misunderstood, despised

and almost forsaken – then we turn for relief to the Word of God and we rejoice as we see that “the throne of God abideth forever” and God, the Omniscient and the just Ruler of all the Universe still sits upon that throne. His face is still against the wicked, but his eyes are toward the righteous and his ears are open to their cry.

All expositors will agree, I think, that chapters 19 and following are still to be fulfilled, and we shall beg leave to go through them rather rapidly, not intending at all to minimize their importance, but realizing that the average student will not so much need our help in their study.