



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 18: 1-24

Revelation

"The City of Destruction"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our text this morning is Revelation 18. We're going to look at the entire chapter, verses 1 through 24. I won't deal with it in all detail in the exposition, but I'm going to read the entire chapter.

"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.'

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, "I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning." For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.

And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, "Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come."

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more—cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. 'The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying, "Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!" And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, "What city is like the great city?" And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, "Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!" Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."

Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, 'So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. 'And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.'" May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank You for this time together and this opportunity to gather together and worship on this Sunday morning, this opportunity to read the Scriptures as we've done and consider their meaning together, and we pray that as we do that together, You'd bless us, that the Spirit of God would teach us what a blessing

we have in Him, what a good thing You've given to us, that You've given us the Holy Spirit that resides within us, literally. We have the third person of the Trinity who has sealed our hearts. He protects us, He guides us, and He instructs. He illuminates our minds that we might understand texts that may be difficult to us. Of course, even the simplest of texts are closed to those who do not have the Spirit of God, to open their minds and hearts to understand and receive the words of it. And so, we thank You that He is with us to instruct us, and I pray for that ministry that it open hearts and guide us, and direct us in our thinking, that we'd understand the things that we've just read, and know how it applies to us. So, we look to You to bless us and build us up in the faith, strengthen us spiritually. This is an important time of the week for us where we worship as Your people. We come together in this hour and we seek to know Your word. And it's through the study of the Scriptures that we're sanctified, that we're built up in the faith, that we're equipped and prepared for the week to come. And so I pray that that will be the result of our time together.

Through this unusual text, this rather difficult text, we would be instructed, and we would be conformed to the image of Christ, and we would be motivated to live a life of service for You. I pray that for our time together in this hour. I pray for the hour to come, the Sunday school classes. We pray that You'd bless those who teach and enable them to be effective. And bless the work that they have done throughout the week in preparation. We pray for the meeting this evening, that You'd bless it, and for the weekday services that take place. We thank You for all who take the time to prepare lessons and teach Your people here at Believer's Chapel. And I pray that You'd give them a great sense of blessing from the work that they do.

And not only the teachers, but the secretaries, and the maintenance personnel, and the volunteers, those who work in a variety of ways. We pray that You'd bless them. We thank You for their service. So bless us spiritually.

I pray that You'd bless us materially as well. We have many needs, material needs. We have those who are sick, some seriously. We pray for them, and pray Your healing hand would be upon them, that they would know Your healing mercy. I think of Mary Dean Mansfield. We think of Mike Dixon, and so many others, Lord. Ask Your blessing upon them, give them healing, give them encouragement. We will all face difficulty at some time, Father, and so we know that ultimately, the afflictions of life come from Your good hand. We don't understand that. It doesn't seem that way at the time, but we know that that's the case. And so I pray that You'd enable them and all of us when our time of affliction comes, to be able to rest confidently in Christ and know that You're working everything out for our good. Well, we'd pray

You'd bless us now as we sing our next hymn and use that to prepare our hearts for our time of study together. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] On the wall of my library at home, there's a framed print of an old picture that used to hang in the home of pious Dutch families in Holland, oh, two, three generations ago. It's an allegory. It's full of a lot of scenes that develop along two paths. One is broad, the other narrow. One has a large gate on which the path is entered. The other, a small gate. The large gate has a sign over it that says, in Dutch, "Welcome." And it's held up by two figures: one is Venus, and the other is Bacchus. Along the road, along this broad way, there are theaters and places of pleasure, and scenes of confusion, fighting in the streets and war taking place.

The road winds up a mountain. At the top, at the end of this broad way, there is a great city. It's on fire. Its walls and towers are falling in. The smoke is rising to heaven. It's what Bunyan called the "City of Destruction." And it is the end of the road for this world. It's the destiny of all who follow on that broad way. It leads to destruction, Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7 and verse 13.

That's the subject of Revelation 18. The fall of Babylon, the future center of world rebellion against God. John prophesied its fall in chapter 17 when the beast and his ten confederates destroy it. Chapter 18 continues the subject of Babylon's destruction in even greater detail. Opinions differ about whether Babylon is an actual city or only the symbol of a system. I think we cannot be certain about that, but I think that it's a real city. That's the way I interpret this passage, that Babylon will someday be rebuilt..

Some reasons for that are: when Babylon was captured by Cyrus, he didn't destroy the city. In fact, Peter visited Babylon, at least if we can take his statement at the end of 1 Peter in chapter 5 and verse 13 literally. Then, it was in existence in his day. But the Bible says that that Babylon's end, its destruction would come suddenly. That's a prophecy that we find in Isaiah 47 verse 11 and we find it again in rather Jeremiah 51 verse 8. That's the kind of destruction that's described here in Revelation 18. Since the prophecy, it would seem, has not happened, it seems reasonable, at least to me and to others as well, to understand the reference to Babylon here is a reference to a future rebuilt city on the Euphrates, or at least a city that has the spiritual character of Babylon, an idolatrous, rebellious city. But, regardless of whether it's that city that will be rebuilt on the Euphrates, or it's another city, it will be the future capital of the final world power of the beast, and of satanic opposition to God which will be both religious and political.

So, it refers to a place, but not just a place, it also refers to a system, and an ancient system that goes back to the dawn of human history. Chapter 17 describes the destruction of the religious aspect of the city and system. Chapter 18 describes the destruction of the economic system. And both are really parts of the same thing. Religion and money often are tied together. Very often, maybe always tied together. In Colossians chapter 3 and verse 5, Paul says that greed is idolatry. Money is a god. People worship it. And you often see what generates enthusiasm or loyalty or zeal within religion. I think it was last week, we made a distinction between Christianity and religion. But within religion, what generates enthusiasm is money.

There's a great example of that in the Book of Acts in chapter 19 when Demetrius and the craftsman of Ephesus had a riot over Paul and his preaching of the gospel. All he'd done is preach the gospel. And yet, multitudes of people were drawn to Christ and believed, and so the synagogues and the temples began to empty and the church began to fill up, and that caused a crisis because people weren't buying the little shrines and idols that Demetrius the silversmith had been making. And so, he and his craftsmen staged a riot. There were thousands of these people gathered in the theater there in Ephesus, and for hours they demonstrated, and finally it was dismissed and came to nothing. But Paul's life was at a risk for a while there, because money and religion are tied together, and that is so often the case.

Well, we see that here. And the wealth of Babylon will draw the world under its spell and its system. And verse 3, John writes that "all the nations have drunk of Babylon's wine." It made the world's merchants rich.

There's nothing wrong with being rich. The sin is when riches replace God. And the sin of the city is that it will be a substitute for God. It will seduce men into thinking that it, that that city and what it offers is all that they need, that its resources are endless, that it gives security, and that real life, what is valuable about life is bound up in that city and its prosperity and the pleasure that it provides.

Well, with that mindset, men won't need God. They'll have their safety in the luxury of that city. At least that's how they'll think. And so, at the end of history, God will bring down the city. The chapter begins with that announcement: an angel, so bright that it illuminates the earth, comes down crying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" Now, that event will cause the host of heaven to rejoice and give shouts of hallelujah while men of the world will weep and they'll throw dust on their heads. The fall of Babylon will be complete. It will be irreversible.

That symbolized at the end of the chapter in verse 21. when the angel throws a great millstone into the sea to illustrate that this city will never rise again. It will be

like a millstone sunk in the sea. The city becomes silent, the sound of the musicians and the craftsmen and the merchants are no longer heard. All the lights go out. It's the end of civilization.

So, throughout the chapter, there are choruses of lamentation. Kings and merchants weeping over the destruction of this great and powerful city. We get a sense, I think, of the world's despair from the response of men when Rome fell in the fifth century. It was a city a lot like this future Babylon, this mother of harlots. The historian Tacitus described Rome as a "place where all the horrible and shameful things in the world congregate and find a home." Seneca, the first century philosopher, the man who tutored Nero was a moralist, and he called Rome a "filthy sewer." So, it's very much like this mother of harlots that's yet to come, but it was also a source of wealth, and comfort for many people, and Rome stood for 1,000 years. It seemed permanent. And that very fact made it seem not only impregnable, but the fact that it seemed to be an impregnable city gave people a sense of security.

Rome stood, regardless of what happened. So when the barbarians stormed the city and sacked in 410, the world was shocked. Men thought that its fall was a prelude to the destruction of the world. And even Christians were grieved over the ruin of Rome. Jerome was in Palestine. He was translated in the Bible into the Latin Vulgate when he got the news, and he was astonished. He wrote, "A terrible rumor reaches me from the west telling of Rome besieged. Life and property perishing together. My voice falters. Sobs stifle the words I dictate, for she is a captive, that city which enthralled the world. "

He sounds a lot like the men of Revelation 18, who see the smoke of Babylon and they cry, "Woe, woe, the great city Babylon, the strong city, in one hour, your judgment is come." For the world, all its hopes go up in smoke with that city. It's the end. It will be the end of everything for the unbeliever. Because for the unbeliever, the things of this world are the only things that he or she will ever have. When that's gone, everything is gone. And it will all be gone in a moment, in one hour. It's a real event that will happen someday.

And we can even visualize it I think from those vivid images that we still have of the Twin Towers falling, and the smoke rising. An amazing sight. As amazing as that was, this will happen on a greater scale. But still, it is also a kind of parable. I believe this is literally going to happen in the future, but I do think that it illustrates the complete folly of investing one's life in this world today. And what happens today, in the present? We don't know when these events that we're reading about and are studying will happen. It may be 1,000 years from now. We do not know. But we

do know that the things that are described here happen in principle all the time. This world and the life that people build for themselves in the present is coming to nothing. It's coming to destruction. It's going up in smoke.

John tells us in 1 John that the world is presently passing away in the lust thereof. It's presently going up in smoke, the very things that people invest in. If they're investing in this world, it's coming to nothing.

Well, John hears another voice, he records in verse 5 this voice. It says, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues." It's surprising to read that because it means that even at the end of the tribulation period, it's just going to be a violent, bloody period of persecution. Even at the end of that, there will be saints, there will be believers living in the city of the beast. They will be in constant danger. We would certainly assume they'll be under the pressure because of the danger and the persecution, the blood that's flowing. They'll be under constant pressure to conform to that city, to conform to the sins, to capitulate, and to come under the influence of that city rather than oppose it. But they'll not only face that kind of pressure, but the natural pressure that comes from the desire for self-preservation. But there's also the pressure that comes from the deception of it all, because the beast will be a great deceiver. We see that back in chapter 13.

In Matthew chapter 24 and verse 24, the Lord speaks of that time and the great signs and the wonders of the false Christs and the false prophets and that if it were possible, that they, meaning the people of God, would believe. He says that if it were possible, that the saints, even the elect, would be led astray.

But this is always the case for the people of God. The church today faces the temptation to conform to the world, and participate in its sins, to adapt itself to the world, and be conformed to it. Paul warns us of that in Romans chapter 12. So we too are to come out of it. It's a text that is directed to a particular people at a future time in a future city, but it applies to us wherever we are in whatever city we live in. We're to be a separate people. We're not to be conformed to this world. We're to be separate, not geographically. We're not to take ourselves out of this world, but to be separate morally and spiritually. We're to be in the world, not of the world. We're to be different from the world. We're to be a holy people. But these people are to, literally, flee Babylon. It's going to be destroyed. Its sins are described in verse 5 as piled up to heaven. Maybe an allusion there to the Tower of Babel reaching up to heaven. I think that that's very likely the illusion that's being made there. You remember, God sees that. He comes down to see it. These sins are piled up like a

tower to heaven, and He sees it. He remembers, John says. It's a way of saying He knows it all. It doesn't escape His eye, His knowledge. He sees everything.

Sometimes we wonder about that, don't we? We look at the world, we see things going on as they do, and the wicked prospering, and we wonder if God really takes notice of what is happening. Wondering if He's taking notice of what's happening in the world, and the difficulties that the church is facing, and that Christians experience, and it seems like the wicked prosper, wherever they are. They do. They prosper. This is their time. This is their place. That's the very fact that caused Asaph such trouble when he wrote Psalm 73. Looks around, sees the wicked prospering, and they're fat, they're prosperous, and their deaths are easy, and it caused him to stumble, almost, until he came to the temple of God, and then he saw everything in its proper perspective.

But that's the way we see the world as well. We wonder: does God see it as we do? God sees it all, and He will act in His time, and He'll do so in His way. And when that day comes, the angel who tells the saints to flee will call for God's justice. That's what He does in verse 6. " Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her." The cup that the angel speaks of there is referred to back in chapter 17. It was full of abominations and the blood of the saints. The cup often refers to judgment and the beast, and the harlot there had its cup of what it considered judgment on the saints and on the people of God. And so now, that judgment is truly God's judgment. It'll be given to this city that is full of crime. And it's a cup that will fit the crimes of that city.

It's a cup of revenge. Not revenge as we tend to think of revenge; God's vengeance is pure justice. It is always right. It is perfect. We know that God doesn't take revenge as men today do. I've referred to this frequently, but in Ezekiel, we have in chapter 18 and chapter 33 this statement that gives you the mind of God, the attitude of God toward judgment. He says He takes no delight in the death of the wicked. Judgment's not something He takes joy in.

So, revenge, or vengeance I should say, really doesn't find a place in the mind of God the way it does in fallen man. It's not as we think of it as vengeance. And of course, our attitude is to be the same as God's. It's that men live, that wicked men live and come to a saving knowledge of Christ. That's what we desire. But, after a long time of patience, God is long-suffering. After a long period of patience, judgment must, in the end, finally come. And here it does.

But after all of that, after all of its sins that have piled up to heaven, and after God's patience with this city, it's unprepared for what comes. In verse 7, its pride and its self-confidence are expressed. It says, "I sit as a queen I am not a widow, and will never see mourning." That's a great deal of confidence on the part of this city that should have no confidence at all, that wealth and power can fill people with that kind of attitude, a sense of invincibility, pride, that puffs them up, and leaves them unprepared for the ruin that will certainly come.

Well, we see that in the ungodly. We see that there in this city. That's the attitude of it. But sadly, that can be true even of the saints, of the godly. We can be taken in by the things of the world and the success that God gives us. It could fill us with pride that will lead to our own discipline. Uzziah is a great example of that. Uzziah was one of the great kings of Judah. One of Israel's greatest kings. They were few and far between, but he was a good one. God blessed him in many ways. He had a long reign. But, 2 Chronicles 26 and verse 16 states that when he became strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.

That happens. Pride's a dangerous thing. It's an intoxicating thing, and this city will be strong, and wealthy, and that will cause it to be very proud. So much so that it thinks itself invulnerable, that it is in itself as self-sufficient. That's what people think. I am self-sufficient. Look at my assets. But it's not. And no one is. Only God is self-sufficient. So, John writes in verse 8 that it will be burned up with fire for the Lord who judges her is strong. She thinks she's strong, and it's that city, later on it's described, as being strong. But where men are strong, God is stronger. God is infinitely stronger. He's omnipotent. And so, He will destroy this strong city because He is strong. He is the Almighty, and none can resist the Lord and His judgment.

We know from chapter 17 and verse 16 that the beast and his kings, his allies, destroy the religion of Babylon. They destroy that aspect of it. But John makes it clear that ultimately that is the Lord's doing. In chapter 17 and verse 17, he states that God put it in their heart to execute His purpose. That gives you a sense of how strong He is, that these mighty kings exercise their power against this city, but they're only doing God's will. He is strong. He's in control. He is in control of all of the events of history, and we made this point last week. But not only that, He's in control of the very thoughts and intents of the evil people of this world. He controls their thoughts, even that of the devil himself.

And He's able to turn His enemies against themselves to that, in a moment, this great city is gone. Nothing can stand against God Almighty. Nothing can frustrate His will. John wants the believers of that future day to know that and be encouraged

by it. It will be a treacherous time for them, and as they read this book and they see these things, they will be encouraged by the fact that the one they serve is far stronger than this beast who threatens their life.

So, it'll be an encouragement for them, but that should be an encouragement for us as well. God's plan is being worked out in the present right now. His plan for your life, His plan for His church, His plan for the people of God, His plan of the ages is presently being worked out, and nothing can frustrate it. So we're to trust in Him. Our security is in Him, not in the world, or the things of the world. The world's system seems so strong and so enduring. It seems permanent, but it will come down.

When that happens, there'll be a great cry of sorrow that will go up from the world. And in verses 9 through 19, John gives the response of the kings, the merchants, and the sailors. It's a response of the world, to this city that's destroyed. Kings of the earth and in verse 9, are probably not the ten kings of chapter 17 who assisted the beast in destroying the religion of Babylon. These are the other heads of state that traded with Babylon, the kings of the earth.

They're mourning because they've lost their source of wealth. They've invested in this city, and now it's gone. So they stand at a distance and weep, and they watch the smoke of the city rising. "Woe," they say, "woe, the great city Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come." In a brief moment, their security has vanished. The merchants do the same. They weep and mourn over her because verse 11 says, "No one buys their cargoes any more," and they have a large volume of cargo. It's listed in verses 12 and 13, precious stones, expensive fabrics of cloth, wood, metal, marble, spices, animals, and people. Slaves. Much of this is luxury items for a lavish way of life, which is not uncommon, was not uncommon in the ancient world. In Ezekiel 27, there's a similar description that's given of the merchandise of Tyre. It was a great port city on the Mediterranean coast, and it became rich from trade with merchants all over the ancient world.

John may have that in mind because the list that John gives here is very similar to the list of things, of merchandise, that Ezekiel lists connected with that city. And John would certainly, he doesn't need Ezekiel 27 to give him an idea of wealth that will come because he lived in a day when Rome was known for its conspicuous consumption. He was notorious for that, and various commentators have illustrated this by giving examples of how wealthy Romans lived. One example is the emperor Vitellius. Vitellius reigned very briefly during the year 69, which was a year of chaos for Rome because Nero committed suicide, and there were three emperors in that year

before Vespasian finally came from Jerusalem where he had laid siege to the city, came back, took the throne, and brought order to the city and the empire.

But, during that year, Vitellius, I think he was the first of the three, comes to the throne and he reigned for just a few months. But during those few months, it's said that he spent over 20 million dollars mostly on food. Well, there are examples like that, of the Romans and their, what we call conspicuous consumption. But this is perennial. This is found in every nation throughout history where there's excess. There are those who are rich, and they live lavishly. That's what happens when people live the way the Romans lived, the way these people in the future will live, live as it's often been described as "time-servers." They don't live for eternity; they live for the present, they live for right now, and they grab for everything they can get right now. And when that happens, the result is that people live for themselves, and they live callous lives in the world, which is like that, is a hard and a selfish place.

Now, that's indicated, I think, in the last commodity on this list: slaves and human lives. It's estimated that the Roman empire had 60 million slaves. And this future revived Roman empire will also have slaves, literally, slaves and human lives or bodies and souls of men. That's probably a reference to the same thing, not two different groups, but one group. Put that way in order to say that slaves have souls, which distinguishes them from the animals that are listed in this list. They are real people, but they are listed after the cattle, and sheep, and horses, suggesting that to the merchants, and the consumers, slaves are just bodies. They're little more than human livestock.

This is the world. It is self-indulgent and it is callous. That's the nature of the world in which we live. It's a cruel place. Verse 15, the merchants who weep are described as those who became rich from her, from the city, from its trade. They had a vested interest in the city. It was the source of their wealth, the source of their luxury. But now, "no one buys their cargoes any more," we read in verse 11. Now, that's the reason for their weeping. They're not weeping for the city. They're not people full of compassion for all of the lives that have been lost and for all of the culture of that city that's been swept away. They didn't care about the people who lived there. They only cared about the city, really. They cared about themselves, and their loss of the source of all their wealth.

Now they have nothing. It's the same with the seafarers, the captains, and the sailors in verses 17 through 19. They cry over the city. Verse 19, "And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one

hour she has been laid waste!" And in that one hour, they've lost everything that they had, and everything they hoped for. Their hope in this world is gone in that one hour because that's what they'd invested in, that great city. That's what happens to everyone who follows the wrong path, who follows the broad path that leads up to this great city that will be destroyed. It's the road to destruction and despair, following that path.

Those who follow the other path, the narrow way, and multitudes do and will. They won't despair. They rejoice when they hear of Babylon's fall. That's what we're told in verse 20. "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her." At the beginning of chapter 19, the hosts of heaven shout, "Hallelujah." Again, this is an expression not of angry vengeance, as we might think, but an expression of joy at the triumph at God's righteousness. Righteousness triumphs here. It will be the vindication of God's justice and His people. The guilt of Babylon is given clearly at the end of the chapter in verse 24 which says that the blood of the saints is found in the city. Babylon was guilty of murder and deception. The tribulation will be a time, a period when God allows Satan to have his way, to build his society, to do his worst. It may be that that is one of the main purposes of the tribulation to say to Satan, in effect, you, an unbelieving man, are going to have your opportunity now. Let's see what you can build, and let's see what you can produce. Something beautiful? Something edifying? Something holy and righteous and good? And God gives him that opportunity. And Satan, who will be incarnate, as it were, in the beast. He'll be inspiring that man. He will get worship, and he will destroy those who don't give it, and he will have his capital in Babylon, and what it will be will be a day of terror, a reign of terror.

But, it will be temporary. God will give the devil and man their opportunity. They will produce not good things, not glory, but moral chaos. And then, God will destroy that satanic society. The destruction of Babylon will be the victory of truth over the lie, of righteousness over evil. It will be an occasion for great rejoicing. So, this is the right response. And the event is inevitable. The capital of this world will be destroyed, the city of Babylon, the great will fall, and something glorious will then come.

That old print that I mentioned at the beginning of the lesson, in my library, on my wall there has another city pictured across from the one in flames, and that is the city of God. It stands on another mountain at the end of the narrow road, and it stands not in flames, but bright and shining, and that's our future.

John speaks of it in chapters 21 and 22, and that is the reason to rejoice and hope. God has a glorious plan for His people, and for this world. He is going to destroy evil, and all of the works of the devil, and he will bring righteousness and joy to the earth in a new city, a bright city, a beautiful city. That's coming. It is certain. And it's what we are to be living for now.

This passage is a prophecy about the future. Maybe the distant future, maybe a near future. We don't know. But what it assures us of is God's involvement in the affairs of man. In verse 5, John says that God "remembered Babylon's iniquities." He never forgets. It's not like suddenly it comes to His mind after some forgetful moments. That obviously is not the case with God. He's omniscient. He knows everything. But it's a way of saying He doesn't forget. He knows what's happening. He knows everything, and He deals with everything at the right time. He remembers what Babylon produces, and He remembers what you produce as well. He remembers our service, and He will bless us for it. He'll judge sin, and He'll reward righteousness. Nothing we do for the Lord, nothing, is vain.

I don't care how simple the task may be. It may be someone working in the nursery and he or she feels like this is a very minor service. This is not very important compared to teaching that lesson, or standing in that pulpit. It's very important. Any service rendered to the Lord is important to Him. The infinite eternal God rewards it, however insignificant it may seem to you. So, nothing that we do for the Lord is in vain, so we are to be active in His service. It counts.

There are things, though, if we are honest with ourselves, hold us back from doing that. There are subtle distractions that come from the world. And I think that's another application of this prophecy to us. The sin of Babylon, as one writer put it, is crass materialism. And that's not just a thing of the future, or a thing of the past. We can talk about ancient Rome and we can talk about future Babylon, but look at our own society. We live in a materialistic society, a rich society. It's with us today. And in a sense, that city of Babylon is with us today. It's always been with us in this age. There is that system that's still here, and that's going to be destroyed. So it's not just a city. It's also a system, and it's present with us now, and we fight it at all times. It's the problem that we face of conforming to the world.

And so, the exhortation to God's people in verse 4 to come out of her, is very much for us today as well. We're not, as I mentioned earlier, not to withdraw from the world. We are to be in it, involved in it, trying to improve our lives, and improve the lives of others. We don't do that by withdrawing from the world and going off to some monastery or hiding or whatever the case may be. We do that by living in this

world with its people and being a light in the midst of this world. We can't do that. We can't be a light in this world by adopting the principles and the goals of this world.

They're attractive, and intoxicate. They are. The nations will drink of its wine, we're told. It has alluring powers called sorcery, in verse 23. It's deceptive, and it's intriguing, and it's that to us, and that's present with us now. So we must realize that. We must guard ourselves against it. In fact, we must come out, as John, or the angel says. That's a word for us. But I think it's also a word for anyone who's in unbelief. If that's true of you, if you're here this morning, you don't know Christ as your Savior, then you are of this world, a part of Babylon's system and not of God.

And the message here is: your world is doomed to destruction, and it will come unexpectedly. That's how Babylon fell the first time. You read about it in Daniel chapter 5. The king, Belshazzar, was feasting in his palace, confident, even though the enemy was outside the walls of Babylon. He was drinking wine from the vessels of God's temple when he saw a hand writing on the wall. And when Daniel was brought in to interpret the words on the wall, he told the king the meaning of the message: you had been weighted on the scales and found deficient.

On that night, Babylon fell and Belshazzar died.

Don't think God won't put you on the scales. He will. In fact, He has. And someday, your kingdom, your world, your life, will be taken from you. It's appointed for all of us to die someday. But there's hope, there's a way of escape. Bunyan tells us about that in an illustrative way. He begins Pilgrim's Progress with a man dressed in rags and in great distress. He's learned that his city is doomed, and his city is the city of destruction, and it will go up in flames, and he'll go up with it. And he knows that, because he has this burden on his back, this great burden of sin. It's weighing him down, and he's deeply distressed and troubled, and he's asking: "What must I do to be saved?" When he met a man named Evangelist who pointed him to a little gate across a field where a cross stood.

The man, Christian, began to run. He fled the city, crying, "Life, life, eternal life." When he finally arrived at the cross, his burden of sin fell off. His rags were removed and he was clothed in the new clothes of righteousness. That's the way of escape.

Come out of her. Come out of Babylon. Come to the cross. Believe in Jesus Christ, and your sins will be removed, replaced with the righteousness of Christ, and you will have eternal life. May God help you to do that, to flee the wrath to come. Flee to Christ. He's our refuge. That's how one of the old hymn writers put it. I'd like to close with us standing and singing that hymn, hymn 279 in the red book, "How

Firm a Foundation." Let's stand and sing, and then remain standing for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for that assurance that You'll never forsake us, regardless of the trials we go through. We do thank You that we who have fled to Jesus for refuge have found a permanent and eternal refuge in Him, from the storms of life. But more importantly, from the great storm of judgment that's yet to come for the unbelieving. Thank You for Your grace. Thank You for all that we have in Christ. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.