Come Out of Her, My People

Revelation 17:1-18:24

Key Verse: 18:4 “Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “‘Come out of her, my people,’ so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;”

In the Old Testament there are four major prophets and twelve minor prophets. The four major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They are called ‘major’ just because of the length of their books. There are many common factors in these four major books such as the vision of God, the judgment of God, the prophecy of the Messiah, and so on. Among them there are God’s judgment against the ungodly neighboring countries such as Egypt, Philistine, Babylon, Ammon, Edom and so on, just before the restoration of Jerusalem: God’s judgment on the neighboring nations (Is 34-47, Jer 45-50, Eze 21-32) and the restoration of Jerusalem (Is 49-66, Eze 36-48). God judged the evil nations who persecuted and destroyed Israel right before he restored his people and rebuilt new Jerusalem. In the book of Revelation this cycle repeats. In Rev 17:1-19:10 God shows John the Fall of Babylon right before the restoration of New Jerusalem in Heaven (Rev 19:20-22:21) The Fall of Babylon is not the fall of specific nations such as The Babylonia Empire or the Roman Empire, but the symbol of fall of the ungodly and earthly power and glory, and its idolatrous system. New Jerusalem is the symbol of New Holy City in heaven where God’s redeemed people dwell forever. Indeed, the name of city Jerusalem appears most in the Bible, and then Babylon, the next. Let’s study what is the vision which God showed John regarding to the Fall of Babylon.

Look at verses 1-2. “***One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries***.” Revelation 17 &18 is known as the appendix of the judgment of the Seven Bowls in chapter 16. One of the seven angels showed John the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. Here ‘many waters’ are explained in verse 15 as people, multitudes, nations and languages. The great prostitute is the same woman who sits on a scarlet beast in verses 3-4. John explained this great prostitute in verse 18 as the great city Babylon that rules over the kings of the earth. What does it mean in verse 2 that ‘with her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries? As I mentioned, Babylon is the symbol of the powerful nation with extreme luxury and idolatry. The city of Babylon is known as one of the four origin of human civilization. It is also known as the site of the tower of Babel, where is southern part of Bagdad in Iraq today. In the era of the Babylonia Empire, one of the Seven Ancient Wonders, the Hanging Gardens, were built in the palace of Babylon. It is also known as the city of idolatry and pagan worship. As we studied in the book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar built a huge golden statue and ordered his people to bow down before it as the Kim’s family in North Korea do these days. The word ‘Babylon’ means in Greek, ‘the gate of gods (idols).’ Like its name Babylon is the emblem of idolatry. It is said that Saddam Hussein wanted to restore the glory of the Babylonia Empire. So, he made a coin with the picture of King Nebuchadnezzar on one side and his picture on the other. The kings of the earth committed adultery means that they committed the same sin of the city of Babylon such as idolatry, sexual immorality, injustice, violence, pride, and greed. The inhabitants of the earth are largely influenced and seduced by the sin of Babylon as they are intoxicated with the wine of fornication.

Verses 3-4 describes how the prostitute looks like. “***Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries***.” The woman sitting on a scarlet beast is the great prostitute who sits by many waters in verse 1. This woman was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The blasphemous names may be Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Nero, Saddam Hussein, Kim Jung Un, and so on. She was dressed in purple and scarlet, which color symbolizes seduction and adultery. In Nathanael Hawthorne’s noble “*The Scarlet Letter*”, the letter ‘A’ which indicates ‘adultery’ is written in scarlet. The color is also contrast with white, and those who dressed in white in heaven. The woman was also adorned with glittering gold, precious stones and pearls, which are the symbol of luxury, wealth and vanity. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. Verse 5 shows that she had such mysterious letters on her forehead, but the letters identify who she is, “BABYLONE THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUES AND THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

Look at verse 6. “***I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God’s holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus***.” This verse teaches us the woman is responsible for the death and the shed blood of all the saints in the Old Testaments and Christians in the New Testament. Drinking with blood is the expression of lust for violence. In verses 7-13 the angel explains the mystery of the woman and the beast. In verse 8 the angel said, “***The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because it once was, now is not, and yet will come.***” The beast is described as ‘*once was, now is not, and yet will come*.’ (8,11) What does it mean? This means that the beast was strong and powerful in the past enough to kill God’s holy people, but not now because Jesus Christ defeated them through his death and resurrection. Christ Jesus disarmed the beast who became a toothless and pawless lion. But the beast will appear again to deceive God’s people in the future. As we studied in chapter 12 &13 the beast will come again to deceive and torture the remaining people.

The angel said that the beast has the seven heads and ten horns. (7, 9) The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. (9) They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while. (10) Verse 11 continues, “***The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction***.” Based on this description about seven hills and seven kings, some scholars claim that this beast indicates the Roman Empire. This is because the city of Rome was built on the seven hills, and the seven kings may be five emperors from Julius Caesar to Claudius, and Nero who was at throne during John’s day. They also said that the ten horns in verse 12 may be the ten native kings of the satellite countries under the Roman Empire. (12) However, other scholars claim that the seven hills indicate the seven powerful countries, five in the past starting with Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire at present. The ten horns may be ten countries which follow the pagan worship and the way of Rome. Either way, the beast controls the evil kings and rules their kingdoms.

What did this beast and its followers do? Look at verse 14. “***They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is the Lord of lords, and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers***.” The beast and its followers challenged the Lamb of God, but they were overpowered by the Lamb. This is because the Lamb of God is the Lord of lords and King of kings. All his chosen and faithful followers in past and at present joined him to defeat the beast. No matter how the beast and the evil tried to destroy God’s people and his kingdom, they can’t because our God is the Sovereign Ruler and Almighty God. We remember the destiny of King Pharaoh who stood against God, the God of Moses. The army and chariots of Pharaoh were drowned under the water by the breath of God, and they couldn’t come out any more. Victory belongs to the Lord, the Lamb of God. The Lamb looks weak and vulnerable compared to roaring lions. But the Lamb, who was slain, triumphs over the lions because he obeyed God on the cross and shed his blood for the sins of the world. John the Baptist said, “*Look! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*.” (Jn 1:29) Sin has power which the beast uses. But the beast can’t do anything unless we are under the power of sin. Jesus, the Lamb of God, took away the sins of the world through his death, which sets us free from the power of the beast. Amen!

Verses 16-18 explains the self-destruction of the woman because of the betrayal of the beast and its followers. They will hate the woman and finally kill her and eat her flesh. God’s enemies can’t stand forever because they fall when they are divided. Through this self-destruction God fulfills his purpose. The glory of the world and splendor of the earth looks lasting forever, but it is a sheer illusion. All their glory will fall like flowers of the field. Only God’s kingdom and his words endures forever. Amen.

Chapter 18 looks like the echo of chapter 17 about the Fall of Babylon. But we find slight difference between these two chapters. In chapter 17 the angel described Babylon as the adulterous woman, the Mother of Prostitute, which is the center of idolatry and political power. She mobilized other satellite cities to join war against the Lamb. In chapter 18 Babylon is described as the center of commercial power with luxury, wealth, and self-glorification. So, some scholars warn Babylon in chapter 17 as a powerful world government or political system such as Popularism. They also warn Babylon in chapter 18 as a deceptive economic power like Materialism. In fact, 18:1-20 the kings and the merchants of the earth lament over the fall of Babylon because of their financial loss.

In verses 1-3 an angel from heaven shouted the Fall of Babylon, especially in verse 3. “***For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries***.” The kings and the merchants of the earth became rich by trading in the city of Babylon. But now there is no more benefit or profit from Babylon because she will soon be destroyed. In verses 4-8 the angel warns God’s people to come out of Babylon. Look at verse 4. “***Then I heard another voice from heaven say:*** “‘***Come out of her, my people,’ so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues***.” This verse is repeated in Jeremiah 51:45 when Jeremiah warned the Israelites about the coming judgment of God against the Babylonia Empire. “*Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the Lord*.” (Jer 51:45) This warning is also a reminiscence of the angel’s message to Lot who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah right before God punished the cities with fire. At that time an angel said to Lot, “*Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city! But his sons-in-law thought he was joking*.” (Ge 19:14) Even today God warns his people to get out of Sodom and Gomorrah, the city of Babylon, the city of adultery, sexual immorality, idolatry, vanity, pride, and greed. This is because God will judge the cities and its people soon. Like all the possessions of Lot and all the glory of Babylon, their earthly possession and position were gone after a little while. God warns us to come out of these cities. Still, many people treat God’s warning as a joke as Lot’s sons-in-law did. Some of them also look back and become pillar of salt like Lot’s wife. (Ge 19:26) We must listen to God and come out of Babylon because we cannot share in her sins. We must get out of our Babylon not to receive any of her plagues.

The angel continues to warn in verses 5-8. “***for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Pour her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much as torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, ‘I sit enthroned as queen. I am not a widow; I will never mourn. Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her***.” (5-8) Money itself is not evil. We must work hard to make money in order to serve the Lord and support our family. But the love of money with greed and selfishness is the root of all kinds of evil as the Bible says (1 Tim 6:10) These days people want to build their own Babylon as soon as possible. They invest their money as they gamble. They envy billionaires who became rich in short periods. They laugh and cry as stocks rise and fall. Today God warns us not to be slaves of money, but rulers of money. Look at 17:9. “***This calls for a mind with wisdom***.” We need wisdom to make money, use the money, and manage the money. Making money itself is not sinning. Even Jesus said in the Parable of Minas, “*Put your money to work*”. (Lk 19:13) He meant that we must work hard to make profit for whatever we do and in wherever we invest. But we must come out of materialistic deception. We must get out of greed, pride, and selfishness. Amen!

In verses 9-20 there are threefold woe over Babylon’s Fall. All the kings and merchants of the earth who followed the beast and were drunk with the wine of her adultery mourn and cry out over the fall of Babylon. They repeated it three times in verses 10-19. Especially they mourn over their financial loss because of the fall of Babylon. (11-13) What is the response of the people of God to the destruction of Babylon? Look at verse 20. “***Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you.***” It is not recommendable to rejoice over other’s misfortune or tragedy, but this is not the case. We, people of God, must rejoice over the Fall of Babylon. We rejoice because God triumphed over Satan, and his judgment was proved true and right. Surely the day will come when we rejoice over injustice, idolatry, immorality, and adultery of this world. The day will come when every tear from our eyes will be wiped out by the Lord Jesus. The day will come when this world become the kingdom of Christ and a holy nation. Verses 21-24 explain the finality of Babylon’s destiny. Such a powerful and luxurious city like Babylon will disappear and will not be found again. (21) We cannot hear their music anymore and see their trades any longer, but only darkness and ruin will remain in the city. (22-23)

In conclusion let us accept God’s warning against Popularism and Materialism today and come out of their deception and temptation. They seduce our hearts like prostitute tempt senseless people. This calls for a mind with wisdom. May God give us spiritual discernment and strength to follow our true King of kings and Lord of lords Jesus Christ. Amen!