

The Fall of Jerusalem

Revelation 18:1-3

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2018-04-22

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Text

18:1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. 2 And he cried out with a strong voice saying: “It fell, it fell, Babylon the great! and has become a dwelling place of demons, even a prison of every unclean spirit, also a prison of every unclean and detestable bird. 3 Because all the nations have drunk of the rage of the wine of her fornication and the kings of the earth have fornicated with her, and the merchants of the earth became rich through the strength of her luxury.” 4 And I heard another Voice from heaven saying: “Come out of her, my people, so as not to participate in her sins and so as not to receive of her plagues. 5 For her sins have reached to heaven and God has remembered about her her iniquities. 6 Render to her just as she rendered to you; yes, pay her back double, according to her deeds; in the cup that she mixed, mix double for her. 7 To the extent that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, by so much give her torment and sorrow; because in her heart she says, ‘I sit a queen, and am not a widow; and I will certainly not see sorrow.’ 8 Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and sorrow and famine—and she will be burned up with fire; because the Lord God who has judged her is strong.

Introduction

In chapter 18 we finally come to the heart of why Jerusalem was judged so severely. To some people it may seem like overkill; but it was not. The leadership had become a criminal organization - no exaggeration. Corruption, intimidation, and murder was rampant. Through the international banking of the Sadducees many countries had been drawn into the corruption, and many lives had been ruined in the process. Overt idolatry had crept into the temple. The occult of the two main secret societies was more and more on the surface. Jerusalem was a mess; a mess that could only be solved by conversion or destruction. God chose destruction, though later in the chapter we will see that there was a remnant even after AD 70 that was being saved.

I. The time frame is “After these things” (i.e., after Jerusalem is conquered - 17:16)

And the first phrase anchors the timing of this vision. It says, “After these things.” Way too many commentaries either completely ignore the numerous time sequence indicators in this book (sometimes making no comment) or they say that they only relate to one vision coming after another vision.¹ But

¹ For example, Beale says, “As throughout the book, μετὰ ταῦτα (“after these things”) refers to the

if that was the case, it would have said simply, “After this” or “After seeing this,” but he says instead, “After these things.” He is referring to the specific events listed in the previous vision. And we saw that the last of those events took place in AD 69 when the ten kings gathered together in a one-hour meeting with Titus to conspire on three things: 1) how take over the empire for his father, 2) how to destroy Jerusalem, and 3) how to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. And yes, I gave documentation on how all three things were discussed in that conspiratorial one-hour meeting in Beirut. But that destruction hasn’t happened yet. That destruction that they determined to do in the hour-long meeting in Beirut, now happens in this chapter. So it is important to get the time sequences right.

II. The cause of her fall - God, not Rome guaranteed it

But where verse 2 describes the fall of Jerusalem, verse 1 shows the cause of her fall. So let’s look at the cause first. This was no accident of history. This was God at work, not simply Rome at work. This was a judgment that came from heaven. The same Jesus who had guaranteed in the Gospels that all these things would come upon that generation, was now bringing those judgments through his angels. And Rome was simply another tool in His hand.

A. Another angel is involved (v. 1b)

Verse 1 goes on to say, “After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven.” This is not Jesus, as so many commentators assume based on the enormous glory that he has. The text says “another angel,” and the word for “another” is not ἕτερος, which would be another of a different kind, but is ἄλλος, which means another of the same kind. This is not a divine messenger, but a creaturely messenger just like the other angels were. And even this little verse tells us a bit more about angels.

Angels too have authority (v. 1c)

The text says that this angel came, “having great authority.” Like all authority, it was a delegated authority. He was sent. He came down from heaven representing heaven’s authority. Romans 13 tells us that this is the way it is with all creaturely authority - we have no authority unless it is

temporal order of the visions from the seer’s viewpoint, not to a chronological order of events in history.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 892.

given to us from heaven. As Jesus told Pilate, “You could have no authority (ἐξουσίαν) at all over (κατά with the genitive) Me unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:11) - “no authority...at all.” Unless God gives the authority, the state does not have that authority. The same is true of the church and other creaturely authorities. So this angel was simply carrying out the decrees of the Father and the Son.

Angels in God’s presence absorb God’s glory (v. 1d)

But this angel also had glory. He had so much glory that it says, “and the earth [or literally, “land” - the land of Israel] was illuminated by his glory,” which is the more literal rendering of Pickering’s choice of “splendor.” It’s the Greek word δόξης.

And I find it interesting that angels have glory. Luke 9:26 says that the Father has glory, the Son has glory, and His holy angels have glory. And just as the authority this angel had did not originate with the angel, the glory did not originate with him either. It came from God. Luke 2:9 says, “And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.” The angel’s glory is the glory of the Lord. It comes from the Lord. Think of Moses on Mount Sinai to see how this works. The longer Moses basked in God’s presence, the more of God’s glory transferred to him until he had so much glory it was too bright for any of the Israelites to look at. For quite some time Moses had to put a covering over his face to hide the glory because people could not look upon it.

When we have the heart’s longing of Moses, who said to God, “Please, show me your glory” (Ex. 33:18), 2 Corinthians 3 says that we too will begin to absorb more and more of God’s glory into our soul. After talking about the glory that had transferred to Moses’ face, Paul says,

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (v. 18)

It is impossible to be in God’s presence without becoming more and more like Him. This is why Acts 6:15 says that when the Sanhedrin summoned Stephen to a court trial, “... all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.” How did it get that way? He was walking close to God. I am convinced that the early paintings of Christian fathers that present some of them with a halo glowing around their heads was probably recording an actual glimpse that people had of those father’s momentary experiences of God’s glory. It radiated from them. These were

men and women who were specially gifted to spend hours of time in prayer and they spoke of the beatific vision - an experience of God's presence so overwhelming that they lost all track of time and space. They were lost in the wonder of who God is. I have watched prayer warriors on their knees beginning to radiate some of God's glory. They are not aware of it, but I see the transformation. Yet most of us (myself included) are so shallow in our prayer-walk with God that the glimpses of glory that we do get when we enter God's presence do not tend to show that much outwardly. Apparently this angel was one of the angels that stood in the very presence of God Himself - even more so than Moses. No wonder his glory was so strong that it illuminated the land.

B. The loud voice indicates the seriousness of his pronouncement (v. 2a)

But I want you to notice that, like Moses, he didn't just pray. Some people are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. But this angel, like Moses, also worked; He advanced God's cause on earth. So he comes from heaven to the earth, and the text says that "he cried out with a strong voice." Commentators say that this strong voice either emphasizes the angel's authority, his power, the seriousness of the situation, or the certainty of the judgment.² Maybe all four are wrapped up together because all four were certainly true.

C. The divine certainty of its fall (v. 2b)

And the double reference, "It fell, it fell," probably points to the certainty of God's judgment or perhaps how astonishing it was. The temple was burned on Ab 9 of AD 70 under remarkable circumstances that we have looked at before in the first half of the book, and every portion of the city was subjugated by September 1. But this is probably a reference to Ab 9, since so many other references in Revelation clearly point to that date being the very center of the seven years of wrath - the end of 1260 days. It was the day that the temple was burned. And this is further confirmed by the fact that

² Beale says, "'cried out in a strong voice' (ἔκραξεν ἐν ἰσχυρᾷ φωνῇ λέγων), highlighting further the authority of the announcement of Babylon's fall, the narration of which follows throughout the chapter. Likewise, wherever an angel approaches and then "cries out in a great voice" (κράζω, φωνέω, or λέγω with φωνῇ μεγάλῃ), this underscores a subsequent authoritative pronouncement (7:2, 10; 10:3; 14:7, 9, 15; 19:17). The authoritative nature of the announcement is stressed here, as elsewhere, to encourage the readers concerning the certainty of the message's fulfillment, whether it concerns their salvation or the judgment of the wicked. The angel is more glorious than Babylon (v 1) and is an authority more compelling than Babylon. His glorious appearance and loud voice are meant to get the attention of any who are in danger of falling under the spell of Babylon." G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 893.

Revelation follows the pattern of a previous judgment in Ezekiel, and we know that on both occasions the city was overrun and burned on Ab 9. In any case, I am forced to that conclusion by the subsequent events that happen in chapters 18 and 19.

III. The reason it fell

A. It had become more pagan than Biblical (v. 2c)

But in verses 2-3 he goes into the reasons for why it fell. First, he calls Jerusalem “Babylon” once again. Earlier he had called the city where our Lord was crucified Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon. And the reason is clear. It had taken on much of the demonic religion of Babylon and the empires of Greece and Rome that God thinks it appropriate to liken Jerusalem to Babylon the Great. I’ve dealt with this Babylonian connection before, and there are other reasons for that name, but since this is giving the reasons for why Jerusalem fell, let me amplify on the Babylonian idolatry that Israel deliberately engaged in after they rejected Jesus. It’s almost like demons completely took over once the rejection was complete.

Matthew 27:51 says that the curtain in the temple was torn by God from top to bottom the moment Jesus died. That should have been a sign to the Sadducees and priests that Jesus was the final sacrifice. And in fact, the book of Acts tells us that it was for many. It says that many priests became obedient to the faith. But those who persevered in their rejection of Jesus became hardened and blinded and they had to patch things up. So they made a curtain that fit their secret society’s Babylonian occult practices - a curtain that was far more beautiful than the Biblical curtain; but it also had something sinister about it. I believe that this was the first time that an occult curtain had ever entered the temple. Josephus describes the curtain this way:

In front of these hung a veil of equal length of Babylonian tapestry embroidered with blue, scarlet and purple and fine linen, wrought with marvelous craftsmanship. This mixture of materials was not chosen without mystic significance; it typified the universe. The scarlet denoted fire, the fine linen the earth, blue the air, and the purple the sea; [And you can see the pagan philosophy of a four-fold nature of the universe there. He goes on:] the resemblance in the two cases, was one of color, and in that of the fine linen and purple, their origin, as the first comes from the earth and the second from the sea. Worked into this tapestry was the panorama of the heavens, except for the signs of the Zodiac.³ Now, by that last clause, Josephus does not mean that the Zodiac was not on the curtain; it most certainly was, and he speaks of its mystic occult meanings. What he says is that though the Zodiac was on the curtain, the

3 Josephus, War, 5.212-214. Translation by Gaalya Cornfeld, Josephus, The Jewish War (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 358.

pictures that sometimes accompanied the Zodiac were not. It was more subtle. But it is clear that the Sadducees had reinterpreted everything in the temple in terms of the occult. For example, Josephus says, “Now, the seven lamps signified the seven planets; for so many there were springing out of the candlestick. Now, the twelve loaves that were upon the table signified the circle of the zodiac and the year.” They had completely rejected the Biblical symbolism that pointed to Jesus, and they had substituted an occult symbolism. And you can see other similar references to this occult connection in the temple when you read other Jewish writings of the time. And you especially see it in the Kabbalah.

In fact, new evidence of this Babylonian occult is beginning to be written about and documented by a number of scholars. You can even find the Babylonian occult images on the temple furniture. It was absolute blasphemy, but it is clear that those idolatrous images were there. And I have given you some sample pictures of those idols that were in the temple.

For example, look at the top two pictures. Instead of the simple menorah that God commanded in the Scripture, and that was present in the temple at least as late as 37 BC, if not way beyond that, the Menorah that Titus carried out of the temple had the gods of Babylon, Greece, and Rome carved right into it’s base. There were eagles with slightly spread wings and holding a garland in their beaks. Several have pointed out that the identical symbol on that Menorah was a very popular symbol in Roman temples that pointed to Zeus.

There were dragons on this Menorah with the tale of a fish - what some people call Capricorns. All dragons were strictly forbidden for Jews because of the occult connections,⁴ but scholars admit that there are dragons right on the temple Menorah. This was one of the gods on the Roman standards, and was the sign of the Zodiac that Octavian August took for himself. But the same occult symbol goes back to Babylon as well.

On the next panel were images of griffins. In Greek and Roman tradition these were connected with Apollo, the god of beauty, art, and death, but the Griffin itself can be found all over Babylonian walls and furniture.

The next image is the hippokampos, which was a horse’s torso and a fish’s tail. These too were connected with the cult of Apollo.

The final image was of lions. We don’t know what images had been carved onto the back side of the menorah, but these scholars assume that other

⁴ For example, the Mishna in Avoda Zara states that, “if one finds vessels and upon them are the picture of a dragon... they must be thrown into the Dead Sea.” (Avodah Zara, 3:3)

occult images were there too, and the mosaics of Second and third century synagogues give us hints of the Babylonian gods they may have also had in the temple.



Small Section of the Arch of Titus





Pagan hippocampus idol



Babylonian style Griffin

Now, here's where it becomes interesting. Many years ago Israel made the Menorah that is on the Arch of Titus into the official symbol of the nation. And I think "How appropriate. Israel is still in rebellion against Jesus. What better way to show that rebellion." The pagan symbols are stylized, but they are obviously copies of the Babylonian gods on the Menorah found in the Arch of Titus.

And after a couple of archaeologists began publishing the proofs that these were pagan symbols, it raised a huge debate in Israel, with many insisting that the Biblical Menorah replace this obviously unbiblical one as the national symbol. But that's the problem - this was the Menorah that was in the temple when Titus conquered it. How did it get to be that way? We know from coins and other references before the time of Christ that it didn't have the kind of stand that is pictured there, but instead had three feet. The evidence seems to point to the fact these changes were made in the first century AD - probably after Christ's crucifixion. You can see the bits and pieces of the puzzle coming together - with rejection of Jesus comes demonic blindness.

And while there has been debate, the evidence is more and more overwhelming that someone introduced overt Babylonian idolatry into the temple. Anyway, once citizens of Israel caught on that the state emblem is not the menorah in the Bible, and that it has pagan symbols on it, and that even the base of it was different than the base of the biblical menorah, fur started to fly. Every attempt to explain why this was not idolatry seemed to dig the hole deeper; it made things worse. So some rabbis simply responded that they were OK with it since the Jewish Kabbala also has these occult symbols. Yeah, we have seen that the Kabbala was a syncretism between the Bible and Babylonian religion. In fact, those Babylonian symbols have crept

into each empire after Babylon, and into Judaism, and even into the Roman Catholic Church, as Hislop's book, [The Two Babylons](#) demonstrates. Demons don't seem to have a lot of creativity. They keep introducing the same occult symbols, and the same proven strategies.

But things got worse when an archaeologist by the name of Richard Freund started studying a treasure trove of temple tools and vessels that had been discovered buried in a cave along with some temple scrolls. Dr. Freund was the rabbi who taught me modern Hebrew and used to be a professor at UNO. Anyway, he pointed out that it is not just the Menorah that is covered with symbols of pagan gods. The temple pots, incense shovels, and other artifacts also have pagan religious symbols all over them. Initially this was covered up. Then they just said it was artwork. But Dr. Freund, even though he was rabbi, demonstrated rather conclusively that that is not the case. When he wrote the book,⁵ he was the director of the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford, and a well-known archaeologist. And in his book he shows that 1) these artifacts were indeed from the temple, 2) are dated to this precise period of time leading up to AD 70, 3) and that all of these things, including the incense shovels, were patterned after pagan vessels from other well-known pagan temples. In fact, initially they were so similar that some thought they were made from exactly the same mold used by the pagan temples. But that is not the case. The decorations and other patterns are the same, but they were different molds with the same pattern. The Jerusalem temple was clearly copying the pagan temples.

5 Richard A. Freund, *Secrets of the Cave Letters* (Prometheus Books, 2004)



Sample of Jerusalem temple vessels that show pagan influence & symbols

If you look at the bronze engraving that is second from the bottom on your outlines, you will see one of the images on the temple patera - a picture of the god Achilles and Thetis. People in the past have criticized the book of

Revelation since it claims that the temple was engaged in idolatry, and they thought that was impossible. But the impossible has recently proved to be true.



Idolatrous image of the gods Thetis
& Achilles on patera from the
Jerusalem temple stash above



The *patera* from the Cave of Letters. (G. Hochman/COL Project)

Anyway, the debate is fascinating, and how to interpret the evidence is hotly

debated still, but the evidence is pretty convincing to me that the Sadducees who ran the temple introduced Babylonian and Roman occult symbols and ideas directly into the temple worship. They were indeed engaged in idolatry. Some have claimed that Herod must have forced them to do it,⁶ but without any evidence that that was the case. Certainly chapters 16 and 17 show that the temple leaders were in deliberate rebellion against Christ. And it mirrors the Pharisees' parallel rebellion that is recorded in what they themselves call, "The Babylonian Talmud." There was a reason why chapter 11 called the city where our Lord was crucified, spiritual Egypt and Sodom and why Paul called Jerusalem equivalent to Arabia and why these chapters called Jerusalem Babylon. It no longer had a claim to being the holy city of God. It had become a pagan nation under God's judgment.

B. False trust in its impregnability (v. 2d)

The second reason for its fall was a false trust in the city's reputation for being impregnable. As Chilton worded it, loyalty to Jerusalem had become an idolatrous loyalty, and loyalty to the temple made the temple into yet another idol. Josephus mentions a number of times that the Jews were absolutely convinced that God would never allow Jerusalem or temple to be destroyed. It was the same false confidence that let Babylon be conquered by Cyrus, the emperor of Persia. No one thought Babylon could be conquered. Well, in the same way, Jerusalem was a pretty amazing fortress, but like Babylon the Great of old, it would fall.

C. It had become a demonic stronghold

The third reason for the fall is that Jerusalem had become a stronghold of demons. Verse 2 ends with, "and has become a dwelling place of demons, even a prison of every unclean spirit, also a prison of every unclean and detestable bird." The background to this is Isaiah, and Beale's commentary says that even the "detestable bird" is a reference to a kind of demon. He says of this city,

6 "If one looks closely at the base of the menorah, one discovers the matter is even more horrific. The panels on the base include: the picture of two eagles (the symbol of Rome), and a dragon with a tail of a fish! (Fig. 8) The dragon was one of the idols of Greek mythology, worshiped during Roman rule. The Mishna in Avoda Zara states that, "if one finds vessels and upon them are the picture of a dragon... they must be thrown into the Dead Sea." 11 They must be destroyed because one is forbidden to derive any benefit from as an idol. In fact, an exact duplication of panel, both the picture of the dragon as well as the border motif, is found in a Roman Temple in Turkey (Fig. 9).

Some historians suggest that the menorah's idolatrous addition was constructed during the rule of Herod, who, having deposed Mattisyahu in 37 BCE, possibly added the abominable base in order to find favour with the Romans. Josephus writes that Herod placed images of eagles atop the gates of the Beis Hamikdash against the will of the populace. Quite possibly he made this change to the menorah as well." <http://beta.moshiach.com/index.php/item/the-menorah-the-arch-of-titus>

within which sit only demonic birdlike creatures. Jewish interpretation of the creatures in Isa. 13:21 and 34:11, understood them to be demonic. This final revelation shows that the demonic realm has been Babylon's guiding force.⁷

Well, if Babylon is a symbol for Jerusalem (which we have clearly seen that it was earlier in the book), then the demonic realm has been Jerusalem's guiding force. Is there historical evidence that that was the case? Yes, we will look at that in a bit.

Interestingly, “dwelling place” (κατοικητήριον) is rare word used of God’s true temple or the false temple (v. 2e)

Interestingly, the Greek word for “dwelling place” (κατοικητήριον) is a rare word that is used elsewhere for both God's heavenly temple (1 Kings 8:39,43,49; 2 Chron. 6:30,33,39; 30:27; Ps. 33:14; Eph. 2:22) and the earthly temple (Ex. 15:17; Psalm 76:2; Rev. 18:2). So one commentator said, “The Temple had been the dwelling place of God but was now the dwelling place of demons.”⁸ You may remember my referencing Jewish histories that claimed that the glory cloud of God's Shekinah presence left the temple in AD 66 and ascended to heaven in AD 70 (exactly three and a half years later). So with God not present in the temple, demons filled the vacuum. Another commentator broadened it to Jerusalem as a whole, saying, “Jerusalem, which had been God's dwelling place, has now become the unclean dwelling place of demons.”⁹

Either way, it makes sense of the ancient historians who document the huge increase during the first three and a half years of the war in occult practices, homosexuality, transvestitism, torture, and other kinds of irrational behavior. Josephus recorded people earlier stealing a statue of Queen Berenice, putting it on top of a brothel, and simulating sex with it, then drinking toasts to a pagan god. These were Jews drinking toasts to a pagan god. Some of their behavior was so bizarre that I don't dare speak of it from the pulpit, but let me give some tamer quotes. Josephus, the Jewish eyewitness of the war, said, “...nor did any age breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world.”¹⁰ In another place he says, “... indeed that was a time most fertile in all manner of wicked practices, insomuch that no kind of evil deeds were then left undone; nor could any

7 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 894.

8 Duncan McKenzie. *The Antichrist and the Second Coming: Volume II: The Book of Revelation* (Xulon Press, 2012), p. 249.

9 David Chilton, [Days of Vengeance](#)bf9b7893-82ef-4a88-b73c-e59a265df94f, (Forth Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 447-448.

10 Wars. 5.10.5

one so much as devise any bad thing that was new, so deeply were they all infected...”¹¹ They were infected by demons. He then adds this, comparing them to Sodom and Gomorrah: “I suppose, that had the Romans made any longer delay in coming against these villains, the city would either have been swallowed up by the ground opening upon them, or been overflowed by water, or else been destroyed by such thunder as the country of Sodom perished by, for it had brought forth a generation of men much more godless (ἄθεωτέρων) than were those that suffered such punishments; for by their madness it was that all the people came to be destroyed.” And you can look at many other examples in Josephus that show a demonically possessed people. It was ripe for judgment.

In Matthew 12:43-45, Jesus anticipated this. He likened Jerusalem to a house inhabited by a demon that had just been cleansed. That represents all the demons that Christ had cleaned out of Israel during His ministry. But since nothing was put into the house to replace the demon, the demon finds seven worse demons, and He says, “they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first, so shall it also be with this wicked generation.” (v. 45) By the time of the war (less than forty years later) it had been overrun with demons. We saw in chapter 9 that the demons that God unleashed from the Abyss were so numerous that they were likened to a locust plague. Josephus himself distanced himself from the citizens of Jerusalem and said that he couldn’t imagine a more wicked and deviant people to have ever existed since the creation of the world. He had been one of their leaders, but he was now mystified by their behavior. But it can be explained by the demonic, and several times this book speaks of the demons who had taken over Jerusalem.

Interestingly, the demonic had made a literal prison of Jerusalem from which no one could escape (v. 2f)

The other interesting thing about this is that the demonic had made a literal cage or prison for the citizens of Jerusalem. Pickering’s translation takes the middle Greek kai as an explanatory kai rather than a conjunction. I translate it as a straightforward conjunction so that it reads, “and has become a dwelling place of demons, and a prison of every unclean spirit, also a prison of every unclean and detestable bird.” The demons aren’t imprisoned; they own the prison and it is the rebel Jews who are the prisoners. The Zealots who captured the city would not allow anyone to leave the city. There were people who tried climbing with ropes over the wall, only to be killed by

¹¹ Wars 7.8.1

Romans. But if Christians had not heeded Christ's warnings to flee the moment they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies, they would not have been able to escape. It was a prison. The demons had made it a prison.

Of if you simply translate that word as watchtower, it was indeed a watchtower for the demonic from that time forward.

D. Because of its international political prostitution (v. 3a)

The fourth reason the angel gives for the fall of Jerusalem was its international religious and political prostitution. He says, "Because all the nations have drunk of the rage of the wine of her fornication and the kings of the earth have fornicated with her." One commentator suggested that this is a description of the Queen of Israel, Queen Berenice. And she may have partially been in mind because of her fornications with the various kings in the area, including an incestuous relationship with her brother, king Agrippa, and an affair with the emperor of Rome.¹² She definitely got around. But if that is the literal referent (and we have seen that most of the symbols in this book do have a literal referent), the thing symbolized by the behavior was definitely the spiritual and political prostitution that I documented in my March 11 sermon.

The Sadducees ruled the temple, but they also ruled Israel and beyond. Their religious prostitution was very appealing to the nations, so much so that Nero became converted.¹³ One commentator says,

Judah extended her influence throughout the known world through her religion. Judah's immorality was in fornication with idols. The nations she comes into contact with are infected with her particularly evil spiritual practices. Judah was particularly evil because she mixed knowledge of the truth with Baal worship and the worship of many other pagan gods. Such a mixture is more deceptive and destructive than common paganism. This serves as a warning to modern Christianity that is so inclined to mix Christianity with psychology...¹⁴

But in addition to religious prostitution, we documented political prostitution of the elite in Jerusalem. It was astounding how much money exchanged hands. And if they couldn't bribe people, they would resort to assassinations,

12 For a description of these sordid affairs, see Josephus Antiquities of the Jews 19.1; 19.5.1; 19.9.1; 20.7.3; Tacitus The Histories 2.2; Cassius Dio Roman History 66.15.

13 The Talmud says, "He [God] sent against them [Israel] Nero the Caesar. As Nero was coming he shot an arrow towards the east, and it fell in Jerusalem. He then shot one towards the west, and it again fell in Jerusalem. He shot toward all four points of the compass, and each time it fell in Jerusalem. He said to a certain boy, 'Repeat to me the last verse of Scripture that you have learned.' He said, 'I will wreak My vengeance on Edom through My people Israel.' Nero said, 'The Kadosh Barukh Hu [the Holy One] desires to lay waste His Temple and to lay the blame on me. So he ran away and converted to Judaism, and Rabbi Meir was descended from him.'" [Gittin 56a]

14 Ralph A. Bass, Jr., [Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation](#)bf9b7893-82ef-4a88-b73c-e59a265df94f (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), p. 400.

blackmail, political pressures, police harassment, and other forms of pressure. And we looked adequately at that before.

E. Because of financial corruption between business and state (v. 3b)

But I do want to spend a bit of time on the last reason given for Jerusalem's fall. It was economic. Jerusalem's leaders had statist business deals that enriched either themselves, their families, or their friends through incredibly unethical practices. And it is important to understand that even an economy can be deserving of judgment. Economics is not neutral. Verse 3 goes on to say, "...and the merchants of the earth became rich through the strength of her luxury." The word "strength" is δύναμις, and is defined by the dictionary as power, might, strength, or force (BDAG). So it is a mixing of the force of statism with the economics of merchants. Only merchants who cooperated with that force became rich and shared in her luxury.

What did it look like? It looked much like what has been happening in America between big business and politicians - not just the bailouts, but all kinds of corruption.

I wanted to read a couple of paragraphs from a historical novel that captures this time period rather well. I haven't found the book yet, but if I remember right, it accurately portrays Caiaphas the high priest using numerous unethical tactics to either enrich himself or to enrich his relatives and friends who owned businesses. Annas and Caiaphas would use assassinations of competitors and then pressure the widow to sell her property for a song. They would pass laws that would favor large businesses much like the large plantation owners in colonial days got laws passed that would make it difficult for the new small plantations of the freed slaves and others to compete. There is nothing new under the sun. Men have tried these tactics over and over.

Some of the Sadducee families had become part of the international banking cartels. The Roman historian, Tacitus, speaks of "boundless riches"¹⁵ that flowed into the temple every year, the bulk of which the Sadducees pocketed. Josephus says much the same. This, together with the tight social connections that they had developed with Rome made the Sadducees a formidable force to deal with. They were able to forge new alliances with powerful businessmen and gain even more power and money. Their empire had become a huge international corporate conglomerate.

¹⁵ Tacitus, Histories book 5,8, The Jews, p. 275.

And rather than trying to reconstruct it via academic notes, I thought I could summarize some of those techniques by listing similar ones that we have in America today. I think that might be a bit more interesting. Some years ago, Peter Schweizer wrote another book called, [Throw Them All Out](#)bf9b7893-82ef-4a88-b73c-e59a265df94f that exposed the insider trading on the stock market that Congressmen who were sitting on privileged committees had been flagrantly involved in. They would use government investigation to gain access to information that no one else had, and then use that information to make a killing on the stock market. The book led to such an outcry that the STOCK Act was passed to make that practice illegal. STOCK is an acronym for Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge. Well, they didn't have a stock market back in the first century, but Josephus documents that the Sadducees did use their position in government to develop a huge spy network that benefited them both politically and economically. They used their government position and their government spies to unfairly compete with others.

Of course, sometimes they just used brute police force to steal things. And those actions might be closer to the asset forfeiture laws that we have today - which I can't believe Christians actually support. It is a mafia-like shakedown.

And in Schweizer's next book, [Extortion](#)bf9b7893-82ef-4a88-b73c-e59a265df94f he did document how politicians have used mafia-like tactics to enrich themselves and others. There is a tight connection between state and business commonly referred to as the Iron Triangle. If you just do a search on Iron Triangle, you will see quite a few technical articles on how this legal bribery system works in America.

In his next book, [Clinton Cash](#)bf9b7893-82ef-4a88-b73c-e59a265df94f he outlined how the Clintons monetized access and official favors. He dealt with a number of scandals like the Uranium deal. But they seem to be covered in Teflon - everything seems to fall off of them. Now granted, some of their dealings were not technically illegal, but they were an unethical wedding of the power of the state with business that made money you could not have made without government force. There was a lot of creative stuff that they did. Well, the Sadducees were skilled at that game.

Schweizer's most recent book came out last month, [Secret Empires](#)bf9b7893-82ef-4a88-b73c-e59a265df94f, and it uncovers corruption by proxy - through friends and family members. He points out that financial deals channeled through the politician's family members or through friends

does not require disclosure, so it is more difficult to expose. But I think he does a successful job of showing how China has pumped billions of dollars into the businesses of family members of Congress who vote in favor of China's policies. He implicates Republicans and Democrats. He connects the dots between the time that their family members get the money and the changes that came in their votes. Rather interesting smoking guns.

For your own independent research, all you need to do is to take a look at the itemization of the pork barrel items in the most recent spending bill and you will wonder why so-called conservative Congressmen who were elected to drain the swamp voted in favor of the bill and why President Trump failed to veto it. It's one of the worst bills ever. This problem being described here and in verses 9-20 is found everywhere. It seems impossible to stop.

This book also documents cronyism where the Congress passes a bill to bail out a failing business with grants or government-backed-loans. There were enough of those under Obama that you probably remember them. And though the Bible would describe the rewards as bribery, it is technically legal.

But he also documents what he calls the smash and grab actions of politicians. I won't go through his documentation, but let me read his preface which very concisely describes this particular way of enriching businesses. He says,

Smash and grab in government works in a similar way, only while one guy smashes, another grabs. Say there is a particular company or industry with large assets. The government, by their words or policies, "smashes" the industry on the grounds that it is bad, destructive, or dangerous. This is often done because an industry or company is deemed harmful to the environment or damaging to public health, or it exploits vulnerable people. Once "smashed," the valuation of that industry or company drops dramatically. But then something else happens. Investors or financiers closely tied to that politician suddenly buy the company or buy into the industry for pennies on the dollar. The company or industry is then resurrected to its previous luster and its valuations rise dramatically under new owners who have close ties to the politicians.¹⁶

Well, that gives a small picture of what went on in the far less regulated Israel of the first century. Josephus called the high priest Annas "the great procurer of money" (Ant. 20.205) and Tosephta, Menahoth 13:22, 534, speaks of the temple going to ruin because of avarice and hatred. As I already mentioned, the Roman historian, Tacitus, speaks of "boundless riches" that flowed into their coffers every year. Massyngberde Ford in his commentary shows the enormous amount of trade that happened during

¹⁶ Schweizer, Peter. Secret Empires: How the American Political Class Hides Corruption and Enriches Family and Friends (pp. 15-16). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

these last years that the temple was being built. In fact, it was destroyed almost as soon as it was built. But no government funds were spared in making the temple the most gorgeous building in the world, and its magnificence was indeed declared to be a wonder of the world even by the Romans. It was a monstrous pork barrel project that gave plenty of opportunity for graft, cronyism, and expansion of the Sadducees financial empire way beyond the bounds of the Middle East. The businesses that vied to provide materials for the temple came from all over the empire. John didn't have to expand for his first century audience because they knew about this stuff. But I have had to flesh it out a bit.

When we get to verses 9-20 we will see that the destruction of temple and Jerusalem was not just the destruction of some petty tyrants. It destroyed the international banking system, hurt businesses all over the Mediterranean, and impoverished many who had become wealthy through dependence on the crooked system of the Jerusalem-Rome alliance. You see, if your business is dependent on the civil government, it might fall with the civil government. A blow to the center of the corruption can negatively impact the entire world economy. And the Sadducees and the temple were a key gateway to that corruption of the world economy.

IV. Four more applications

So what can we take home from all of this? None of you are billionaires. None of you are benefiting from the government like the Sadducees were. But you do have to live in a similarly corrupt world. So there are four reactions that I believe God does not want you to have toward the modern statist economy.

A. *Don't be naive*

The first reaction is being naive. It would be easy to assume (like the rich people in verses 9-20 must have assumed) that the economic luxury they were enjoying would continue forever. But these verses remind us that economic blessings cannot last forever without an ethical and covenantal relationship to God. How many times have people tried to fix the problem in DC apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is never a long-term solution. It is naive to think that we can drain the swamp without Jesus changing hearts. The seductive power of the enormous potential of statist wealth is just too strong. It is a strong temptation. I think the most recent budget shows that. So don't be naive in thinking that our economic comforts of today will last forever. We are experiencing a false prosperity, but we are

irrationally plunging into economic crisis.

Nor should we be naive in our investments.

Nor should we be naive about America being a Christian nation any longer. It is not a Christian nation. It used to be, but the only remnants we have are on our money ('In God We Trust') and in our statist pledge of allegiance ('One Nation Under God'), which by the way, the Sadducees would have been quite happy to recite. They were after all quite religious. But John did not want the first century church to buy the propaganda that the synagogue system was a believing system. In Revelation 2:9 and again in Revelation 3:9 he calls it a "synagogue of Satan." Next week we will see the call to leave corrupt and unbelieving churches.

Nor should we be naive about the conservative versus liberal false contrast. The demonic has taken over both. Schweizer shows how both parties have benefited by the corruption.

Nor should we be naive about the military being exempt. It is not. If you talk about the Military-Industrial Complex, some people will write you off as a nut-case. But follow the money. Who gets rich by declaring war and who gets rich by rebuilding? I think the evidence is clear to those who will take the time to read. Of course, Schweizer's books are exposing far more problems than simply the Military-Industrial Complex. The demonic spirit of the Sadducees has completely taken over DC. Don't be naive and think that everything is hunky dory. Don't be surprised by the inability of politicians to drain the swamp. So that is the first take-home. Don't be naive. Be like the sons of Issachar. 1 Chronicles 12:32 says that they "had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do." Know your Scriptures; know your times.

B. Don't be frustrated

The second reaction that we should put off is frustration. There is no need to feel helpless and frustrated. God is sovereign. He is the One who has allowed this, no doubt as a discipline of our nation. He is sovereign and He can help you to navigate the mess we are in. But make sure that you are working with God, and not against His purposes. If you insist that God cannot discipline our nation and you act consistently with that assumption, then yes, you will be frustrated and unprepared.

Nor should you be frustrated as if Satan is winning. These kinds of things are God's sovereign disciplines for a nation that has thrown Him out of the courts, politics, business, schools - out of everything. And with a vacuum

comes what? The demonic. But we need not be frustrated. This too is from the hand of God. It actually can be used by God as a redemptive judgment to bring our nation to repentance. But either way, frustration indicates a lack of faith.

C. Don't fear

But so does the next point. The third reaction God wants you to put off is fear. If Christ is on the throne, and if you are united to Him, and if you are the apple of the Father's eye (as He says you are), then there is nothing to fear. Nothing - not even death, can pluck you out of the Father's hand or security.

D. Don't be in denial of judgment coming

The last reaction that God does not want you to have is to deny that judgment is coming simply because people have wrongly cried wolf so many times before. The wolf does eventually come in that story, doesn't he? In any case Romans 1-2 describe what a nation looks like when God gives it up unto a depraved mind. We are already experiencing judgment. Look at the irrational actions of California on sexual orientation. As long as our nation continues the political and economic prostitution it has been increasingly engaged in, the words "It fell, it fell" should stand as a warning. Our economic system can fall just as surely today as it fell back then. Psalm 49:6 warns all who trust in riches by saying that our riches are a lousy security. May we fix our eyes on Jesus, the One who holds the nations in His hand. Amen.