

# Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the word of God

## 2021

### JULY

## Revelation ~ Victory Book Chapters 12-22

**Introducing**  
As high as heaven

**From Study Groups**  
The fall of Babylon the great  
(Rev. 18 & 19:1-5)

**Feature**  
Divine sovereignty  
and human responsibility



Revelation 22:13

## AS HIGH AS HEAVEN

Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness' (Is. 32:1 RV). 'In his days shall the righteous flourish' (Ps.72:7). Such a contrast to fallen Babylon whose very sins (not just the impact of or reputation of!) 'reached even unto heaven.' There will be an impact of righteousness and of the reputation it earns. Folk will learn that 'with righteousness shall he judge the poor' (Is.11:4), and that the meek 'shall inherit the earth' (Mat. 5:5). The days of success being measured by possessions and influence, earned without regard to integrity, which is familiar enough to us in our time even before 'one that restraineth...be taken out of the way'(2 Thes.2:7) will be over. Those who seek first 'his kingdom, and his righteousness' (Mat. 6:33) will not be swimming against the tide any more 'for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea' (Is.11:9).

There will be a city of righteousness and peace, contrasting to Babylon's iniquity and its unity gained through exploitation, moral compromise, and ungodliness. The city is of course Jerusalem. Nations will see her righteousness and all kings her glory (Is. 62:2). There will be rapid

population growth and expansion of the boundaries accordingly but no difficulty in food provision (Ps.72:16; Zech. 2:4). The Lord Jesus Himself will be 'the glory in the midst of her' (Zech. 2:5) and 'men shall be blessed in him: All nations shall call him happy' (Ps.72:17), 'and shall serve him' (v.11) rejoicing in His ability to remove need, helplessness, poverty, oppression, violence, slavery, and all social and economic ills (vv.12-17). What a contrast to our world today and our world historically where some sectors of society prosper disproportionately at the expense of others; a condition all the more prevalent in the city of Babylon and the systems it represented.

What the seedplot of Babylon desired but was not to achieve (see Gen. 11:4-8), its final manifestation of it will achieve, horrifically, through sins, while God waits His sovereign time. But in that day to come there will be the wonderful sight of 'the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man' (John 1:51), upon a ladder, the top of which reaches to heaven (Gen 28:12).

*P.D.*

# *From Study Groups . . .*

## THE FALL OF BABYLON THE GREAT

### (Revelation 18 & 19: 1-5)

**From Aberdeen:** A reasonable interpretation of Revelation 18 would view 'Babylon the great' as a city yet to be built. Today the ecumenical movement is strengthening and world trade and the global financial system are rapidly heading in the direction of major change and upheaval. World politics are under the influence of an agenda that is evidently preparing the way for huge changes in the structure of business, finance and worldwide trade. The scene is being set for the kingdom of the beast (with its seven heads and ten horns) and its association with the harlot city of religion and commerce. Modern methods of construction can enable a complete city to be built within a matter of a few years rather than decades.

Where will this Babylon be built? Undoubtedly a future day will declare its location. One clue points to a wilderness scene (Rev. 17:3). Another clue points to it being a seaport city, because we read about 'every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea' who will react to its destruction by throwing dust on their heads and weeping (Rev.18:17). Indeed, 'all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth' (Rev.18:19 NASB). And from the long list of cargoes mentioned, including gold, marble and spice, we get a picture of a commercial city operating as a major hub of world trade. Some of the cargoes mentioned are compatible with a Middle Eastern location for this city. Eventually God's people will be called out of this Babylon before judgement falls on her. Perhaps 'my people' in this context is a reference specifically applying to God-fearing Jews (Rev.18:4) [Comment 1].

*James Johnson*

**From Aberkenfig:** Continuing the lewd corruptions of Babylon described in chapter 17, they are enlarged in greater detail in this chapter where John presents to us four different but important announcements. Throughout Scripture, Babylon was not only an ancient city and a powerful empire, but a symbol of man's rebellion against God. Here in chapter 18, it represents a world system of economic and political dominance.

The first announcement we might call 'the voice of condemnation' (vv.1-3), foretold in Jeremiah chapters 51 & 52 and in Revelation 14:8. Babylon will be a haunt of demons intent on inspiring extreme human wickedness, 'a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean spirit and every unclean and hateful bird' (NKJV). The double utterance (v.2) of the falling of Babylon is significant. This suggests a dual judgement: to ecclesiastic Babylon 'the harlot' in Revelation 17,

and the political one here in chapter 18, being emphasised in verse 6. How easy it is for believers today to become fascinated by this world and its attractions!

The second voice comes from heaven, we might call it the voice of separation (vv.4-8). 'Come forth my people ... have no fellowship with her... '. We can trace this from the beginning when God created light and divided the light from the darkness. Then Satan, through pride, sought to be as God. Adam and Eve had enjoyed sweet fellowship with God, but found themselves banished as a result of sin. There was enmity between the serpent and humankind; nevertheless, God desired that His creatures should be separate to praise and worship Him. We see it, for example, in the cases of Noah and Abraham. Of Noah, Genesis 6 says 'the Lord was grieved in His heart ... and I will destroy man from the face of the earth' (we know the consequences). God called Abram out of Ur - 'get thee out of thy country' (Gen. 12) and Abraham's offspring (the children of Israel) were told in Exodus not to go back into Egypt. So it has been down through the ages (1 Tim. 5:22b; Jer. 51:9). Two reasons for this separation are (1) to avoid pollution (v.4), and (2) non-contamination of the terrible plagues God was to pour down on Babylon. God had been patient with the growing evil system, but now the time had come for His wrath to be released upon Babylon—double measure for what she had done to His people. Three sins are mentioned here: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and pride of life. These are seen in (1) idolatry - glorifying herself; (2) pride - as a queen, no widow and not dethroned; and (3) waxed wanton (live deliciously) i.e., live proudly while others are in want (v.7).

The result is that John hears what could be called the third voice, that of mourning. The word translated 'wail' in verse 9 and 'weep' in verse 11 means a loud lament as opposed to silent weeping. It extends from verses 9 - 19: the merchants are not feeling sorry for the city but for themselves; they have lost their life of luxury and wealth, which also includes 'slaves and the souls of men' (v.13). The inventory John gives starts with gold, silver and precious stones, then comes down to most basic items such as were imported. It is most disturbing to find the long list of commodities including humans, but more and more people are being 'enslaved' to the integrated system of computers, government and business. 'For in one hour so great riches is made desolate' (v.17). They saw the smoke afar off. We see a mirror of Ezekiel 27 regarding the fall of Tyre.

John then sees and hears a strong angel, who casts a stone like a great millstone into the sea with a triumphant saying concerning the fall of Babylon. God is patient with His enemies, but when He begins to work, He acts suddenly and thoroughly.

Babylon has been destroyed; the political and economic system of 'the Beast' has at last been destroyed: heaven rejoices but earth laments. When God says 'No more!' there is nothing that man can do to change it. How emphatic are verses

21-24, for five times God says this 'No more!' (see also Jer. 25: 9-11; Jer. 51). The great multitude are praising God in Revelation 19:1-5. Babylon has been destroyed; in fact, the fall of Babylon merits three 'Hallelujahs' from heaven! All of this constitutes a fourth voice, that of celebration. *Bill Paterson*

**From Buckhaven:** After the flood, men went east. They went forth to build and make a name for themselves (Gen. 11). They gathered together but not to God. Babylon (Shinar) was built beside the river Euphrates. It was the first city built by man and reached its zenith in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Its walls were 140 feet thick; it had many iron gates; its gardens were famous; it was a place of many temples and had great wealth. Babylon is mentioned more than 270 times in Scripture; it symbolises man's rebellion and was ultimately conquered by the Persians led by king Cyrus.

*Will we see a manifestation of Babylon once more in the end time scenes?* Zechariah 5:5-11 indicates that Babylon will be rebuilt in the end times. The prophet Zechariah saw a vision of 'an ephah'—a receptacle or basket (*Brown-Driver-Briggs*), full of evil and wickedness, personified as a woman. A heavy lid was placed on the basket to keep the evil in check. When the prophet saw the basket being carried, he asked where they were taking it. He writes 'The angel that talked with me' answered: 'To build her an house in the land of Shinar' (Zech. 5:10,11 RV). This tells us that wickedness will again be seen in the land of Shinar (Babylon).

*How will Babylon the great be destroyed?* Revelation chapters 17 and 18 foretell the fall of Babylon. Jeremiah 50 and 51, Isaiah 46 and 47, and Isaiah 13:1 all deal with 'the oracle concerning Babylon'. Isaiah 13:4 speaks of 'the noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as a great people! the noise of a tumult of the kingdoms of the nations gathered together! the Lord of hosts mustereth the host for the battle.'

*When will this take place?* Isaiah 13:6 ff indicates that it will happen in the day of the Lord: 'the stars of the heaven and the constellation thereof shall not give their light, the sun shall be darkened in his going forth and the moon shall not cause her light to shine' (v. 10). Thus, Babylon the great meets its end.

Revelation 18 speaks of an angel with great power illuminated by many splendours, who speaks with a mighty voice and declares the fall of Babylon the great. Babylon thought she was a queen who would remain forever, but God's swift and holy judgement falls upon her. This causes a great lament by kings, by the merchantmen who plied their trade and those who travel by ships and made their living from the sea. They stand afar off to watch great Babylon and its system being destroyed. No longer will they ply their trades and commerce—its social

systems will cease. Babylon will be no more, for the judgement of God will have fallen on this evil city and its godless inhabitants.

Finally, an angel casts a great millstone into the sea (Rev.18:21). This seems to signify the completeness of God's judgements. Thus, Babylon and its systems will be no more. *Martin Notman*

**From Cromer: *Mentions of Babylon in Scripture*** Babylon is mentioned 288 times in the ESV scriptures: 276 times in the OT and 12 times in the NT. However, although she was for a time at the head of a great empire, those were tumultuous times, and her hegemony was not to last—as earthly empires do not. Before Babylon there had been the Assyrian empire, which was able to threaten the small 'buffer state' of Israel; but as 2 Kings 19 records Hezekiah, king of Israel, turned to the Lord when he heard Sennacherib's threats, and God heard his prayer. The Assyrians captured Samaria and took away many people from the northern kingdom of Israel, replacing them with foreigners (2 Kin. 17:24). However, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was able to besiege Jerusalem and sack the city, slaughtering the sons of king Zedekiah before his eyes, then putting out his own eyes (2 Kin. 25:7).

*The Babylonian Attitude* Look at me! Look at what I have done! Do you recognise the attitude? It's a common attitude among the famous, isn't it? Nebuchadnezzar had it too; he said 'is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?' (Dan. 4:30 ESV), and immediately he lost the authority of his kingdom. We don't expect that any of our readers will be kings or presidents, but we are all tempted to boast about something, because we all think that there is something that we are particularly good at.

*The Downfall of Babylonia* Her destruction is announced in Isaiah 47. In response to her wickedness, arrogance, self-indulgence and brutality towards the people of God, the Lord pronounces a message of sudden doom: 'But evil shall come upon you, which you will not know how to charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, for which you will not be able to atone; and ruin shall come upon you suddenly, of which you know nothing'. (Isaiah 47:11 ESV). The walls of Babylon were said to be impregnable, but according to Herodotus, Cyrus the Great diverted the river Euphrates so that his troops could enter the city.

*References to Babylon in the New Testament* are all unfavourable, apart from those which are merely factual. Whereas the Old Testament refers to the physical city and its king and empire, the New Testament refers to its spiritual nature. For its time, Babylon was the metropolis of the world, and metropolises always attract the sleazy and disreputable. Hence, she is described as 'Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations' (Rev. 17:5).

*Prophecy and Apocalypse* Photographs of the present state of the area where Babylon was confirm the prophecy of Isaiah 13:20; there is no difficulty in reconciling the apocalyptic description of Revelation 19 with this. *Peter Hickling*

**From Greenock:** With the marvels of computing, it only takes a second to find that Babylon appears some 294 times in 260 verses. Of course, some are re-telling the same event and so could be discounted, but it is worth remembering that God repeats things He really wants us to note (Job 33:14).

A remarkably interesting analysis reveals that the history books account for 60 but the prophetic are far more numerous at 220 occurrences with most still to be fulfilled. Clearly this tells us that what is to happen to Babylon in future is more important than that which has happened in the past.

The law of first mention is a useful tool for the Bible student and we first read of Babylon, a.k.a., Babel, in the dispersion of Noah's sons after the flood. Nimrod's kingdom included Babel. He was 'a mighty hunter before Jehovah' (Gen. 10 :9ASV), whose name means 'rebellion'. From the start Babylon is linked with opposition to God's plans [Comment 2; see also *Introducing* and Surulere's paper]. The descendants of Noah had not spread out to cover the earth as instructed (Gen. 9:1). Building a huge tower would allow protection from a repeat of God's judgement by the flood. It implies a distrust in God's promise not to flood the earth again.

The area around Babylon was the place of origin of the substitute peoples for the cities of Samaria (2 Kin. 17:24) when the ten northern tribes were led into captivity. The descendants of the tower builders, with their foreign gods, are to trample down the promised land. This action is part of Satan's action to thwart the divine plan for salvation. If there are no ruling classes left in the land, the Messiah cannot be born there—He is to be of the lineage of David the King. The lands of the captivity in which Daniel lived had great civil works. Nebuchadnezzar's pride in his building up of Babylon and dismissing the higher authority of God led to his downfall (Dan. 4:29-33). Babylon's gardens were recognised as one of the ancient wonders of the world. In his vision, Daniel mentions the citadel of Susa and the Ulai Canal (Dan. 8:1-2). The canal can still be seen today, and it was constructed to isolate the citadel from the lower city as well as to provide a water supply to the east of the sprawling metropolis.

There are twelve references to Babylon in the New Testament. The first five refer to historic events. Peter refers to 'She that is in Babylon'. Who 'She' is has been the conjecture of scholars of early church history. The word used for church is feminine in Greek (*ekklesia*). Babylon is much nearer than Ephesus (1151 km and 1800km) and in Paul's time there was a group of Christians on the route to Babylon at Damascus, so it is quite possible there was a church there by the time

Revelation was written.

The remaining six references are in the Book of Revelation and are all prophetic. These could be the literal Babylon in present day Iraq, or could be symbolic of other great cities. There is no shortage of centres of administration which were hostile to the early church. Scholars have suggested it might be Rome, Jerusalem or Babylon, all of which were places of persecution for the early Christians. What we do understand is that the commercial world is not founded on Christian principles. The trade in rare animal poaching, addictive drugs, illegal arms sales, mercenaries, human trafficking and prostitution is rampant in our world today. All these are based on a complete devaluation of the worth of a single soul and a disregard for God's creation.

Living in Scotland in a town with one of the highest drug-related death rates, I too would rejoice at the destruction of these evil organisations who deal in human misery.

*Steve Henderson*

**From Halifax:** *Fallen, fallen* After these things John saw another angel—a powerful angel whose glory illuminated the earth (Rev.18:1). Crying with a great, strong voice, the angel said, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen' (v.2 KJV; cp. 14:8). The repetitive nature of this message appears to be a form of emphasis, and is analogical with Isaiah's prophecy against the city (21:9), which preceded its overthrow by the Medes. John then heard another voice (Gk. *phone*, 'sound of uttered words', Thayer); but the speaker is not identified here. However, the call to come out of Babylon is directed at 'my people' and this point has brought many to consider the voice to be that of Christ or God. Again, we have yet another prophetic re-echo. Likewise, God had called His people out of Babylon of old through Jeremiah (51:45).

*Alas, alas* In the deliciousness of life Babylon the great boasts, 'I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow' (Rev.18:7); 'She had glorified herself and waxed wanton' says John Miller (*Notes on New Testament Scriptures* p. 692). How true is the saying, 'Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall!' (Prov.16:18). For this reason, Babylon's plagues—death, mourning and famine—shall come 'in one day' (Rev. 18:8). So will be precipitated a three-part threnody: the kings of the earth will bewail and lament her (v. 9); the merchants will weep and mourn over her (v.11); and every steersman and sailor shall cry saying, 'What city is like unto this great city?' (v.18). 'In stark contrast to the laments of Babylon's consorts,' writes Alan Johnson, 'the heavenly choirs burst forth in a great liturgy of celebration of God' (*Expositors Bible Commentary*, p. 569). Then was heard a voice out of the throne, saying, 'Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great' (Rev.19:5).

*Robert J. Butler*

**From Mount Forest:** Isaiah's prophetic word against the Babylon he foresaw (Is.13) was fulfilled initially by the Medes overcoming the empire of the king who destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem (Is.13:17; cp Jer. 52:11). The city was neutralized, though not immediately physically destroyed: that came later, and it remained abandoned. Isaiah's message of permanent desolation may have a twofold application, partially to Nebuchadnezzar's capital and then a full completion in Daniel's 70th week. What if the woman John sees is not merely the emergence of the same physical city again, but 'Babylon' is essentially a metaphor for an enduring deviant influence in world government, for which all the evil connotations of a Babylon epitomized in the Great Harlot apply (wherever it may be sited, and at whatever phase in human history the woman's evil characteristics prevail)? [Comment 3]. Aspects seen under Roman rule may reappear without a direct link to Rome. The mention of a wilderness location, the drying up of the Euphrates and specific kingly characters (Rev.17:2,16; 16:12; 17:10 and 18:3) necessarily point to specifics occurring in the culmination of evil purposes. From one aspect evil Babylon's political and economic domination is stressed and from another its appeal is to the flesh. It is also the devil's imitation of the true woman, who is also depicted in metaphor as a city (Rev.21:2,9,10) and imitates the fulfilment of God's purpose to dwell with mankind.

The temporal goods valued and traded by Babylon can be contrasted with the attire of the Bride (Rev.21:11-21; Mat. 6:20), whose qualities are enduring. The counsel provided in Revelation 3:18-21 resonates here.

Most of this passage deals with the response of the deceived and sinful ones to the demise of great Babylon, but it also speaks of faithful ones. Although Old Testament worthies may be included in Revelation 18:20,24, it seems His called ones, who in future suffer the injustices of Babylon the great, are addressed here. Indeed, the antitypical twelve apostles 'of the Lamb' (Rev. 21:14) may prove to be different from the men listed in Matthew 10:2-4, who earlier and typically stood by Christ in His trials (Luke 22:28) [Comment 4]. Revelation 18:4 says: 'Come out of her, my people ...'. This may take our minds back to the appeal to Noah to separate from his sinful generation, and to Lot to leave Sodom, and Isaiah and Jeremiah's prophetic appeals for those of the captivity to leave Babylon (see Gen. 7:1; 19:15; Is. 52:11; Jer. 51). We too hear the warning for our time of 2 Corinthians 6:17 'Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you'. It is a call not only 'from, but 'to' a close relationship with Him. If we can see world conditions increasingly taking shape for the fulfilment of Revelation prophecies, God's word to us takes on even more urgency. The world will again be like it was in Noah's day (Mat. 24:37) or Lot's day (2 Pet. 2:6-10), clinging to a Babel-like common purpose to replace God and enjoy temporal pleasure to the full. Another apostle provides timely warning (James 4:4).

*Geoff Hydon*

**From Ravulapalem:** *Prophecy of Isaiah 13:20* Babylon was a beautiful city, called the jewel of the kingdoms, and it was the cause of pride to the king who reigned (Dan. 4:28-30). Babylon becomes like Sodom and Gomorrah. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire (Jude v. 7). The comparison of Babylon with Sodom and Gomorrah is not the way God decreed for their destruction, but the end of Babylon is like the end of those places (Jer. 51:29). No Arab will do his business there as there will be no inhabitation of people—jackals, ostriches and owls live there.

There is a lot of difference between the ideas of men and of God. The destruction of Babylon the great causes worldly people much grief but rejoicing to God and His saints (Rev.18:20). Compare Luke 16:15; Isaiah. 55:8-9. It is a system fully dependent on greediness and love for money without caring for God. Many people believe Babylon the great was a coded substitute for Rome as it killed Peter, Paul and many faithful Christians by spilling their blood. The all-powerful world systems seduce people away from God. Regardless, chapter 18 reveals that the great enemy, Babylon the great, will disappear for ever (18:21).

In chapter 19 Babylon the great is no more! This is truly joyous news. No wonder John hears happy exclamations of praise in heaven! Hallelujah indeed! We are here reminded of the exhortation of the Psalmist: 'Every breathing thing, let it praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!' (Ps. 150:6). The God that caused the fall of ancient Babylon has now judged and destroyed Babylon the great. Ascribe to Him all glory for that feat. The power that manoeuvred her downfall belongs to Him rather than to the nations that He used as instruments in desolating her. To God alone we must attribute salvation (Is. 12:2; Rev. 4:11; 7:10,12). Babylon the great will be set afire like a conquered city and the smoke from her goes on ascending forever and forever (See Is. 34:10) [Comment 5]. It is a token of finality of her judgement and no one will ever be able to restore that iniquitous city. False religion is gone forever. Hallelujah, indeed! The fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 13:20 is the cause of rejoicing, the voice of a great multitude as 'Hallelujah' four times here. We also join in that great multitude and say once again 'Hallelujah! Amen'!

*S.J.M. Edward*

**From Surulere:** Babylon is the sum of all evil and a symbol of man's utter devotion to satanic manipulation in opposition to God and His divine rule. Long before the first city of Babel was founded by the fierce and independent Nimrod on the plains of Shinar (Gen.10:8-10,11; 11:9), the defiant spirit emblematic of Babylon had stirred in the hearts of men as far back as the early dawn of human civilization: 'Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intent of the thought of his heart was only evil continually' (Gen. 6:5 NKJV).

The LORD swiftly brought about, although with utmost divine forbearance, an all-encompassing destruction on both mortals and the earth in display of His holy displeasure at the wickedness of men. The divine marker had been laid down: wickedness and evil in whatever shape or form would be decisively dealt with by the LORD, and yet undergirding that is the principle highlighted by Abraham: ‘Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’(Gen.18:25).

The perfidious spirit of Babylon has straddled millennia, leaving in its deadly wake both physical and spiritual devastation. Its spiritually enfeebling effects are seen in its sickening full bloom in Revelation 18, where it has kings, rulers, businessmen, captains of commerce and industry, and possibly believers under its abominable charm. Its corrosive and corruptive influence over the earth, culminating in its inevitable destruction, is seen in the categories of mourners that took up a dirge at its demise:

Revelation 18:9 ‘The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning’.

Revelation 18: 11,15-16 ‘And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: the merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, “Alas, alas, that great city...”’

Revelation 18:17-18 ‘... Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, “What is like this great city”?’

In sharp contrast, heaven erupts in effusive celebration, at the destruction of this hellish, abominable, and accursed Babylon? (19:1-3) And why would those awesome personages of dignity and power, the twenty-and-four elders and four living creatures, whose sworn duty is to an eternal adoration of Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, not partake in this heavenly celebration? (19:4). Seeing the Lord has avenged the blood of the apostles, prophets and saints (18:20,24).

How else would heaven react to the collapse of this last bastion of human defiance to all that is holy and divine, encapsulated in the exploits of the first dwellers on the plains of Shinar who in clear opposition to God congregated in one place and sought to build a tower (Gen. 11:4).

Babylon did not only encourage the barter in earthly goods but traded also in the perishable bodies and imperishable, immortal souls of mankind (18:13). As an

indication of its pernicious influence, the saints are exhorted to come out of Babylon lest they share in her sins and lest they share in her plagues (18:4). As always, in God's execution of judgement He is vindicated, for true and righteous are His judgements (19:2). *F. Ntido*

**From Victoria B.C.:** Revelation 18 and the first 5 verses of 19 demonstrate a shift from man building and trying to advance as a world society to a world that God has had in mind before He created the universe and all things in it. The judgements of God have been hitting the inhabitants of the earth and the earth itself. Most of the trees are gone. All the grasses that feed 70% of the animal population are burnt up. Waters have turned to blood. Darkness has descended and many hours of daylight have been curtailed. There have been scorching heat and massive hailstones (ch.16). Billions have died by now [This is a sobering fact. Revelation 9:18 records the demise of a third of the world's population – *J.J.*] All the while God has been getting the gospel out to mankind. There are the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel preaching to the world. There are the two witnesses prophesying to a lost world. There is an angel flying in the midst of heaven with the everlasting gospel, preaching to them that dwell on the earth, saying 'Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgement is come' (14:6-7).

Chapter 17 covered God's judgement on the earthly religion that is currently moving slowly and inexorably into prominence in Italy and recently in rebuilt Babylon, Iraq. A short while ago, in this year 2021, the current Pope and invited guests celebrated 'Chrislam' which is Catholicism, Israel, and Islam into a single entity, worshipping what they think is the same God. In the 1980's there was much talk of whether Babylon would be rebuilt, or was this going to be a metaphor for something different? Also, the question was raised back then as to whether the Catholic Church would one day move there in a first step in eventually acquiring Jerusalem. So far, Babylon has indeed been rebuilt and the Pope is heading this religion. We see in this Book of Revelation how God deals with this religious entity [Comment 6].

In response to God's dealing with it, the inhabitants of the world lament the loss of this city and of everything associated with it. There are riches beyond imagination to be made by cooperating with everything the one-world system with its Beast mark and worship offers (vv.15-19). Verse 20 tells heaven to rejoice because God has judged her and avenged the apostles and prophets. There is also an angel described as taking a millstone and casting it into the sea, and thus with violence it is overthrown.

Chapter 19 shows that following the destruction of Babylon the collective voices of heaven ring out with Hallelujahs and glories, salvations, honour and power to the Lord our God. The four and twenty elders are falling down

worshipping. It is a celebration of God's true and righteous judgements on Babylon.

We seem to be the generation that will witness these things start to come to pass. We never imagined we might have to endure some of the coming persecution, so we must quit ourselves like men [Comment 7].

*Rodger Lefevre; Micah Lefevre*

## COMMENTS

**1. (Aberdeen):** While Isaiah 48:20 refers to a very much earlier period of time, the emphasis there is the deliverance of Israel from Babylonian captivity. In the context of Revelation, Babylon the great's corrupting influence is widespread, extending beyond God-fearing Jews to include God-honouring Gentiles. *R.B.F.*

**2. (Greenock):** In his book *Studies in the Book of Genesis*, George Henderson quotes the 19th century American preacher Dr A.T. Pierson, who noted these striking contrasts between Babylon and the New Jerusalem: 'In Babylon—the type of worldly civilisation—the law of association is mechanical centralisation; the spirit is independence and rebellion against God's government; the aim is self-interest and self-glorification; the cult is materialism or idolatry; the method is autocracy and monopoly; the unifying bond is fear; the end is confusion. In the new Jerusalem, the city of God, the law of association is brotherly fellowship; the spirit is loyal obedience to God; the aim is God's glory, and benevolence to all; the cult is spiritual worship of God alone; the method is social equality and co-operation; the unifying bond is love; and the end is perfect harmony'.

**3. (Mount Forest):** There can be little doubt that the evil influence emanating from the actual city of Babylon will also be characteristic of world rulers in the time of the end.

**4. (Mount Forest):** So far as I know, there are no scriptural grounds for the suggestion that the twelve apostles of the Lamb are different from the twelve chosen by the Lord, excluding Judas Iscariot of course, who was replaced by Matthias. On the contrary, I would contend that the promise made by the Lord in Matthew 19 lends support to the view that the twelve disciples are synonymous with the twelve apostles of the Lamb: 'in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Mat. 19:28). *J.J.*

**5. (Ravulapalem):** I disagree with the statement that ‘the smoke from her goes on ascending forever and forever’. Isaiah 34:10 is in the context of the day of vengeance (see v. 8; also Is. 61:2; 63:3). The Christ of Isaiah 63:3 is the Christ of Revelation 19:13, arrayed in a garment upon which ‘their lifeblood is sprinkled’ at Armageddon. It is better I think to keep this direct action by the Lord Jesus against the gathered hosts of the nations in Revelation 19 distinct from the destruction of Babylon by the confederation of nations God uses as instruments for this purpose in Chapter 18. Likewise, the announcement by the third angel in Revelation 14:9-12 that the worshippers of the Beast and his image will be tormented with smoke for ever and ever is preceded by the second angel’s announcement that ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.’ Again, the two judgements are distinct from one another. *P.D.*

**6. (Victoria B.C.):** A clear distinction should be made between the metaphorical aspects of the Babylonish religious fusion which we see developing, to which you rightly allude, and the actual, rebuilt city of Babylon which as other contributors have noted, will ultimately be overthrown.

**7. (Victoria B.C.):** Many Christians today are enduring severe persecution and violence, notably in some African countries, in countries where Islamic extremists wield power and in parts of India where Hindu extremists exert their baleful influence. The huge uptick in anti-Semitic persecution across the world also confirms the imminence of the times foretold in these chapters. Opposition of this sort demands of the faithful a greatly increased resolve, even to the point of martyrdom. The more insidious attacks in secular Western cultures, on our freedom to articulate and practise Bible-based theology within societies that are actively dismantling the enlightened moral code of the Bible, also demands that we be ready to suffer loss for Christ rather than compromise divine truth. The more such things gather pace, the more fervently we wish that ‘our gathering together’ to the Lord Jesus (2 Thes. 2:1 & 1 Thes. 4:16,17), will happen soon. *J.J.*

# Feature

## DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

### 1. Introduction

In this feature article we start by looking at a number of Hebrew and Greek words to find out their meaning in the Scriptures, in the Old & New Testaments respectively, introducing them by the English words ‘calling’ ‘chosen’, ‘election’ and ‘foreordination’ / ‘foreknowledge’. Then we review certain views that have emerged which fail to keep divine sovereignty and human responsibility in perfect balance. We then look at a whole range of scriptures showing that, and how both truths are widely taught, presented, and implied in the inerrant Word of God, and how bible teachers have summarised these doctrines for our ease of understanding, or warned against imbalance concerning them. Finally, we summarise, and suggest further reading. Our conclusion will be that Scripture teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility in perfect balance.

We consider the relevant doctrines of Scripture are brought out by this method of presentation in a fuller and more Bible-based way than one which orders itself by stating the doctrines in turn and examining them along with, it may have been, the misuse and abuse of them. It is vitally important to pay the utmost attention to what God says in and through His word to individuals or peoples. It is singularly different from what we would normally think of as someone simply opening their mouth to say something they would like a person to hear.

### 2. God’s Calling

The most common word for ‘call’ and its derivatives in the **Old Testament** is the Hebrew word *qara*, meaning ‘to accost’, ‘encounter’, or ‘call out to’. When used, it is intended to elicit a specific response, and is not random. It can also mean to summon for a specific task (see e.g., Is. 44:7; 45:3).

In Isaiah 48:12 we read “Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I *am* He, I *am* the First, I *am* also the Last” (NKJV). The emphasis is on God ascribing a special significance in His ‘calling’ to the nation of Israel, and their close relationship with Him that no other nation has or ever will have, which cannot be changed by anyone or anything.

In the **New Testament**, we have a variety of Greek words for God’s calling, with variations of meaning. They are:

*Kaleo*: call forth; command. Found in such scriptures as Mark 2:17 of Christ coming not to call the self-righteous, but sinners; Romans 9:24 of not only Jews,

but also Gentiles being 'called' by God; 1 Thessalonians 2:12 of those in the Greek city of Thessalonica who had been called into God's kingdom and glory.

*Proskaleo*: call towards oneself. Acts 2:39: 'For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.'

*Epikaleonai*: call over / upon. 1 Corinthians 1:2b: '... with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.'

*Chrematizo*: to be called or named. Acts 11:26: '... And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.'

*Klesis*: a calling to be and to do something (for God). We find this word described from different standpoints as: your calling (1 Cor. 1:26); His calling (Eph. 1:18); holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9); heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1).

*Kletos*: carrying the thought of invitation / appointment / welcoming, as in Romans 1:7 'To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints', and 1 Corinthians 1:2a 'To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints ...'

When does this calling of God take place? In the case of Paul the apostle, he speaks of God setting him aside for His purpose from his mother's womb and calling him through His grace (Gal. 1:15). This could have taken place prior to his birth, at his birth, or even at some time after his birth. It could even have happened on his journey to Damascus. Jeremiah in his calling, on the other hand, was sanctified and appointed by God to be a prophet before he was even conceived (Jer. 1:5).

From all this we deduce that in some cases God's calling of a person or a people, took place in eternity, long before time began, but its due effect or evidence of the calling, occurred during their lifetime. In other instances, the Lord is calling there and then, at a specific point and time, without any seeming background, such as we have described. The context determines the setting.

### 3. Chosen (Choose / Choice)

Hebrew word *Bachar*: to 'prove', 'try', 'choose', 'select'. Usually, the word expresses choices with eternal consequences.

References to 'choose' in **O.T.** (AV): Num. 16:7; Deut. 7:6-7; 1 Kin. 8:16; Ps. 33:12 etc.

In **N.T.**, most common Greek word is *Eklektos*: 'choose', 'elect', 'called out'. For example, in Mat. 20:16; Rom. 16:13; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 17:14

*Ekleptomai*: to speak intelligently; choose for oneself: Mark 13:20; John 6:70;

Acts 15:7.

*Ekloge*: choice, election: Acts 9:15

*Procheirotoneo*: elect in advance; choose before: Acts 10:41

*Haireomai*: to take up for oneself; choose, lift: 2 Thes. 2:13

#### 4. Election

The act of divine choice whereby God selects an individual (or group) out of a larger company for a purpose or destiny of His own divine appointment.

‘Elect’ is used four times in Authorised Version of the Old Testament to translate the Hebrew word *bachiyr*, whose meaning is essentially to ‘try’/‘prove’, with other implied meanings such as ‘select’ and ‘choose’. As with its root *bachar* (see above), it usually expresses choices with eternal consequences.

In Isaiah 45:1-7, God calls (Heb. *qara*) a Medo-Persian king called Cyrus who conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., where Jews had been in captivity. He allowed God’s people to return home to Jerusalem. Isaiah foretold his name and actions 150 years before he was born. It was written of Cyrus that he was ‘God’s shepherd’ and ‘His anointed’ (Heb. *mashiyach*), terms used of the Saviour, despite Cyrus being a Gentile monarch (Is. 44:28; 45:1). ‘Anointed’ means Messiah and Jewish thought was of Messiah being a conqueror.

In 45:4 (‘Israel my chosen’ Heb. *bachiyr*) - AV has ‘elect’ while RV has ‘chosen’. In this verse we have divine revelation, divine calling, and the divine purpose of the Almighty in relation to His people Israel. At the same time, we have identified God’s special work in the nation’s existence on account of the patience and perseverance of individual faith in the life of His servant Jacob. The Hebrew word for ‘called’ in the same verse is *qura*, described in its primary root meaning of ‘accost’; ‘encounter’; ‘call out to’, as referred to earlier.

Please note the exercise and operation of divine fiats in the ‘I wills’ of Jehovah Elohim in verses 1-5: Loose (v. 1); Go (v. 2); Break (v. 2); Give (v. 3); Gird (v. 5).

In the **New Testament** the Greek word *eklektos* is translated ‘elect’ or ‘chosen’. Nearly all references to ‘elect’ in the AV derive from the word *eklektos* or cognate words (from *ek* = out of; *klektos* = choose: therefore ‘choose out of’ – and ‘chosen into’ by implication).

#### Some verses to consider:

Eph. 1:4: ‘Chose us in Him’ - Gk. *eklegomai* (*ek* = out; *lego* = speak intelligently). Its derivation comes from *exeloxato* meaning ‘chosen out of’. This does not imply the rejection of what is not chosen, rather it is the bestowal of favour in electing grace on the chosen subject/s long before the world was brought into existence.

Rom. 8:33: 'God's elect' - those chosen to salvation and glory.

Rom. 11:5: 'election of grace' (*ekloge*)

1 Thes. 1:4: 'knowing ... your election' ( " )

Tit. 1:1: 'faith of God's elect' (*eklektos*)

1 Pet. 1:1: 'the elect' ( " )

1 Pet. 2:4: 'elect, precious' ( " )

### Others instances of the word 'elect' includes:

Elect Angels: 1 Tim. 5:21 *eklektos*

Elect Corner Stone: 1 Pet. 2:6 ditto

Elect People: 1 Pet. 2:9 *hagios* (set apart)

Elect Sister: 2 John 1:13 *eklektos*

Elect Assembly: 1 Pet. 5:13 *suneklektos*  
(preposition *sun* = union; closeness)  
'elect together with' is one word in Greek.

### God's Eternal Purpose according to election:

'for the children being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth' (Rom. 9:11).

Here Paul refers to the purpose of God according to election (*ekloge* = choose); 'Him that calls' (Gk. *kaleo* = a call with a personal objective). It is a divine call and is not conditional on human agency ('not of works'; 'good or bad'). Simultaneously, His elective design does not imply by any means He plans and prepares certain human beings, created by His hands, for destruction and damnation, without opportunity being afforded them of escaping His eternal wrath. They do not simply fall to an inevitability of perishing eternally in the lake of fire. In what way could the Almighty rightfully impart punitive judgement on those who are not given the possibility of avoiding it? The idea cannot be entertained for a moment. He does not fashion souls to populate the earth, having already determined before they are born, that they will be vessels of wrath bound for destruction without the capacity to do something about it; otherwise, how can they be found guilty of sin and be held accountable?

### Other scriptures dealing with these principles include:

Eternal Salvation: Rom. 11:5: election' (*eklektos*)

Eternal Love: Rom. 11:28: 'election' (*ekloge*)

Eternal Effectuality: Rom. 11:29: 'calling' (*klesis* - to call)

**N.B.** *eklektos*: also found in 2 Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:2;

*ekloge*: also found in Rom. 11:7; 1 Thes. 1:4; 2 Pet. 1:10

## 5. Foreordination (AV); Foreknowledge (RV)

**Foreordination:** 1 Pet. 1:20 (AV): *Proginosko* (*pro* = before, in front of; prior; *ginosko* = to know). Verb is perfect participle passive, conveying the outcome of what God has done for us and to us and its everlasting effect.

**Foreknowledge/Foreordination** is always unto salvation and not perdition. The Lord never foreordains anyone to be lost, but those who are saved as a result of the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus were known ahead of time and chosen by God. The salvation of every believer is known and determined in the mind of God before its actual accomplishment in its historical setting. *Proginosko* ('foreknowledge') corresponds to having been chosen before the foundation of the world and always precedes *proorizo* ('foreordained' - Eph. 1:5).

### Further thoughts on Foreknown

Rom. 8:29: 'whom He **foreknew**, he also foreordained ...'

1 Pet. 1:20: 'Christ ... was **foreknown** indeed before the foundation of the world'

Rom. 11:2: 'God did not cast off His people which He **foreknew**': *proginosko* (*pro* = before; in front of; prior; *ginosko* = to know); see above.

Acts 2:23: 'the determinate counsel and **foreknowledge** of God'

1 Pet. 1:2: 'according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father': *prognosis* (*pro* = before; *ginosko* or *gnosis* = to know).

**N.B.** *Prognosis* is God's determination to fellowship with the objects of His sovereign counsel which precedes the realisation of such a relationship.

Eph. 1:5: 'having **foreordained** us unto adoption as sons': *proorizo* (*pro* = before; *horizo* = determine)

*R.B. Fullarton, Bathgate (to be continued)*

He who testifies to these things says,  
"Surely I am coming soon."  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22:20 ESV