

The lament for Babylon

As with other Revelation chapters a complex matrix of OT allusions and echoes are interwoven in the form of a lament. A central theme that emerges is that of materialism, the loss of riches and trade that causes the merchants to weep. They watch at a distance with utter dismay and shock because the basis of their economy has literally gone up in smoke. As readers we want to identify the city associated with Babylon. Is a literal Babylon intended or is Babylon a metaphor for another city or cities (plural)? The lament itself is a pastiche of allusions to Nineveh, Babylon, Tyre and Jerusalem (more on this anon) and therefore in a sense it transcends any particular city and becomes supra-historical and global. However, the lament obviously refers to the harlot city (Mystery Babylon) of the previous chapter which points to a specific city (singular). Babylon is simultaneously a universal *and* localized phenomenon but this dichotomy need not cause problems as “she” becomes a caricature of global mammon worship. After all, a whore prostitutes herself for monetary gain.

In 70 CE the city of Jerusalem fell and the temple was destroyed but can that be metaphorically equated with the fall of Babylon? In 69 CE Rome fell when it was devastated by a civil war and internecine fighting. In 116 CE Babylon literally fell to Trajan and his conquest disrupted Parthian trade to the dismay of Jewish merchants who trafficked as far as China for luxury silks. All these cities had in their time been persecutors of God’s people but the fall of these cities is only a partial realization of the lament, because together they depict a composite judgement of the “great city” which finds its counterpart in the “heavenly Jerusalem”. Therefore the great city encapsulates **all the cities** of the earth, for the fall of Babylon precipitates the fall of the **cities of the nations** (16.19). The “great city” is therefore representative of all cities and at the same time specific to the city of Jerusalem the only city **in covenant relationship** because God had his dwelling place there.

The meaning of the city

The Meaning of the City is a Christian classic written by Jacques Ellul and the following transcript is a compilation of some of the most important passages in his book.¹

The city represents man's ultimate rejection of God. It demonstrates man's creativity and independence. Rather than rely on God, Cain built a city in order to provide protection and security for himself (Gen.4: 17) and cities quickly became the focus of primitive industrialisation (Gen.4: 22). Gods dwelling place was never in the city, for it was David who wished to build God a house in the city. "Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?" (2 Samuel 7:6-7)

This is a kind of refusal to enter the city, to make a home there. And all of Jerusalem's destiny is included, then, in this opposition emphasised by God: "You David, want to build me a house, and put me in a city. But in fact, it is I, the Lord, who will build you up a house." And the Lord then grants David's immediate posterity the permission to build the Temple, but it is nothing more than accepting David's wish. Jerusalem's destiny is henceforth unique and ambiguous, that of being one of man's cities chosen by God. Jerusalem is a holy city. But she is still a city. She carries man's mark, even in her election, even in her adoption by God. She never escapes from all the characteristics of the city, as is indicated by the accusations constantly aimed at her, aimed at the sins she never ceases falling into anew. Her sins are those of other cities: she acts like them and is condemned like them.

Moreover, Jerusalem fulfilled by Christ's death what had ever been announced; namely that she would play a unique role in the history of salvation. And how earnestly did she seek out that role. This obviously emphasises Jerusalem's ambiguity. She is, in spite of her sanctification and adoption, the city seeking to combat God, to destroy his action. But all she does by this is to continue accomplishing God's will, and not only his general will, but his particular will for her.

God's revelations instruct us of the unparalleled truth that by Jesus Christ's death, Jerusalem literally becomes Babylon. During the period of time between Christ's ascension and his return there is a confusion of the formerly holy city and the city of demons, Babylon. Jerusalem here is called the great city and this term is, as we know, characteristic of Babylon. Moreover, the text as a whole confirms our identification. Jerusalem here plays a part which should be that only of Babylon. She is the defiled place where all nations of the earth gather to revel drunkenly and make merry over the death of God's prophets. She is celebrating therefore, the victory of the Beast, and becomes the city of the nations.

Moreover in John's portrayal there is much food for reflection, if only from the historical standpoint, for those who consider Revelation only as **a political writing turned against Rome**. (Ellul was a reformed sociologist, historian and lawyer and had every reason to be critical of Rome, yet did not fall into the trap of so many of his contemporaries) Jerusalem – ever controlled by the Goyim and unable to attain spiritual liberation in the Christian faith. Neither Jewish nor Christian, but always torn apart, going from one persecution to another, from siege to destruction, with no durable period of domination, no settled condition, no possible restoration under Arab domination. Even today's Jewish domination is but one more sign of the underlying contradiction. A wandering city, defiled, condemned. A deserted city in the midst of its swarming peoples and confused races. A deserted city because she did not recognise her Lord: "Your house is desolate, for you will not see me again." He alone could have populated her; he alone could adequately take the place of the Temple and was waiting to do so. A city of which not one spiritual stone was left upon another, full of horrible tourist churches and monuments raised by every sect and every religion, the symbol of division and spiritual falsehood, the symbol of satanic spirituality, a subject of mocking for the Holy Spirit.

Jacques Ellul concludes that the city is essentially a metaphor for man's work, it is God's pardon that will transform it; This pardon teaches us, much better than any historical considerations, the vanity and relativity of man's work, since everything depends on forgiveness. God's pardon will make the city of man into a New Jerusalem; that is, its precise goal is to keep her disappearing into nothingness. So not only man's spiritual destiny is connected with God's forgiveness, but also the destiny of his work and the very materiality of history, which rests exclusively on this act of God – rests on the infinitely thin line, that razor blade which separates decisively between the work destined to vanish and the work that will be transformed into a creation of God for all eternity.

Mammon

An examination of the connection between religion and mammon is beneficial to understanding the background of Rev 18. There has always been a relationship between false religion and making money and it should therefore not come as a surprise that the first temples **were banks**. This may seem like a digression but it is extremely relevant to grasping the intent of Rev 18, so here follows a short excursus on banking before delving into an analysis of the chapter. Wikipedia states, “The history [of banking] begins with the first prototype banks of merchants of the ancient world, which made grain loans to farmers and traders who carried goods between cities. This began around 2000 BC in Assyria and **Babylonia**. Later, in ancient Greece and during the Roman Empire, lenders based in temples made loans and added two important innovations: they accepted deposits and changed money”.²

Bamber notes that, “In early civilizations a temple is considered the safest refuge; it is a solid building, constantly attended, with a sacred character which itself may deter thieves. In Egypt and Mesopotamia gold is deposited in temples for safe-keeping. But it lies idle there, while others in the trading community or in government have desperate need of it. **In Babylon** at the time of Hammurabi, in the 18th century BC, there are records of loans made by the priests of the temple. The concept of banking has arrived”.³

Bromberg⁴ explains as follows, “The economic importance of the sanctuaries of antiquity has long been recognized. **The Babylonian** shrines were no exceptions; not only were the chief Mesopotamian temples religious centres, law courts, schools, and archive depositories, but they were also banks and mercantile establishments. Indeed, as fiscal institutions of the **Babylonian economy**, the importance of the sanctuaries cannot be overemphasized: “In financial or monetary transactions the position of the Babylonian temples was not unlike that of national banks; they carried on their business with all the added weight of official authority.”⁵

In a further article Bromberg says, “Banking is one of the oldest institutions known man. Its history is lost somewhere in remote antiquity. But this much is definitely known: banking was born in the temples consecrated to the gods and goddesses of mythology in the Mesopotamian area thousands of years before the rise of Christianity”.⁶

The picture emerges that **banking** and **Babylon** are virtually synonymous as are **banking** and **temples** and this leads us to attempt to understand the Jerusalem temple from the perspective of finance and economic power. The Jerusalem temple was the nation's **Central Bank**; "If one was a pilgrim coming to Jerusalem, one would probably first go to the bank to change money as the coins of the realm, engraved with the head of Caesar were unacceptable for use in the Temple. The central "bank" in Jerusalem and some of the Law courts could be found on the Temple mount platform in a building called the royal portico or stoa".⁷

Ritmeyer notes, "Ancient historian Josephus calls Annas the high priest "a great hoarder up of money." The sons of Annas had bazaars (known in the Talmud as the *hanuyot bney hanan*) set up in the Court of the Gentiles for the purpose of money changing and the purchase of sacrificial animals. It was the combination of their greed, the fact that they brought in foreign coins, and that they carried out these activities in a sacred area that aroused the zeal of Jesus. This background can help us better understand why Jesus drove out these money changers and why the priests, especially those of the high house of Annas, were so opposed to his teachings".⁸ The following excerpt is from Stan Duncan:⁹

"According to John, Jesus found two things: those who were "selling" and those who were "changing." The *sellers* sold things like cattle, sheep, and doves for the offerings, and the *changers* changed money from international currency to local currency so that it could be used in the Temple. Both were corrupt, and both were central to the economic idolatry that sustained the nation as a whole.

The sellers (*tous polountas*) were those who sold animals for the offerings made at the temple (sorry, but that was the tradition; they would probably think that I-pads and high heels were immoral too). People were required to make sacrifices for a variety of festivals and rites. If you were wealthy you gave a large animal, like a cow or ox. If you were poor you gave doves or pigeons. However, to ensure "unblemished" animals, you were required to purchase your animals at the gate of the temple where the prices were higher than the country-side. And, as with any regressive tax or price system, the costs tended to be felt more by the poor than the wealthy. To purchase one pair of doves at the temple was the equivalent of two days' wages. But the doves had to be inspected for quality control just inside the temple, and if your recently purchased unblemished animals were found to be in fact blemished, then you had to buy two more doves for the equivalent of 40 days' wages!

Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells a story of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel (son of Gamaliel, Paul's personal spiritual trainer), who went on a campaign against price gouging. But unfortunately stories of someone trying to protect the poor from the practice are rare. More common was the reference in the Jewish Mishna that the costs of birds rose so fast in Jesus' time that women began lying or aborting their babies to avoid the required and punitive fees.

The changers (*kermatistēi*) were needed because neither the animal offerings nor the temple tax could be paid with the Roman currency in use for most of the national commerce, because it had pictures (read “graven images”) of the Roman Emperor on them who claimed to be a god. So, the money had to be changed into usable local currency.

The money changers sat outside of the temple proper, in the “court of the gentiles.” They bought and sold money as a part of the functioning of the general economy. Jerusalem, in fact, required a money changing industry because it was an international city that dealt in a number of currencies and people had to have a system by which they could buy and sell them. They used the money changers both for basic commerce and also for currency speculation. Insider traders could make fortunes when a new Roman battalion came to town carrying a glut of new coins which depressed the value of the local currencies. Ched Myers calls the money changers “street level representatives of banking interests of considerable power.” Indeed, because there was no one else to perform the function, the money changers were the banks in first century Palestine.

However, the Money Changers were also corrupt. They would not only exaggerate the fees they had to charge for the transactions, they would also inflate the exchange rate. The result was that for a poor person, the Money Changer’s share of the temple tax was about one day’s wages and his share of the transaction from international to local currency was about a half-day’s wages. And that was before they purchased their unblemished animals for sacrifice and then had to buy them again (at an enhanced price) because the inspector found a blemish or otherwise inadequate for the offering.

All tolled, a one day stay in Jerusalem during one of the three major festivals could cost between \$3,000 and \$4,000 dollars in contemporary value, and Jews were required to attend at least one of them each year. Josephus estimated that up to 2.25 million people visited Jerusalem during Passover, which would generate the equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars. The money-changers opened their stalls in the country towns a month before the feast and then moved them to the temple by the time of the first arrivals. While all of this may appear immoral, none of it was illegal. They were business men operating within the law. But it took Jesus and a few radical rabbis to point out that the law itself was unjust.

Two last notes on the tables used by the money changers. First, it’s interesting to note that the word, “table” trapezes, had just two usages, one was for reclined eating and the other was for conducting financial transactions. It functioned like a loan office where people invested and borrowed money, and was sometimes translated simply as “Bank” (cf. Luke 19:23). The second thing is that in Isaiah 65:11 God condemns those tables. He says that people who forget God and God’s holy mountain are like those who set up “tables” to “Gad,” the name for the God of wealth.

So, what was Jesus’ response to the situation he found in Jerusalem? He made a whip, drove out the money changers, poured out their coins, turned over their tables and demanded that they “Stop making the realm of God into a realm of commerce.” It’s interesting to note that he doesn’t say “stop abusing a good system,” but simply “stop the system.”

To this short excurses we must add further citations from two scholars and encourage readers to peruse these short papers in full as they give a sense of the importance of the Jerusalem temple as a financial and economic institution and that in regard **to pilgrimages**. A good modern day analogy is the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca; “The annual occasion has become a lucrative business in recent years, proving a great financial asset to the economy of the oil-rich kingdom...Last year, the 10-day event generated some \$10bn (£6.2bn), according to the Chamber of Commerce in Mecca”¹⁰.

Magen Broshi¹¹ has the following observations:

Undoubtedly, many pilgrims brought not only cash with them to cover expenses, but also merchandise which they could sell or barter. This must have made Jerusalem an important commercial centre [p.34].

Recently Y. Meshorer has shown that after 19 B.C.E., when Tyre ceased to mint its own coins, all the Tyrian drachmas were produced in Jerusalem, most probably by the Temple authorities and possibly by Herod himself. The minting of the coins in Jerusalem must have accounted for a significant amount of income for the local economy [p.35].

The half-shekel due was raised from every Jewish male beyond the age of thirteen, and not from the age of twenty as appears in the Pentateuch. The Mishna makes a clear distinction between a minor and one who has to raise the due: if the father had begun to pay the Shekel on behalf of (his son that was a minor) he may never again cease to pay it (Mishna Shekalim 1. 3). According to the Mishna the money was used for Temple expenses and the city’s expenses in general. The dues could be spent on the (upkeep of the aqueduct, the city wall and its towers, and all the needs of the city. Hence it is apparent that those large sums of money made a great impact on economic life in the development of trade and industry in Jerusalem and on the employment situation there and in neighbouring settlements [p.35].

In addition to the half-shekel dues, the temple and its functionaries—the priests and Levites—received donations and gifts, some discretionary and some obligatory, which must have amounted to very high sums as well [p.36]

Thus the Temple, both as a focus of pilgrimage and a recipient of dues and donations, played a most important part in the country’s economy, and if we add to its revenues the regular sources of income already enumerated here we can see how Herod was able to finance his grand designs [p.36]

Martin Goodman¹² also adds pertinent observations:

It is clear that, despite social tensions engendered by the inequitable distribution of wealth, this was an exceptionally prosperous society [p. 69].

The wealth of Jerusalem derived in one form or another from its Sanctity. It is a truism that without its religious role Jerusalem would never have become a major city; specifically, although by the end of the Second Temple period the city may have attracted wealthy visitors to study or to settle in an exciting international atmosphere, the main cause of prosperity was the presence of the Temple [p. 69]

As Philo remarked with pride, these pilgrims came from all over the Jewish world: they were thousands of men from thousands of cities” (*Special Laws* 1,69). Such mass international pilgrimage is not attested for any other cult in the Roman empire. for the simple reason that only Jews insisted (at least in theory) both that only one Temple was a valid place for sacrifices and that all adult male devotees of the cult were duty bound to make regular obeisance there [p.70]..

It seems clear that mass international pilgrimage was a feature of Judaism which distinguished it from other religions, thus explaining the nervousness of the Roman authorities at the potentiality for political unrest among such huge crowds [p.71].

Both Jewish and non-Jewish writers referred quite frequently to the transfer of money from the Diaspora to the Temple. This was the theme of Cicero (On Behalf of Flaccus 28), Josephus described it as an ancient custom (*Ant.*14, 185—267; 16, 160—78), and according to *Bar.* 1: 10—14 Babylonian Jews sent money (rather than themselves) to Jerusalem for offerings and prayers to be made on their behalf in the holy city on the feast days. None of these sources, however, refers to Diaspora pilgrimage. It seems likely that the pilgrimage feasts before Herod’s time involved essentially only local Jews from the land of Israel; the vastly expanded Temple court which Herod was to build would eventually be filled to overflowing, but no source suggests a problem with lack of space in the Temple before then [p.71].

But it seems to me more likely that the prime motivator was Herod himself. Herod was a remarkable businessman, speculator, and entrepreneur, and had initiated numerous complex financial schemes [p.71].

The Babylonian community remained under Parthian rule at this time, but trading contacts between the empires multiplied, as is evident from the sudden prosperity of the caravan city of Palmyra, which facilitated communications of other kinds. In any event, the brief episode of Parthian control over Judaea in 40—37 B.C.E. initiated far closer relations between Palestinian and Babylonian Jews than had been known for many centuries [p.72]

The economic advantages brought by such pilgrims were multifarious. Pilgrims helped to protect delivery of the offerings sent to the Temple, even by those who did not themselves go up to worship (cf. Ant 17. 312—13, on the caravans which came from Babylon); according to T Sheqalim 2:3, which may or may not be based on anything more than speculation, the offerings from remote lands were a rich source of Temple income. Jews from the Mediterranean Diaspora seem to have picked up from their gentile compatriots the practice of euergetism, apparently uncommon among Judaeans outside the Herodian family. Thus, the gates of the Temple were plated with gold by Alexander the Alabarch, who came from Alexandria (War 5, 201—206), and there are other examples of such conspicuous expenditure by individuals in search of prestige. Visitors were bound to spend money on the purchase of souvenirs, and although it is impossible to tell precisely when the non-biblical requirement to spend all second tithe money in Jerusalem became current, it is probable that it was in operation in Herod's time [p.72-73].

Among more blatant moves was the appointment of high priests from the principal Diaspora communities, such as the Babylonian Hananel, and Jesus b. Phiabi and Boethus, both from Egypt. This preference for non Judaeans as incumbents of the highest office has often been discussed as part of the suppression of the local Jewish elite, but it is reasonable also to emphasize its effect in raising the profile of Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem [p.73].

Summary: Goodman argues that although before Herod's time there may have been pilgrimages it is only with the arrival of Herod that it becomes a full on commercial activity. This explains why he expanded the Temple, built a harbour in Caesarea and erected forts along the caravan routes. It also explains why he appointed Babylonian priests etc – to curry favour with the Jewish Diaspora. He was very cunning – cunning like a fox (as Jesus would say of his descendants) but he was also a money grubbing psychopath (like many modern bankers nowadays). Therefore, Jerusalem and the Temple **became a money making machine and the priests were the bankers.**

They had become **merchants** (Canaanites) and this enraged Jesus. The poor were oppressed while corrupt priests drowned in luxury. To Sum up the status of the temple:

- It was a Central Bank
- It became a royal mint for other countries
- It practiced usury and inflated exchange rates
- It was a commercial hub at the centre of the Jewish Diaspora
- It was extremely wealthy
- It was politically important to Rome and Parthia

If this is not the picture of a beautiful woman who has become a whore then I don't know what is. In other words, Jerusalem had become **like pagan Babylon** and their "banker temples". As an aside, where did Mohamed get the clever idea to start a pilgrimage to Mecca? The Jews of Mecca are excoriated as hypocrites in the Koran and many were killed but it is a known fact that much of the Koran and Hadith rests on rabbinical writings. One clear way to unite fractured Arab tribes and create political stability and enormous wealth is (you guessed it) religion and pilgrimage. Of course, it is difficult to substantiate historically, but Mohammed is known to have been an illiterate merchant who obviously came into regular contact with Jewish traders. Who wrote down the "vision" that he received in a cave? It is unlikely that he relied on pagan Arab scribes (if there were any) to do this and literate and multilingual Jews had for centuries run law schools and study centres in these regions. It is notable that Muslims are also obsessed with Law and subsequently established law schools. Whether or not Jewish influence can be established beyond doubt it cannot be dismissed as a historical coincidence (sic). Our argument is that Jews contributed largely to Islam and also to the rise of apostate Christianity (through sabotage) and Babylon became the "Mother of harlots" with all her daughters dwelling in (and arguing about) Jerusalem –the holiest place for Judaism, Islam and Christianity. False religion has always been a happy bedfellow of mammon and political power, it was ever so.

Before we progress, we need to remind ourselves that Rev 18 is **not all related to 70 CE** (in the past) it establishes **a pattern** that bursts onto the scene to reveal its "full glory" right at the end (this will be discussed in a separate chapter but signs are already emerging for those willing to see). Having gained an impression of the commercial and economic importance of the temple we can now commence the exegesis.

The structure of Revelation 18

Revelation 18 continues the same subject matter as the previous chapter – the fall of Babylon. The reason for placing the chapter division between the two is doubtless the completely different approach that each has to the same event. While Rev 17 is a purely narrative account, Rev 18 waxes eloquent in offering us an almost poetic appraisal, from both a divine and worldly perspective, of the loss of this great city. The description is much more vivid, image after image is knit together to form the most brilliant patchwork of Old Testament texts. The text has a definite inverted structure, marked by the change in speaker:

A. Mighty angel (v.2f)

B. Heavenly voice (vv.4-8)

C. Kings (v.9f)

D. Merchants (vv.11-17)

C. Mariners (vv.17-19)

B. Heavenly voice (v.20)

A. Mighty angel (vv.21-24)

Closer examination reveals that each parallel element has certain features in common. Thus the first and second **A's** possess a threefold structure consisting of the following:

- (a) A declaration of the destruction of Babylon (v.2, 21)
- (b) A description concerning its future state (v.2, 22f)
- (c) Three reasons for its fall – “for...and...and...” (v.9, 23f)

The **B** elements, uttered by some unidentified voice from heaven, both address the saints as “you” (v.4, 20). The middle **CDC** section, containing mourning for Babylon by three different categories of people, each begins the lament with the words, “Alas, alas, that great city!” (v.10, 16 and 19) Between these first and last lines, words are found which relate to the category of people speaking. Thus the kings focus upon the might of the city (v. 10), the merchants upon its fine garments and jewels (v. 16), and the mariners upon those “who had ships at sea” (v. 19). Such parallels and refrains are typical of Hebrew poetic style.

Some commentators are of the opinion that the theme of Rev 18 spills over into the following chapter, for the judgment of the harlot is again mentioned in 19.2f. Yet at the beginning of Rev 19 we notice the start of a new structure based upon the repetition of the word “Hallelujah” (19.1, 3, 4, and 6). This and the perfect balance of the content of Rev18 suggest that the chapter division has, in fact, been appropriately located. The picture of the harlot has been drawn from three distinct sources, i.e., those prophetic texts relating to Jerusalem, Tyre and, instead of Nineveh, yet hardly different in its significance, Babylon. In some cases the quotation is almost verbatim.

Allusions to ancient cities

References to ancient Babylon

| | |
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| Babylon is fallen, is fallen | Isa.21.9 |
| Is become the habitation of devils and the hold of every foul spirit | Jer.50.39, Isa.13.21 |
| All nations drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication | Jer.51.57 |
| Come out of her my people... | Jer.51.6, 45, 50.8 |
| Her sins have reached unto heaven | Jer.51.9 |
| Reward her even as she rewarded you | Jer.50.29, Ps.137.8 |
| I sit a queen and am no widow... | Isa.47.8 |
| Therefore shall her plagues come in one day | Isa.47.9 |
| Rejoice over her, thou heaven | Jer.51.48 |
| A stone...cast into the sea | Jer.51.63 |
| Thus shall that great city, Babylon, be thrown down | Jer.51.64 |
| All that were slain upon the earth | Jer.51.49 |

References to Tyre

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Kings of the earth committed fornication with her | Isa.23.17 |
| The kings of the earth shall wail and lament her | Ezk.26.16, 17 |
| Gold, precious stones, spices...etc | Ezk.27.22, 24 |
| Bodies and souls of men | Ezk.27.13 |
| Merchants weeping and lamenting | Ezk.27.31 |
| Every shipmaster and all company of ships.. | Ezk.27.29, 30 |
| And they cried out, What city is like unto this great city | Ezk.27.32 |
| They cast dust on their heads, weeping and wailing | Ezk.27.30 |
| The voice of harpers heard no more at all in thee | Ezk.26.13 |
| Thy merchants were the great men of the earth | Isa.23.8 |

References to Jerusalem

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| Double unto her double | Jer.16.18, Isa.40. 2 |
| The sound of the millstone... light of a candle shall shine no more in thee | Jer.25.10 |
| The voice of the bridegroom... | Jer.25.10 |
| In her was found the blood of prophets and of saints... | Jer.2.34 |

Scholars such as Provan understand Rev 18 as simply reflecting the familiar OT lament song patterns echoing God's past judgment on pagan peoples rather than a description of economic details; "Does this list signify economic critique of Rome as such, or is it there simply because it is the sort of thing that one finds in biblical laments and dirges?"¹³ The demise of "Babylon" is based on the lament song of Tyre (Ezek.26-28); the lament of the merchants (Rev 18.11-16), and of the shipmasters (Rev 18.17-19) which is purely out of self interest, motivated by the loss of their trading partner.

The choice of lament song is significant as Tyre supplied much of the materials and labour for the building of the first temple (1 Kings5-9), moreover, Jerusalem under Solomon received abundance of spices etc (from Sheba)...gold from Ophir and precious stones (from the navy of Hiram).....Solomon constructed his own fleet to import gold, silver and ivory, apes and peacocks; "So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches" (1 Kings 10.23).¹⁴ The kingdom apostatised under Solomon with his penchant for foreign alliances and syncretism, so it is hardly coincidence that it is recorded that the weight of Solomon's annual revenue of gold was 666 talents (1 Kings 10.14) the same number that identifies the beast (Rev.13.18). The image of "Babylon" is therefore a picture of Jerusalem at the zenith of her power and prestige.

Provan has noted that the OT lament songs employed in Rev 18 are deliberately altered in order to emphasise their rhetorical intent. For example, the addition of chariots to Ezekiel's cargo list (compare 1 Kings 4.26, were Solomon ignored the command in Deut 17.16 not to accumulate horses and chariots)¹⁵ and the addition of ἐκολλήθησαν¹⁶ to the Babylonian oracle of Rev 18.5. The Tyre lament is complemented (interrupted) by an oracle against Judah and Jerusalem in verses 23-24¹⁷ and the double recompense (in the Old Testament, only ever used against Israel) warning of verse 2 in the middle of Babylon allusions, and a number of echoes of passages from Lamentations reflecting on Jerusalem's destruction (Provan suggests at least six such allusions). Therefore the original OT lament songs have been creatively adapted to point to Jerusalem. It is significant that Jesus states that both Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba would condemn that generation for not repenting.

Jerusalem is the harlot city of the OT because she was the place God chose to dwell.¹⁸ Chilton notes that the only two cities outside of Israel that are accused of harlotry are Tyre (Isa 23:16-17) and Nineveh (Nah 3.4). Yet, both had been in covenant with God (1 Kings 5.1-12; 9.13; Amos 1.9; Jonah 3.5-10).¹⁹ However, Chilton is incorrect as understanding this as equivalent to the covenant that God made directly with Israel at Sinai. In the first instance it was an agreement between Solomon and Tyre regarding supplying building materials for the temple. In Amos it references the “brotherly covenant” – i.e., a peace treaty between nations, and lastly the Jonah narrative is about the repentance of Nineveh –an agreement to abide by divine directives (soon forgotten). None of these are comparable to the covenant that God made with a nation chosen to be a kingdom of priests.

Significantly oracles against both these cities are altered to lament/condemn “Babylon” (Jerusalem) in Rev 18. A sexually loose daughter of a priest was subject to being ‘burned with fire’ (Lev 21.9; cf. Gen 38.24; Judg 15.6) because her uncleanness defiled her father. The city of Jerusalem suffered this fate twice in her history in 586 BCE (Jer 52.13) and in 70 CE (cf. Matt 22.17; 2 Pet 3:0).²⁰ The “harlot city” of Revelation will suffer the same fate (17.16; 18:8).

The Glory returns (Rev 18.1-2)

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

When it says of the angel that **the earth was lighted with his glory** it is referring back to Ezekiel 43.1-7. In that passages Ezekiel refers to the return of glory to the temple via the east gate. The fall of Babylon (the false temple) is therefore the prelude to the establishment of the new temple – “descending out of heaven, having the glory of God” (Rev 21.10, 11). The same verses also condemn Jerusalem for whoredoms and for leaving the corpses of their king’s unburied (cf. the witnesses left unburied –the kings and priests of the future age). So the introduction to this chapter specifically chooses an inter-text from Ezekiel that deals with the temple signifying that the matter in hand concerns the renewal of the city of Jerusalem and of the temple (the return of the glory). However, the “new” cannot be revealed until the “old” is removed. This will not be the garish, pseudo-glory and fame of a city that has prostituted itself over the centuries and gone out of its way to fornicate with every passer-by. Yahweh declares that they are worse than a whore – at least a whore asks for money – but often they gave it away for free.²¹

When Jesus Christ came to exorcise the unclean spirit from the nation (cf. Legion), he prophesied that the condition of the patient would deteriorate because of an obstinate refusal to replace the uncleanness with something wholesome. After wandering in the wilderness, the unclean spirit returned to his house making the final condition worse than it previously was (Matt.12.43-45). In fact it was seven times worse – complete madness! Jesus had declared their house unclean and prophesied that it would be desolated. Now, the woman after her initial wilderness wandering is encountered still in the wilderness, and with seven worse spirits in her bosom she has truly become an unclean harlot-city. In the repetition of the word unclean there is no doubt a contrast intended with the holy city, into which nothing unclean may enter (Rev 21.27).

Interestingly, in the Taylor Prism Sennacherib boasts that his siege resulted in Hezekiah being shut up in Jerusalem “like a caged bird”. This is another indication that we are dealing with Jerusalem. However, the inhabitants of Jerusalem in Rev 18.2 are not “doves” (Ps.55.6) like the suffering servant Hezekiah but rather “unclean and hateful birds” – carrion eaters (cf. Matt 24.8 eagles/vultures). It has become a cage for vultures picking away at the carcass of the nation in their avarice and littering the streets of the city with the corpses of the saints. To all intents and purposes it has become Babylon and is destined for the same fate as that pagan city.

Come out of her my people (Rev 18.3-4)

“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. 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”.

Rev 18a has an intra-textual link with Rev 14.8; “And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication”. In the **trumpets and in Rev 14** we established a dual context –a literal fall of Babylon followed by the fall of Jerusalem. Although these two events were separated by time they are cause and effect as the political threat to Babylon (Parthia) spurred the Kitos wars and the Bar Kochba rebellion. Notably, the rabbis described the fall of Jerusalem in 135 CE in similar terms to those found in Rev 14. However, the fall of Jerusalem in 70CE and again in 135CE is but a prelude, establishing a pattern that **is repeated at the end**. Trade is emphasised with mention of the merchants of the earth. The Hebrew for merchant is Canaanite, but mercantilism will have no place in the worship of the age to come; “In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts” (Zech 14.21) and this is because the whole city is transformed into a holy city **with the LORD and his saints forming the temple**.

They waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies στρῆνους (strEnous), giving the idea of force or strength (cf. strenuous) translated by the CLV as “her power to indulge” and by the YLT as “from the power of her revel were made rich” the normative form στρηνιάσαντες found in Rev 18.9 is again translated indulge/revel or lived luxuriously (NKJ), deliciously (KJV) or wantonly (ASV). The idea seems to be one of unrestrained (or strenuous) passion. The appeal to “come out of her” is an appeal to disassociate from “her temple” (which is her idol/image); “And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:15-17). The apostle based his exhortation on an allusion to Isa 52.11; “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean *thing*; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD”.

That chapter tells of the New Zion (freshly delivered from Assyria) where Hezekiah had been “caged like a bird” and where now the “good tidings” (gospel) of salvation is preached to the city of Jerusalem and the priest return with the sacred vessels that had been paid to the Assyrians (2 Kings 18.16) as a down payment (done while Hezekiah was mortally sick) to secure a peace treaty which Sennacherib that he subsequently reneged on. Isaiah in turn bases his allusion on the Exodus (Exod.11.1-2) where the people were encouraged to depart from Egypt bearing gold and silver payments from their gentile neighbours that was afterwards used to build the furniture of the sanctuary. Gentile wealth built all the sanctuaries and was not of itself unclean, in fact the wealth of the Gentiles will flow to God according to the prophets (and this “wealth” includes Gentile converts).

However, the harlot had used Gentile wealth for her own aggrandizement and the enrichment of her trading partners. Future nations will bring their glory and honour to the New Jerusalem and the gates of the city are left permanently open (no longer exclusively Jewish) but despite the open access no obscenity will find its way into this city (Rev 21-24-27). As always, scripture paints a cascading pattern of allusions from the Old to the New Testament as the people of God are encouraged to “come out of her”. Rev 18.4 ends with a reference to the vial-plagues; “that ye receive not of her plagues”, demonstrating that Rev 18 runs parallel with the last vial-plagues described in Rev 16. This is then an “end-time” picture, but it is based on the patterns revealed in the past (70CE/135CE). The question remains how do the saints “come out of her”? In the past it meant martyrdom as Christians who refuted the Sanhedrin or refused Bar Kochba were murdered.

I sit a queen, and am no widow (Rev 18.5-7)

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

Like the tower of Babel the sin of the great city is so blatant that it reaches to heaven. It threatens the sovereignty of God himself, and is of such a magnitude that it can no longer be ignored. The longsuffering of God has been stretched beyond the limit and has finally expired, he will not be mocked. The man of sin has been revealed in all his glory, but though he exalted himself to heaven, he will be cast into the lowest part of hell. The time has arrived for just retribution. The expression double unto her can only be understood with respect to the Jerusalem background, since the expression has its origins within the law and covenant. In Deut.21.17 it states that the firstborn son should inherit **a double portion** from the father. Israel was God’s firstborn (Exod.4.22), and therefore if found wanting would receive a double punishment for his sins (as Isa.40.2). At this particular point, since Tyre and Babylon is in no sense firstborn, any application to these (or to Rome) is wholly excluded. The soliloquy in Rev 18.7 is based on Isa.47. 8- 9:

Isaiah 47:8-9 Therefore hear now this, *thou that art* given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I *am*, and none else beside me; I shall not sit *as* a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: But these two *things* shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, *and* for the great abundance of thine enchantments.

Isaiah 47 relates to Assyria although many commentators contextualize it as an Oracle against Babylon. In the ancient world Nineveh and Babylon became virtually synonymous terms (scholarly confusion between Assyria and Babylon has been previously discussed).²² This explains the correspondence between Isaiah 47 and the oracle against Nineveh found in Nahum:

| Isaiah 47 | Nahum |
|---|--------------|
| v.3 Thy nakedness shall be uncovered | 3.5 |
| v.9 For the multitude of they sorceries | 3.4 |
| v.14 As stubble | 1.10 |
| v.15 Thy merchants | 3.16 |
| v.5 Get thee into darkness | 1.8 |
| v.3 I will take vengeance | 1.2 |
| v.11 Evil shall come upon thee | 1.11 |
| v.13 The multitude of thy counsels | 1.11 |
| v.6 Thy yoke | 1.13 |
| v.14 The fire shall burn them | 1.15 |

In Matt 12.41, it is the repentance of Nineveh that Jesus holds up as an example to the Jews of his day. In Isaiah it is the pagan city of Nineveh (Babylon) that is being condemned for sitting as a queen. In an act of self-divinization she boasts twice in chapter 47 --- “I *am*, and none else beside me” (vv.8, 10) which is a parody of, “I, *even I am* the LORD; and beside me *there is no saviour*” (Isa 43.11). She appropriates divinity to herself and therefore robs God. In his Isaiah commentary H.A. Whittaker notes; “In recent years the easy assumption that the Babylon of Revelation is the Roman church has been seen to rest on precarious foundations. On the other hand copious Bible evidence has been adduced (“Rev”: ch.34) pointing to equation with apostate Jerusalem. At first sight any parallel (which is certainly reasonable to look for) with Assyria seems right out of the question. Yet the parallel is there. In the first century the great enemy of the gospel was not Rome but Judaism. The N.T. evidence for this is massive. Thus, just as Assyria sought to destroy Hezekiah and his faithful remnant but was itself destroyed, so also the bitter antagonism of Jewry to the cause of Christ led to the horrors of A.D. 70 and the end of the temple. Jerusalem the Queen city became a slave,²³ and will yet again before Messiah’s coming. Self-confidence and false religion will alike be found futile. The supreme blasphemy of Jewry today is the claim that Israel is her own redeemer: “I am, and there is none beside me.” This pride will be rebuked, “I will take vengeance”.²⁴

The hour of judgement (Rev 18.8-10)

“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. 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, 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”.

These verses describe the effects of the outpouring of the vial plagues (see Jer.18.21) and the burning of the city (Rev.17.16), a punishment solely reserved for a priest's daughter who committed harlotry. Pestilence and famine were the common results of a prolonged siege, mourning is linked with the death of the inhabitants, and burning with fire is the final act of destruction by the conquerors. A fate Jerusalem has suffered twice before.

Heaven has lamented the idolatrous materialism that has led to Babylon's fall. Now the voice from heaven goes on to tell how earth will join the lament, because the bottom has dropped out of the world market. The kings of the earth are said to mourn the mighty city, the merchants the wealthy city; but this is a distinction without a difference, for the kings have shared her fornication and luxury, i.e. their sovereignty has been based on the mercantile prosperity she provided. Three times we are told that the desolation is to be accomplished in one hour, and we are reminded of the one hour of the ten kings' reign with the monster, during which they will wage war on the Lamb (17.12-14). The one hour of persecution is balanced by the one hour of retribution, because the blood of the martyrs is not only the seed of the New Jerusalem but the ruin of the great whore. The phrase **standing afar off**, is also repeated three times in this text unit (v.10, 15, 17) and characterises the stance of each of the three groups who witness the destruction of the archetypal Babylon; kings, merchants and the maritime professionals. This spatial separation not only expresses the horror they feel at its sudden and unexpected destruction; it also refers to their attempt to distance themselves from a judgment they deserve to share. We note how no one comes to her rescue – **where are the merchant ships of Tarshish?**

“Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out. There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up.” (Isa.51: 17-18)

The merchants weep (Rev 18.11-13)

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

Most commentators understand the list of merchandise, particularly the mention of slavery (v.13) as indicative of the Roman markets with their unparalleled access to world trade. Later, this vast accumulation of worldly wealth and temporal power became a characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church. The author would not dispute that there is a universal element of truth in this perception, the Romish Church is a false religion and has done what false religions always do, self- aggrandisement. This assessment is however, an oversimplification and ignores important scriptural considerations:

1. The man of sin is only fully manifested at the end.
2. It only exists a short while.
3. It has Middle Eastern origins.
4. It is typified by Solomon’s kingdom.

Solomon was specifically condemned for three sins:

- (a) Idolatry – image of the beast.
- (b) Foreign marriages- fornication with the kings of the earth.
- (c) Commerce- 666 talents of gold income per annum.

Commerce flourished in his kingdom and brought wealth; and voyages were successfully made to Ophir and traffic was conducted with India. For the protection and fostering of trade, he built store cities, among others Palmyra, in the desert midway between Damascus and the Euphrates. Many of the goods listed in Revelation bear correspondence with the materials stockpiled by David, for the building and ritual of the temple (2 Chron.2.4, 7, 8). This was innocent enough, and Solomon spent seven years building the temple, after which he devoted **thirteen years**²⁵ to the building of his own palace (1 Kgs.7.1-12). This was completed with a magnificent throne approached by six steps and flanked by two gold lions.

The splendour of his court, the magnificence of his table, and his pomp when on excursions corresponds to his wealth and political power (1 Kgs.10.4, 5, 21). “And he reigned over all the kings from the river even unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt. And the king made silver in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycamore trees that are in the low plains in abundance.” (2 Chron.9. 26-27)

Although Solomon’s reign commenced with the best of motives, absolute power corrupts absolutely. His reign became a parody of the kingdom, and the gift of divine wisdom was transformed into man’s wisdom. Without a doubt, the picture in Revelation is based on Solomon’s corrupt kingdom. It serves as a salutary lesson in how easily divine principles can be corrupted. This is not, therefore a picture of the Roman Church, although she too will undoubtedly play her role, for all that is false will be cleansed by fire.

How do we understand the slaves (bodies) and souls of men in this light? Solomon raised a levy (tribute) of bondservants on the nations he conquered (1 Kgs.9.21). No doubt their labour contributed towards the building of his palace (and the temple?) and was also used for domestic service. We are told that he did not raise a levy (tribute) from among the children of Israel. Presumably, the 30,000 men required for cutting timber and mining stone in Lebanon were Gentile captives (1 Kgs.5.13-18). This is not completely clear, but we know that the common people resented Solomon’s harshness; “Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.” (1 Kgs.12.4) Serving the Lord should not be considered “grievous”, but it is not God that they were serving – they were serving the ambition of a King, who literally committed fornication with the women of the surrounding nations (made marriage alliances that led Israel astray). Parallels with 70CE (and 135 CE) are clear enough – the temple had become a mammon machine ---literally sucking up the riches of Babylon and beyond– no doubt much of this ended up in the private coffers and residences of the priestly class ---silks from China and slaves from the empire, gifts to influence political favours and priestly blessings. Think here of the palatial residence of the high priest with its own courtyard/auditorium and bath.²⁶ They had prostituted themselves to mammon and they were to be burnt with fire.

The desire of your soul (Rev 18.14-16)

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

Here the phrase translated **the ripe fruit you desired** can be rendered more literally **the ripe fruit of the desire of your soul**. The children of Israel were commanded the following: “When the LORD thy God shall enlarge thy border, as he hath promised thee, and thou shalt say, I will eat flesh, because thy soul longeth to eat flesh; thou mayest eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after.” (Deut.12. 20) It was not sinful for them to eat (clean) flesh “only, be sure thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh” (v. 23). The harlot has, however, developed **a taste for blood**, for she has no qualms in drinking the blood of the saints and the prophets. She also exercises her other lust, materialism: “For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth.” (Ps.10: 3) But even more than the desire for temporal power is the desire to be like God: “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” (Gen.3.6)

The RV has the rendering woe instead of alas. This is repeated in v.10, 16 and 19. These three woes have already been encountered in the last three trumpets (8.13) also a judgment against Israel, and are now intensified in the judgment of the great city which happens in the vial section. We now have 2 x 3 Woes – render double unto her (v.6). At this point the words of the merchants echo the description given by the angel in 17: 4 – except for this one particular detail:

Rev 17. 4 - angel says:

clothed in purple and scarlet,
and decked with gold and
precious stones and pearls

Rev 18.16 – merchants say:

clothed in **fine linen** and
scarlet and decked with
precious stones and pearls.

While the minds of the merchants associate the harlot of being worthy to be **clothed in fine linen**, not so with the angel, who omits these words. The reason for this can be readily explained by reference to 19.8 where it states that **the bride was attired in fine linen – for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints**. How unfitting it would have been to include this in 17.4. And how remarkably consistent is the scriptural use of imagery!

Such great riches come to nought (Rev 18.17-19)

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

The shipmasters had every reason to lament for they were out of business. Consider the following:

2 Chronicles 9:20-22- And all the drinking vessels of king Solomon were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold: none were of silver; it was not any thing accounted of in the days of Solomon. For the king's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram: every three years once came the ships of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. And king Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.

1 Kings 9:26-28 - And king Solomon made a navy of ships in Eziongeber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red sea, in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon.

1 Kings 10:22-23- For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.

Caird comments; “With exemplary restraint John never shows us the fall of Babylon. Just as earlier he declined to describe God and allowed us to see him through the hymns of the worshipping host of heaven, so now he allows us to see the fall of Babylon only through the laments of the heavenly and earthly spectators. But this is no mere literary or dramatic device. There is a sense in which the spectators speak for the author as well for themselves. He has had to be told not to stare in wonder at the great whore (17: 6-7), for he too was able to appreciate the glamour and brilliance, however deeply aware he might be of their dangers.

He was no ascetic, contemptuous of the beauties and amenities of the civilised world. The cry, “Was there ever a city like the great city?” is wrung from his own heart as he contemplates the obliteration of the grandeur of the city of Jerusalem. The proof of this is to be seen in the thoroughly material splendours of the holy city, into which “the treasures and wealth of the nations” are to be brought (21: 6). There was nothing sinful about the commodities that made up the luxury trade, until the great whore used them to seduce mankind into utter materialism. Every object of worth that seafaring man had ever carried to grace the life of the city, whether in its natural state or enhanced by the craftsmanship of man, belonged to the order of God’s creation which must be redeemed by the overthrow of Babylon, and would find its proper place in the New Jerusalem. In the meantime it is with infinite pathos that John surveys the loss of so much wealth”.

Rejoicing in heaven (Rev 18.20)

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

This is very close to the LXX version of Deuteronomy 32.43 – **the song of witness** against the nation of Israel, a prophetic song, as the previous chapter (Deut.31) makes clear:

For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swear unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear. (Deut.31.20-21)

The rejoicing of the saints stands in sharp contrast to the mourning of the kings, merchants and seafarers. It is the heavenly voice that summons the saints to rejoice because God has avenged you on her. This verse is not easy to translate. Literally it reads: “God has judged your judgment from her.” This very difficult expression has given rise to many different interpretations. Some consider that it means, “God has judged her and vindicated you”; but it is not obvious how this can be gotten from the Greek. The RSV appears to take *krima* (judgment) as a cognate accusative and “your judgment” as the equivalent of “judgment in favour of you”: “God has given judgment for you against her.” The NEB takes *krima* as the equivalent of the Hebrew *rib*, which can either mean a lawsuit or the cause which a man submits to the arbitration of a judge: “in the judgment against her he has vindicated your cause.”

These renderings suffer the same two disabilities; they overload the final phrase, *ex autes* (from her), and they give to *krima* a meaning that it does not have anywhere else in Revelation, in the New Testament, or indeed even in the Septuagint. In the New Testament *krima* means one of three things (a) the right to act as a judge (Rev.20. 4); (b) the judicial act of passing sentence (John 9. 39; Rom. 20. 4; Acts 24. 25; 1 Pet.4.17); and most frequently (c) the sentence passed by a judge. It is not hard to see that only the third sense will fit the present context. “Your judgment”, then, must mean either “the sentence passed by you” or “the sentence passed on you”; and the first of them is inappropriate here because God is the judge.

The verse would then literally read; Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath sentenced or judged (instead of avenged) you on her.

Caird sums up as follows, “Thus your judgment must be the sentence passed on the martyrs in law court of “Babylon.” John has previously been invited to watch the passing of sentence on the great whore (17:1); now he hears that this consists in the reversal of the sentence she passed on you. The phrase *ex autes* is best explained by two Old Testament laws – the law of bloodshed and the law of malicious witness. The law of bloodshed declares: “I will require from a man the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds a man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen. 9:5-6.) The law of malicious witness adds: “If a malicious witness comes forward to accuse a man of crime, then both parties to dispute shall appear before the Lord...and if the witness is found guilty of perjury and has accused his fellow falsely, you shall do to him as he meant to do to his fellow” (Deut.19: 16-19; cp.Rev.11: 13). John has produced a portmanteau version of these two laws. God has imposed on her the sentence she passed on you. Babylon has brought a malicious accusation against the martyrs, which has resulted in their death. But the case has been carried “before the Lord”, to the court of final appeal, where judgments are true and just. There Babylon has been found guilty of perjury, and God has therefore required from her the life of her victims, exacting from her the penalty she extracted from them.

With this forensic setting so clearly before us, we can now the better appreciate why John has throughout called the victims of persecution witnesses (martyrs). The Greek word martyrs had not yet come to be a technical term, meaning a martyr. It still meant “one who gives evidence in a court of law.” It had, of course, been used metaphorically of the missionaries of the church, who were witnesses to the truth and power of the gospel (Acts 1: 8). But John uses it more literally than this, with an eye to its legal origins. He knew from his own experiences that no Christian could be put to death for his faith without first being given the opportunity of testifying at his own trial before a Roman judge (cp. Lk.21: 13). But he wishes to assure prospective martyrs that the evidence given in earthly law courts leading to a death sentence, is also evidence given in the heavenly court, leading to the condemnation of Babylon. This explains the lack of gloating in the song of triumph, since the martyrs can be vindicated only by the reversal of Babylon’s sentence, so that Babylon’s malicious witness recoils on her own head”

Babylon to sink like a millstone (Rev 18.21)

“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”.

The mighty angel is the third to be given this appellation (Rev 5.2; 10. 1). Since the first was the angel of the great scroll, in which was written the redemptive purpose of God, and the second was the angel of the little scroll, which contained the witnesses part in that purpose, the third appearance of the mighty angel (Gabriel?) must mark the consummation of the contents of both scrolls. His symbolic act with the millstone and the words he speaks are reminiscent of both Jeremiah and Jesus. Jeremiah wrote his prophecies against Babylon in a scroll and was told to tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates, saying, “So shall Babylon sink, never to rise again” (Jer.51: 60-64). Jesus declared that the faithful man could have this mountain (Mt. Zion, with its temple and Judaism) removed and cast into the sea. Jesus also warned that it would be better for a man to be thrown into the sea with a millstone round his neck than to cause one of his disciples to stumble (Mtt.18: 6). With the hurling of the millstone it is as though a voice called, “Stop!” over all the activities of the great city.

No more at all (Rev 18.22-11)

“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; 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”.

This whole section is a paraphrase of Jer.25.10 and refers to the ancient city of Jerusalem: “Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle.” (Jer.25.10) The prophecy of Joshua ben Ananias (62 CE), which anticipated the destruction of Jerusalem, contains one line that reads “A voice against the bridegroom and the bride.” (Jos.J.W.6.301) Jeremiah had warned his contemporaries that the normal activities of the city of Jerusalem would cease. Jesus had also warned their descendants that the day of the Son of man would overtake them, like lightening out of a clear sky, amid all the pursuits of the city – trade, building and marriage (Lk.17: 24-30). The old Jerusalem will pass away as though she had never existed, she will be replaced with, and transformed into the New Jerusalem. “Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD.” (Jer.33.10-11) The voice of gladness will be heard again, the voice of bride, the Lamb’s wife and voice of the bridegroom himself (Rev 21.9). “Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the West Country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.” (Zech.8.3-8)

Blood guilt (Rev 18.24)

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

There is yet another echo of the teaching of Jesus in the last words of the angel. Jesus had warned his contemporaries that, unless they disassociated themselves from the past by an act of national repentance, their generation would “be held accountable for the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world.” (Lk.11.50). National Jewish history is a record of cumulative guilt. They were instructed to, “fill up the measure of their fathers”, and they did – by murdering the witnesses in Jerusalem (Rev 11.8). In fact this last verse is almost the exact equivalent of Lk.13.33, “It cannot be that a prophet shall perish out of Jerusalem.”

Conclusion

The demise of “Babylon” is based on the lament song of Tyre (Ezek.26-28); the lament of the merchants (18.11-16) and of the shipmasters (18.17-19) is purely out of self interest, motivated by the loss of their trading partner. One argument contra the use of Babylon as a metaphor for Jerusalem is that Jewish literature applies Babylon as a cipher for Rome. Although Jerusalem is called Egypt and Sodom, Beale notes that there is no example in Jewish literature of the use of the name Babylon for Jerusalem.²⁷ It is true that both Babylon and Rome burnt the city of Jerusalem and therefore Babylon is more likely to be cast in the role of the enemy of Jerusalem, rather than as a metaphor for Jerusalem. However, Beale’s argument by omission is weak, for it is possible to understand the “Old Jerusalem” (Babylon) as the enemy of the “New Jerusalem”(the saints) and this is strengthened by the admonition to “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (18.4), which echoes the words of Christ spoken to Jerusalem and Judea to “flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart...” (Lk.21.21//Matt.24.16//Mk.13.14).

Moreover, the vision of the prophet Zechariah explicitly informs us that after the destruction of the temple (in 586 BCE) that “wickedness/lawlessness” (symbolised by a woman) would establish a base in Babylon.²⁸ It was in Babylon that various Jewish academies were established, where a renaissance of Jewish interpretation occurred and where the Babylonian Talmud was compiled (after the destruction of the “house” in 70 CE). So, it is not so strange to find Jerusalem referred to as “Babylon” because that is where she came from (the exile) and that is where she established a base to justify her rejection of the Messiah and institute her own righteousness. In this sense Jerusalem = Babylon ; “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” (Gen.11.4 contrast Gen.12.2).

Jerusalem was chosen as the divine dwelling place (“city of the great king” – Ps.48.2 cf. Rev 1.5), established “in the midst of the nations” (Ezek.5.5) and destined to “reign over many nations” (Deut.15.2 cf. 28.1). Kraus argues that ancient Jews saw the world, even in times of oppression, as under the rulership of the Davidic dynasty, because God had chosen Israel and established Jerusalem as His world’s capital.²⁹ It is against this background that Rev.17.2 (“reigns over the kings of the earth”) should be understood. Ford proposes that Rev 17.18 “is probably a similar hyperbole; cf. 4QLam which describes Jerusalem as ‘princess of all nations’.”³⁰

The choice of lament song is significant as Tyre supplied much of the materials and labour for the building of the first temple (1 Kings 5-9), moreover, Jerusalem under Solomon received abundance of spices etc (from Sheba)...gold from Ophir and precious stones (from the navy of Hiram).....Solomon constructed his own fleet to import gold, silver and ivory, apes and peacocks; “So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches” (1 Kings 10.23).³¹ The kingdom apostatised under Solomon with his penchant for foreign alliances and syncretism, so it is hardly coincidence that it is recorded that the weight of Solomon’s annual revenue of gold was 666 talents (1 Kings 10.14) the same number that identifies the beast (Rev 13.18). The image of “Babylon” is therefore a picture of Jerusalem at the zenith of her power and prestige.

The cities of Babylon and Nineveh were utterly destroyed and never rebuilt. Surely, the city of Jerusalem will not suffer the same fate? The short answer is yes, Jerusalem will suffer the same fate and “shall not be found anymore”. The “Old Jerusalem” will no longer exist. The “Old Jerusalem” was full of obscenities, fornication and murder – it resisted the prophets of old, the messiah and the witnesses. There is no place in the kingdom of God for that Jerusalem and for all that she represents; instead she is replaced by; “The holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”. (Rev 21.2) Of course, this does not mean that there will no longer be a physical city or a national presence; however, the “great city” will not resemble her old self. That city will be found “**nevermore at all**” and will no longer exist as a place of rebellion against God. The new city will be built on different principles and sound foundations; she will become the dwelling place of Christ and his saints.

End notes Chapter 18 pages 390-423.

¹ Summation from pages 94-97, 137, 140-144, 180

² History of banking. (2017, May 6). In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 13:19, May 11, 2017, from [Access here](#)

³ Gascoigne, Bamber. "History of Banking" History World. From 2001, ongoing. [Accessed May 2017] [Access here](#) see also; David Astle, The Babylonian Woe: A Study of the Origin of Certain Banking Practices [Access here](#)

⁴ Benjamin Bromberg, The Origin of Banking: Religious Finance in Babylonia in The Journal of Economic History, Vol. 2, No. 1 (May, 1942), pp. 77-88, 77

⁵ Morris Jastrow, Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria, (New York, 1911), 277.

⁶ Benjamin Bromberg, Temple Banking in Rome in The Economic History Review, (Volume 10, Issue 2 December 1957):128–131,128

⁷ Shelley Cohny, Jewish Virtual Library, The Second Temple employing as source: Hasson, Nir. "Archaeologists restore Second Temple flooring from Waqf's trash," Haaretz, (September 6, 2016) [Accessed May 2017] [Access here](#)

⁸ Leen Ritmeyer, "Temple Mount and the Money Changers", n.p. [cited 7 May 2017]. Online: [Access here](#)

⁹ Stan Duncan, Jesus and the International Currency Exchange Traders in the Temple, (The Blog, 2015) [Access here](#) [Accessed May 2017]

¹⁰ Ahmed Maher, The economics of Hajj: Money and pilgrimage, (October 2012) [Accessed May 2017] [Access here](#)

¹¹ Magen Broshi, The Role of the Temple in the Herodian Economy: (The Israel Museum Jerusalem) in Journal of Jewish Studies, *JJS* 31-37,1987 [Accessed May 2017] [Access here](#)

¹² Martin Goodman "The Pilgrimage Economy of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period," in Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism Christianity, and Islam (ed. Lee. I. Levine; New York: Continuum, 1999), 69—76 [Access here](#) [Accessed May 2017]

¹³ Iain Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 From an Old Testament Perspective," Journal for the Study of the New Testament 64 (1996), 81–100:86

¹⁴ Compare Solomon's use of forced labour (1 Kings 9:21) with "bodies and souls of men" (Rev.18:13) – returning to Judaism is likened by Peter to returning to slavery (2 Pet.2:19-22); the Sinai covenant was one of bondage (Gal.4:24).

¹⁵ Provan, "Fouls Spirits, Fornication and Finance," 88

¹⁶ See Provan, *Ibid.*, 94. The term ἐκολλήθησαν (pile up to/reach) is the indicative aorist of the verb κολλάω (cling/stick) a term that has covenant implications in the LXX (forms of *proskollao* [προσκολλάω]; cleave to, stick to, cf. Deut.11:22; Ps.72:28; Jos.23:8) and therefore invokes negative associations in Rev.18:5 i.e., the apostates did not cleave/stick to God and therefore their sins have stuck together/piled up etc until they reach heaven (like the tower of Babel).

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ See, P. Wyns, "The Harlotry of Israel" in *CEJBI*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Jul 2012) [Access here](#)

¹⁹ David Chilton, "The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation", (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 424-26.

²⁰ Josephus, *War* 7.1 indicates that Titus gave orders for "the whole city and the temple to be razed to the ground"; and in Josephus *Ant* 20.250, it is stated plainly that "Titus captured and set fire to the temple".

²¹ The prophets were not pruders or squeamish when depicting this but translators often protect the readers sensibilities e.g., Ezek 23.20 in the KJV: For she doted upon their paramours, whose flesh *is as* the flesh of asses, and whose issue *is like* the issue of horses in modern English would read something like, "hung like a donkey and comes like horses" which would not go down very well when read from the platform. Nevertheless, there is no false modesty in Scripture and the prophets did not pull their punches.

²² See the resources page under the heading; [Interchangeability of Babylon/Assyria](#)

²³ Depicted on Vespasian's coins

²⁴ H.A. Whittaker, Isaiah, (Biblia, 2000 [reprint]),402

²⁵ The number 13 in scripture signifies rebellion [Access here](#) [Retrieved Feb 2018] and is a metaphor for the rebellion of Solomon who spent more time in erecting his own "house" than the "house of God". See, P. Wyns, Solomon as the "Son of God", *CEJBI*, Vol 3, No. 4, 2009 [Access here](#)

²⁶ He [Leen] has tentatively identified the "Palatial Mansion" (or "Herodian Mansion") as the place of residence for Annas the high priest. If this is correct, then this would be a "look inside" the first phase of Jesus's Jewish trial. And it may explain things like where the courtyard was located and how Jesus could look at Peter though they were in two different locations (Jesus inside and Peter outside, warming himself by a charcoal fire). Leen Ritmeyer, The Palace of Annas the high priest (2012)[Accessed May 2017] [Access here](#)

²⁷ "In Revelation Rome, along with other kingdoms, is identified with Babylon, yet Jews never re-ferred to Rome as Babylon until afer the destruction of the temple in 70, comparing that destruction with the similar destruction carried out by the Babylonians many centuries before." (page 4 of the [excerpt](#)) or the book; G. K. Beale, *The Book of*

Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 25.

²⁸ See, P. Wyns, “Wickedness in Shinar” in *CEJBI*, Vol.4 No.1 Jan 2010, pp.,20-26 [Access here](#) [cited May 2017]

²⁹ Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 127–28.

³⁰ J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 285

³¹ Compare Solomon’s use of forced labour (1 Kings 9:21) with “bodies and souls of men” (Rev.18:13) – returning to Judaism is likened by Peter to returning to slavery (2 Pet.2:19-22); the Sinai covenant was one of bondage (Gal.4:24).