

Text: Rev. 18:9-19

Title: "Earth's response to the fall of Babylon"

Time: 7/1/2018 am

Place: NBBC

Intro: The year 1660 marks the Restoration of the Stuarts to the throne in English history with the rise of Charles II. Charles was a "crypto-Catholic" [Beale, *Baptist History in England and America*, p. 158] who determined as the head of the Church of England to solidify his reign by stamping out religious dissent in his country. To do that, four laws were passed that are remembered today as the Clarendon Code:

1661 - The Corporation Act; this law stipulated that you had to take communion in the Church of England in order to hold public office;

1662 - The Act of Uniformity; this law required pastors to publicly affirm their unquestioning agreement with the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*; thousands of pastors, many of them Baptists, lost their ministries when they refused to comply;

1664 - The Conventicle Act; this law levied fines, imprisonment, and exile on any older than 16 years of age who attended a nonconformist religious assembly time;

1665 - The Five-Mile Act; this law forbade nonconformist clergy from coming within 5 miles of their former churches or any town that was large enough to be represented in Parliament; they were also forbidden from teaching in schools.

That same year, the bubonic plague hit London killing around 70M people. In addition, a ten-month drought ultimately resulted in the Great London Fire of 1666.

The fire raged from Sunday evening, September 2, until Thursday, September 6. Archeologists have found melted pottery on the street where the fire was started, indicating that the temperature of the blaze reached over 2000 degrees Fahrenheit. The homes of 70,000 of the city's 80,000 inhabitants were destroyed, and 87 Anglican churches, along with St. Paul's Cathedral, together with most of the governmental buildings housing city officials, were lost in the fire.

As I read that history I could not help but notice some similarities to the fall of Babylon of Revelation 18, where we read of "the smoke of her burning" (vv. 9, 18).

One of our Baptist forefathers, Hanserd Knollys, who had suffered persecution under the Clarendon Code—numerous imprisonments, exile, and the confiscation of his property—began writing on the Book of Revelation the year after that Great Fire of London (*Apocalyptic Mysteries*, 1667). Knollys's writings demonstrate that, for him, what he found in the Book of Revelation in chapters like the one we are studying was a great source of comfort and wisdom to him in a difficult day.

In one of those books on Revelation, he wrote this about how we as Baptists see our relationship to governmental authorities (some great counsel as we anticipate celebrating Independence Day):

"And let the Churches, Ministers, and all the Saints know and Consider seriously, That though they ought to pray for Kings, and all who are in Authority . . . to obey Magistrates,

and be subject to Principalities, and Powers, being God's Ordinance . . . For so is the Will of God . . . Yet in Case the Powers of this World shall command them to do any thing, which God hath forbidden, or shall forbid them to do any thing, which God hath Commanded, they ought to obey God rather than Men, as they [Apostles] did . . . and patiently Suffer for Righteousness sake, . . . as the Saints and Servants of Christ have done" [*Exposition of the Eleventh Chapter of Revelation*, p. 43; quoted in Denis C. Bustin, *Paradox and Perseverance: Hanserd Knollys, Particular Baptist Pioneer in Seventeenth-Century England*, p. 234].

Throughout the history of the church, Baptist history especially, God's people have often had to suffer at the hands of governmental authorities. The eschatological Babylon of the coming antichrist will be the worst example of this persecution (18:24). For this reason, when Babylon falls, heaven reacts with great rejoicing (v. 20).

But before we read about that heavenly reaction to the fall of Babylon in this chapter, we first read about a reaction that comes from earth, which is of a very different nature. This is the section of the chapter we are focused on this morning, and I want us to see three things from it about "Earth's response to the fall of Babylon."

I. Earth responds with great sorrow over the fall of Babylon (vv. 9-19).

III: A little known fact about the Great Fire of London was the heroic response King Charles II led to the conflagration. In an article entitled, "Charles II: The Great Fire of London's Forgotten Hero?", one author praised the king's response this way:

“The first thing Tuesday morning found him and his brother, the duke of York, back in the city. They rode to and fro, urging on the firefighters and sometimes dismounting to join the chains of people passing buckets of water. Charles also carried a pouch of gold guineas to give spontaneous rewards to men conspicuous for their efforts.

“Charles was everywhere. For more than 30 hours without a break he rode about the northern parts of the capital, which had so far avoided the flames. He sent word downriver to the dockyard for bread to be brought from the navy stores to feed the homeless and destitute. He gave orders for the relief of the hundreds of citizens gathered in makeshift camps on the spaces of Moorfields and Spitalfields to the north. He instituted the setting up of a relief fund. By the time he returned to Westminster his clothes were wet and muddy and his face black with soot” [<https://www.historyanswers.co.uk/kings-queens/litvinenko-doctors-new-evidence-was-james-vi-and-i-was-poisoned-by-his-lover/>; accessed 6/28/18]. We can only conclude that the response of this king to the burning of London was commendable. He felt great sorrow over what was happening, and his actions demonstrated the noble nature of that sorrow.

Application: I want us to see this morning that the great sorrow that the kings, merchants, and seamen feel for the fall of Babylon is of a different sort altogether. It is not patriotism they feel, nor pity for the suffering of Babylon the Great, but rather they feel great sorrow over the luxuries that they have lost (vv. 11, 14). They weep and grieve not because Babylon was sinful, nor even because Babylon was judged by God for her sin, but rather because they were no longer going to be able to sell their cargo and increase their wealth with her help.

That kind of sorrow is produced by the human heart that has come to treasure the wrong thing. Jesus warned His disciples against this temptation (Matt. 6:19-21). Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Where is your treasure this morning? Is your treasure Christ? Then you will worship Him with your heart. Is your treasure bringing souls to Christ? Then you will labor not for more of this world's things, but for the salvation of the souls of men.

Application 2: Our passage mentions the souls of men in passing (v. 13). Here they are lamented as some of the lost cargo of these earthly kings and merchants. The word *slaves* in the preceding phrase is the word *bodies*, so as John speaks of the slaves that were treated as cargo in Babylon he mentions that they had both bodies and souls. They were different than the cattle, sheep, and horses. Slavery, treating the bodies and souls of men as cargo, is sin. But how do we see lost people around us? Do we just see bodies to be avoided or used as we find desirable? Or do we see never-dying souls in need of Christ?

Earth responds with great sorrow at the fall of Babylon for all the wrong reasons. Are we living lives dominated by those same values — accumulation of things and the treatment of people as though they have no eternal soul?

II. Earth responds with great surprise at the fall of Babylon (“a single hour,” vv. 10b, 17a, 19b).

Illustration: Research shows that today victims of a house fire have about three or four minutes to escape. That statistic surprised me when I read it. The reason there is so little time to escape is that homes today are filled with synthetic fibers that burn hotter and faster than materials used in homes just decades ago.

Application: Earth responds to the fall of Babylon with great surprise over how quickly all that Babylon had been goes up in flames. Have you ever thought about how quickly everything we have of this world's delicacies and luxuries and possessions and praise will be taken away from us? Jesus wants His disciples to think about that (Luke 12:15-21). Everything this world gives us will be taken from us in an instant, just as it was for Babylon.

When that happens, it should not be surprising or troubling to us, because as disciples of Christ we have learned the truth of our Savior that "man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." We are a people who, instead, have learned to be "rich toward God." We can live for riches that will last (see Eccl. 2:1-26).

III. Earth responds with great fear from the fall of Babylon ("standing afar off"; vv. 10a, 17b).

Illustration: The article that praised Charles II's response to the Great London Fire noted that at times he was very close to the blaze trying to help put it out.

Application: There is no such help to be found from earth for fallen Babylon ablaze with the judgment of God. Those who see this smoke watch from afar fearfully. All they can offer is the word *Alas*, a word of great regret and pain.

Interestingly, the Greek word translated *Alas* here is elsewhere often translated *Woe*. It means *woe* when someone is warning others of a coming judgment, calling them to repentance and salvation. Jesus did this for His hometowns: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done

in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Matt. 11:21).

But when judgment comes, the *woe* of warning becomes the *alas* of regret. "Alas, judgment has come. Alas, it is too late. Alas, we are not saved." We may not enjoy hearing the Lord's *woe's*, but He gives us those so that we need not cry out *alas!* someday.

Conclusion: Babylon has none to stand with her on this day of God's judgment. All stand afar off.

How will it be on our day of judgment? When we stand before the throne of our holy God's judgment, will we have anyone to stand with us? Christ has died so that He can stand with us then. In Him we have an advocate who stands by our side (1 John 2:1-2). He took our torment and secures our justification in the courtroom of heaven. All we need is to trust Him to be our Savior from sin.

Hansferd Knollys put it this way: "Sinners, you must get Jesus Christ; if you will not receive and entertain Christ in your hearts, by faith, a true penitent and lively faith, he will not receive and admit you into the Marriage Chamber of his Kingdom when he comes" [*Parable of the Kingdom*, p. 120; quoted in Bustrin, pp. 219-220]. When we stand before God, will we regret having pushed Christ afar off, or will He be standing there with us?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*