

THE ROLE OF BABYLON IN BIBLE PROPHECY

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In the coming tribulation period, the Antichrist will rule the entire world from his headquarters located in the literal, rebuilt city of Babylon on the Euphrates River found in modern day Iraq. Not only have numerous Christians throughout church history embraced this view,¹ but it has also been incorporated into the bestselling *Left Behind* series.² The real question, however, is whether such a view can be successfully defended from Scripture, which is the ultimate court of authority in all matters of Christian faith and practice. It is the purpose of this work to demonstrate that it can. Thus, this work will survey various lines of biblical evidence that call for a futuristic, literal Babylon in God's end time program. These lines of evidence include the Tower of Babel (Gen. 10–11), the pre-exilic prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isa. 13–14; Jer. 50–51), the postexilic prophecies of the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 5:5-11), the prophecies concerning the kings of the East found within John's predictions concerning the sixth trumpet and sixth bowl judgments (Rev. 9:13-21; 16:12-16), and finally the prophecies concerning the rise and destruction of Babylon found in Revelation 17–18. After this evidence has been presented, this work will then highlight the inadequacy of other approaches that view the prophecies regarding Babylon as something other than the literal city of Babylon. Finally, this work will conclude by examining how current events are currently setting the prophetic stage for Babylon's predestined end time role.

¹ It was commonly held within the early church that the Antichrist would be born in the City of Babylon. See Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 102.

² Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale, 1995), 352.

An important principle that the interpreter must adhere to in order to accurately decipher biblical prophecies is to resist the temptation of employing a “dual hermeneutic.”³ Such a hermeneutic treats prophecy as a special category that must be approached with a different set of interpretive principles than one would use in interpreting other portions of Scripture. Thus, the interpreter’s ability to accurately interpret God’s future program is contingent upon his willingness to embrace the same interpretive method that he would use when interpreting any other portion of Scripture.⁴ Some may balk at such a statement on the basis that Revelation is too symbolic to be approached literally. While not disputing Revelation’s symbolic character, it must be understood that many of the symbols employed in Revelation are either identified in the immediate context⁵ or in the Old Testament.⁶

³ Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation. It deals with the question of how Scripture is to be interpreted.

⁴ Many justify a dual hermeneutic when interpreting the Book of Revelation on the basis that the book represents a special category of literature known as “apocalyptic” literature. This type of literature, which flourished during the intertestamental period, is highly symbolic and therefore cannot be understood through straightforward literalism. Once Revelation is lumped into this apocalyptic category, the interpreter is then liberated from consistently employing the literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutical method. However, those that employ this approach typically overestimate the similarities, and simultaneously marginalize, the differences between apocalyptic literature and Revelation. For a refutation of this approach, see Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 323-48.

⁵ Walvoord identifies twenty-six instances in which Revelation’s symbols are interpreted in the immediate context. See John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 29-30. For a more comprehensive list of symbols in Revelation that are interpreted in the immediate context, see J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, trans., J. Otis Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1961), 18-19.

⁶ It only makes sense to turn to the Old Testament for assistance in this matter since 278 of Revelation’s 404 verses allude in some way to the Old Testament. See Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 40. In addition, the literal interpreter is also assisted upon understanding that much of the figurative language in Revelation can be explained in terms of John’s use of comparative language. John frequently employs terms such as “like” and “as” indicating a correspondence between what John saw in the vision and what he was trying to describe (e.g. Rev. 8:8-9).

The Tower of Babel

God's end time program for Babylon has its roots in the historical account of the Tower of Babel found in Genesis 10–11. This section of Scripture is significant in that it records humanity's first worldwide rebellion against God. Here, we learn of mankind's rebellion against God's command to scatter throughout the face of the earth following the Flood (Gen. 9:1, 7). The evil motives of the of the builders at the Tower of Babel can be identified based upon the meaning of the name of their leader Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-11). His name means rebellion or revolt.⁷ Nimrod's rebellious ambition at Babel is also captured in Jewish tradition. Josephus makes the following statement concerning Nimrod:

He persuaded them to attribute their prosperity not to God but to their own valor, and little by little transformed the state of affairs into tyranny, holding that the only way to detach men from the fear of God was by making them continuously dependent upon his power. He threatened to have his revenge on God if He wished to inundate the earth again; for he would build a tower higher than the water could reach and avenge the destruction of their forefathers.⁸

Under the leadership of Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-12), mankind gathered in the land of *Shinar* (Gen. 11:2) for the purpose of building a city and tower to reach into heaven (Gen. 11:4). *Shinar* is located in *Babylonia*⁹ or *Mesopotamia* or the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates. This area is the location of modern-day Iraq.

While the political components of this apostasy are evident in the tangible manifestations of a city and tower (Gen. 11:4) at *Shinar*, it is important not to underestimate the religious dimension of this rebellion. Because of the desire to make a

⁷ Charles H. Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 43.

⁸ Josephus *Antiquities* 1.4.2. See also E. W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or "The Day of the Lord"* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1909; reprint, London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1972), 506-07.

⁹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1906), 1042.

name for themselves (Gen. 11:4), “Babylon is the city where mankind first began to worship himself in an organized manner.”¹⁰ Moreover, the “*ziggurat*, intended by them to reach the heavens, was no doubt intended to be a place of occult worship of the stars and heavens.”¹¹ In fact, the religious aspect of the Tower of Babel can be observed by noting where the very name “Babel” is derived. Ultimately the name comes from *bab* (gate) and *el* (God).¹² Those involved in this building project were seeking to create a “stairway to heaven” or a gateway unto God Himself.

Babel is also the place of the origin of the infamous mother-child cult. According to extra biblical tradition, Nimrod’s wife, Semiramis founded the secret Babylonian religion. She also had a son named Tammuz that was begotten through an alleged miraculous conception. According to tradition, Tammuz was killed by a wild animal and miraculously restored to life.¹³ Because, at the time of the Tower of Babel event there was only one language governing the human race (Gen. 11:1), God’s disruption of the language (Gen. 11:7-8) caused each resulting individual language-speaking group to incorporate the mother-child system into their respective newfound people-group or ethnicity.¹⁴ Hitchcock explains the global influence of this mother child cult that began at Babel:

The legend of Semiramis and Tammuz spread around the world. Their names were changed in different places, but the basic story remained the same. In

¹⁰ Mark Hitchcock, *The Second Coming of Babylon* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 106.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹² Brown, Driver, and Briggs, eds., 93; Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans., M. E. J. Richardson, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:107.

¹³ John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1983), 2: 970.

¹⁴ Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons; or, the Papal Worship Proved to Be the Worship of Nimrod and His Wife*, 2nd American ed. (Edinburgh: Wood, 1862; reprint, New York: Loizeaux, 1959), 19-90.

Assyria, the mother was Ishtar, the son was Tammuz. In Phoenicia, the mother was Astarte and the son was Baal. In Egypt, she was Isis and her son was Osiris, or Horus. In Greece she was Aphrodite and her son was Eros. For the Romans, the mother was Venus and the son was Cupid.¹⁵

In sum, the Tower of Babel represents humanity's first collective rebellion against God. Genesis 11 emphasizes both the political and religious facets of this apostasy. Moreover, "this initial centralization, followed by the global distribution, *is the primary mechanism by which Babylon became the central influence in all cultures and civilizations which followed.*"¹⁶ It is in this sense that the Tower of Babel incident at *Shinar* uniquely characterizes Babel, or Babylon, as the ultimate source or mother of all spiritual harlotry. Larkin well explains why the Tower of Babel is well deserving of such a characterization:

The river Euphrates, on which the city of Babylon was built, was one of the four branches into which the river that flowed through the Garden of Eden was divided, and Satan doubtless chose the site of Babylon as his headquarters from which to sally forth to tempt Adam and Eve. It was doubtless here that the Antediluvian apostasy had its source that ended in the flood. To this center the 'forces of Evil' gravitated after the Flood, and 'Babel' was the result. This was the origin of the nations, but the nations were not scattered abroad over the earth until Satan had implanted in them the 'Virus' of a doctrine that has been the source of every false religion the world has ever known.¹⁷

God's response to this collective rebellion was swift and decisive. According to Genesis 11:5-9, God frustrated this worldwide apostasy by confounding human language thus inhibiting the builders from communicating with one another. God's action had a purpose. Satan's capacity to lead humanity away from the truth is enhanced if only one government exists and this single government happens to fall into the hands of anti-God forces. No opposition to an anti-God agenda is even possible under this scenario.

¹⁵ Hitchcock, 42.

¹⁶ Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2 vols. (Camano Island, WA: Spirit and Truth, 2004), 2:193.

¹⁷ Clarence Larkin, *The Book of Revelation* (Glenside, PA: Larkin, 1919), 151.

However, with the existence of multiple nations, those nations that reject anti-God agendas can work to oppose those nations that embrace such agendas. Consequently, through such a balance of powers concept, evil is restrained, at least to some extent.¹⁸ Thus, ever since the Tower of Babel incident, God has decreed that humanity be ordered according to national boundaries, rather than global government (Deut. 32:8; Isa. 2:4; 66:18; Acts 17:26; Rev. 12:5; 20:3; 21:24, 26).¹⁹

However, one of Satan's purposes throughout history is to subvert this divine ordering of nations. His desire is instead to bring the world back together so that he once again can have unlimited control over it through one man. Thus, Satan's ambition has always been "to bring man back to Babylon under His rule. This will finally happen according to Revelation 17–18. Both the city of Babylon and the false religious system of Babylon will be resurrected in the end times."²⁰

The fact that human rebellion will one day cycle back to where it all began comes as no surprise to diligent Bible students due to numerous parallel themes or common denominators running through both the books of Genesis and Revelation. Of this phenomenon, Henry Morris observes, "The Book of Revelation is the sequel to the Book of Genesis, the two books together bounding all history and bounding all of God's revelations to mankind. They constitute the alpha and omega of God's written word, the Book of Beginnings and the Book of Unveilings."²¹ Examples include the thematic parallels between the probationary world of Genesis 1-2 and the eternal state of

¹⁸ Examples of how the existence of multiple nations allows for the opportunity of opposition against those nations with evil intent can be found in the World War II allies' response to Hitler's Nazi Germany and the United States' recent response to Sadam Hussein's Iraq.

¹⁹ John Eidesmoe, *God & Caesar* (Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1984), 209-12.

²⁰ Hitchcock, 43.

²¹ Henry Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale, 1983), 14.

Revelation 21–22, as well as the distinctions between the cursed world as depicted in Genesis 3 and the eternal state of Revelation 21–22.²²

Isaiah 13–14 and Jeremiah 50–51

The next piece of evidence calling for a futuristic, literal rebuilt Babylon concerns the prophecies depicting Babylon's destruction found in Isaiah 13–14 and Jeremiah 50–51. The eighth and seventh century prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah repeatedly warned Judah of impending disaster that she would suffer at the hands of foreign powers because of her repeated violations of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:49-50). Yet, at the same time, these prophets also comforted God's people by predicting the ultimate destruction of the very nations that were oppressing them. Such is the case in Isaiah 13–14 and Jeremiah 50–51, where we find two prolonged passages dealing with the destruction of Babylon.

How do these passages contribute further evidence favoring a futuristic, rebuilt Babylon? Although Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian Empire (Dan. 5:31) in 539 B.C., Babylon's historic fall does not match the cataclysmic language found in either Isaiah 13–14 or Jeremiah 50–51. The details of these texts simply were not satisfied in the historic fall of Babylon. In other words, the biblical information regarding Babylon's fall does not fit the known facts of history. Thus, in order for these prophecies to be literally and accurately fulfilled, Babylon must be revived so that it can be destroyed again according to the specific details given by Isaiah and Jeremiah.²³ Babylon's ultimate

²² Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific & Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 33-34. For another extensive list of thematic comparisons and contrasts between the Books of Genesis and Revelation, see E. W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or "The Day of the Lord"*, 57-59.

²³ Interpreting prophetic events whose details do not fit the known facts of history in such a futuristic framework is a common method of biblical interpretation. For example, it is because of such a methodology that we know that the prophecies of Matthew 24–25 and Revelation 4–22 are not speaking of the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 but rather pertain to the future events.

destruction will take place in the coming Tribulation period (Rev. 16:19). Let us look at both prophetic passages and observe how their details were not satisfied in the historic fall of Babylon.

Isaiah 13–14

The Isaiah 13–14 passage appears in an extended section dealing with God’s coming judgment on the surrounding nations (Isa. 13–23). Yet Isaiah appears to be drawing special attention to the Babylon oracle in comparison to the oracles against the other nations. Not only does the Babylon oracle appear first on the list, but it also consumes more verses than any of the other oracles.²⁴ Moreover, there are at least seven clues found within Isa 13–14 that clearly require a prophetic fulfillment beyond the historic fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.²⁵

First, Isaiah 13:6, 9 uses the expression “Day of the Lord” to describe the fall of Babylon. Although some may argue that this expression is sometimes used to depict events of judgment that have already transpired (Ezek. 30:3, 10), the phrase typically concerns a time of divine judgment that is yet future.²⁶ Second, Isaiah 13:10-13 predicts that a host of cosmological disturbances will take place when Babylon falls, and these obviously did not take place in 539 B.C. Interestingly, these signs have far more in common with language that is used to describe the Second Coming (Matt. 24:27-30) than they do to any past event. Third, Isaiah 13:11-12 indicates that Babylon’s judgment will

²⁴ Charles H. Dyer and Eugene H. Merrill, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology and Meaning of Every Meaning in the Old Testament*, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Word, 2001), 538-39.

²⁵ Hitchcock, 80-91. See also Arthur Pink, *The Antichrist* (Swengel, PA: Depot, 1923; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1988), 240-43; Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 348; G. H. Lang, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Select Studies* (London: Paternoster, 1948), 300-04; Kenneth W. Allen, "Rebuilding and Destruction of Babylon," *Biblioteca Sacra* 133, (January–March 1976): 19-27.

²⁶ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 1983), 183-88.

inflict punishment upon the whole world making mankind scarcer than gold. The magnitude of this prophecy obviously never happened in the past and therefore awaits a future fulfillment (Matt. 24:21-22).

Fourth, Isa 13:19 analogizes Babylon's destruction to the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, this prophecy does not fit the known facts of history. Ancient Babylon gradually declined and therefore never experienced a sudden, fatal cataclysmic destruction as did Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-28). Fifth, Isaiah 13:20-22 predicts that after her destruction Babylon will never be inhabited again. Yet, Babylon has been inhabited numerous times since 539 B.C.²⁷ Sixth, Isaiah 14:5-8 predicts that the world will enter a time of universal peace and rest following Babylon's destruction. Certainly, such peace and rest did not begin in 539 B.C. Nor are such conditions present in today's war-torn world. Seventh, Isaiah 14:1-4 predicts that Israel's spiritual restoration will transpire immediately after Babylon's demise. Because such a restoration is consistently portrayed as an eschatological event throughout Scripture (Rom. 11:26-27), Isaiah 14:1-4 obviously awaits a future fulfillment.

All these facts make it clear that the prophecy of Isa 13–14 goes far beyond the historic fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. and is speaking of a futuristic destruction of Babylon. Interestingly, Isaiah 21:1-10 again records the destruction of Babylon. Perhaps Isaiah records two destructions of Babylon because Isaiah 21 pertains to the historic fall of Babylon either in 686 or 539 B.C. while Isaiah 13–14 is speaking of the futuristic destruction of Babylon.²⁸ At any rate, because Isaiah 13–14 is speaking of a future destruction of Babylon, it is apparent that this empire must again be revived in order for Isaiah's prophecy to find a literal fulfillment.

²⁷ Consider the following: Herodotus visited and wrote about Babylon, Alexander the Great visited and died in Babylon, Seleucus conquered Babylon, Strabo visited and wrote about Babylon, Jews from Babylon were present on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:8-10), Peter wrote First Peter from Babylon (1 Peter 5:13), and the Babylonian Talmud was created in Babylon. See Hitchcock, 85-86.

²⁸ Ibid., 181.

Jeremiah 50–51

We find an identical pattern in Jeremiah 50–51. This passage, like Isaiah 13–14, also appears in an extended section dealing with God’s coming judgment on the surrounding nations (Jer. 46–51). Yet, Jeremiah appears to be drawing special attention to the Babylon oracle in comparison to the oracles against the other nations. Unlike the other oracles, two full chapters are devoted to predicting the destruction of Babylon.²⁹ Moreover, there are at least six clues found within Jeremiah 50–51 that clearly require a prophetic fulfillment beyond the historic fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.³⁰

First, Jeremiah 50:3 predicts that an enemy from the north would destroy Babylon and yet the Persians came from the east.³¹ Second, Jeremiah 51:8 predicts that Babylon would be destroyed suddenly and yet the actual destruction of the city was a gradual process taking several centuries. Third, Jeremiah predicts that Babylon would be completely and permanently destroyed (Jer. 50:3, 13, 26, 39-40; 51:29, 43, 62) and yet Babylon remained productive and populated after her initial fall. In fact, the city was spared and made one of the ruling centers of the Persian Empire with Daniel serving in an administrative position (Dan. 5:30; 6:1-3).

Fourth, Jeremiah 51:26 predicts that Babylon’s destruction would result in even her building materials never being used again, and yet the materials from which ancient Babylon originated have been used extensively in the building of many surrounding cities.³² Fifth, Jeremiah predicts that believers would flee Babylon upon her

²⁹ Dyer and Merrill, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology and Meaning of Every Meaning in the Old Testament*, 633-42.

³⁰ Charles H. Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (Part 2)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144, (October-December 1987): 443-49.

³¹ Charles H. Dyer, "Jeremiah," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1983), 1:1199.

³² Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale, 1999), 135.

destruction (Jer. 50:8; 51:6, 45) and yet there is no record of the Jews fleeing Babylon when she fell to the Persians. In fact, Scripture specifically states that Daniel remained in the city after its fall (Dan. 5:28, 30-31; 6:1-3). Sixth, Jeremiah predicts the reuniting and national repentance of Israel following Babylon's fall (Jer. 50:2, 4-5, 20; 51:50) and yet such a reuniting and repentance never took place. In fact, the postexilic record evidence God's continual rebuking of His people through the ministries of the prophets such as Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Furthermore, as previously indicated, the reuniting and restoration of Israel is typically treated as an eschatological event throughout Scripture (Ezek. 36-37; Rom. 11:26-27).

Summary of Isaiah 13-14 and Jeremiah 50-51

In sum, it is quite plain that the prophecies of Isaiah 13-14 and Jeremiah 50-51 were never fully exhausted in the historic fall of Babylon. The predicted cataclysm never came to pass. In fact, it is safe to say that although the city fell politically to the Medo-Persian Empire in 539 B.C., it never fell physically.³³ Interestingly, because the Medes and Persians diverted the waters of the Euphrates and entered the city at night through the dried up channel, the city fell by surprise. Half the city was captured while the rest were not even aware of what had happened.³⁴

When Persia conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., Cyrus the Persian, in the Steele of Cyrus, boasted concerning the lack of any real battle at the time:

Without any battle, he made him enter his town Babylon . . . sparing Babylon . . . any calamity. . . . I am Cyrus . . . king of Babylon. . . . When I entered Babylon . . . as a friend and (when) I established the seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing, Marduk, the great lord, [induced] the magnanimous inhabitants of Babylon . . . [to love me], and I was daily endeavouring to worship him. My numerous troops walked around Babylon

³³ Garland, 2:193.

³⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002), 1462.

. . . in peace, I did not allow anybody to terrorize (any place) of the [country of Sumer] and Akkad. I strove for peace in Babylon . . . and in all his (other) sacred cities. . . . I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been in ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad, whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon . . . to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their (former) chapels, the places which make them happy. May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me and may they recommend me (to him); to Marduk, my lord, they may say this: "Cyrus, the king who worships you, and Cambyses, his son, . . ." . . . all of them I resettled in a peaceful place . . . ducks and doves, . . . I endeavoured to fortify/repair their dwelling places . . . ³⁵

Similarly, Herodotus, writing in 450 B.C., or within a century of Babylon's historic fall to the Persians in 539 B.C., records the absence of any battle involved in this conquest:

. . . he conducted the river by a channel into the lake . . . and so made the former course of the river passable by the sinking of the stream. When this had been done, the Persians who had been posted for this very purpose entered by the bed of the river Euphrates into Babylon, the stream having sunk so far that it reached about to the middle of a man's thigh. . . . those Babylonians who dwelt in the middle did not know that they had been captured . . . ³⁶

Such placid language hardly satisfies the cataclysmic language of Isaiah 13–14 and Jeremiah 50–51.³⁷ Walvoord best summarizes the matter when he notes:

³⁵ James B. Pritchard, ed. *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1969), 315-16.

³⁶ Herodotus, *Herodotus: The Histories*, trans., G. C. Macaulay (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 1:191.

³⁷ An unfortunate trend among evangelicals involves taking passages like Isaiah 13–14 and Jeremiah 50–51 as instead conveying dramatic hyperbole rather than a literal prediction. Proponents of this approach see these prophecies as rather having found an "essential fulfillment" in the historic fall of Babylon although the specific details were never fulfilled. Sometimes the hyperbolic language of destruction common in ancient Near East treaties is used to argue for such an approach. See Homer Heater, "Do the Prophets Teach That Babylonia Will Be Rebuilt in the Eschaton?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, (March 1998): 23-43. However, this approach is questionable. Not only does it ignore the details of the text, but it also opens the door for viewing other portions of prophetic Scripture as having found merely an "essential fulfillment." For example, if Isaiah 13–14 and Jeremiah 50–51 were "essentially fulfilled" in 539 B.C., then why cannot the same interpretive approach be used to argue that Matthew 24–25 or Revelation 4–22 were also "essentially fulfilled" in A.D. 70? Moreover, if it is indeed God's desire to communicate future events in Isaiah 13–14 and Jeremiah 50–51, and yet the language of these texts is insufficient to communicate such futurism, one wonders how God could have better

As far as the historic fulfillment is concerned, it is obvious from both Scripture and history that these verses have not been literally fulfilled. The city of Babylon continued to flourish after the Medes conquered it, and though its glory dwindled, especially after the control of the Medes and the Persians ended in 323 B.C., the city continued in some form or substance until A.D. 1000 and did not experience a sudden termination such as is anticipated in this prophecy.³⁸

The implications of these unfulfilled prophecies for a future Babylon are obvious. As Clarence Larkin observes, "...the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah cannot be fulfilled unless there is to be a future Babylon that shall be thus destroyed."³⁹ When then will these unfulfilled Old Testament prophecies concerning Babylon be fulfilled? Revelation 17–18 represents an answer to this question. These chapters describe the time in history when they will be fulfilled as the rebuilt City of Babylon will be destroyed in conjunction with the seventh bowl judgment (Rev. 16:19).

It is for this very reason that commentators have noticed similarities between the destruction of Babylon as depicted in Jeremiah 50–51 and Revelation 17–18.⁴⁰ For example, both passages associate Babylon with a golden cup (Jer. 51:7; Rev. 17:3-4; 18:6), dwelling or sitting on many waters (Jer. 51:13; Rev 17:1), intoxicating the nations (Jer. 51:7; Rev 17:2), and having the same name (Jer. 50:1; Rev. 17:5; 18:10). Moreover, both passages illustrate Babylon's destruction as a stone sinking into the Euphrates (Jer. 51:63-64; Rev. 18:21) and depict Babylon's destruction as sudden (Jer. 51:8; Rev. 18:8), caused by fire (Jer. 51:30; Rev. 17:16; 18:8), final (Jer. 50:39; Rev. 18:21), and deserved (Jer. 51:63-64; Rev. 18:21). Furthermore, both passages describe the response to

communicated His point? Also, there is more taking place in these passages than mere destruction. As explained, the regeneration of Israel is also in view. Where else in Scripture is the reunification and restoration of Israel treated as anything other than a future event?

³⁸ John F. Walvoord, *The Nations in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 63-64.

³⁹ Larkin, 158.

⁴⁰ Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (Part 2)," 441-43; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 307; David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 983.

Babylon's destruction in terms of God's people fleeing (Jer. 51:6, 45; Rev 18:4) and heaven rejoicing (Jer. 51:48; Rev 18:20).⁴¹

Zechariah 5:5-11

Another piece of evidence favoring a futuristic Babylon is a prophetic vision found in Zechariah 5:5-11. This vision was given 519 B.C. and is the seventh of Zechariah's eight night visions that are recorded in Zechariah 1:7-6:8. Let us first describe the contents of the vision and then provide an interpretation. To grasp the meaning of the vision, the following five elements must be understood.⁴²

First, Zechariah saw a basket for measuring grain, otherwise known as an ephah. Because an ephah was the largest measure in the Old Testament and was typically used for measuring flour and barley, the basket signifies commerce. Second, in the basket, Zechariah saw a woman signifying wickedness. Third, Zechariah saw the woman being pushed back into the basket and a heavy lid was closed on top of her. This incarceration of the woman in the basket signifies that God is in control and He will release her from the basket only in accordance with His timetable (2 Thess. 2:6-7).

Fourth, Zechariah saw the basket being transported to the land of *Shinar*. This part of the vision identifies the specific geographic locale that the woman will one day operate from once she is released from her incarceration. The Old Testament repeatedly identifies *Shinar* as the exact same piece of real estate where the Tower of Babel (Gen.

⁴¹ Dispensationalists are divided concerning the timing of Babylon's destruction. Some see the destruction of religious Babylon (Rev. 17) at the midpoint of the tribulation and the destruction of commercial Babylon (Rev. 18) toward the end of the tribulation. For an articulation of this view see C. I. Scofield, ed. *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University, 1909; reprint, 1996), 1369-70. I think the preferred view is to see Rev 17 and 18 as a unit describing the singular destruction of Babylon toward the end of the tribulation period. For a defense of this view see Charles H. Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (Part 1)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144, (July-September 1987): 305-13. However, despite whichever view is taken, the fact remains that Babylon must be rebuilt in order to experience future destruction.

⁴² Dyer and Merrill, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology and Meaning of Every Meaning in the Old Testament*, 825-26; Hitchcock, 96-99; Pink, 279.

10:10; 11:2; 14:1, 9) as well as where historic Babylon once stood (Isa. 11:11; Dan. 1:2). Fifth, Zechariah was told that the woman one day be will be released and set upon the pedestal of a temple in *Shinar*. Because this part of the vision conveys religious imagery, it communicates that the woman will be vested with future religious authority. Putting all of this together, Zechariah's vision teaches that in God's providence wickedness, commerce, and religion will once again return to the land of Babylon.

Because ancient Babylon had already fallen to the Persians (539 B.C.) by the time that this prophecy was given (519 B.C.), Zechariah's vision furnishes a clear biblical prediction of a futuristic, rebuilt Babylon. Newton notes, "That this event predicted in this remarkable passage remains still unaccomplished, is sufficiently evident from the fact of Zechariah's having prophesied after Babylon had received that blow under which it has gradually waned. Zechariah lived after Babylon had passed into the hands of the Persians . . ." ⁴³ Morris also aptly observes, "Zechariah's vision thus clearly foretells a time when the center of world finance and commerce will be removed from its bases in New York and Geneva and other great cities and transported quickly across the world to a new foundation and headquarters in the land of *Shinar*." ⁴⁴

Revelation 17–18 records the circumstances by which this vision will be fulfilled. As Pink well explains, "The vision or prophecy (Zech. 5) contains the germ which is afterward expanded and developed in such detail in Rev. 17 and 18." ⁴⁵ As mandated by the aforementioned details of Zechariah's prophecy, in the coming Tribulation period, the literal city of Babylon (Rev. 17:18) will exert wicked influence (Rev. 17:2), religious authority (Rev. 17:2; Jas. 4:4), and commercial power (Rev. 18:10-

⁴³ Benjamin Willis Newton, *Babylon: Its Future, History, and Doom. With Remarks on the Future of Egypt and Other Eastern Countries*, 3rd ed. (London: Wertheimer, 1890), 64.

⁴⁴ Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 355.

⁴⁵ Pink, 281.

18) over all the inhabitants of the earth (Rev. 17:15). In fact, note the parallels between the woman of Zechariah 5:5-11 and the harlot of Revelation 17–18.⁴⁶

<u>Zechariah 5:5-11</u>	<u>Revelation 17-18</u>
Woman sitting in a basket	Woman sitting on the beast, seven mountains, and many waters (17: 3, 9, 15)
Emphasis on commerce (a basket for measuring grain)	Emphasis on commerce (merchant of grain, 18:13)
Woman's name is wickedness	Woman's name is Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth
Focus on False worship (a temple is built for the woman)	Focus on False worship (17:5)
Woman is taken to Babylon	Woman is called Babylon

In sum, if Babylon is not predestined to be restored to life, so as to become dominant and then destroyed in the future Tribulation period, then there is no place in biblical history for the specific prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah concerning Babylon to find a literal realization.

The Sixth Trumpet and Bowl Judgments (Rev. 9:13-21; 16:12-16)

The next piece of evidence favoring a revived last days City of Babylon involves the prophecies concerning the kings of the East found within John's predictions pertaining to the sixth trumpet and sixth bowl judgments (Rev. 9:13-21; 16:12-16). The sixth trumpet judgment (Rev. 9:13-21) depicts a vast army released from the east of the Euphrates River and violently moving into Northern Israel to participate in the final

⁴⁶ Hitchcock, 109.

Battle of Armageddon. Then, the sixth bowl judgment predicts that the Euphrates river supernaturally dry up to expedite the path of this eastern army (Rev. 16:12-16). By examining both judgments together, one receives the distinct impression that a force just to the east of the Euphrates is summoning this vast army into northern Israel. This army will then cross the Euphrates, which is the geographical marker separating the Orient, or the far east, from the Middle East.

If this is indeed an accurate interpretation, one then must ask who or what to the east of the Euphrates will influence the trajectory of this massive army? Certainly, the rebuilt City of Babylon serving as the Antichrist's empire would furnish an appropriate response to this inquiry. Babylon, of course, is located to east of the Euphrates river, just fifty-eight miles south of Baghdad. Interestingly, whether when speaking of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8), the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:2), or where the Magi came from to worship the Christ child (Matt. 2:2), the Scripture consistently designates this area of Babylonia, or *Shinar* or *Mesopotamia* between the Tigris and the Euphrates,⁴⁷ as being located in the "east." All things considered, a rebuilt City of Babylon on the banks of the Euphrates functioning as the world capital of the Antichrist during the future Tribulation period would serve as a logical venue from where to summon the nations from the far east to move into the Middle East. Hitchcock well observes:

...the Euphrates River is mentioned by name twice in Revelation (9:14; 16:12). In Revelation 9:14, the text tells us that four fallen angels are being held at the Euphrates River, awaiting the appointed time for them to lead forth a host of demons to destroy one-third of mankind. In Revelation 16:12, the sixth bowl judgment is poured out and dries up the Euphrates River to prepare the way for the kings of the east. These references to the Euphrates point to the fact that something important and evil is occurring there. The rebuilt city of Babylon on the Euphrates, functioning as a great commercial and political center for

⁴⁷ Babylonia, or the region between the Tigris and Euphrates, is known by the Hebrew name *Shinar* or the Greek name *Mesopotamia*, which literally means "between (*meso*) the rivers (*potamia*)." Today, this area is known as modern-day Iraq.

Antichrist, is a good explanation for this emphasis on the Euphrates River in Revelation.⁴⁸

Revelation 17–18

The final piece of scriptural evidence favoring a literal, futuristic Babylon is found in Rev 17–18. Chapter 17 features a woman with a title inscribed on her forehead, which reads, “Mystery Babylon the Great the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth” (Rev 17:5). She is later identified as a city (Rev. 17:18; 18:10). Several preliminary steps must first be taken before it is possible to properly identify this woman.

Mystery Babylon?

A proper identification of the woman first begins with correctly interpreting her title. To do this, two questions must be answered.⁴⁹ First, is her name “Mystery Babylon the Great” or is her name “Babylon the Great,” which happens to be a mystery? The former reading favors an allegorical interpretation of the word Babylon in her title. For example, Bruce believes that word Babylon on the harlot’s forehead should be allegorically understood as Rome since her title is not just Babylon but “mystery Babylon.” He writes, “This title was written on her forehead: Mystery: ‘mystery’ indicates that the name she bears...is not to be understood literally, but allegorically: Babylon the Great is read, but ‘Rome’ is meant (cf. verses 9, 19).”⁵⁰ However, the latter reading favors a literal understanding of the word Babylon in her title since all that would be communicated by its use there is that Babylon’s end time role is a mystery, or a new truth. Although either reading is linguistically possible, the latter reading is preferred. All

⁴⁸ Hitchcock, 107.

⁴⁹ Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (Part 2)," 434-36.

⁵⁰ F. F. Bruce, "Revelation," in *International Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1621.

other references to this title in Revelation cite it as “Babylon the Great” (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 18:2, 10, 21) rather than “Mystery Babylon the Great.”⁵¹

Second, what is meant by the word “mystery”? Some believe the word “mystery” connotes the notion of mysticism or symbolism. Thus, such interpreters use the presence of this word “mystery” in the woman’s title as a justification for interpreting the name Babylon in a mystical, spiritual, and non-literal manner.⁵² However, “mystery” simply means the revelation of new truth that has been previously undisclosed.⁵³ The mystery, or new truth, spoken of in the harlot’s title is not Babylon’s prophetic destiny of dominance and destruction in the end times, since Old Testament Scripture has already revealed these truths (Isa. 13–14; Jer. 50–51; Zech. 5:5-11).

Rather, the mystery relates to the harlot’s interaction with the beast and his Eurocentric global empire (Dan. 7:23). This notion is buttressed by the fact that just two verses later, in Revelation 17:7, the word “mystery” is extended beyond just the harlot’s title (Rev. 17:5), but also applied to the woman riding the beast. In other words, God will place his purpose into the heart of the beast and his revived Roman empire to destroy the harlot (Rev. 17:16-17). Apparently, the beast, who will desire to be worshipped above all that is called god (2 Thess. 2:4), will become jealous of Babylon’s worldwide influence causing him to consequently turn against Babylon. In so doing, he will be fulfilling God’s

⁵¹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary*, 246; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 289.

⁵² Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, rev. ed., vol. 6 (Nashville: Broadman, 1933; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 6:430. Robertson seeks to buttress this interpretation by equating the word “mystery” of Revelation 17:5 with the word “spiritually” of Revelation 11:8. In Revelation 11:8, “spiritually” is used to introduce a spiritual, non-literal interpretation. However, it is fallacious to equate these two words. “Mystery” is a noun and not an adverb like “spiritually.” Also, the Greek word “mystery” comes from a different root than the Greek word “spiritually.” See Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 288-89.

⁵³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 428-34; W. E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 424.

will of destroying the City of Babylon in the events of the seventh bowl judgment (Rev. 16:19). Exactly how the harlot will be destroyed via the relationship between the beast and the harlot in the end times represents the undisclosed mystery that only Revelation 17 unfolds.⁵⁴ In sum, the woman's name is "Babylon the Great." Her name is a mystery in that it represents new truth that has never been previously disclosed.

Babylon is a City

Furthermore, to properly interpret the woman, it is necessary to follow the interpretation given at the end of the chapter, which identifies the woman as a city (Rev 17:18). Although much speculation surrounds the identity of the woman, most of it would cease by simply following the interpretation given in Rev 17:18.⁵⁵ Dyer correctly observes, "Whatever else is said about the harlot, she is first a city, not an ecclesiastical system."⁵⁶ Bullinger similarly observes:

It is indeed surprising how any mistake could have been made in the identification of this woman. For the Holy Spirit first shows us her very name upon her forehead. Then, in verse 18, He tells us as plainly as words can tell anything, that 'the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reignest over the kings of the earth', and chap. xvi. 19, as well as xvii. 5, identifies this city with Babylon. God says it is a 'city.' He does not say a system or a religion, but a 'CITY.'⁵⁷

Despite all this evidence, many still resist viewing Babylon as the literal city on the Euphrates. Many contend that the harlot imagery of Rev 17:1-5 conveys the notion of a religious system due to the fact that such imagery is consistently used in Scripture to

⁵⁴ Charles H. Dyer, *World News and Bible Prophecy* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1993), 148.

⁵⁵ Allowing Revelation 17:18 to interpret the identity of the harlot is a textbook example of the hermeneutical philosophy provided in the introductory section of this work. The Book of Revelation can be interpreted literally despite its symbolic content because many of these symbols are identified in the immediate context. Earlier, it was observed that there were at least 26 instances where Revelation's symbols were identified somewhere in the immediate context.

⁵⁶ Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (Part 2)," 436.

⁵⁷ Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or "The Day of the Lord"*, 509.

depict man's rebellion against God (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; Ezek. 16; 23). However, this harlot imagery is not enough to disqualify Babylon from being a literal city. The Old Testament uses such harlot imagery to depict the Gentile cities of Tyre (Isa. 23:16-17) and Nineveh (Nah. 3:4) while never hinting that these cities are not meant to be understood literally.⁵⁸ Thus, the harlot imagery communicates that Babylon of Revelation 17-18 is a literal city on the Euphrates that will have a religious influence over the entire world. In this regard, Babylon will be identical to the Tower of Babel, which was a literal city in the land of *Shinar* that exercised a universal, religious, apostate influence. By combining this insight with the preceding discussion regarding the woman's title, we are now able to offer an identification of the woman of Revelation 17. She is a city (Rev. 17:18) named "Babylon the Great" (Rev. 17:5).

Babylon Means Babylon

However, the question remains as to whether this city named Babylon is meant to be understood literally. This question can be answered by observing how other cities and geographic locales are understood in the rest of Revelation. It is a general rule that the names of cities and geographical regions are treated literally throughout the book of Revelation. For example, most interpreters typically understand the following places and cities in Revelation literally: Asia (1:4), Patmos (1:9), Ephesus (2:1), Smyrna (2:1), Pergamum (2:8), Thyatira (2:12), Sardis (3:1), Philadelphia (3:7), Laodicea (3:14), the Euphrates (9:14; 16:12; Gen. 15:18), Jerusalem (11:8; 20:9),⁵⁹ Armageddon (16:16; 2

⁵⁸ Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (Part 2)," 434.

⁵⁹ Although Revelation 11:8 speaks of Jerusalem that is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, this text in no way denies Jerusalem as a literal city. Rather, this text is simply saying that in the coming tribulation, Jerusalem will have a spiritual aspect resembling Sodom and Egypt, or depravity and bondage, in addition to being a literal city.

Kgs. 23:29), and even the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2).⁶⁰ Why should the city of Babylon depicted in Revelation 17–18 not be given the same literal interpretation?

Moreover, when John wants to communicate that he is using a city in a non-literal sense, he makes this explicit as in Rev 11:8 where he says “the great city which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt.” Because no similar formula is found in Revelation 17–18 to alert the reader that John is speaking of the city of Babylon figuratively, there is no reason that Babylon should be interpreted non-literally.⁶¹ Henry Morris appropriately sums up the matter: “It must be stressed again that *Revelation* means ‘unveiling,’ not ‘veiling.’ In the absence of any statement in the context to the contrary, therefore, we must assume that the term Babylon applies to the real city of Babylon, although it may extend far beyond that to the whole system centered at Babylon as well.”⁶²

Equating Revelation’s use of the word Babylon with the literal city on the Euphrates is further strengthened when recalling Revelation’s dependence upon the Old Testament. Because Daniel is the most frequently referenced book in Revelation, the Book of Revelation can be viewed as a type of sequel to Daniel. When Daniel uses the word Babylon, he is referring to literal Babylon. Therefore, why should Revelation’s use of this identical term be treated any differently, especially considering Revelation’s dependence upon Daniel?⁶³ Moreover, Revelation evidences great dependence upon the Old Testament due to the fact that 278 of Revelation’s 404 verses refer to the Old Testament.⁶⁴ The Old Testament uses the word Babylon nearly 300 times. In every

⁶⁰ Armageddon is an actual geographic area located in Northern Israel.

⁶¹ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 206-07.

⁶² Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 323.

⁶³ Hitchcock, 105.

⁶⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary*, 40.

instance, Babylon refers to literal Babylon. Thus, why should Revelation's use of this identical term be treated any differently especially considering Revelation's heavy dependence upon the Old Testament?

Babylon's Imagery and Geography

This connection between the Babylon of Revelation and the literal Babylon of the Old Testament is further strengthened upon noticing the number of allusions Rev 17–18 makes to Old Testament Babylon. For example, the reference to the wilderness in 17:3 may be a reference to the “oracle concerning the wilderness of the sea” in Isaiah 21:1. “The wilderness of the sea” refers to the sandy wastes of the Persian Gulf area outside of Babylon on the Euphrates. Interestingly, this oracle also includes the same statement “fallen, fallen is Babylon” (Isa 21:9) that is used in Revelation's description of Babylon (Rev 14:8; 18:2).⁶⁵ In addition, the boast of Babylon, “I sit as queen and am no widow, and will not see sorrow” (18:7) replicates that of ancient Babylon (Isa 47:7-9).⁶⁶ Other references to Old Testament Babylon found in Revelation 17–18 include the association with many waters (Ps. 137:1; Rev. 17:1), the title “Babylon the Great” (Dan. 4:30; Rev. 17:5), the colors purple and gold (Dan. 5:7, 16, 29; Rev. 17:4; 18:16), the association with sorcery (Isa. 47:9-13; Rev. 18:23), Babylon's destruction in a single day (Dan. 5:30; Rev. 18:8, 10), and being occupied by birds (Dan. 4:12; Rev. 18:2).

Understanding Revelation 17–18 as literal Babylon also seems most consistent with how these chapters describe the city's geography. For example, the imagery of the many waters corresponds well with Babylon's location on the Euphrates “with its canals, irrigation trenches, dikes, and marshes surrounding the city.”⁶⁷ A

⁶⁵ Hitchcock, 105.

⁶⁶ Steve Gregg, ed. *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Nelson, 1997), 431.

⁶⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 283.

mention of the Euphrates at two places in the Apocalypse (Rev. 9:14; 16:12) further confirms that assigning Babylon the literal significance of the city on the Euphrates is the most natural way of understanding Revelation 17–18.⁶⁸

The Mother of Harlots

The part of the woman's title that reads "the mother of harlots" (Rev. 17:5) also uniquely identifies her as Babylon. "The mother of harlots" conveys the notion that she is the one who ultimately gave birth to all harlotry. The mother is the source. When Genesis 3:20 calls "Eve...the mother of all the living," such a designation is meant to communicate that all subsequent human beings are ultimately sourced in Eve and Eve's descendants. In the same way, all harlotry is sourced in Babylon, the mother of harlots."

Only the Tower of Babel fits this description.⁶⁹ Fruchtenbaum explains, "The headquarters of this one-world religion will be the rebuilt city of Babylon, the mother of idolatry, for it was here that idolatry and false religion began (Gen. 11:1–9)."⁷⁰ Because the Tower of Babel incident took place before God had established national divisions through the creation of languages, this event stands in its own unique category as the first and only collective rebellion by mankind against God that has ever occurred in past history. As previously indicated, this initial apostasy in one centralized locale "...followed by the global distribution, *is the primary mechanism by which Babylon became the central influence in all cultures and civilizations which followed.*"⁷¹

Consequently, the Babylonian mystery religions were exported throughout all the nations

⁶⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 206-07.

⁶⁹ Pink, 259-60.

⁷⁰ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel, 2003), 237-38.

⁷¹ Garland, 2:193.

of the earth. Revelation 17:15 draws upon this concept when it explains that the woman sits on “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.”

Summation

The one-world city and system that began on the plains of *Shinar* at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) will eventually be recycled back to the very location from where it initially sprang. This seems to be the plain teaching of Revelation 17–18. From this location, the Antichrist will gather the armies of the world for the end time battle of Armageddon during the sixth bowl and sixth trumpet judgments (Rev. 9:13-21; 16:12-16). Babylon’s rise to power and sudden destruction will represent the very fulfillment of countless Old Testament prophecies (Isa. 13–14; Jer. 50–51; Zech. 5:5-11). Solomon was indeed correct when he said, “That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9).

Alternative Interpretations

Unfortunately, the literal Babylon view is not the only view that interpreters have embraced. Before concluding this work, I will briefly highlight some alternative approaches to the identification of Babylon as well as point out their main inadequacies. In general, three reasons should cause interpreters to reject these approaches. First, they ignore the plain meaning of the word Babylon as consistently found throughout Scripture and instead pour an alien meaning into this word. Second, to the extent that they often identify Babylon as some historical city or empire of the past, they frequently force the text’s global language (Rev 17:1, 15, 18) into local language. Third, they give inadequate attention to the description of Babylon as “the mother of harlots” (Rev 17:5). As previously discussed, this phrase uniquely identifies the Tower of Babel. By associating Babylon with some city, later city, or empire, these alternative approaches end up

identifying Babylon with a descendant of Babel or a daughter of harlotry despite the fact that the text calls for identifying Babylon as “the mother of harlotry.”⁷²

A Religious System

Some interpreters identify Babylon of Revelation 17–18 as merely a religious system rather than a geopolitical place. However, as indicated earlier, the problem with this view is that both chapters routinely identify Babylon as a city rather than just a religious system (17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21). Moreover, being a system does not detract from the fact that a literal city is also in view. For example, while the name Wall Street represents a global financial system, that fact, in and of itself, does not detract from the fact that Wall Street is also a literal address. Similarly, although the name Madison Avenue represents a universal marketing system, this fact, in and of itself, does not subtract from the fact that Madison Avenue is also represents a literal street.

Moreover, while the name Hollywood represents a worldwide system of entertainment, Hollywood is also a literal city. In addition, although the name Vatican City represents a religious system, Vatican City is also a literal location. Also, as noted earlier, while the ancient Tower of Babel was the headquarters of the infamous mother-child religious cult, it was still located in a literal place in the land of *Shinar* (Gen. 11:2). Future Babylon will have this same element. While it will be the headquarters of the future financial, political, and religious system of the world, these systems will be headquartered in an actual city on the banks of the Euphrates.

Jerusalem

Many identify Babylon with the city of Jerusalem. The most vociferous proponents of this approach today are preterists who date Revelation in the mid 60’s and

⁷² Pink, 258-59; Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or "The Day of the Lord"*, 506.

see some, or all, of its contents as finding a fulfillment in the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. For example, Hanegraaff boldly writes:

What has puzzled me over the years is not the identity of “the great prostitute,” but how so many could mistake her historical identity...In biblical history only one nation is inextricably linked to the moniker “harlot.” And that nation is Israel! Anyone who has read the Bible even once has flashbacks to the graphic images of apostate Israel when they first encounter the great prostitute of Revelation. From the Pentateuch to the Prophets, the image is repeated endlessly. Perhaps the most gut-wrenching portrayal of Israel as prostitute is found in Hosea.⁷³

At least three reasons cause this approach to be suspect. First, to the extent this view is advocated by preterists, it requires an early date for Revelation. Revelation obviously cannot be a prophecy about A.D. 70 if it was written after A.D. 70. This fact is problematic for preterist interpreters because the overwhelming opinion among modern New Testament scholarship is that Revelation was written in A.D. 95, or a quarter of a century after Jerusalem fell to the Romans in the events of A.D. 70.⁷⁴ Irenaeus, who was just one generation removed from John, the author of the *Apocalypse*, was clear that the book was written at the end of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 95): “But if it had been necessary to announce his name plainly at the present time, it would have been spoken by him who saw the apocalypse. *For it was not seen long ago, but almost in our own time, at the end of the reign of Domitian.*”⁷⁵

⁷³ Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code: Find out What the Bible Really Says About the End Times and Why It Matters* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2007), 118, 19-20.

⁷⁴ For a refutation of preterist arguments used to support an early date see J. Ritchie Smith, “The Date of the Apocalypse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 45, (April-June 1888): 297-328; Mark Hitchcock, “The Stake in the Heart: The A.D. 95 Date of Revelation,” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 123-50; idem, “A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005).

⁷⁵ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.30.3. Italics added.

Second, throughout Scripture, Jerusalem means Jerusalem and Babylon means Babylon.⁷⁶ Yet suddenly in Revelation, preterists switch the meaning of these words. Babylon suddenly becomes Jerusalem. No scriptural or logical justification exists for this sudden alteration except to satisfy preterist theological presuppositions. Third, although harlot imagery typically conveys God's displeasure with His elect nation and city, Israel, and Jerusalem, throughout the Old Testament (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; Ezek. 16; 23), this is not uniquely the case. The Old Testament also sometimes uses such harlot imagery to depict the Gentile cities of Tyre (Isa. 23:16-17) and Nineveh (Nah. 3:4). Thus, similar harlotry imagery (Rev. 17:1-5) could thus easily apply to the future gentile city of Babylon.

Rome

By far, the most popular approach is to identify Babylon with Rome. A variation of this view is to identify Babylon with the Roman Catholic Church reigning from Vatican City.

The Wrong Question

Many believe that John is identifying Rome in the west in Revelation 17–18 rather than Babylon in the east on the basis of Revelation 17:18, which says, “The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” Such interpreters then rhetorically ask, what city was reigning over the kings of the earth at the time John wrote these words? The obvious answer to this question is the City of Rome. However, unfortunately, these interpreters ask the wrong question. Asking the wrong question elicits a wrong answer. Because John was told to write down the things that

⁷⁶ The name “Jerusalem” is used roughly 800 times in Scripture and the name “Babylon” is used roughly 300 times. In all instances, these two names are never intermingled and are always kept distinct.

would take place “after these things” (Rev. 1:19), he was recording information concerning a future generation (Rev. 4–22) rather than his own. So rather than the question being what city was reigning over the kings of the earth at the time John wrote?, the proper question is what city will be reigning over the kings of the earth concerning the distant generation that God allowed John to see in the vision? Such a proper inquiry and accompanying answer leads the interpreter away from interpreting Revelation 17–18 as Rome and instead toward viewing these chapters as relating to the future city of Babylon.

Seven Hills of Rome?

Much of the impetus for the Rome view also comes from the assumption that the seven mountains of Revelation 17:9 identify the topography of the ancient city of Rome, which is the city that sits on seven hills. Although literal interpretation is to be employed whenever possible, there are times when the text specifically mandates a non-literal interpretation (Rev. 11:8). Revelation 17:9-10 informs the reader that the seven hills are not literal hills but rather are a metaphor for kings. Kings and kingdoms are often used interchangeably in Daniel and Revelation (Dan. 2:37-39; 7:17, 23). Thus, the seven hills represent seven kingdoms. The Old Testament frequently uses the word “mountain” to refer to a kingdom or empire (Ps. 30:7; 68:15-16; Isa. 2:2; 41:15; Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:35, 45; Hab. 3:6, 10; Zech. 4:7).⁷⁷ These seven kingdoms are those that have persecuted and will persecute Israel throughout her existence. The five fallen kingdoms include Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. Rome was the kingdom reigning when John wrote. The seventh kingdom will be the revived Roman Empire headed by the antichrist.⁷⁸ Thus, the seven hills have nothing to do with the topography of Rome.

⁷⁷ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 227-28.

⁷⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 297.

Moreover, the seven hills have nothing at all to do with the entity Babylon. The seven hills are seven heads (17:9) that belong to the beast (17:3, 7; 13:1) rather than the woman named Babylon. It is possible to argue that the woman is still associated with the seven hills because she is sitting on them. However, it is better to see this as referring to the woman's control rather than her location. The other references to the woman sitting in Revelation 17 also refer to her control (17:1, 3, 15).⁷⁹

Code Theories?

The Babylon = Rome view is also built upon the notion that Babylon was a common code for Rome in the first-century world and that John was employing this practice when he wrote Revelation. Support for this view is supposedly found in various extra-biblical writings that use Babylon as a code for Rome.⁸⁰ Support for this view is also found in First Peter 5:13 where Peter indicates that he is writing from Babylon and yet church tradition places his death in Rome. Yet such support is unpersuasive. Many of the extra-biblical writings equating Babylon with Rome were written in the second century quite some time after John wrote Revelation.⁸¹ Moreover, through John's repetition of "I saw" and "I heard" found throughout the Book of Revelation, it becomes apparent that John was receiving and recording direct revelation from God on the Island of Patmos at the close of the first-century rather than trying to deliberately incorporate common literary conventions of the day that used Babylon as a cipher from Rome.

Furthermore, use of First Peter 5:13 to support the code theory is damaged upon recognizing that Peter could have very well been in Babylon when he wrote his epistle. At the time Peter's epistle was written, Babylonia had the largest concentration of

⁷⁹ Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (Part 2)," 437-38.

⁸⁰ *Sibylline Oracles* 5:143, 159, 434; *Apocalypse of Baruch* 11:1; 67:7.

⁸¹ Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 206.

Jews living outside the land. Not only did the magi following ancient messianic prophecies (Num. 22:5; 24:17; Deut. 23:4; Dan. 9:25) come from that region (Matt. 2:2), but pilgrims from Mesopotamia also came to hear Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9). The Babylonian Talmud would later be developed from this area. Because Peter was the apostle to the circumcised (Gal 2:8), Babylon would have been a logical place for him to travel to.⁸² In fact, Josephus mentions Jews living in Babylon:

But when Hyrcanus was brought into Parthia the king Phraates treated him after a very gentle manner, as having already learned of what an illustrious family he was; on which account he set him free from his bonds, and *gave him a habitation at Babylon, where there were Jews in great numbers. These Jews honored Hyrcanus as their high priest and king, as did all the Jewish nation that dwelt as far as Euphrates*; which respect was very much to his satisfaction...⁸³

Thus, there is every reason to believe that Peter eventually traveled there as part of his ministry to the circumcised and then recorded his first epistle from that region.

Conversely, there is little reason to believe that Peter ever went to Rome. After all, why would Paul make it his ambition to travel to Rome (Rom. 1:7, 11) if Peter was already there, since it was Paul's practice not to build upon another man's foundation (Rom. 15:20)? Moreover, why does Paul never greet Peter in Rome (Rom. 16:1-16) nor ever mentioned Peter's presence with Paul in Rome in his many later letters written during his first and second Roman imprisonments? While the biblical case that Peter traveled to Babylon can easily be made, no similar luxury is enjoyed by those arguing that Peter traveled to Rome. Rather, the entire case that Peter traveled to Rome comes not from Scripture but rather from extra-biblical tradition arising over a century after Peter's death. English explains, "It is evident that memorials of Peter's presence in Rome for a quarter of a century, and his bishopric and martyrdom there, had their beginnings more

⁸² Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Christology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel, 1998), 1003.; Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 352.

⁸³ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 15.2.2. Italics added.

than one hundred years after the apostle's execution."⁸⁴ If Peter never traveled to Rome, then the entire case that Babylon is a code word for Rome based upon First Peter 5:13 largely collapses.

In sum, the notion that John in Revelation used Babylon as a code for Rome is mere speculation at best. Moreover, the code theory should be rejected because it wreaks havoc upon the Old Testament eschatological Babylon predictions. Garland explains, "Identifying Babylon as Rome implies that God gave numerous prophecies using a code name which would not obtain its true meaning until hundreds of years later."⁸⁵ Interpreting Revelation's prophecies concerning Babylon on the basis of a preconceived code theory represents a far cry from the consistent application of the literal, grammatical, historical, contextual method of biblical interpretation. Thomas explains: "Another clear distinctive of literal interpretation is its avoidance of assumptions not justified in the text. Theories that 'Babylon' in Revelation chapters 14 and 16-18 is a code for Rome have been widespread."⁸⁶ Morris also explains not only the improbability of biblical writers using a Babylon as a code for Rome, but also why interpreting Revelation through such a presupposition violates the principle of literal interpretation. He writes:

At the very least, it would be confusing to John's first century readers, as well as to later generations, for him to write so much about Babylon when he really meant Rome (Paul was not afraid to speak directly against Rome in his writings, so why should John be?) or 'the false church' (all the apostles, including John, wrote plainly and scathingly about false teachers and false doctrines in the church and would not hide their teachings by symbols). It must be stressed that Revelation means "unveiling," not "veiling." In the absence of any statement in

⁸⁴ E. Schuyler English, "Was St. Peter Ever in Rome?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124, (October–December 1967): 316.

⁸⁵ Garland, 2:200.

⁸⁶ Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old*, 336.

the text to the contrary, therefore, we must assume that the term Babylon applies to the real city of Babylon...⁸⁷

A Sketchy Origin

The notion that Babylon of the Apocalypse is really a prophecy about Rome has its roots in tradition rather than careful biblical exegesis. The protestant reformers learned that when they called the Papacy “the Antichrist” and Vatican City “the City of Babylon,” the masses, already abused by the Roman Catholic Church through its sale of indulgences, enjoyed listening to such hyperbolic rhetoric. Thus, the idea that Rome represents the fulfilment of Revelation’s prophecies is germane in the writings of the protestant reformers. For example, according to Martin Luther:

No man can believe what an abomination *the papacy* is. A Christian does not have to be of low intelligence, either, to recognize it. God himself must deride him in the hellish fire, and our Lord Jesus Christ, St. Paul says in II Thessalonians 2 [:8] will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his glorious coming." I only deride, with my own weak derision, so that those who now live and those who will come after us should know what I have thought of *the pope, the damned antichrist*, and so that whoever wishes to be a Christian may be warned against such an abomination.⁸⁸

John Calvin similarly pontificated:

...therefore, is evident that we by no means deny that the churches under his tyranny remain churches. But these he has profaned by his sacrilegious impiety, afflicted by his inhuman domination, corrupted, and well-nigh killed by his evil and deadly doctrines, which are like poisoned drinks. In them Christ lies hidden, half buried, the gospel overthrown, piety scattered, the worship of God nearly wiped out. In them, briefly, everything is so confused that there we see the face of *Babylon* rather than that of the Holy City of God.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 323.

⁸⁸ Martin Luther, "Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Eric. W. Gritsch (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), 273-74. Italics added.

⁸⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, ii, 12. Italics added.

Ever since this point in time, the Babylon equals Rome thesis began to catch on among protestant Christians. Thus, quite unknowing, even well-intentioned advocates of the Rome view are simply regurgitating overheated rhetoric from the sixteenth century rather than advocating a belief that has been derived from a careful study of the biblical text. Because of this sketchy origin, in addition to its other aforementioned interpretive problems, the notion that the City of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 is the City of Rome should be frankly and explicitly abandoned.

Trans-historical

Another approach identifies Babylon with the world system in general rather than with a specific geographic locale. This view has trans-historical and a-temporal aspects. Hamstra, a proponent of this position, contends: “In the first century, Babylon was Rome. Two generations ago it was Berlin. Today, perhaps, it is Las Vegas or even a university campus. Babylon can be found everywhere throughout the history of the world. It is the center of anti-Christian seduction any time in history.”⁹⁰

However, this view should be rejected because of its failure to interact with the details of the text that clearly call for Babylon to be a specific place on the earth at a particular time in history. Predictive prophecy in Scripture has fulfillments in history that are specific, such as the predictions in Isaiah 53 of the Messiah’s sufferings.⁹¹ Even preterists, like Gentry, recognize the folly associated with the trans-historical and a-temporal interpretation of Bible prophecy. Gentry notes: “It requires us to believe that many of the specific events, things, and personages of Revelation will appear repeatedly on the scene of earth history. In the same order? In the same geographic regions? With

⁹⁰ Sam Hamstra, "An Idealist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 117.

⁹¹ Robert L. Thomas, "A Classical Dispensationalist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 226.

continual groupings of 144,000 being sealed? With constant beasts being designated by the same number 666? On and on I could go.”⁹²

Eclecticism

Another approach views Babylon as an eclectic amalgamation of two or more of the preceding views. For example, Progressive Dispensationalist Pate identifies Babylon as having both a futuristic component as well as being historical Jerusalem.⁹³ However, this view should be rejected because of its reliance upon a dual hermeneutic that is simultaneously inconsistent. On the one hand, Revelation’s global language is allegorized to accommodate the Jerusalem view. On the other hand, a literal interpretation is embraced to accommodate the futuristic view. Milton Terry warned against such an approach through his articulation of the principle of single meaning: “a fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture.”⁹⁴

Two-Phase View

Some view the two chapters in question (Rev. 17–18) as teaching different realities about Babylon and occurring at different times. Walvoord best articulates this view when he notes, “In general, however, it is helpful to consider chapter 17 as dealing with Babylon as an ecclesiastical or spiritual entity and chapter 18 as dealing with

⁹² Kenneth L. Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 44.

⁹³ C. Marvin Pate, "A Progressive Dispensationalist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 160, 68-69.; C. Marvin Pate and Calvin Haines, *Doomsday Delusions* (InterVarsity: Downers Grove, Ill, 1995), 43-44.

⁹⁴ Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (1885; reprint, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1947), 205.

Babylon as a political entity.”⁹⁵ Thus, Walvoord interprets the city in Revelation 17 non-literally⁹⁶ while simultaneously interpreting the city in Revelation 18 literally.⁹⁷

Proponents of this position also contend that religious Babylon of Revelation 17 is destroyed at a different time than commercial and political Babylon of Revelation 18.

Walvoord explains:

Babylon, ecclesiastically symbolized by the woman in Revelation 17, proposes a common worship and a common religion through uniting in a world church. This is destroyed by the beast in Revelation 17:16 who thus fulfills the will of God (Rev 17:17). Babylon, politically symbolized by the great city of Revelation 18, attempts to achieve its domination of the world by a world common market and a world government. These are destroyed by Christ at His second coming.⁹⁸

Unity of Revelation 17–18

Despite its popularity, this view suffers from several weaknesses. For example, why is the word “city” (*polis*) non-literal in 17:18 but literal in chapter 18 (Rev 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21)? A further weakness is that three reasons seem to make it apparent that what unites these chapters is greater than what separates them.⁹⁹ First, both chapters refer to Babylon as having the same name (17:5; 18:2), being a city (17:18; 18:10), having the same color adornment (17:4; 18:16), holding a cup (17:4; 18:6), fornicating with kings (17:2; 18:3), being drunk with wine of immorality (17:2; 18:3), persecuting

⁹⁵ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary*, 243.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 267. See also Larkin, 150.

⁹⁹ Dyer, *World News and Bible Prophecy*, 142-45; *idem*, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 (Part 1)," 305-13; *idem*, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17 and 18" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), 17-38.

believers (17:6; 18:24), experiencing destruction by fire (17:16; 18:8), and experiencing destruction by God (17:17; 18:5, 8).¹⁰⁰

Second, the larger context also supports viewing these chapters as a unit. Revelation 14:8 announces the singular destruction of Babylon while drawing imagery from both chapters (fall: 17:16 and 18:2; name: 17:5 and 18:2; immorality: 17:2 and 18:3). Revelation 19:2-3 also announces the singular destruction of Babylon while drawing imagery from both chapters (compare 19:2 and 17:1; 19:3 and 18:9, 18). Revelation 17–18 must also be singularly connected to the seventh bowl since one of the angels who had the seven bowls also gave John the revelation of Babylon (17:1). Thus, Johnson observes, “These two chapters form an extended appendix to the seventh bowl, where the judgment on Babylon was mentioned (16:19). . . . ‘One of the seven angels’ connects this vision with the preceding judgments, showing that it is a further expansion or appendix of the final bowl action and not an additional event.”¹⁰¹ Thus, the extended context does not seem to support Babylon’s two-phase judgment as taught by this view’s proponents.

Answering the Disunity Arguments

Third, most of the arguments used to prove two Babylons have been answered.¹⁰² For example, according to Larkin, “. . . and the fact that the first verse of chapter eighteen says—‘**after these things,**’ that is after the destruction of the ‘**Woman,**’ what happens to the ‘**City**’ occurs, shows that the ‘**Woman**’ and the ‘**City**’ are not one

¹⁰⁰ Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 (Part 1)," 311-13. See also Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 313.

¹⁰¹ Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 554-55.

¹⁰² Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 (Part 1)," 305-11; idem, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17 and 18", 17-30.

and the same.”¹⁰³ However, the phrase “after these things” (*meta tauta*) in Revelation 18:1 can simply indicate the time sequence in which the visions were revealed to John (chronological use) rather than something that must take place later chronologically (eschatological use) because the phrase is accompanied by a verb of perception “I saw.” Whenever a verb of perception accompanies “after these things” in Revelation, the phrase is used chronologically (4:1a; 7:1; 7:9; 15:5; 19:1) rather than eschatologically (1:19; 4:1b; 9:12; 20:3).

In addition, it is claimed that Babylon in chapter 17 is destroyed in a different manner and by a different source than the Babylon in chapter 18. Larkin notes that while the ten kings destroy the woman, the city of Rev 18 “. . . is not destroyed by them but by a mighty earthquake and a fire.”¹⁰⁴ However, this contention is without merit because the Babylons in both chapters are both destroyed by fire (17:16; 18:9) and by God (17:17; 18:8). Thomas notes the destruction by fire in both chapters. Regarding Rev 18:8, he observes, “‘She shall be burned up with fire’ . . . corresponds closely to . . . 17:16 and must be the same destruction.”¹⁰⁵

Moreover, it is claimed that the response to the destruction of the two Babylons is different because chapter 17 records the kings hating the harlot (17:16) and chapter 18 records the kings weeping over the harlot (18:9). According to Morris, “The kings of the earth had burned Mystery Babylon, the harlot religious system, with fire, but these same kings mourn the burning of commercial Babylon (Revelation 17:16; 18:9), so obviously these are not the same burnings.”¹⁰⁶ Larkin echoes, “The ‘**Woman**’ is

¹⁰³ Larkin, 150.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 326.

¹⁰⁶ Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 360.

destroyed by the ‘**Ten Kings**,’ while the ‘**Kings of the Earth**’ in the next chapter, ‘**bewail and lament**’ the destruction of the ‘**City**’ . . .”¹⁰⁷ However, this discrepancy can be explained. The kings in 17:16 are those who unite with the beast to defeat the harlot while the kings in 18:8 are those engaged in commerce with Babylon mourning over the loss of their source of revenue. According to Bullinger, “We have noted before that ‘the ten kings’ are never seen apart from the Beast; and ‘the kings of the earth’ are never seen apart from Babylon; it is the latter who weep and wail over her.”¹⁰⁸

Also, it is claimed that the Babylon in chapter 17 is referred to as a woman while the Babylon in chapter 18 is referred to as a city. According to Larkin, “That the ‘**Woman**,’ and the ‘**City**’ do not symbolize the same thing is clear, for what is said of the ‘**Woman**’ does not apply to the city, and what is said of the ‘**City**’ does not apply to the woman.”¹⁰⁹ However, this argument collapses upon realizing that 17:18 explains that the woman represents a city. According to Bullinger:

If we look at these two chapters carefully, we fail to find the distinction so persistently affirmed. Someone states a thing as a fact; and then others think they see it. There is no such thing as “Mystic Babylon.” The Babylon mentioned in chap. xvii. is the same as that in chap. xviii. It is the “Woman” which is a secret symbol or sign. But that means only that we are not to take it literally as a woman, but as “that great city,” as explained in verse 18 . . . It means, as we have seen, a *secret sign*, but that refers to the “Woman” as being the sign or symbol of the “city.”¹¹⁰

Finally it is observed that the reference to “another angel” (18:1) bifurcates the chapters since this phrase is often used to introduce a new vision (10:1; 14:6, 8, 9). Larkin states, “That the two chapters refer to different things is further verified by the fact that they are announced by different angels. The events of chapter seventeen are

¹⁰⁷ Larkin, 150.

¹⁰⁸ Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or "The Day of the Lord"*, 567.

¹⁰⁹ Larkin, 150.

¹¹⁰ Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or "The Day of the Lord"*, 557-58.

announced by one of the ‘Vial’ Angels, while those of the eighteenth are announced by ‘another’ angel . . .”¹¹¹ However, Revelation also interjects the phrase “another angel” into a vision without indicating that a new vision is in view (7:2; 8:3; 14:15, 17, 18).

Conclusion

For these preceding three reasons, it seems better to treat these chapters as a unit that explain the contents of the seventh bowl rather than two different Babylonian destructions. According to Osborne, “While there have been attempts to see chaps. 17 and 18 as distinct and even to see two separate ‘Babylons’ in these chapters, Dyer (1987) demonstrates well the unity of these chapters.”¹¹² Thus, Johnson concludes, “Chapter 18 contains the description of the previously announced ‘judgment’ . . . of the prostitute (17:1). It is important not to separate this chapter from the portrayal of the prostitute in chapter 17, for there is no warrant for making the prostitute in chapter 17 different from the city in chapter 18 (cf. 17:18).”¹¹³

Thus, both Revelation 17 and 18 should both be considered prophecies about the rise and fall of the same futuristic City of Babylon. Like the Tower of Babel, which had both political and religious elements, the Babylon of the future will be the same. However, having these different features does not mean two different Babylon’s are in view in Revelation 17–18 anymore than Genesis 11:1-9 is speaking of two different Towers of Babel. It is fair to say that Revelation 17 is more focused on the religious aspects of the future City of Babylon while Revelation 18 is more focused on the commercial and political aspects of the identical city. Yet this much is certain: both chapters are highlighting different features of the identical city.

¹¹¹ Larkin, 155.

¹¹² Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, ed. Moisés Silva, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 631, n. 1.

¹¹³ Johnson, 565.

Summation

In sum, none of the preceding views offers a plausible interpretation of Revelation 17–18. It is best to take the text in a straightforward manner by interpreting Babylon as the rebuilt City of Babylon on the Euphrates in these chapters. Any strengths are quickly outweighed by weaknesses when interpreting Revelation's Babylon as merely a religious system, Jerusalem, Rome, or when embracing a trans-historical, eclectic, or two-phase interpretation.

Current Events

Now that the biblical case for a literal interpretation of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 has been presented, it is appropriate to look at world events to determine if such a city is on the precipice of being rebuilt.

Newspaper Exegesis?

However, at the onset, it is important to point out that some resist the literal Babylon view on the grounds that it is allegedly the product of reading current events regarding the most recent Iraqi crisis back into the biblical text rather than being the product of sound exegetical principles. However, this accusation is inaccurate in light of the fact that numerous interpreters held to the literal Babylon view long before Saddam Hussein rose to power.¹¹⁴ Such commentators include¹¹⁵ Newell (1935),¹¹⁶ Jennings

¹¹⁴ It is true that Dyer released his book advocating the literal Babylon view on the eve of the Gulf War [Charles H. Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1991)] and on the eve of the recent war with Iraq [Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon*, 2003]. However, it should also be noted that the content of these books is based upon Dyer's master's thesis that was completed in May of 1979 [Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17 and 18"] long before Hussein's rise to power and escalating tensions between America and Iraq.

¹¹⁵ For a more extensive list of early commentators who held to the literal Babylon view, see Hitchcock, *The Second Coming of Babylon*, 27-32; Thomas Ice, "Babylon in Bible Prophecy," *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 7, no. 11 (March 2003): 5.

¹¹⁶ William R. Newell, *Revelation: A Complete Commentary* (Chicago: Grace, 1935; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 268.

(1937),¹¹⁷ Cooper (1942),¹¹⁸ and Lang (1948).¹¹⁹ Other commentators held the view even before Iraq became a nation in 1932. Such commentators include Seiss (1909)¹²⁰ and Larkin (1919).¹²¹

Optimal Geography

Now that the biblical evidence for the literal Babylon view has been presented and the trite charge of newspaper exegesis has been refuted, allow me to briefly present a few pieces of corroborating evidence demonstrating the feasibility of a future world capital in Babylon. The first piece of evidence involves geography. Geographically speaking, Iraq seems to be an ideal location for a future world capital. According to Henry Morris:

Computer studies of the Institute for Creation Research have shown, for example, that Babylon is very near the geographical center of all the earth's land masses. It is within navigable distances of the Persian Gulf and is at the crossroads of the three great continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. Thus, there is no more ideal location anywhere for a world trade center, a world communication center, a world banking center, a world educational center, or especially, a world capital! The greatest historian of modern times, Arnold Toynbee, used to stress to all his readers and hearers that Babylon would be the best place in the world to build a future world cultural metropolis.¹²²

¹¹⁷ Frederick C. Jennings, *Studies in Revelation* (New York: Loizeaux, 1937), 476.

¹¹⁸ David L. Cooper, *The World's Greatest Library Graphically Illustrated* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1942), 114.

¹¹⁹ Lang, 305.

¹²⁰ J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1909; reprint, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1964), 397.

¹²¹ Larkin, 150.

¹²² Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 349.

Black Gold

The second piece of evidence involves oil. “Iraq sits on at least the second largest crude oil reserves in the world.”¹²³ In fact, if the Antichrist were to set up his world capital in modern-day Iraq and annex the surrounding and nearby nations of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, overnight he would control nearly sixty percent of the world’s oil supply.¹²⁴ With such vast oil resources comes tremendous power to wield influence over the nations of the earth. For verification of this statement, one need only remember back to the Arab oil embargo of 1973 when the Arabic nations reduced their oil supply and implemented an embargo against those nations supporting Israel. Interestingly, although these oil reserves were not discovered until 1927, God in His word predicted thousands of years ago that the world’s center of commercial power would once again return to the ancient city of Babylon.

The United Nations Moving to Babylon?

Furthermore, the United Nations and the global community seem to be exhibiting a heightened interest in modern-day Babylon. For example, Babylon was recently named a UNESCO World Heritage site. According to a recent Associated Press report:

Iraq on Friday celebrated the UNESCO World Heritage Committee’s decision to name the historic city of Babylon a World Heritage Site in a vote held in Azerbaijan’s capital, years after Baghdad began campaigning for the site to be added to the list...The 4,300-year-old Babylon — now mainly an archaeological ruin and two important museums — is where dynasties have risen and fallen since the earliest days of settled human civilization. King Hammurabi wrote his famous

¹²³ Hitchcock, *The Second Coming of Babylon*, 147.

¹²⁴ David Jeremiah, *What in the World Is Going On? 10 Prophetic Clues You Cannot Afford to Ignore* (Nashville: Nelson, 2008), 207.

code of laws in Babylon, while Nebuchadnezzar sent his vast army from the city to Jerusalem to put down an uprising and bring the Jews back as slaves.¹²⁵

There is no doubt, that for the reasons previously stated, Babylon in Iraq is an attractive venue in the geo-political realm. It is probably for reasons such as these, that two well-decorated and credentialed professors at the Army War College recently argued that the United Nations should be moved from New York City to Babylon in Iraq. In an article entitled *Want Middle East Stability? Move UN to Iraq*, they contend:

The idea of moving U.N. headquarters seems to resonate with many.... Where should it go? Try Iraq...In order to maintain its fledgling democracy, Iraq needs international commitment, an inducement to stop factional violence, and a stable form of income not subject to the terrorists' reprisals...New York is an expensive city, and representation at the U.N. is currently a costly endeavor...The remaining big spenders should have a positive effect on the Iraqi job market and improve the overall economy of the entire region, which might in turn reduce the tendency...¹²⁶

The Imminency of the Rapture?

Some resist the literal Babylon view on the grounds that if we must wait for Babylon to be rebuilt to the stature of a city of global dominance spoken of in the Book of Revelation, then the rapture is not imminent. The response to this is two-fold. First, we are living in an era when cities can be built and even rebuilt rapidly. Bullinger answers this argument by noting that the city of Chicago was completely rebuilt in just a few short years following the Chicago fire.¹²⁷ Larkin similarly observes:

The rapid growth of modern cities is one of the remarkable phenomena of the times. Since 1880 more than 500 cities have been built in America. Less than 100 years ago the site of the City of Chicago was but a swampy expanse at the mouth of the Chicago river. Now it has been transformed into a beautiful Metropolis, stretching 25 miles along the shore of Lake Michigan, with 5000 miles of streets,

¹²⁵ Qassim Abdul-Zahira, "Iraq Celebrates Naming Babylon a UNESCO World Heritage Site," online: www.timesofisrael.com, July 6, 2019.

¹²⁶ Cynthia E. Ayers and David W. Cammons, "Want Middle East Stability? Move UN to Iraq," online: www.newsweek.washingtonpost.com, April 9, 2007.

¹²⁷ Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or "The Day of the Lord"*, 558.

many of them beautiful boulevards 120 feet wide. In 1840 Chicago had only 4470 inhabitants, today the population is over 3,000,000. Once the Capitalists of the world are ready the revived City of Babylon will spring up in a few years.¹²⁸

This pattern of rapidly emerging cities is particularly common in today's Middle East, especially in cities nearby modern-day Babylon. Hitchcock notes how rapidly the influential city of Dubai sprang into existence in the United Arab Emirates.¹²⁹ A similar rapidly appearing city is now emerging in Neom, Saudi Arabia. Notice the following from a recent headline entitled *A Prince's \$500 Billion Desert Dream: Flying Cars, Robot Dinosaurs, and a Giant Artificial Moon*:

Saudi Arabia's crown prince turned to U.S. consultants for help imagining a massive new city-state in a barren section of his kingdom. What emerged was a Jetsons-style world of automation. SHARMA, Saudi Arabia—This seaside corner of northwest Saudi Arabia is so barren that the only abundant resources a group of consultants could identify were sunlight and 'unlimited access to salt water.' But Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman didn't see a wasteland when he landed in his helicopter here a few years ago. He saw the future — and hatched a plan for a \$500 billion city-state to cover 10,000 square miles of rocky desert and empty coastline to attract the 'world's greatest minds and best talents' to the world's best paying jobs in the world's most livable city.¹³⁰

Second, it is possible that a gap of time could exist in between the of the rapture and the confirming of the covenant between the Antichrist and unbelieving Israel, which will inaugurate the seven-year tribulation period (Dan. 9:27a). While many assume that both events will transpire in a rapid succession, this is more of an assumption and need not be the case. Bullinger believed that a gap of 30 years or more could elapse between the events:

And Babylon, though fallen gradually, and very low, has never suffered such a destruction. There is only one conclusion, that in the interval of, say *some 30 or*

¹²⁸ Larkin, 162.

¹²⁹ Hitchcock, *The Second Coming of Babylon*, 151-52.

¹³⁰ Justin Scheck, Rory Jones, and Summer Said, www.wsj.com, "A Prince's \$500 Billion Dollar Desert Dream," online: 25 July 2019.

more years between the removal of the church and the last "week" of Daniel's prophecy, it will be revived and exceed all its former magnificence.¹³¹

Larkin speculated a gap of 25 to even 50 years:

But I hear the protest, how can you say we be expecting Jesus to come at "any moment," if the city of Babylon must be rebuilt before He can come? There is not a word in Scripture that says that Jesus cannot come and take away His Church until Babylon is rebuilt. The Church may be taken out of the world *25 or even 50 years* before that.¹³²

If true, Babylon could be rebuilt during the gap in between the rapture and the confirming of the covenant. Under either scenario of a rapidly built city or Babylon's rebuilding occurring in between the rapture and the confirming of the covenant, the literal Babylon view poses no threat to the any moment appearing of Christ for His church in the rapture.

Babylon Needs a Harbor?

A common objection to the literal Babylon interpretation is that John depicts Babylon in a maritime sense (Rev. 18:17-19). After all, according to John's predictions concerning Babylon as recorded in the Apocalypse, it is those who make their living by the sea that seem to wail the loudest when God ultimately judges Babylon. Currently, the City of Babylon is landlocked containing no influential harbor of its own. How then, it is asked, can modern Babylon ever become the fulfillment of John's prophecies?

Interestingly, one of the great ambitions of Saddam Hussein was to build an influential Babylonian harbor. Sciolino explains:

It was unacceptable to Saddam [Hussein] that a country as great as Iraq did not have a long coastline. Over and over he talked about the necessity of building a Navy and becoming a seafaring power. Iraq's isolation from the sea was a cruel accident of history, he believed, and one that had to be rectified—a theme he continued to dwell on after his invasion of Kuwait.¹³³

¹³¹ Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or "The Day of the Lord"*, 577. Italics added.

¹³² Larkin, 162. Italics added.

¹³³ Elaine Sciolino, *The Outlaw State: Saddam Hussein's Quest for Power and the Gulf Crisis* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991), 191-92.

Dan Hayden explains how such a harbor in Babylon could easily be built, thereby setting the stage for a literal fulfilment of the prophecies concerning Babylon found in the Book of Revelation:

Actually, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers converge in southern Iraq and enter the Persian Gulf in Iraqi territory. The problem has been that Iran and Kuwait squeeze Iraq into a bottleneck at the mouth of the rivers and Iraq's attempts to forge a harbor there have been thwarted by the hostile refusals of those two countries. But suppose international pressures were brought to bear upon Iran to allow Iraq access to the Shatt al-Arab waterway all the way to Basra and cooperation could be coerced from Kuwait to open up the area around its little island of Bubiyan and Warba. A commercial port and harbor for ships could become a reality for Babylon in a relatively short period of time. With modern dredging equipment, a deep channel waterway could be opened from the Persian Gulf all the way to Babylon. With its location on the Euphrates River, ships and sailors could indeed have access to this future queen of modern cities. The Antichrist ruler, with his political and economic power and global influence, could easily make that happen. So, as you can see, a harbor in Babylon is not at all out of the question.¹³⁴

If true, then this objection of a lack of a harbor against a literal interpretation of Revelation 17–18 disappears.

A 1948 Parallel

As has been demonstrated, the plain teaching of Scripture is that human history will one day cycle back to where it all began. In the same region where the first world emperor led mankind in a universal political and religious revolt against God, the future Antichrist will also lead the last collective revolt before Christ returns. Sadly, many reject this view. Why? Unbelief and timing are the two primary reasons that cause interpreters to reject the literal Babylon view.¹³⁵ Unbelief occurs when interpreters refuse to take God at His word. Timing also motivates unbelief because the type of Babylonian world capital spoken of in the Bible has not yet materialized in the Middle East.

¹³⁴ Dan Hayden, *Iraq: In the Crosshairs of Destiny: What the Bible Says About the Future of Iraq* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Advantage Books, 2008), 115.

¹³⁵ Garland, 2:204.

However, because God knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:9-10), it is simply a matter of time before these prophecies will be literally fulfilled.

Prior to 1948, Bible students faced a similar dilemma regarding how to interpret the plethora of prophecies requiring a Jewish return to their ancient homeland. After all, Mark Twain had visited the Holy Land in 1867. When he wrote about his visit two years later in *The Innocents Abroad*, it hardly seemed as if the biblical prophecies concerning Israel's restoration would ever be fulfilled:

...A desolate country whose soil is rich enough but is given over wholly to weeds... a silent mournful expanse.... a desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action.... we never saw a human being on the whole route.... there was hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive tree and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.¹³⁶

However, the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 as well as the existence of its thriving economy and population of today vindicated those who then insisted upon a literal interpretation. Those that insist upon literally construing the prophecies regarding Babylon will one day be similarly vindicated.

All things considered, there are many items in current events that can be reasonably interpreted as setting the stage for a literal fulfillment of John's prophecies found in Revelation 17-18. In fact, many of the practical objections to the literal Babylon view are really no objections at all and thus can be easily dispensed with.

Conclusion

Babylon is destined to play a monumental role in God's end time prophetic program. Human history will eventually recycle back to where it all began. In the very geographical area where humanity first engaged in a collective rebellion against God

¹³⁶ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, Complete, 1st ed. (A Public Domain Book, 1869), 267, 285, 302. These quotes can be found in chapters 47, 49, 52.

(Gen. 11:1-9), the Antichrist will attempt the same feat (Rev. 17–18). Such a literal interpretation of these chapters harmonizes well with the predictions of both the pre-exilic (Isa. 13–14; Jer. 50–51) and post-exilic prophets (Zech. 5:5-11). This view also makes good sense of the events surrounding the sixth trumpet and sixth bowl judgments (Rev. 9:13-21; 16:12-16). Alternative interpretations of Revelation 17–18 leave more unanswered questions than they do solutions. Although the literal Babylon view is not based on a newspaper reading of the Bible, it does harmonize well with current events that seem to be pushing humanity in the direction of a world capital in modern-day Babylon.

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