

THE ACQUISITION AND USE OF WEALTH: SOME REFLECTIONS FROM REVELATION 18

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I. Introduction

In his article, "The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation," Richard Bauckham comments: "This condemnation of Rome's economic exploitation of her empire is the most unusual aspect of the opposition to Rome in Revelation ... and it has also received the least attention in modern study of the book."¹ His study "highlights, for the first time, not only the extent to which Revelation condemns Rome for its economic oppression, but also the accurate detail with which Revelation 18 depicts the economic relations between Rome

¹ R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 338.

and her empire."² Bauckham's work has underscored the economic significance of Revelation 18. Since then, more study has been done on various economic aspects in Revelation.³

This paper focuses on two economic aspects of Revelation 18: firstly, the acquisition of wealth: a critique of how the kings and the merchants of the earth and the seafarers acquired their wealth; and, secondly, the use of wealth: a critique of Rome's use of her wealth.⁴ In 18:4, John hears a voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues."⁵ The one making the call is not identified, but the reference to "my people" shows that this voice must be that of God or Christ.⁶ God's people are being addressed here, and the call is for them to "come out" of Babylon so that they would not "share in her sins."⁷ The fact that this call is made indicates that at best, John's readers were tempted to "share in her sins," and at worst, some of

² Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, xvii.

³ E.g. J.N. Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); R.M. Royalty, Jr., *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998) for a study of the rhetoric of wealth in Revelation.

⁴ In this paper, the term "seafarers" refers to ship owners and sea captains, sailors and all who earn their living from the sea (18:17).

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical references are from Revelation.

⁶ The speaker is not God as God is used in the third person (v 5b) but probably Jesus Christ: see D.E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 990. Others think the speaker is an angel: S.S. Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text to the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 446.

⁷ In this paper, I shall use Babylon and Rome interchangeably. John's readers would have understood Babylon to refer to Rome (17:18). Rome shares two characteristics with Babylon in the OT: both were centres of great world empires, and both were responsible for destroying the temple at Jerusalem, Babylon in 587 BC, and Rome in AD 70. See other aspects of comparison cited in D.E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) 830; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 343-50.

them had already shared in her sins. I will explore the economic nature of Babylon's sins in the acquisition and use of her wealth, and how some of John's readers could have acquired and used wealth in similar ways, which are condemned in Revelation 18. My approach is a socio-historical one.

II. Wealth: A Predominant Motif in Rev. 18

Revelation 18 depicts the fall of Babylon, which John has already spoken of in 14:8, 16:19 and 17:15-18. From 12:1 to 17:14, John unveils the enemies of God and his people, and then from 17:15 to 20:10, he shows how each of these enemies is destroyed in reverse order of its appearance. This can be seen clearly in the structure below:

Rev 12-20

God's Enemies Revealed

The dragon (12:1-17)
The beast from the sea (13:1-8)
The beast from the earth (13:11-17)
Babylon the Great (14:8; 16:19; 17:1-14)

God's Enemies Destroyed

the dragon (20:1-10)
the beast from the sea (19:11-21)
the beast from the earth (19:11-21)
Babylon the Great (17:15-19:10)

Of the enemies, Babylon the Great is the first to be destroyed by God. Revelation 18 is part of this account of judgement. The leading motif in this chapter is wealth. This is clear from the literary structure below:

- A 18:1- 3 Announcement of judgement on Babylon; reasons for the judgement
- B 18:4 - 8 The call to God's people to come out of Babylon before judgement falls; further reason for judgement on Babylon
- C 18:9 -19 Three laments upon the fall of Babylon
- 18:9- 10 by the kings of the earth who had shared her luxury
- 18:11- 17a by the merchants of the earth who had gained their wealth from her
- 18:17b- 19 by the seafarers who had become rich through her wealth
- B` 18:20 The call to rejoice at the fall of Babylon
- A` 18:21-24 Announcement of judgement on Babylon and reasons for the judgement

Here I follow largely Rossing's structure.⁸ This chiastic structure highlights the prominence of the wealth motif in the central section in verses 9 to 19. It comprises three laments by the kings of the earth, the merchants of the earth, and the seafarers when they saw the fall

⁸ B. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities: Whore, Bride and Empire in the Apocalypse* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1999), 100-101. But note that I have not included her chiastic structure of 18:9-19.

of Babylon. All had acquired their wealth through Babylon (18:9, 15, 19). The laments also reveal the riches and splendour of Babylon, evidenced in the luxury goods she imported to gratify her selfish desires (18:12-13). When the kings and merchants of the earth and the seafarers saw Babylon burning, they mourned the loss of their future earnings.

The wealth motif is also evident in the two announcements of God's judgement, which frame the chiastic structure. The reasons for God's judgement have to do with wealth (18:3, 23). Babylon had used her wealth to lure the nations to drink "the maddening wine of her adulteries," the kings of the earth to commit adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth to grow rich from her excessive luxuries (18:3). Another reason for judgement also relates to wealth: her immense wealth had led to self-glorification and to "her idolatrous arrogance." (18:7)⁹

With this structure in mind, I shall turn my attention to the first of the two aspects of wealth in Revelation 18: the acquisition of wealth.

III. The Acquisition of Wealth

In the Graeco-Roman world, one way to gain wealth was through trade or commerce.¹⁰ Merchants joined trade guilds: some were from the same trade, and some others had different interests and might be

⁹ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 350.

¹⁰ The other way was through the military.

from different social classes.¹¹ Members of trade guilds met regularly for social and business purposes.¹² Regular meetings together created a brotherly spirit among members, who could find mutual help in times of need.¹³ It was also in these trade guilds that members could make business contacts and conduct their business.¹⁴

Members also participated in honouring patron deities of the guilds. Honouring these gods was taken seriously by the members and the guilds. Harland tells of the confession of a man who claimed he was punished for not participating in the rituals.¹⁵ In Acts 19:24-27, silversmiths in Ephesus were threatened when Paul preached the gospel there. Demetrius, a silversmith, called together a meeting of the members of their trade guild and workmen in related trades, and said to them, " ... this fellow Paul ... says that man-made gods are no

¹¹ For different kinds of trade guilds, see P.A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 38-40. Trade guilds were one type of voluntary associations in the ancient world. See also J. Stambaugh & D.L. Balch, *The New Testament in its Social Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 124-26; J.S. Kloppenborg, "Collegia and Thiasoi: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Kloppenborg and S.G. Wilson (London: Routledge, 1996), 16-30 for a classification on the basis of membership. He distinguishes associations linked with a household, those formed around a common trade, and those formed around the cult of a deity. All three undertook to bury their dead members.

¹² MacMullen sums up the need for setting up voluntary associations: "... the urge to congregate and incorporate themselves inspired philosophers and palace cooks, and every conceivable trade, ethnic minority, religious sect, or social class in every city. Their objects were simple, summed up in the phrase 'social security': to have a refuge from loneliness in a very big world, to meet once a month for dinner, to draw pride and strength from numbers, and at the end of life (if one's dues were paid up) to be remembered in a really respectable funeral," R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest and Alienation in the Empire* (London: OUP, 1967), 174.

¹³ A.J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 88.

¹⁴ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 113.

¹⁵ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, 71-72.

gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." The existence of such a silversmith guild is attested by a tomb inscription in Ephesus specifying that the association of silversmiths was responsible for the maintenance of the tomb.¹⁶

According to Klauck, "a major element in the life of the association was the sacrificial feast and common meal held at regular intervals, each year on the feast of the god or of the foundation, once a month or even more frequently, depending on the aim and the statues of the association."¹⁷ Members worshipped the gods through prayers, singing, music and dancing. They prayed to the gods, to which they looked for protection, and offerings were made when their prayers were answered. The remains of buildings used for guild meetings show places of worship and banqueting halls. Harland cites one example of a builders' meeting place at Ostia (during Hadrian's reign) where the sanctuary for the worship of patron gods occupies the central part of the building.¹⁸ Four other rooms were dining rooms.

Members of trade guilds also participated in the religious festivals of the city. These would include the civic cults and the imperial cult.¹⁹ The former included the worship of Roman gods like

¹⁶ *I. Eph.* 2212 cited in Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 111.

¹⁷ H-J.Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions* (ET; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 44.

¹⁸ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, 63-65.

¹⁹ The imperial cult with its focus on the worship of the Emperor is portrayed symbolically by the beast from the sea in 13:1-8. The beast from the sea is a parody of Jesus Christ: "one of the heads of the beast had a fatal wound but the fatal wound had been healed." (v. 3) He receives the worship of the people. He blasphemes God, makes war against God's people, and demands absolute loyalty and worship from all men.

Jupiter, Juno, Mars and other gods, and also the patron gods of the cities.²⁰ The celebrations of the imperial cult and civic cults were often held together.²¹

As to the imperial cult, its widespread presence in the Roman Empire is attested by ancient writers. Dio Cassius (150 - 235 AD) wrote:

This practice [of imperial cult], beginning under him [Augustus], has continued under other emperors, not only in the case of Hellenic nations but also in that of all the others, in so far as they are subject to the Romans.²²

According to Dio Cassius, the imperial cult was not only practised under the Roman rulers but was a "unifying factor in the religions of the vast imperial territory" shared by all Roman subjects of the empire. The emperor was the head of political power and the guarantor of peace in the empire.²³ Thus the well-being of the emperor was held to be very important for the welfare of people in the empire. The emperor was the highest patron. All subjects, following the example of the governor, expressed their homage to the emperor through their prayers on behalf of the emperor, and their prayers to the emperor himself.²⁴ Divine honours were paid to emperors as early as 49 BC. An inscription from Ephesus honouring Julius Caesar reads:

²⁰ For a list of the major Greek and Roman gods, see R. Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 315.

²¹ In this section, I will only discuss the imperial cult.

²² Dio Cassius, 51.20.7.

²³ K. Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (ET: London: SCM Press, 1987), 46-47.

²⁴ Aristides, *Or.* 26.

The cities of Asia and the [communities] and the country districts (honour) Gaius Julius, son of Gaius, Caesar, Pontifex Maximus, Emperor and consul for the second time, descendant of Ares and Aphrodite, the god who has appeared visibly [Θεὸν ἐπιφανῆ] and universal saviour of the life of human beings.²⁵

Divine honours were also conferred on other emperors. The city of Myra in Lycia honoured the emperor Tiberius as "the exalted god, son of exalted gods, lord of land and sea, the benefactor and saviour of the entire world."²⁶

The practice of the imperial cult was widespread in Asia Minor.²⁷ In many instances the initiative for establishing the cult came from the people themselves. It was at the request of the people of Asia and Bithynia around 29 BC that Augustus allowed them to build sanctuaries in Ephesus and Nicaea respectively, which were dedicated to the cult of Roma and Julius Caesar.²⁸ Deputations from eleven cities of Asia were sent in 26 AD to plead with Emperor Tiberius for the privilege of erecting a temple in honour to himself, Livia and the Senate. Again, this was at the initiative of the people of Asia, who wished to express their loyalty to the emperor in Rome. This temple

²⁵ SIG 3/760 cited in Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity*, 290.

²⁶ Cited in Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity*, 302. For divine honours on other emperors, see Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity*, 290-312.

²⁷ There were more than eighty imperial temples in the cities in Asia Minor: S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 135. The seven cities to which John directed his letter had imperial temples. For a catalogue of imperial temples and shrines in Asia Minor, see Price, *Rituals and Power*, 249-74.

²⁸ Dio Cassius, 51.20.6-7. There were also cult centres in Pergamum and Nicomedia: S.J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 12-15. See also B.W. Longenecker, "Rome, Provincial Cities and the Seven Churches of Revelation 2-3," in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honor of B.W. Winter on his 65th Birthday*, ed. P.J. Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 281-91.

was subsequently built in Smyrna because of its many "good offices towards the Roman people."²⁹

The main feature of the imperial cult was the imperial festival, which was held in honour of the emperor. Everyone in the city, from the governor to the ordinary person, participated in imperial festivals. Sacrifices were offered; banquets and gladiatorial shows were put up for the people. Imperial worship was so widespread by the early second century AD that when the Roman authorities sought a means by which men and women could categorically denounce Christianity and profess their attachment to the emperor and the gods, they required them to make oaths and sacrifices to or on behalf of the emperors.³⁰

The imperial cult became part of the religious component in guilds by the late first or early second century AD.³¹ This was particularly so for shippers whose personal fortunes depended on the emperor.³² The emperor built harbours, canals, lighthouses, and provided protection from pirates. In return the shippers brought to Rome all the luxurious goods from the provinces and from lands beyond the Roman Empire. Religious ceremonies, which included honours to the Emperor, marked the opening of the navigation season.

Kraybill cites the example of an association of fishermen and fish dealers, comprising a hundred members from different strata of society in Ephesus, who were granted the right to erect a customs house at the harbour of Ephesus: "The association presumably collected taxes

²⁹ Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.55-56. See Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 15-21, for the presence of the imperial cult in Smyrna.

³⁰ Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.

³¹ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 47.

³² Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 117. Kraybill shows a resurgence in shipping in the middle of the first and early in the second century AD.

on exports and imports, and was in a position to monitor all maritime traffic to and from the city. An inscription from the customs house dedicates the facility to Nero, his mother, his wife, the Roman people and the people of Ephesus."³³

Trade guilds also contributed to the imperial cult through acts of public benefaction. Some acts of public benefaction were performed directly in connection with the imperial festivals.³⁴ Members of trade guilds would often participate in the imperial festivals by parading their banners through the streets in homage to the emperor.³⁵ These associations would also contribute to the shows and spectacles, which were a common part of the imperial festivals.³⁶ Members of trade guilds who had adopted the emperor or members of the imperial family as patron deities would also participate in rituals and sacrifices offered to them alongside other gods.

It is clear from this brief survey of trade guilds and the imperial cult that those who wanted to share in the wealth of Rome would have had to participate in the worship of patron deities of the trade guilds and the emperor and civic gods. In Revelation 18, John identifies three groups of people who acquired wealth through their trade relations with Rome: the kings of the earth, the merchants of the earth, and the seafarers who earned their living by the sea (18:9, 11, 17b, 19).

The kings of the earth had committed adultery with Babylon (18:3b). In the OT, the imagery of adultery and prostitution points to faithless Israel turning away from Yahweh to worship other gods

³³ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 112.

³⁴ Price, *Rituals and Power*, 118.

³⁵ R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 76.

³⁶ MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 175.

(Jer. 3:1-6). This imagery was applied only to the people of God. In 18:3, John uses the imagery of the prostitute and adultery to refer to Babylon's idolatrous religion, which corrupts people (19:2). The relationship between idolatrous religion and wealth is made more explicit in 18:9: "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury ..." Bauckham puts it well when he writes: "*Religious* corruption is offered in the cup whose golden exterior symbolises the attraction of Rome's wealth and splendour. John will be thinking primarily of the imperial cult. Part of the delusion of the *Pax Romana* – the intoxicating wine from the harlot's cup – was the people's sense of gratitude to the Emperor, who was worshipped as a divine Saviour for the blessings he had brought to his subjects."³⁷

The merchants had also prospered because of Rome: they supplied Rome with the goods listed in 18:12-13 to feed the enormous and insatiable appetite of the extravagant and luxurious lifestyle of the rich there. They could only mourn when they saw the collapse of Babylon because "no one buys their cargoes anymore." The merchants had become rich from selling these goods to Babylon (18:15). But now they had lost their most important customer. The seafarers too had become rich through Babylon's wealth (18:19). They had brought these luxury goods for wealthy Romans from all parts of the Roman Empire and beyond. They too lamented the loss of their future earnings.

We need to see the acquisition of wealth by the kings and merchants of the earth and seafarers in the context of the economic and religious background of trade guilds and imperial cult. For people who wanted to acquire wealth through trade and commerce, they

³⁷ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 348.

would have had to participate in the worship of the patron gods of the trade guilds and in the worship of emperor and civic gods.³⁸

The churches in Asia Minor would have had congregations of diverse social and economic classes.³⁹ Among them would be merchants and tradesmen, who were among the converts on Paul's missionary journeys.⁴⁰ People from the provinces, including Asia Minor, could rise in their economic or political status through trade and commerce. The provincial cities were places where small traders and even freedmen could advance, and upward social mobility was possible.⁴¹ Presumably some Christians would have continued trading after their conversion. It would have been very hard for Christian merchants and traders to acquire wealth if they could not participate in the religious activities of the guilds of their trade. Those who refused to participate in the worship of the patron gods of the trade guilds and of the emperor would face social ostracism and economic deprivation.

Some Christians might have been tempted or had already compromised their faith. Beale suggests that this might have been the case in Thyatira, where there were many prosperous trade guilds,

³⁸ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 905: "The close connection between idolatry and economic prosperity was a fact of life in Asia Minor of John's time, where allegiance to both Caesar and the patron gods of the trade guilds was essential for people to maintain good standing in their trades."

³⁹ W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2d ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 73.

⁴⁰ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 94-96. One prominent example was Lydia, who was "a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira" and had moved to Philippi where she heard the gospel from Paul and was converted (Ac 17:13-15). A number of items on the list of cargoes in 18:12-13 came from different parts of Asia: A. Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures: Luxury and indulgence in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2000), 161-68.

⁴¹ M. T. Boatwright, D. J. Gargola & R.J.A. Talbert, *The Romans: From Village to Empire* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 380.

possibly one for almost every trade.⁴² In the letter to the church in Thyatira, the angel warned the Christians against tolerating "that woman Jezebel," who had misled some Christians into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols (2:20). The latter could be a reference to the feasts and cultic meals in trade guilds and in imperial temples.⁴³

Kraybill argues that "Christians and Jews were not immune to the allurements of Rome."⁴⁴ He cites a number of NT passages which warn Christians against the love of riches.⁴⁵ One clear warning is 1Timothy 6:9-10: "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." Some Christians had compromised or even abandoned their faith for the sake of acquiring wealth. This could well refer to Christian merchants and traders who continued their membership in trade guilds and participated in idolatrous worship. It was to these Christians that the urgent call from Christ was made, "Come out of her, my people." (18:4)

The reason for the call to "come out" is very clear: so that (*hina*) they would not participate in Babylon's sins, so that (*hina*) they would not share in the coming judgement. This clearly links Babylon's sins to God's judgement.⁴⁶ The fact that this call is made indicates that at

⁴² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 261. See also Longenecker, "Rome, Provincial Cities and the Seven Churches of Revelation 2-3," 281-91.

⁴³ This could be similar to the teaching of the Nicolaitans and those who hold to the teaching of Balaam which had penetrated the church in Pergamum (2:14-15): Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 249.

⁴⁴ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 100.

⁴⁵ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 90-93.

⁴⁶ Aune, *Rev. 17-22*, 993

best, John's readers were tempted to compromise their faith, and at worst, some of them had already compromised and were participating in the worship of pagan gods and the emperor, and were getting rich in the process.⁴⁷

IV. The Use of Wealth

In this section, I will consider first, Rome's use of wealth in Revelation 18. From John's perspective, Rome used her wealth in three ways: firstly, to seduce the kings of the earth, the merchants of the earth, and the seafarers; secondly, for self-glorification; and thirdly, for self-gratification. All three ways came under God's judgement. The second part of this section will explore the possibility of John's readers using the wealth they acquired for self-gratification in a way similar to the Romans.

1. Her Use of Wealth to Seduce Others

In 18:1–3, an angel with great authority and glory shouts: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!" This is followed by a dirge which highlights the utter desolation of Babylon: she had become the habitation of demons, evil spirits, and unclean and detestable birds.⁴⁸ The *hoti* in verse 3 introduces three reasons for God's judgement, and these are tied, explicitly or implicitly, to wealth. The first reason is found in 14:8, 17:2 and 18:3a. The reference back to 17:2 recalls the great prostitute and her alluring wiles which she used to seduce the

⁴⁷ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 192.

⁴⁸ For a study of the form and function of a dirge, see A. Y. Collins, "Revelation 18: Taunt-Song or Dirge?" in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed. J. Lambrecht (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1980), 185-204.

nations by making them drunk with the wine of her adulteries.⁴⁹ John identifies the prostitute as "the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." (17:18) Not only had the nations drunk of the wine of her adulteries, the kings of the earth had committed adultery with her (18:3b). The third reason for Babylon's sin is also linked to her wealth (18:3c).⁵⁰ It had to do with her opulent and extravagant lifestyle that was sustained by the import of luxury goods listed in verses 12 and 13. The merchants who supplied these goods had become rich through her.

The imagery of prostitution linked with trade is also taken from the OT. Here John alludes to Isaiah's prophecy against Tyre (Isa 23:15–18). After seventy years, Tyre "will return to her hire as a prostitute and will ply her trade with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth." (v. 7)⁵¹ Tyre was the main centre for commerce and trade in the OT period, and her trading activities had made her very wealthy. The example of Tarshish is typical: "Tarshish did business with you because of your great wealth of goods" (Eze 27:12).

Thus we see in 18:3 that God's judgement is tied in with Babylon's wealth and excessive luxuries. She had used her wealth to seduce people "into idolatry and false economic security."⁵² Her seduction was so successful that the kings and the merchants of the

⁴⁹ This alludes to Jeremiah's prophecy on Babylon's fall: "Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad." (Jer 51:7)

⁵⁰ Osborne refers to this as "the sin of materialistic luxury": G. R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 637.

⁵¹ The LXX translation of Isa. 23:17b "she will be a market (emporion) for all the kingdoms of the earth" further emphasises the economic aspect of God's judgement: Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 895.

⁵² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 896.

earth and the seafarers could only look on in shock and mourn in deep anguish when they saw the source of their wealth burning.⁵³

In the central section of Revelation 18, Babylon's fall is told from the perspective of these three groups of people.⁵⁴ There are some similarities in the laments.⁵⁵ But there are also variations, which reveal the particular interests of the mourners. The kings of the earth had committed adultery with her and shared in her luxury. In their cry, they referred to the greatness and power of the city (18:10). They had been seduced by her power and wealth. When they saw Babylon burn, they mourned the loss of their political power base, and their partner in luxurious living.

The merchants of the earth also saw Babylon in terms of her wealth. They had gained their wealth from her. The seduction by her wealth can be seen in the merchants' description of the city. The city is "dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls." (18:16) Except for the fine linen, this description matches the gaudy garments of the prostitute in 17:4. These items of fine clothing and precious gems are also found in the list of cargoes in 18:12-13. All these emphasise the seduction of the merchants by the wealth of the city. This is further stressed in the suddenness of their loss: "In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"

The third group who had been seduced by Babylon's wealth and had benefited from their trade with her were the seafarers. They stood in awe of the great city. Their rhetorical question, "Was there ever a city like this great city?" is an echo of the cry of the worshippers of the

⁵³ C.S. Keener, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 424.

⁵⁴ See the literary structure of Rev 18 on p. 258 above.

⁵⁵ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 978-79.

beast from the sea in 13:4, "Who is like the beast?" This is a parody of the awed cries of the Israelites after God had rescued them from the Egyptians: "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Ex 15:11) The cry of the seafarers suggests that their awe of Babylon was close to idolatry.

The above shows how Babylon used her wealth to lure the kings and the merchants of the earth and the seafarers to pledge their allegiance to her.⁵⁶ Merchants and shippers providing Rome with her luxury goods would have had to participate in the worship of the patron gods of their trade guilds and in the imperial cult, both of which were idolatrous from John's perspective. Hence Babylon would come under God's judgement.

2. Her Use of Wealth for Self-glorification

Immediately following the announcement and reasons for God's judgement on Babylon in 18:1-3, John hears a voice from heaven calling God's people to "come out of her." This is followed by an indictment which states another of Babylon's sins: "Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.'" (18:7)

Babylon's sin is rooted in her self-glorification and arrogance. In Revelation, only God and Christ are worthy of glory (4:9–11; 5:12–14; 15:4; 19:1). Babylon's self-glorification is demonstrated in her boast as a queen who would never mourn (18:7b).⁵⁷ It is striking that she saw

⁵⁶ It must be said that they were not unwilling partners to the seduction, for they had all become rich through Babylon's wealth.

⁵⁷ For other examples of this kind of soliloquy, see Aune, *Rev. 17–22*, 995.

herself not as the gaudily dressed prostitute portrayed in 17:4 but as queen. She claimed that she would not be a widow, having to depend on others for her survival.

Her boast is based on Isaiah 47:5-8: "Sit in silence, go into darkness, Daughter of the Babylonians; no more will you be called queen of kingdoms ... You said, 'I will continue forever – the eternal queen!' ... Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.'" This allusion to Isaiah's prophecy highlights her boast of eternal reign. Graeco-Roman writers also attributed this trait of eternal reign to Rome: the Roman Empire was "an empire without end," and Rome was "queen and mistress of the world."⁵⁸ But all her boasting merely exposed her self-delusion. Just as Isaiah prophesied the sudden fall of Babylon in a single day (Isa 47:9-11), so too John sees Babylon fall suddenly and swiftly: in one hour (18:10, 17, 19). Her self-glorification is idolatry, and a sin against God.

Her self-glorification is linked to her living in sensuous luxury (18:7). We have already encountered her excessive luxuries, which had made the merchants rich (18:3). With her wealth, she was able to buy luxury goods, which the merchants had sourced from other parts of the Roman Empire and from distant exotic lands, to maintain her sensuous and lavish lifestyle. It was her wealth that fed her arrogance and self-sufficiency.

Babylon's arrogance is also seen in her boast that her "merchants were the world's great men." (18:23b) This claim follows the announcement of judgement on Babylon at the end of Revelation

⁵⁸ Aune, *Rev. 17–22*, 996. For other examples of ancient writers propagating Rome's eternal reign, see Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities*, 127-29.

18. Just as the announcement of judgement given at the beginning of chapter 18 describes vividly the desolation of Babylon and the grounds for judgement, so too at the end of the chapter, we see the city devoid of all the normal aspects of life: music, work, marriage, light and indeed life itself. Her merchants were the world's great men. *Prima facie* this may not seem a good ground for judgement. But this may be an allusion to Isaiah's prophecy against Tyre: "Who planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are renowned in the earth? The Lord Almighty planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth." (Isa 23:8–9) Here we see her pride in claiming her merchants are the world's great men, giving glory to herself rather than to God.

3. Her Use of Wealth for Self-gratification

Babylon's use of her wealth for self-gratification is evident in the list of cargoes brought by merchants from every part of the Roman Empire and beyond (18:12-13).⁵⁹ Some of the items listed in verses 12 and 13 can be found in Ezekiel 27:12–24, which enumerates the goods that Tyre traded in. Bauckham compares John's list with Ezekiel's and those of Graeco-Roman writers, and observes that John's list represented the economic realities of his day.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Produce from all over the world were brought to Rome by ships. See Aristides, *Roman Oration*, 10-11: "From every land and sea all the crops of the seasons, all the produce of each province, river and lake, all the products of Greeks and barbarians, are brought to Rome. If we want to see these things, we can travel the whole world, or we can come to Rome. So many ships arrive here every hour and every day, loaded with every kind of goods from every people that the city is like a market for the whole earth."

⁶⁰ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 351. For a study of the items listed, see Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 352-66; Osborne, *Revelation*, 648-50. Bauckham also refers to Graeco-Roman writers who included these items for the indulgent habits of the Romans in their discourses. These items were available for sale in the *Saepta* in Rome: Martial described how Mamurra "paced all about the *Saepta*, where golden Rome sets out her riches. He inspected the

Bauckham notes that only a few commentators provided information about the individual items on the list in 18:12-13.⁶¹ To redress this situation, Bauckham offers, in what he calls "a rather provisional way," some comment on the individual items on the list of cargoes, in particular on their significance as Roman imports.⁶² For each item, he cites from Pliny's *Natural History* to show its value and use by the rich in Rome.⁶³ He cites other ancient authors like Tacitus and Suetonius, who were critical of the extravagant use of these luxury items by wealthy Romans.

From his discussion, Bauckham draws a few conclusions about the cargoes.⁶⁴ One is that "most of the items were among the most expensive of Rome's imports." Secondly, these were the luxury items "which fed the vulgarly extravagant tastes of the rich." Thirdly, these items were often the subject of critique by Roman writers "of the conspicuous extravagance of the Roman rich." Bauckham asserts that John provides a similar critique, which is effectively expressed in the merchants' lament in 18:14:

soft slave boys: he ate them with his eyes. Not the ones they display in the shop fronts, but those upstairs in the special cages; those that ordinary people, my sort of people, never see'. He looked at the table-tops – the ones that were wrapped up; he looked at the ivory – off the top shelf; he looked at a tortoiseshell couch (*hexaclinon*) which he decided was too small for his citronwood table; he looked at the Corinthian bronzes, and as a true connoisseur he tested them by the smell ... he looked at emeralds, pearls, *sardonyches*, jaspers – but they were overpriced. And then he just bought a couple of cups, and carried them home *himself*." (Martial 9.59) Cited in Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 241-42.

⁶¹ The commentators are William Barclay, H.B. Swete and R.H. Mounce: Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 351. Of the commentators, Mounce, and Aune discuss the individual items in the light of their origins, and their uses by the Romans. Others like Keener, Thompson, Smalley and Resseguie refer to Bauckham's discussion. Beale's comments focus mainly on slaves. Similarly, Witherington has a very brief paragraph on the items but has an excursus on Slavery.

⁶² See his discussion on 352-66.

⁶³ See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 352-67 for references to Pliny.

⁶⁴ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 366-71.

The ripe fruit (ὄπωρα) which your soul craves has gone from you, and all your luxuries (λιπαρά) and your glittering prizes (λαμπρά) are lost to you, never to be found again. (Bauckham's translation)

He then comments: "The first line evokes Rome's addiction to consumption, while the two words chosen for the merchandise in the second line suggest both the self-indulgent opulence (λιπαρά) and the ostentatious display (λαμπρά) of Roman extravagance."⁶⁵

This "self-indulgent opulence and the ostentatious display of Roman extravagance" would have been evident in the houses of wealthy Romans, some of whom would have owned other properties near Rome. These houses would have been made of expensive stone and marble. The furnishings in the houses would have been made from costly wood, scarlet and purple. Wealthy Romans would have worn clothes made of silk, scarlet and purple, with jewellery made from gold and silver and other precious stones. They would have entertained and thrown lavish dinner parties, serving exotic food on trays made of gold and silver and bronze. Aromas and perfumes would have been essential in dining and entertainment.⁶⁶

Dalby examines various Roman writers on the matter of dining and entertainment, and makes this observation: "Discreetly or not, food and wine and aroma displayed the wealth of Empire. So did the festive setting, 'the tables splendid with citronwood and ivory, the couches covered with golden drapes. The ample cups were of different workmanship, but of an equal costliness: you might drink from engraved glass, carved rock crystal, brilliant silver and gold, amber wonderfully sculpted, or marble.'"⁶⁷ Martial appraised "in a richly

⁶⁵ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 368.

⁶⁶ Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 244.

⁶⁷ Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 254-55, citing Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.19.

furnished house, couches encrusted with first grade tortoiseshell, solid Marusian citronwood of a weight rarely seen, silver and gold on a fancy tripod, and boys standing to attention whom I wouldn't mind being slave to."⁶⁸ In these dinner parties, wine imported from all over the Roman Empire would flow freely.

One can only imagine the number of slaves required to take care of these properties and to serve at the lavish dinner parties thrown by their masters. These slaves would have been bought at the market place in Rome, which was the largest market for slaves, many of whom would have been brought from Asia Minor by slave traders.⁶⁹ Slaves could be seen everywhere in the Roman Empire, engaged in different types of everyday tasks.⁷⁰ But it was the large numbers of slaves acquired by the wealthy and the big sums paid for slaves with particular beauty or skills that caused some Graeco-Roman writers to criticise them for such extravagance.⁷¹

The list of cargoes in Revelation 18:12-13 ends with "bodies and souls of men." (NIV) The word used for bodies σώματα refers to slaves. The expression "souls of men" is taken from Ezekiel 27:13 where it refers to slaves. Some commentators see significance in the way both expressions are used together at the end of the list of

⁶⁸ Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 241.

⁶⁹ C.R. Koester, "Roman Slave Trade and the Critique of Babylon in Revelation 18," *CBQ* 70 (2008): 766-86. Koester examined various inscriptions honouring benefactors "from those who do business in the slave market" in Ephesus, Thyatira and Sardis.

⁷⁰ Slaves were owned by the rich and by those of relatively humble means: A.H.M. Jones, "Slavery in the Ancient World," in *Slavery in Classical Antiquity*, ed. M.I. Finley (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1960), 1-15. There were about ten million slaves in the Roman Empire in the first century AD; this made up 16.6 percent to 20 percent of the population: Aune, *Rev 17-22*, 1003.

⁷¹ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 366. Dalby mentions some wealthy slaveowners buying matching slaves, citing "the 'good-looking slaves all the same age' of a wealthy conspirator against Nero (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.69)": Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 268.

cargoes. Bauckham, for instance, comments: "That John gives both the common term for slaves in the slave markets (σώματα) and a scriptural description of slaves (ψυχὰν ἀνθρώπων) must mean that he intends a comment on the slave market. He is pointing out that slaves are not mere animal carcasses to be bought and sold as property, but are human beings. But in this emphatic position at the end of the list, this is more than just a comment on the slave trade. It is a comment on the whole list of cargoes. It suggests the inhuman brutality, the contempt for human life, on which the whole of Rome's prosperity and luxury rests."⁷²

Possession of wealth in itself is not a reason for God's judgement. Rather Babylon's attitude to her wealth has made her culpable. She used her wealth to seduce others to idolatry, and for self-glorification, and her immense wealth led to her "idolatrous arrogance."⁷³ She also used her wealth for self-gratification. In 18:7, Babylon was judged for the "luxury she gave herself." All these are tantamount to idolatry.

V. The Call to "come out of her, my people" (18:4)

1. "... so that you will not share in her sins"

In 18:4-5, John hears another voice from heaven say, "Come out of her, my people ..." The reason for this call is very clear: so that (*hina*) they would not share in Babylon's sins, so that (*hina*) they would not share in the coming judgement.

In what ways could John's readers be said to "share in her sins"? We have shown above three ways in which Rome used her wealth,

⁷² Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 370.

⁷³ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 349-50.

all of which were sinful in God's sight. Rome used her wealth to lure the kings and the merchants of the earth and the seafarers to pledge their allegiance to her; this would have included religious allegiance. Merchants and shippers providing Rome with her luxury goods would have had to participate in the worship of the emperor and the patron gods of their trade guilds. This was essential for their acquisition of wealth.⁷⁴ Rome also used her wealth for self-aggrandizement. With her wealth, she lavished upon herself all the luxury goods brought to her by merchants and seafarers from the length and breadth of the Roman Empire and beyond.

For John's readers to "share in her sins," it would involve participation with her in her sinful activities. The verb συγκαινωνεῖν occurs only in 18:4 and in Ephesians 5:11, and it means to "participate in with someone, be connected with and share."⁷⁵ In Ephesians 5:11, Paul exhorts his readers not to participate in the fruitless deeds of darkness because they were children of light. O'Brien puts it this way: "Because light and darkness are incompatible, it is completely inappropriate to live in the light (with its resulting *goodness, righteousness and truth*) and then to adopt the *lifestyle* of those who are still in darkness."⁷⁶

From the discussion above on the acquisition of wealth by the kings and the merchants of the earth and the seafarers, it is quite clear that Christians would have had to compromise their faith and loyalty to Christ in order to acquire wealth through trade and commerce, for they would have had to participate in the worship of pagan gods (whether it

⁷⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 905.

⁷⁵ J. Schattenmann, "κοινωνία" in C. Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (ET; Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 642.

⁷⁶ P.T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 370. The emphasis is his.

be the gods of their trade guilds or of their cities) and the imperial cult. Such idolatry would have been an act of sharing in Babylon's sins.

John's readers could also have shared in Babylon's sins in their display of arrogance and self-sufficiency. John knows of wealthy Christians in Laodicea, who say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." (3:17) Like Babylon, their wealth had given rise to arrogance and self-sufficiency. For this, Babylon would receive proportionate judgement: "Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself." (18:7) In Mounce's words, "Rome is to receive misery in exact proportion to the self-glorification and luxurious lifestyle she has chosen."⁷⁷ Smalley interprets the verb ἐστρηνίασεν in 18:7 to mean that she "lived luxuriously."⁷⁸ Both commentators stress the self-indulgent lifestyle she had chosen, using her wealth to acquire the luxury goods brought by the merchants and the seafarers to satisfy her insatiable appetite for an opulent and extravagant way of life.

Were some of John's readers also living luxuriously like the Romans, so that the call to "come out of her ... so that you will not share in her sins" would also include a call to disentangle or disassociate them from living such a lifestyle?⁷⁹ There is no explicit mention in Revelation 18 or in the rest of the book that John's readers had shared in a similar luxurious lifestyle like the Romans. However, a case can be made to show that it is possible that the wealthy among John's readers in Asia could have "lived luxuriously" like the Romans, hence sharing in her sins and deserving judgement as well.

⁷⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 328.

⁷⁸ Smalley, *The Revelation of John*, 449.

⁷⁹ For a more detailed discussion of what it means to "come out of her," see p.290-93 below.

I have noted above that in Bauckham's discussion of the luxury items in 18:12-13, he cites frequently from Pliny's *Natural History*. He also cites a few times from Pliny's contemporary, Petronius. Both were critical of Rome's excessive greed and opulent lifestyle. Each made a catalogue of the luxury goods consumed by Rome. Pliny wrote his *Natural History*; Petronius wrote a novel, *The Satyricon*.⁸⁰ In his novel, he devoted a substantial part to a dinner party given by Trimalchio. It was at this dinner party that we can see the extent of Trimalchio's wealth: many of the luxury items in the list in 18:12-13 were present for his own enjoyment in his house in Puteoli.⁸¹

Kraybill also cites the example of Trimalchio: he sees in him an example of how people from the provinces could acquire wealth through shipping and commerce.⁸² He gives a brief profile of Trimalchio as a merchant, who was formerly a slave from Asia. He purchased his freedom and then went into business, which included shipping perfume and slaves to Rome. With his immense wealth, he squandered money on "absurd luxuries." "At a banquet, boys from Alexandria pour water chilled with snow over the guest's hands. Other servants kneel to trim hangnails from the feet of diners."⁸³ While Kraybill mentions only two of Trimalchio's "absurd luxuries," he does not go further to show that Trimalchio's wealth enabled him to purchase many of the luxury items found in the list in 18:12-13.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 10: Dalby refers to Petronius as the "author of the most cynical and realistic of Roman fictions, the *Satyricon*."

⁸¹ Most of the luxuries of the Roman Empire could be found at Puteoli: Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 54.

⁸² Kraybill concedes that "our interpretation of Petronius' novel must allow a margin from the author's exaggeration and caricature. Yet this story tells of a provincial 'selling out' to Rome in a manner that may be parallel to that of 'merchants and seamen' in Revelation": Kraybill, *Imperial Cult & Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 110.

⁸³ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult & Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 110.

⁸⁴ Most of the luxuries of the Roman Empire could be found at Puteoli: Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 54.

Petronius' detailed depiction of Trimalchio's dinner party provides an excellent and detailed portrayal of the opulent and extravagant lifestyle of a provincial who sought to live in a way similar to wealthy Romans. This can be borne out by a more detailed examination of Trimalchio's dinner party.⁸⁵

A brief word must be said here about imaginative literature before we look at Trimalchio's dinner party in greater detail. Trimalchio was a character in Petronius' work of fiction. While such works were the product of creativity, they were not totally removed from reality.⁸⁶ No doubt some aspects of Petronius' portrayal of Trimalchio's dinner party might have been exaggerated but Casson is of the view that while Petronius was a novelist and not a historian, nevertheless "his portrait of Trimalchio is based on reality."⁸⁷ Thus while caution must

⁸⁵ See J.H. D'Arms, *Commerce and Social Standing in Ancient Rome* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 97-100 for various studies on Trimalchio: for Rostovtzeff, Trimalchio was a "typical representative" of wealthy businessmen in Italian and provincial cities; for Veyne, "it was not Trimalchio's commercial activity, but his desire to abandon it to become a landed proprietor, that is historically significant;" for Finley, his emphasis was on his wealth, "his esoteric luxury and his acceptance of certain 'senatorial' values, the ownership of large estates as a 'non-occupation' and the pride in his economic self-sufficiency." For D'Arms, "Trimalchio's controlling impulses were and remained acquisitive. He focused on multiple and diversified economic pursuits – predominantly commercial and financial, in which he for years participated directly, then through the employment of freedmen intermediaries – which were offered by the major port of Puteoli." (116) In this paper, my focus is on the luxuries that Trimalchio was able to enjoy through his wealth.

⁸⁶ Saller, for example, argues that comedies were a part of the cultural and social reality of early 2nd century Rome: R.S.Saller, "The Social Dynamics of Consent to Marriage and Sexual Relations: The Evidence of Roman Comedy," in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. A.E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), 83-104, 110. First, he asserts that "plays were part of a public discourse giving expression to debates over moral issues." He finds that many themes of comedies could also be found in the moral discourses of 2nd century Rome. Secondly, he argues that the world of comedy did not portray ideal households or situations. Rather they reflected the circumstances of real people.

⁸⁷ L. Casson, *Everyday Life in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 57-63. Casson cites the example of a monument in Ostia erected by an ex-slave Lucius Fabius Eutyclus. He was in the civil service and rose to chief clerk. After manumission, he went into construction business: he was elected as president of the builder's association for a term. See also R. Ling, "The Arts of Living," in *The Oxford History of the Roman World*, ed. J. Boardman, J. Griffin & O. Murray (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 381-82.

be applied when using imaginative literature like Petronius' *Satyricon*, they can be a useful supplement to illustrate what life was like in the ancient world.⁸⁸

In Petronius' *Satyricon*, his hero (or anti-hero) Encolpius took up with various companions in Italy, and "lived by theft and free hospitality."⁸⁹ It was in the pursuit of the latter that he and his companions attended a dinner party given by Trimalchio.

At his dinner party, Trimalchio spoke about his rise from being a slave to a wealthy businessman. For fourteen years, he was his master's "fancy" (75) as well as his mistress. He bought his freedom, and began his business. He built five ships, loading them with wine ("it was absolute gold at the time"), and sent them to Rome (76). But all his ships were wrecked, and it cost him thirty million sesterces. He built more ships, "bigger and better and luckier," and loaded them with "wine, bacon, beans, perfumes and slaves." He claimed that in one voyage, he "carved out a round ten million. I immediately bought back all my old master's estates. I build a house, I invest in slaves and haulage ... I retired from business and began advancing loans to freedmen. (76)"⁹⁰

⁸⁸ S.P. Ellis, *Roman Housing* (London: Duckworth, 2000), 15: Ellis is of the view that while much of the behaviour described is exaggerated, *The Satyricon* "contains much fundamental information concerning Roman dining practices." Ellis describes in detail "a very opulent house" in Pompeii belonging to two brothers, A. Vettius Restitutus and A. Vettius Conviva, who were ex-slaves and later gained their freedom, and either bought or inherited the house from their master (2-4).

⁸⁹ In this paper, I use the translation in J.P. Sullivan, *The Satyricon & The Apocolocyntosis: Texts with Introductions and Notes* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1986). The numbers in brackets refer to the sections in this translation.

⁹⁰ D'Arms argues that Trimalchio's advancement of loans to freedmen refers to "his lending money at interest through freedman intermediaries": D'Arms, *Commerce & Social Standing in Ancient Rome* 103. For the kinds of commercial loans he would have provided, see 107.

The house he built had four dining rooms, one for each season. There were "twenty bedrooms, two marble colonnades, a row of box-rooms up above, a bedroom where I sleep myself, a nest for his viper [his wife Fortunata], and a really good lodge for the porter." (77)⁹¹

It was in this house that he gave his dinner party. On the doorpost was a notice: ANY SLAVE LEAVING THE HOUSE WITHOUT HIS MASTER'S PERMISSION WILL RECEIVE ONE HUNDRED LASHES. As mentioned earlier, Trimalchio sold slaves to Rome.⁹² Trimalchio also had many slaves in his house, and they attended to the guests at the dinner party.⁹³ One of his guests remarked: "As for his servants - boy, oh boy! I honestly don't think there's one in ten knows his own master." (37). Indeed, on the wall of the house, there "was a mural of a slave market, price-tags and all." The mural also showed "Trimalchio himself, holding a wand of Mercury and being led into Rome by Minerva." (29)⁹⁴

At the entrance to Trimalchio's house, Encolpius saw a hall-porter shelling peas into a *silver* basin. Over the doorway hung a *golden* cage from which a spotted magpie greeted visitors. Gold and silver, the first two items in the list in 18:12-13, featured prominently in the account. Trimalchio wore a solid *gold* ring on his finger, and "to show off even more of his jewellery, he had his right arm bare and set off by a *gold* armlet and an *ivory* circlet fastened with a gleaming metal plate." (32) He picked his teeth with a *silver* toothpick (33). Encolpius noticed a young boy "with a board of terebinth wood with glass squares, and I

⁹¹ He had other properties. His accountant recited what was going on in his estate (53). He mentioned a fire which broke out at his estate in Pompeii, and Trimalchio said, "When was an estate bought for me at Pompeii?"

⁹² The last item on the list of cargoes in 18:12-13 is slaves.

⁹³ Words in italics are those that can be found in the list of cargoes in 18:12-13.

⁹⁴ Mercury was the patron god of traders.

noticed the very last word in luxury – instead of white and black pieces he had *gold* and *silver* coins." (33) When a *silver* plate happened to fall to the ground, Trimalchio commanded his *slave* to throw it down after he had picked it up. It was swept along with the rest of the rubbish (34). A young Egyptian *slave* carried bread in a *silver* oven (35). Food was served on a *silver* gridiron (70).

As they were drinking *wine*, a *slave* brought in a *silver* skeleton, which purpose was used to encourage diners to "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." (34) Trimalchio claimed that he was very keen on *silver* (52). He gave *gold* crowns to his guests as presents (60). His wife, Fortunata "took the bracelets from her great fat arms and showed them to the admiring Scintilla. In the end she even undid her anklets and her *gold* hair net, which she said was pure *gold*. Trimalchio noticed this and had it all brought to him and commented: 'A woman's chains, you see. This is the way us poor fools get robbed. She must have six and a half pounds on her. Still, I've got a bracelet myself, made up from one-tenth per cent to Mercury – and it weighs not an ounce less than ten pounds.'" (67)⁹⁵ In another room, Encolpius noticed "some *bronze* fishermen on the lamps as well as tables of solid *silver*, with *gold* inlaid pottery spread around and *wine* pouring from a leather wine-flask before our very eyes." (73)

Other items in the list of cargoes in 18:12-13 were also featured in Trimalchio's house and dinner party. Although Trimalchio did not speak about his collection of precious stones and pearls (18:12), he did show off his jewellery, which presumably would have included precious stones. His ring was "studded with little iron stars," and he

⁹⁵ Translator's endnote (47): "One tenth of one percent to Mercury: paid by the month by the grateful merchant to the patron god of traders. The size of the bracelet indicates a high revenue."

had an "a gold armlet and an *ivory* circlet fastened with a gleaming metal plate." (32)⁹⁶

The expensive fabric in 18:12, namely, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth, were also featured in Trimalchio's possessions. He wore a *scarlet* coat, and around his neck was "a napkin with a broad *purple* stripe and tassels dangling here and there." (32) According to one of the guests, all the cushions in the dining room had either *purple* or *scarlet* stuffing (38). When an acrobat tumbled down on Trimalchio's couch and hurt his arm, a servant was beaten for using white rather than *purple* wool to bandage his master's bruised arm (54). His steward was presented by a client on his birthday with "clothes made of genuine Tyrian *purple*." (30) Towards the end of the dinner party, Trimalchio revealed his plan for his own burial: he wanted to be wrapped in "his white shroud and his *purple*-edged toga." (78) He desired "to be buried in style, so that the whole town will pay for my rest." (78)

The next items on the list in 18:12 are "every sort of citron wood and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble." These too were featured in Trimalchio's house: "The dishes for the first course included an ass of Corinthian bronze with two panniers, white olives on one side and black on the other. Over the ass were two pieces of plate, with Trimalchio's name and the weight of the silver inscribed on the rims." (31) There is mention of a tray of Corinthian *bronze* (50), and "some *bronze* fishermen on the lamps." (73) As mentioned above, he had on his right arm "a gold armlet and an *ivory* circlet fastened with a gleaming metal plate." (32) His house had two *marble* colonnades (72).

⁹⁶ In a poem by Publilius, there is mention of pearls, emeralds and carbuncles. (55)

Next on the list are spices and perfumes (18:13). While there was no explicit mention of cinnamon and spice in the account of Trimalchio's dinner party, they would most probably have been used in the preparation of the exotic food served. He had instructed his friend Habinnas to erect a statue upon his death, and to place scent-bottles at the foot of this statue (71). These scent-bottles would have held perfumes made from cinnamon, myrrh and frankincense.⁹⁷ When he asked for the shroud that he would be buried in, he also asked for cosmetic cream. A bottle of nard was brought to him, and he rubbed some of it on his guests saying, "I hope this'll be as nice when I'm dead as when I'm alive." (78) This nard would have come from India or China, and would have been costly.

The next group in the list of cargoes in 18:12-13 comprises food items: wine, olive oil, fine flour and wheat. *Wine* flowed freely in Trimalchio's dinner party (34, 52, 73). Indeed, if his guests did not like the wine they were served, he would have it changed (48). He wanted his bones to be washed from "that jar of wine." (77) He himself shipped wine to Rome (76). Wine, oil and wheat were staples but fine flour would have been used by the wealthy.⁹⁸ Exotic and expensive food was served in Trimalchio's dinner party but the ingredients are not included in the list of cargoes in Revelation 18.⁹⁹ He ordered mushroom spores from India (38). The dishes for the first course "included an ass of Corinthian bronze with two panniers, white olives on one side and black on the other. Over the ass were two pieces of

⁹⁷ "Rose leaves are out of date, cinnamon's the thing now. Anything hard to get is well worth the price." (93)

⁹⁸ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 362.

⁹⁹ Bauckham suggests that perhaps "no *single* item of this kind was important enough to belong in a list like this": Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 367. According to Dalby, by Pliny's time, "it was a mark of affluence if a Roman ate and entertained in his town house from the produce of his own land": Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 30.

plate, with Trimalchio's name and the weight of the silver inscribed on the rims. There were some small iron frames shaped like bridges supporting dormice sprinkled with honey and poppy seed. There were steaming hot sausages too, on a silver gridiron with damsons and pomegranate seeds underneath." (31) Among the food served in the next course were a young sow's udder, a sea scorpion, a lobster, and a goose (35). Later came "a wild boar of the largest possible size ... From its tusks dangled two baskets woven from palm leaves, one full of fresh Syrian dates, the other of dried Theban dates." (40)

There is little mention of sheep, cattle, horses and carriages (18:13) in the account of Trimalchio's dinner. Perhaps this is not surprising as these animals were not likely to feature in a dinner party. He had *sheep* (38), and would have had horse-drawn carriages to take him to his other estates (53). The list of cargoes in 18:12-13 ends with slaves. Trimalchio owned many *slaves*, and also shipped slaves to Rome (76).

This brief account of Trimalchio's dinner party focuses mainly on the items found in 18:12-13. It illustrates how a slave from the provinces was able to acquire wealth, and to enjoy the same kind of luxury commodities which wealthy Romans indulged in. Trimalchio's lifestyle, as exemplified by his dinner party, fits well into what Bauckham calls the "self-indulgent opulence and the ostentatious display of Roman extravagance."¹⁰⁰ Dalby sums up Trimalchio's life with these words: "By being his master's and his mistress's lover, being freed, trading and speculating, becoming a landowner, joining one property to another, knowing what to spend his money on, Trimalchio had become a Roman in one generation."¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 368.

¹⁰¹ Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 270.

The spread of Roman customs and lifestyle was part of the process of Romanization. Ellis sees Romanization as "an attempt to establish the extent to which provincial subjects of the Roman Empire wished to become like the Romans of Rome."¹⁰² MacMullen argues that it was the provincials who sought to be like the Romans: "The nations would be taught, if it was not plain enough on its face, that they could better rise into the ranks of the master race by reforming themselves — by talking, dressing, looking, and in every way resembling Romans. They would be and did respond as intuition directed. They pulled Roman civilization to them — to their home, their families, and their world."¹⁰³ He observes that the urban well-to-do were particularly keen for this to take place in their lives.

In his study of Roman houses, Ellis argues that most people in the provinces accepted Roman rule and the Roman way of life. Where houses were concerned, people did not only adopt Roman design but also the accompanying lifestyle: "Housing was a matter of individual preference, and it is hard to imagine that a villa owner who went to the length of having his own private baths, hypocaust central heating, and very personal decoration on his house walls, was simply conforming to society. By doing so he was conforming to Roman norms. More importantly, he was also adopting specific patterns of Roman behaviour, bathing with his friends and holding Roman-style dinner parties."¹⁰⁴ Trimachio's house and lifestyle certainly fitted this description.

¹⁰² Ellis, *Roman Housing*, 10.

¹⁰³ R. MacMullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 134. The process varied from place to place.

¹⁰⁴ Ellis, *Roman Housing* 10. Although the provinces would have their own local styles, Ellis argues that "domestic architecture indicates that Roman living habits were adopted. Even in the Greek-speaking East, housing adopted more of a Roman style."

According to Parker, the spread of Roman customs throughout the Empire created a demand by provincials for goods necessary to adopt these customs as this would make them "stylish".¹⁰⁵ He gives the example of glossy, red, moulded pottery lamps made in Italy in the first and second centuries AD found in many provincial towns. These lamps were used for burning imported olive oil; both items would have been expensive. Olive oil was produced on a mass scale for provincial use.¹⁰⁶

From Meeks' "impressionistic sketch" of Christians in the Pauline communities, we know that there were some Christians who were traders and artisans, and some were wealthy enough to own houses. They owned slaves and were able to travel. There were also freedmen and their descendants who had acquired wealth and position.¹⁰⁷ John's readers in the seven churches in Asia would have included some wealthy members who owned houses. Some of them might have been tempted to adopt the luxurious lifestyle of the Romans or some might have already "lived luxuriously" like the Romans, thus sharing in her sin of using wealth for her self-gratification. It is to these Christians that Christ's call to "come out of her" in 18:4 is addressed.

2. "Come out of her, my people ..."

What does "coming out" involve? This call alludes to similar summons in the OT for God's people to come out of Babylon and flee for their lives (Isa 48:20; 52:11; Jer 50:8; 51:6, 45). In these instances, physical separation was commanded. Does John envisage a physical

¹⁰⁵ A.J. Parker, "Trade Within the Empire and Beyond the Frontiers," in *The Roman World II*, ed. J. Walcher (New York: Routledge, 1987), 642.

¹⁰⁶ R.L. Fox, *The Classical World: An Epic History of Greece and Rome* (London: Penguin, 2006), 524. See 524-32 for other aspects of Romanization.

¹⁰⁷ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 73.

withdrawal of God's people from Rome?¹⁰⁸ Most scholars are agreed that "coming out" does not mean a physical separation. Bauckham thinks that this separation could not have been understood literally because John was addressing Christians in Asia Minor and not in Rome. Rather the command is to "dissociate themselves from Rome's evils lest they share her guilt and her judgement."¹⁰⁹

But scholars disagree on the degree and type of dissociation that Christians in Asia should make. Collins calls for a "social radicalism" which includes economic separation.¹¹⁰ She suggests that what is envisaged is that Christians should not join societies for mutual benefit or use Roman coins which bore the mark of the emperor. Detachment from wealth and property was demanded.

Others take the view that "coming out" means economic, social, political and spiritual separation,¹¹¹ or economic, social, political and spiritual resistance, the idea being "to resist, to refuse to participate, to create alternatives."¹¹² Kraybill argues that "coming out" was a withdrawal from commercial venues where emperor worship was common practice.¹¹³ However Beale rejects the idea of withdrawal from economic life, although he concedes that Christians might have suffered economic deprivation because of their refusal to compromise.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ For a survey of the different views, see Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities*, 118-20.

¹⁰⁹ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 377.

¹¹⁰ A.Y. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 126-27, 137.

¹¹¹ W. Howard-Brook & A. Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 184.

¹¹² P. Richard, *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 135. However he does not suggest any specific alternatives.

¹¹³ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult & Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 196.

¹¹⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 898.

Harland spells out in greater detail the implications of "coming out" for Christians involved in trade guilds. It required the avoidance of offering and eating sacrificial food to patron gods of the guilds and to the emperor, and this included attendance at communal meals of the guilds. Christians would have had to avoid trade guilds altogether, for their religious practices amounted to idolatry. It also included the avoidance of any involvement in the production and trade of goods for Rome, which John perceived as evil.¹¹⁵ I agree with Harland that Christians would not be able to participate in trade guilds if they chose to be faithful to Christ. This avenue for the acquisition of wealth would be closed to them. They would have had to suffer economically for their faith. But I would go further to say that Christians must not only abstain from involvement in the production and trade of luxury goods for Rome, they must also not use wealth to acquire these luxury goods to feed their extravagant and lavish lifestyle like the Romans.

With regard to the use of wealth, "coming out" would include what Witherington sees as "a call for divorcing oneself from the materialistic orientation that characterized Rome," together with "the greed, gluttony, and immorality that go along with it."¹¹⁶ It would involve a rejection of the extravagant and luxurious lifestyle that wealthy Romans indulged in.

Bauckham suggests that in Revelation 18 John has set "a kind of hermeneutical trap" for his readers:

... it is not unlikely that John's readers would include merchants and others whose business or livelihood was closely involved with the Roman political and economic system. For such readers John has set a kind of hermeneutical trap. Any reader who finds himself sharing the

¹¹⁵ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, 262.

¹¹⁶ B. Witherington III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 225-27.

perspective of Rome's mourners – viewing the prospect of the fall of Rome with dismay – should thereby discover, with a shock, where he stands and the peril in which he stands. And for such readers, it is of the utmost significance that, prior to the picture of the mourners, comes the command: Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues (18:4).¹¹⁷

VI. Some Reflections

There is another call to God's people: "Rejoice over her, O Jerusalem! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you." (18:20) This is in stark contrast to the laments of the kings and merchants of the earth and the seafarers. In his judgement on Babylon, God will vindicate his people and their faithful witness. God's people will not mourn but will rejoice at Babylon's fall. This will encourage those Christians who were standing firm to continue to do so. John calls his readers to come out of Babylon, and to choose New Jerusalem.

In this concluding section, I would like to focus on the character of New Jerusalem expressed in the OT covenant statement in 21:3: "They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."¹¹⁸ This is in direct contrast to the character of Babylon, which set up rival gods, among them the emperor and the patron gods of trade guilds. They promised peace, security and economic prosperity. In return, they demanded their total allegiance and worship. This was tantamount to idolatry. For Christians to reject this would

¹¹⁷ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 376.

¹¹⁸ Lev 26:12; Jer 11:4; 31:33; Eze 37:26-27; Zec 8:8.

jeopardise their own security and prosperity. But this was a false economic security. Thus, any person or institution, whether political, social or economic, or worldview or ideology which purports to usurp the place of God as our God and holds out to be the source of peace, security and prosperity must be identified and resisted.¹¹⁹

How are we to live as citizens of New Jerusalem in the way we acquire and use wealth on this earth? The covenant statement in 21:3 must form the basis of our worldview. The exposition above has highlighted the wealth motif in Revelation 18. Whether from the perspective of Babylon or the kings and merchants of the earth and the seafarers, two aspects are stressed in relation to wealth: the acquisition of wealth, and the use of wealth. I shall confine my reflections to these two matters.

First, we must worship God alone, and be faithful to him. This must guide us in the way we earn and make money. We need a biblical perspective of wealth and poverty.¹²⁰ We must reject any persons, institutions or worldviews or ideologies that elevate themselves as alternative gods that demand our worship and allegiance.

Secondly, we must acknowledge that what wealth we have comes from God (Dt 8:17-19).¹²¹ We must resist the temptation to be arrogant and self-sufficient. That was the reason for Christ's reproach on the Laodicean Christians, who say "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." (3:17) But in God's sight, they were "wretched,

¹¹⁹ I will not attempt to name any modern equivalents of Babylon. But see Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 237-60 for the view that global capital is the empire or imperial reality today.

¹²⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

¹²¹ J.G. McConville, "The Old Testament and the Enjoyment of Wealth," in *Christ and Consumerism: A Critical Analysis of the Spirit of the Age*, ed. C. Bartholomew & T. Moritz (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 49.

pitiful, poor, blind and naked." They were seduced by Babylon's wealth, and had succumbed to the same posture of arrogance and self-sufficiency (18:7). One way to resist the seduction of wealth is to give away some of what God has given us.¹²²

Thirdly, we need to earn or make money in ways that are consistent with the covenant statement. We must have no part in any enterprise that exploits men, women and children, and dehumanise them, no matter how profitable the business may be. They are people made in the image of God, not cogs in money-making machines. We must also reject any enterprise that exploits God's creation in order to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. We must be willing to suffer economic deprivation: we may have to take a different job with a lower salary or give up a business opportunity.

Living according to the covenant statement also has implications for the way we use wealth. The wealth God gives us is not for self-gratification. Materialism and consumerism vie for our worship and allegiance.¹²³ The shopping malls are our temples and the advertising agents the priests who entice us with promises of beauty, success, happiness, and fame. We use wealth to acquire possessions to define who we are. Oliver James identifies these as symptoms of a virus called "Affluenza": "The Affluenza Virus is a set of values which increases our vulnerability to emotional distress. It entails placing a high value on acquiring money and possessions, looking good in the eyes of others and wanting to be famous."¹²⁴ But these values delude

¹²² Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 247.

¹²³ Miles sees consumerism as "the religion of the late twentieth century": S. Miles, *Consumerism as a Way of Life* (London: Sage, 1998), 1 cited in C. Bartholomew, "Christ and Consumerism: An Introduction," in *Christ and Consumerism 2*, ed. Bartholomew & Moritz. See other articles on consumerism in the same volume.

¹²⁴ O. James, *Affluenza* (London: Vermilion, 2007), vii.

us into thinking that we will find fulfilment in the things we buy. The wealth that God gives us must not to be used to acquire possessions to define who we are or our status in society. We are God's people, created and redeemed by him. In Moritz's words: "One's own use of possessions speaks either the transforming language of gospel proclamation or that of consumerist idolatry."¹²⁵ The choices we make everyday will show whether we are worshipping God or Mammon.

We must also remember that we are part of God's people. We must think of others who are also "his people," especially those who are poor and vulnerable. In affluent societies, the poor may be "hidden." We must seek them out and care for them.¹²⁶

We must look at the acquisition and use of wealth critically and biblically. We must start from a sound biblical perspective. Those who subscribe to the prosperity gospel may find this hard to do, or may be unaware that they need to formulate a critique on wealth. To them, wealth is God's blessing, and the enjoyment of wealth their right as God's children. They would see nothing wrong in acquiring luxury cars and multi-million dollar properties. They may need to ask: Are the goods we purchase produced by women and children in sweatshops in developing countries? Do we treat the domestic helper as a slave?

The early church gives us an example of the impact of the right use of wealth on the proclamation of the gospel (Ac 4:32-37). The power of the disciples' witness in verse 33 is framed by their sharing of possessions in verses 32 and 34-35. They testified with great power, and there were no needy persons among them.

¹²⁵ T. Moritz, in "New Testament Voices for an Addicted Society," in *Christ and Consumerism*, ed. Bartholomew & Moritz, 71

¹²⁶ For practical suggestions on the use of wealth, see Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 247-53. On giving and the poor, see for example, R.J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (Dallas: Word, 1997); C.P. Martin, ed., *Christianity, Wealth and Poverty: Indian Perspectives* (Delhi: ISPCK), 2003.

John calls his readers to come out of Babylon, to dissociate themselves from the idolatrous activities necessary for their acquisition of wealth. They must also dissociate themselves from arrogance, and the selfish use of wealth for self-gratification. The same call is made to us today. If Bauckham is right to say that in Revelation 18 "John has set a kind of hermeneutical trap" for his readers, then we need to ask ourselves: When wealth is gone – whether it be the world's or ours – will we mourn or will we rejoice?

ABSTRACT

Richard Bauckham's article, "The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation" has underscored the economic significance of Revelation 18. This paper focuses on two economic aspects of Revelation 18: firstly, the acquisition of wealth, and, secondly, the use of wealth. The former critiques how the kings and the merchants of the earth and the seafarers acquired their wealth, and the latter involves a critique of Rome's use of her wealth. In 18:4, John hears a voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues." The fact that this call is made indicates that at best, John's readers were tempted to "share in her sins," and at worst, some of them had already shared in her sins. This paper explores, from a socio-historical perspective, the economic nature of Babylon's sins in the acquisition and use of her wealth, and how some of John's readers could have acquired and used wealth in similar ways, which are condemned in Revelation 18.

撮 要

包衡 (Richard Bauckham) 的文章：〈啟示錄十八章對羅馬的經濟評論〉強調了啟示錄十八章的經濟意義。本文主要討論啟示錄十八章中兩個經濟論點：第一、獲取財富；第二、使用財富。前者主要評論地上的君王、商人和航海家如何獲取財富，後者則探討羅馬帝國如何使用她的財富。在十八章4節，約翰聽見天上有聲音說：「我的民哪，你們要從那城出來，免得與她一同有罪，受她所受的災殃。」經文中出現這個呼召，顯示約翰的讀者正受試探，「與她一同有罪」，甚至已經參與在那城的罪惡中。本文從社會歷史性的角度，探討巴比倫在經濟方面的罪行，看她如何獲取和使用財富，也分析約翰的某些讀者如何像巴比倫一樣獲取和使用財富，以致遭上帝的審判，藉約翰記載於啟示錄十八章。