

The Biblical Argument for the Rebuilding of Babylon - Dr Charles Dyer

Introduction

Why examine the biblical argument for the rebuilding of Babylon at the Pre-Trib Study Group? Apart from the fact that both topics explore issues in eschatology, is there any common ground? It is this author's opinion that the hermeneutical issues surrounding Babylon are the same issues that affect dispensationalism and pretribulationism. The approach one uses to interpret biblical prophecy lies at the heart of both topics.

For most of Scripture conservative evangelicals argue for historical, grammatical, literal interpretation^[1] However, when they come to "prophetic" passages many change their hermeneutical approach.^[2] Dispensationalists and pretribulationists have argued that the best approach is to begin with the Old Testament passage itself and to determine the meaning of the passage in its original historical context. Is the passage pointing toward the future? If so, to what is it pointing? It is the consistent use of the literal, historical method of interpretation that has resulted in dispensationalists distinguishing between Israel and the church and accepting a pretribulation rapture of the church before God resumes His program with Israel (Dan. 9:27).

Though dispensationalists believe in literal interpretation, no one wants to be accused of being a "wooden literalist." Literal interpretation allows for figures of speech and symbolic language, and all who claim to interpret literally still interpret some passages, images. or events symbolically.^[3] Still, one person's "symbol" is another person's literal prediction. And it is the differences in interpreting specific symbols that often determines one's position on eschatological events such as a pretribulation rapture.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the biblical prophecies relating to the rebuilding of Babylon. However, a larger goal of this study is to explore the issue of literal interpretation as it relates to Babylon. The paper will attempt to ask and answer three questions on the prophecies concerning Babylon.

Why Do Protestants Interpret Babylon Spiritually?

The Influence of Luther and Calvin

The Reformation marked a turning point in interpreting Scripture. Luther and Calvin broke with the allegorical method that had dominated the church since Jerome and Augustine^[4] and began interpreting Scripture in its grammatical! historical context. That is not to say that these early reformers were able to make a clean break with the allegorical method of interpretation. However, they did champion the grammatical/historical method for forming doctrine. Luther summarized his distinction between using the allegorical method for illustration and using the grammatical/historical method for interpretation.

Let us forewarn here concerning allegory that it may be handled wisely in the Spirit. For playing games with the Sacred Scriptures has the most injurious consequences if the text and its grammar are neglected. From history we must learn well and much, but little from allegory. You use allegory as embellishment by which the discourse is illustrated but not established. Let history remain honest. It teaches, which allegory does not do. But this is what it means to teach: to instruct the conscience about what and how it should know, to nourish faith and the fear of God. In history you have the fulfillment of either promises or threats. Allegory does not pertain to doctrine, but to doctrine already established it can be added as color. The painter's color does not build the house Even so faith is not established by means of allegories.^[5]

Luther's dedication to the historical meaning of the text resulted in his understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith. However, Luther was also a product of his times. In the midst of his struggles with Rome he was convinced that his present conflict had been predicted by the prophets.

The appearance of the church under the papacy was exceedingly wretched. It has now revived again, and I am of the opinion that the last three woes in the Apocalypse have now passed and better times are beginning. I know for sure that this age, in which we now are, is better than the age in which the Jews were living at the time of Christ. However, the saying of Christ, "Then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning" [Matt. 24.21], I understand to apply to the tribulation of the godly and not to the tribulation of the world when the pope persecuted the church. "If those days had not been shortened," the passage continues, "no human being would be saved" [Matt. 24:22]. This means that if our Lord God hadn't intervened through the gospel, the pope would have destroyed everything, and the gospel and the sacraments would have been lost together with the Holy Scriptures. Although there were great scandals among the Jews, under the papacy it was worse. For in former times only one people was thrown into confusion, but under the papacy the whole world was unsettled. "He takes his seat in the temple of God" [II Thess. 2:4].

However, as I have said, the church is better off now than it was then.[6]

Luther's willingness to employ an allegorical or spiritual interpretation coupled with his belief that the prophecies of the end times were unfolding in his day led him to find specific references to the pope and the Roman Catholic Church-in the Antichrist and Babylon!

But we, because we flee from and avoid all such deviltry and novelty and hold fast once more to the ancient church, the virgin and pure bride of Christ-we are certainly the true and ancient church, without any whoredom or innovation. This [Roman] church has therefore, remained till now, and it is out of it that we have come. Indeed, we have been born anew of it as the Galatians were of St. Paul [Gal. 4:19]. We too were formerly stuck in the behind of this hellish whore, this new church of the pope. We supported it in all earnestness, so that we regret having spent so much time and energy in that vile hole. But God be praised and thanked that he rescued us from the scarlet whore [[Revelation 17](#)].[7]

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 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.[8]

Calvin, born 26 years after Luther, carried the Reformation in new directions with the publication of his Institutes of the Christian Religion in 1536. Calvin adopted Luther's view that the pope was the Antichrist and the Roman Catholic Church was Babylon.

Therefore, while we are unwilling simply to concede the name of the Church to the Papists, we do not deny that there are churches among them. The question we raise only related to the true and legitimate constitution of the Church, implying communion in sacred rites, which are the signs of profession, and especially in doctrine. Daniel and Paul foretold that Antichrist would sit in the temple of God (Dan. ix. 27; 2 Thess. ii. 4); we regard the Roman Pontiff as the leader and standard-bearer of that wicked and abominable kingdom. By placing his seat in the temple of God, it is intimated that his kingdom would not be such as to destroy the name either of Christ or his Church. Hence, then, it is obvious that we do not at all deny that churches remain under this tyranny; churches, however, which by sacrilegious impiety he has profaned, by cruel domination has oppressed, by evil and deadly doctrines like poisoned potions has corrupted and almost slain; churches where Christ lies half-buried, the gospel is suppressed, piety is put to flight, and the worship of God almost abolished; where, in short, all things are in such disorder as to present the appearance of Babylon rather than the holy city of God.[9]

The Historical Assumptions about Babylon's Fall

While Luther and Calvin saw a prophetic application of Babylon to Rome, both based their identification primarily on the "Babylonian harlot" of Revelation 17 " (). As near as can be determined, both Luther and Calvin assumed the Old Testament prophecies of Babylon's fall were fulfilled historically when Babylon fell to Cyrus in 539 B.C. Luther identified the army being mustered together for war against Babylon in Isaiah 13:4 as "the soldiery and armed host of the Persians and Medes." [10] When Isaiah predicted that the Jews would return to the land after Babylon's fall (Isa. 14:1-4), Luther says, "All these things were done under Cyrus, king of the Persians, who permitted the Jews conquered by the Babylonians to return to their own land." [11]

Most Protestant interpreters since Luther and Calvin have followed them in assuming that the Old Testament prophecies of Babylon were fulfilled historically. McDowell listed a series of eight specific prophecies on the destruction of Babylon from the Old Testament, and he concludes by stating categorically, "All eight predictions have been fulfilled." [12] Even critical scholars associate the various Old Testament "prophecies" with the fall of Babylon to Cyrus. [13] Certainly the consensus of opinion is that the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled historically when Babylon fell to Cyrus. What Did Happen to Babylon Historically?

Before examining the specific Old and New Testament prophecies about Babylon, one must first know the history of this city. The second section of this paper will trace Babylon's history from the time of Isaiah through today. The goal of this section is to use all available historical sources to answer the question: What did happen to Babylon historically? **Babylon's Temporary Destruction by Sennacherib (689 B.C.)**

Beginning with Merodach-baladan, Babylon and Assyria entered a period of conflict much like that experienced between Israel/Judah, and Assyria. Sennacherib conducted several campaigns against Babylon to bring the rebellious city back under his control. [14] Following the final conflict with Mushib-Marduk Sennacherib ordered his troops to destroy Babylon. "I made its destruction more complete than that by a flood. That in days to come, the site of that city, and (its) temples and gods, might not be remembered, I completely blotted it out with (floods) of water and made it like a meadow." [15] Babylon remained in ruins throughout the remainder of Sennacherib's reign (the next eight years, 689-681 B.C.). The Babylonian Chronicle notes this period by simply recording, "Eight years there was no king in Babylon." [16]

Sennacherib's son, Esarhaddon, was in charge of administering the region of Babylon while he was crown prince. After becoming king in 681 he began rebuilding Babylon and restoring the ancient temples.^[17] The work was not completed until 669-the year Esarhaddon died.

Babylon's Fall to Cyrus (539 B.C.)

The Neo-Babylonian Empire can be traced to Nabopolassar who seized the throne of Babylon in 626 B.C. He led the attack that destroyed the city of Nineveh in 612 B.C., and he ruled until 605 B.C. His son, Nebuchadnezzar, is the king who brought the Neo-Babylonian empire to its zenith of power. Nebuchadnezzar reigned 605-562 B.C., and he was responsible for destroying the kingdom of Judah and for beginning the "times of the Gentiles" ([Dan. 2 "\(\)](#)).

Following Nebuchadnezzar's death the Neo-Babylonian empire began its decline. The next 23 years saw four kings ascend the throne (not including Belshazzar who reigned as coregent with his father). The end of the Neo-Babylonian empire came at the hands of Cyrus in 539 B.C. The Babylonian Chronicle provides a concise account of Babylon's fall.

In the month Tishri when Cyrus (II) did battle of Opis on the [bank oJ] the Tigris against the army of Akkad, the people of Akkad retreated. He carried off the plunder (and) slaughtered the people. On the fourteenth day [i.e., October 10, 539 B.C.] Sippar was captured without a battle. Nabonidus fled. On the sixteenth day [i.e., October 12, 539 B.C.] Ugbaru, governor of the Gut!, and the army of Cyrus (II) entered Babylon without a battle. Afterwards, after Nabonidus retreated, he was captured in Babylon. Until the end of the month the shield-(bearing troops) of the Gull surrounded the gates of Esagil. (But) there was no interruption (of rites) in Esagil or the (other) temples and no date (for a performance) was missed. On the third day of the month Marchesvan [i.e., October 29, 539 B.C.] Cyrus (II) entered Babylon were filled before him. There was peace in the city while Cyrus (II) spoke (his) greeting to all of Babylon.^[18]

The Babylonian Chronicle account is corroborated by an inscription found on a clay barrel. The inscription was an edict by Cyrus explaining why the gods had allowed him to capture Babylon. The inscription concludes by recording Cyrus's generous treatment of both the people of Babylon and the gods that had been held captive in 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 (DIN.TIR) [to love me], and I was daily endeavouring to worship him. My numerous troops walked around in Babylon (DIN.TIR") in peace, I did not allow anybody to terrorize (any place) of the [country of Sumer] and Akkad. I strove for peace in Babylon (Ka.dingir.ra') and in all his (other) sacred cities. As to the inhabitants of Babylon (DIN.TIR"), [who] against the will of the gods [had/were I abolished] the corv...e (lit.: yoke) which was against their (social) standing. I brought relief to their dilapidated housing, putting (thus) an end to their (main) complaints. Marduk, the great lord, was well pleased with my deeds and sent friendly blessings to myself, Cyrus, the king who worships him, to Cambyses, my son, the offspring of [my] loins, as well as to all my troops, and we all [praised] his great Igodheadi joyously, standing before him in peace.

All the kings of the entire world from the Upper to the Lower Sea, those who are seated in throne rooms, (those who) live in other [types of buildings as well as] all the kings of the West land living in tents, brought their heavy tributes and kissed my feet in Babylon (u.an.na). (As to the region) from... as far as Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-Turnu, Der as well as the region of the Gutians, I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been 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 (u.an.nak1) 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 settled in a peaceful place... ducks and doves I endeavoured to fortify/repair their dwelling places ^[19]

Babylon's Later History (530 B.C.-A.D. 1975)

Babylon's later history can be traced through the Medo-Persian and Greek periods by focusing on several key historical points. Cyrus was followed to the throne by Cambyses (530- 522), Pseudo-Smerdis (522), and Darius I (522-486). At the time of Cambyses's death two revolts took place in Babylon. According to Herodotus, when Darius was finally able to put down these revolts he tried to weaken Babylon to prevent further insurrection. "Having mastered the Babylonians, Darius destroyed their walls and reft away all their gates, neither of which things Cyrus had done at the first taking of Babylon: moreover he impaled about three thousand men that were chief among them; as for the rest, he gave them back their city to dwell in. "^[20]

There is some question as to whether Darius destroyed all the walls of the city or only the gates and, perhaps, portions of the outer wall on the eastern side. Herodotus visited Babylon about 450 B.C. approximately 70 years after Darius's attack. From his eyewitness description it appears that the gates of the city were no longer in place but most (if not all) of the walls were still standing. "Further, at the end of each road there was a gate in the riverside fence, one gate for each alley: these gates also were of bronze, and these too opened on the river. These [outer] walls are the city's outer armour; within them there is another encircling wall, well nigh as strong as the other, but narrower."^[21] Herodotus also reports that the royal palace was still standing along with the temple complex of Marduk (which he calls Zeus Belus) and the tower of Babel.^[22]

Herodotus's eyewitness account also calls into question later accounts of Babylon's destruction at the hands of Xerxes (485-465 B.C.). Arrian records that "the temple of Belus was in the midst of the city of Babylon, in size immense, and made of baked brick with bitumen for mortar. This temple, like the other shrines of Babylon, Xerxes razed to the ground, when he returned from Greece."^[23] Perhaps the accounts can be harmonized by assuming that Xerxes damaged or ransacked the temple of Marduk proper without destroying the entire complex or the tower structure. In any case, the walls of Babylon, the temple complex of Marduk, and the tower of Babel were still in existence after the time of Xerxes when Herodotus visited the site, though they may have been in some state of disrepair.

Babylon also played a significant role in the life of Alexander the Great. Having "conquered the world," Alexander returned to Babylon. He was busy making the city his chief city in the eastern part of his empire when he died. According to Strabo, Alexander began repairing and rebuilding the tower of Babel. "Alexander intended to repair this pyramid; but it would have been a large task and would have required a long time (for merely the clearing away of the mound was a task for ten thousand men for two months), so that he could not finish what he had attempted."^[24] When Alexander's general, Hephaestion, died, Alexander "ordered a pyre to be made ready for him in Babylon at a cost of ten thousand talents."^[25] In his excavations in Babylon Robert Koldewey uncovered a series of mounds called by the local population "Humaira." The archaeological discoveries in this area support the accounts of Arrian and Strabo and tie both together.

The central mound consists of debris of broken bricks, among which an artificial platform was found, marked by traces of a great conflagration. These ruins are believed to mark the site of the funeral pyre erected by order of Alexander for the funeral of Hephaestion. The northernmost mound, c. 16 m high, consists of nothing but brick rubble, artificially heaped up. Some of the brick fragments bear Nebuchadnezzar's name and record the building of Etemenanki. Indeed it would seem that this is the actual debris removed by Alexander when he decided to rebuilt [sic] the ziggurat, which was in ruins when he reached Babylon.^[26]

Alexander's plan was to establish Babylon as his chief city in the east. "Alexander dug a harbour at Babylon, large enough to be a roadstead for a thousand ships of war, and dockyards on the harbour."^[27] A Greek theater was also constructed in Babylon that could seat 4,000, it is unclear who built the theater. But its location in Humaira near the funeral pyre and the debris from Etemenanki point to the time of Alexander for its construction.^[28] But Alexander's plans for Babylon were cut short when he died in Babylon at the age of 32.

After the division of Alexander's empire among his generals Babylon was seized by Seleucus in 312 B.C. Seleucus later founded the city of Seleucia further north on the Tigris River, and this city replaced Babylon as the capital city of the empire. Yet Babylon remained an important religious and political center. Both Seleucus and his son, Antiochus 1, retained the title "king of Babylon."^[29]

The Parthians pushed into Mesopotamia between 166 and 122 B.C. and eventually established their capital at Ctesiphon.^[30] During the Parthian era Ctesiphon became the civil center, Seleucia remained the commercial center, while Babylon continued as the religious center. Josephus records that a large number of Jews were still living in Babylon during the Parthian period. "When Hyrcanus was brought into Parthia, the king of 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."^[31]

Whitson believes Josephus is mistaken in his identification of Babylon as the site where Hyrcanus was settled. "The city here called 'Babylon' by Josephus seems to be one which was built by some of the Seleucids, upon the Tigris; which, long after the utter desolation of Old Babylon was commonly so called, just as the later adjoining city Bagdat [sic] is often called by the same old name of Babylon."^[32] If Whitson is correct, then Josephus's reference to Babylon has no merit because Josephus would have confused Babylon with either Seleucia or Ctesiphon. However, Josephus seems to know the difference between all three cities. Later in his account he records an incident where "a pestilence came upon these [Jews] at Babylon, which occasioned new removals of men's habitations out of that city; and because they came to Seleucia, it happened that a still heavier calamity came upon them."^[33] Josephus had earlier demonstrated his familiarity with Seleucia by describing it as "the principal city of those parts, which was built by Seleucus Nicator ..."^[34] After describing the massacre of 50,000 Jews who had fled from Babylon to Seleucia, Josephus reports that those who managed to escape "retired to Ctesiphon, a Grecian city, and situated near to Seleucia, where the king [of Parthia] lives in winter every year ..."^[35] The point here is that Josephus clearly distinguishes between the three cities of

Babylon, Seleucia, and Ctesiphon. When Josephus refers to Jews living in Babylon, one should assume that Josephus knew which city he had in mind.

Strabo (63 B.C.-A.D. 24) reported that Babylon, while still in existence in his day, was in decline. "What is more, Seleucia at the present time has become larger than Babylon, whereas the greater part of Babylon is so deserted that one would not hesitate to say what one of the comic poets said in reference to the Megalopolitans in Arcadia: The Great City is a great desert."[\[36\]](#) And yet one cannot read too much into Strabo's words because he goes on to describe the buildings and homes constructed there. He also mentions the religious groups still living in Babylon. "In Babylonia a settlement is set apart for the local philosophers, the Chaldeans, as they are called, who are concerned mostly with astronomy. . [\[37\]](#)

Pliny (A.D. 23-79) gives a similar report on the condition of Babylon in his day. The city had lost most of its former glory, but it still maintained its religious significance. "The temple of Jupiter Belus in Babylon is still standing-Belus was the discoverer of the science of astronomy; but in all other respects the place has gone back to a desert, having been drained of its population by the proximity of Seleucia.. ."[\[38\]](#)

While one cannot be dogmatic, it seems likely that a Jewish community continued to exist in Babylon during the first century A.D. On the day of Pentecost Jews from "Mesopotamia" gathered with others from the diaspora in Jerusalem ([Acts 2:9\(\)](#)). Some of those other Jews who gathered came from "Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia" ([Acts 2:9-10](#)). Jewish believers from these areas are included with Gentiles as the recipients of Peter's first epistle which he wrote to those "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1()). Having written to these believers among the diaspora Peter, the apostle to the Jews (cf. Gal. 2:8-10), closes his epistle by extending a greeting from "she [i.e., the church] who is in Babylon" (1 Pet. 5:13). While some see this as a coded reference to Rome,[\[39\]](#) It hardly seems necessary for Peter to use such coded language. It seems more likely that Peter, while visiting one enclave of Jewish believers in Babylon, wrote a letter to another enclave of Jewish and Gentile believers in Asia Minor.[\[40\]](#)

With the close of the New Testament the information on Babylon becomes very sparse. Writers quote Dio who says Trajan visited Babylon in A.D. 116 and found "nothing but mounds and stones and ruins...." [\[41\]](#) However, Dio's account should not be accepted uncritically. First, he also says Trajan offered sacrifices to Alexander "in the room where he had died."[\[42\]](#) If true, this implies that (a) some buildings were still standing and (b) someone still lived in Babylon who could point out the room to Trajan. Second, Dio also records Trajan's visit to the pit where the bitumen was mined for Babylon. He describes the pit as a place where deadly vapors "destroy any terrestrial animal and any winged creature" who might venture in except "human beings that have been emasculated. The reason for this I cannot understand."[\[43\]](#) He seems subject to exaggeration.

The next western source that can be clearly identified in Babylon is the Jewish traveler from Spain, Benjamin of Tudela who visited the site 1,000 years after Trajan. He left a fascinating account of his travels to the Middle East, including a visit to Baghdad, Babylon, arid Hula.

From thence [i.e., Ras-al-Ain which was two days from Baghdad] it is one day to Babylon. This is the ancient Babel, and now lies in ruins; but the streets still extend thirty miles. The ruins of the palace of Nebuchadnezzar are still to be seen; but people are afraid to venture among them on account of the serpents and scorpions with which they are infested. Twenty thousand Jews live within about twenty miles from this place, and perform their worship in the synagogue of Daniel, who rests in peace. This synagogue is of remote antiquity, having been built by Daniel himself; It is constructed of solid stones and bricks. Here the traveller [sic] may also behold the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, with the burning fiery furnace into which were thrown Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; it is a valley well known to every one. Hillah, which is at a distance of five miles, contains about ten thousand Jews and four synagogues [\[44\]](#)

Benjamin of Tudela's description is a complex picture of a city largely in ruins but which still has some measure of habitation. He mentions that people are afraid to venture into Nebuchadnezzar's palace; but he then describes Daniel's synagogue, which is close to Nebuchadnezzar's palace in the city, and says it is visited by 20,000 Jews.

Benjamin of Tudela's description fits well with the descriptions of Pliny and other ancient writers. Much of the ancient city of Babylon was in ruins. However, the site was still inhabited and still held religious significance. But later western writers seems to paint a more desolate picture of Babylon. For example, in 1574 the German traveler, Rauwoif, traveled to Mesopotamia and wrote of his experiences. His description of the "ruins of Babylon" is more typical of the writings of later Europeans who describe Babylon as totally desolate and uninhabited.

The village of Elugo, now lieth on the place where formerly old Babylon, the metropolis of Chalda, was situated. The harbour is a quarter of a league's distance from it, where people go ashore in order to proceed by land to the celebrated city of Bagdat, which is a day and a half's journey from thence eastward on the Tigris Just before the village of Elugo is the hill whereon the castle stood, and the ruins of its fortifications are still visible, though demolished and uninhabited. Behind it, and pretty near to it, did stand the tower of Babylon.-It is still to be seen, and is half a league in diameter; but so ruinous, so low, and so full of venomous creatures,

which lodge in holes made by them in the rubbish, that no one durst approach nearer to it than within half a league, except during two months in the winter, when these animals never stir out of their holes.[\[45\]](#)

Rauwolf's description of Babylon's utter desolation, while vivid and dramatic, is also incorrect. The "village of Elugo" which he identified as ancient Babylon is known today as Al Falligah.. It is on the Euphrates River and was the spot where travelers left their boats to continue by land to Baghdad.[\[46\]](#) Unfortunately, the ancient site of Babylon is still 75 miles further south on the Euphrates River. Rauwoif never set eyes on the city of Babylon. In fact, many of the descriptions by many western visitors are not of Babylon but of other ruins in southern Mesopotamia that were within "visiting distance" of Baghdad.

Not much information on Babylon during the remainder of the Middle Ages can be found, but there is information that the city has been inhabited in the Modern Era, from at least the 1700s. Koldewey, the German archaeologist responsible for much of the work which has been done at Babylon, makes an interesting comment on the villages around the city. He described the site of the city and its ruins in this way:

At the bend of the Euphrates, between Babil and Kasr lie the ruins of the former village of Kweiresh, whose population migrated elsewhere a hundred years ago. The walls of mud brick still overtop the heaps of debris.

The modern village of Kweiresh lies close to the Kasr, to which we must now turn our attention. The most northerly house of Kweiresh is the headquarters of our expedition (Fig. 12), called by the Arabs "Kasr abid" [*italics added*].[\[47\]](#)

Koldewey makes two important statements. First, he states definitely that a village was existing in his day within the walls of the ancient city of Babylon. He headquartered in this village as he excavated the nearby ruins. Second, Koldewey reports the existence of another village (with the same name) that had also existed within the city of Babylon a century earlier. Since he gives only an approximate date of abandonment, there is no way to determine how long that earlier city had existed in Babylon; but the permanence of the structures would suggest an extended history. Koldewey presents a detailed map of Babylon's ruins (see map on the next page) in which he shows the location of both the ancient village of Kweiresh as well as the modern village. Both are in the heart of what was once ancient Babylon.[\[48\]](#)

Babylon Today

Koldewey has shown that Babylon was still inhabited at least at the time of his excavations in the early 1900s. However, what is the status of Babylon today? In 1978 Mrs. L. Glynne Dairos, Assistant Secretary of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, responded to a question from this writer on the existence of any modern villages within the walls of the ancient city. She wrote, "There are three modern settlements situated inside the walls of ancient Babylon. The government of Iraq does indeed plan to restore much of Babylon and has indeed made a start on certain buildings."[\[49\]](#)

To understand what is happening in Babylon today one must first understand the political ambitions of Saddam Hussein. During the Iran/Iraq War Saddam Hussein used the city of Babylon as a visual aid to remind the Iraqi people of the history of conflict between Iraq and Iran and of the territorial ambitions of the Iranians. As Paul Lewis wrote in the New York Times International, "President Hussein's decision to rebuild Nebuchadnezzar's Palace at the height of a war he almost lost was the centerpiece of a campaign to strengthen Iraqi nationalism by appealing to history Mr. Hussein's campaign also served subtler ends: it justified Iraq's costly war with Iran as the continuation of Mesopotamia's ancient feud with Persia. And it portrayed Saddam Hussein as successor to Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's mightiest ruler."[\[50\]](#)

In effect, Saddam Hussein used Babylon as an Iraqi Alamo or Masada. His decision to rebuild Babylon forced the people to focus on a grand era in Iraq's history that was destroyed by the same enemy who again threatened the nation. It is no accident that the Babylon being rebuilt by Hussein was the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar. As early as 1986 Michael Dobbs, writing in the Washington Post, noticed that the restoration of Babylon had become a political (not merely an archaeological) undertaking. The Iraqis view Babylon somewhat differently [than the Bible]. For the Iraqi government, the Babylonian Empire is a source of national pride and inspiration for the grueling six-year-old war with neighboring Iran, Iraq's hereditary enemy. President Saddam Hussein has ordered that no expense be spared to restore the city to its ancient splendor."[\[51\]](#)

Building Babylon became synonymous with rising to the threat of the Iranians and asserting Iraq's "manifest destiny" to lead the Arab nations to glory. Now, instead of just building Babylon as an archaeological park, Babylon became the focal point of Iraqi nationalism which had replaced the earlier Baathist goal of Arab nationalism. By early 1987 plans were underway to hold the first annual Babylon Festival to celebrate the glory of Babylon, which included an emphasis on Saddam Hussein and Iraq. It is no accident that the opening of the festival was scheduled for September 22, 1987-seven years to the day after Iraq's invasion of Iran.[\[52\]](#)

While the Babylon Festival was announced as a cultural event featuring musical groups, symposia, and other cultural activities, the festival had much deeper political overtones. This writer attended the first Babylon Festival as an invited participant. One could not

help but notice the emphasis placed on Saddam Hussein and the comparisons made between Saddam Hussein and Nebuchadnezzar. The official seal of the Babylon Festival featured the portraits of Saddam Hussein and Nebuchadnezzar side by side. The portraits were designed to stress physical similarities between the two men. The official theme of the Festival was "From Nabukhadnezzar [sic] to Saddam Hussein Babylon Undergoes a Renaissance."

On the opening night of the Babylon Festival Mr. Latif Nssayif Jassim, Minister of Information and Culture, spoke to the audience that had gathered. His speech focused on the political and historical conflict between Iraq and Iran and the part played by Babylon in that conflict.

However, the Persian [i.e., Iranian] mentality in our neighbourhood, prompted by deep- rooted hatred and aggressiveness tried to quench the flame of civilisation in this city of Babylon. Hence the city came under the attack of the Persian ruler Kurash (Cyrus) who, before 2,500 years, laid siege to this town. The siege lasted long and the town remained strong. It was not until Cyrus had collaborated with the Jews inside the city that he was able to tighten the siege round the city and subsequently to occupy it Today we are living in the midst of Khomeini's aggression which has extended over a span of seven years during which Khomeini had allied himself with the Zionists in an attempt to enter Baghdad and other Iraqi cities and to destroy them as was the case with Babylon It [i.e., rebuilt Babylon] will serve as a living example of the grandeur of the Iraqis to pursue their path for more glories.[\[53\]](#)

This writer's visits to Babylon in 1987 and 1988 confirm that much of the site is being rebuilt by Saddam Hussein. (See map on the following page.) Hussein's agenda in rebuilding Babylon has nothing to do with Bible prophecy, but it has everything to do with his desire to promote his political agenda in the Middle East.

Old policies have always ignored the status of Babylon when they created psychological and scientific barriers between Iraqis and their leaders in ancient times. No one has ever mentioned the achievements of "Hammurabi," the founder of the first organized set of law in human history. Or "Nebuchadnezzar," the national hero who was able to defeat the enemies of the nation on the land of "Kennan" [i.e., Canaan] and to take them as prisoner of war to Babylon. What we need now is to increase awareness in this regard.[\[54\]](#)

The third annual Babylon Festival was held in September 1989, but the fourth annual festival scheduled for September 1990 was canceled following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm became the dominant topic in that region of the world. When the smoke of battle cleared, many felt that Saddam Hussein's days were numbered. But amazingly he has survived longer than the U.S. President who masterminded the coalition against Iraq.

But what about Babylon? The city was not damaged during the bombing in Operation Desert Storm. It was included on a list of sites off limits to bombing because of historical or archaeological importance. Work on the reconstruction of Babylon stopped following the invasion of Kuwait, but the reconstruction already completed remained intact. Within months after the end of Operation Desert Storm an article appeared in the New York Times describing the resumption of work at Babylon.

One of President Hussein's favorite prestige projects has been the rebuilding of King Nebuchadnezzar's great southern palace in Babylon according to the designs of German archaeologists early this century Reconstruction has been more or less complete for a year now. And while archaeologists may bicker over details, this immense set of interconnecting chambers and courtyards surrounded by crenelated fortifications is more interesting for visitors than the pile of mud that used to be all there was to see at Babylon.

Today, however, the southern temple [sic, palace] is a desolate spot. Power and water have been cut off by the allied bombing, and its shops, museums and restaurants are closed. But work is under way on a series of three huge viewing platforms just outside the walls of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon from which visitors will be able to look down at new excavations Iraq is planning.

"This is the personal orders of the President," said Iraq's Director General of Antiquities, Mouyad Said[\[55\]](#)

On August 27, 1992, this writer received a fax from the Iraqi Interest Section of the Algerian Embassy. The fax read in part, "On the occasion of the Fourth Babylon Festival, the symposium of Babylon architecture will be held from September 1, 1992 to September 6, 1992 In Baghdad. We are please to invite you to participate in this symposium..."[\[56\]](#) On June 28, 1993, another letter was received inviting this writer to "the Fifth Annual Babylon Festival to be held from September 22, 1993 to October 6, 1993."[\[57\]](#) The war may have slowed Saddam Hussein down, but it did not put an end to his plans to restore the city of Babylon.

What Does the Bible Say about Babylon?

Having traced Babylon's history from the time of Isaiah till today, this paper must now turn to the Bible to place Babylon's history in prophetic perspective. Three Old Testament prophecies and one New Testament prophecy concerning Babylon will be briefly examined to determine what, if any, prophetic significance they might have.

Isaiah 13-14

In Isaiah 13-23 the prophet turns from Judah to deliver God's message to the surrounding Gentile nations. It is as if the prophet is telling these nations, "If God hasn't spared His own people, what makes you Gentiles think you will escape?" This section is so large that it is often difficult to determine its structural significance. It often helps first to list the nations in order and to make any observations on the overall structure before examining the particular messages. The nations addressed by Isaiah are as follows:

- Babylon (13:1-14:23)-45 verses
- Assyria (14:24-27)---4 verses
- Philistia (14:28-32)-5 verses
- Moab (15:1-16:14)-23 verses
- Damascus and Samaria (17:1-14)-14 verses
- Cush (18:1-7)-7 verses
- Egypt (19:1-25)-25 verses
- Egypt and Cush (20:1-6)--6 verses
- Babylon (21:1-10)-10 verses
- Edom (21:11-12)-2 verses
- Arabia (21:13-17)--5 verses
- Jerusalem (22:1-25)-25 verses
- Tyre (23:1-18)-18 verses

Four principles of Bible study can help in evaluating this list of nations. The first principle is the principle of chiasm. If a list is structured as a chiasm, whatever is at the beginning and end of the chiasm or whatever is in the center of the chiasm might be that which the author is stressing. This principle does not apply to Isaiah 13-23 because the list is not structured as a chiasm. The second principle is the principle of perceived order in a list. Whatever the author places first or last in his list might be important. Isaiah placed Babylon first, and he placed Tyre last. The third principle is the law of proportion. In any list the author will spend more time on those items he intends to emphasize. If Cush and Egypt are counted as a unit, then the three nations on which Isaiah spends most of his time are Babylon (45 verses), Egypt and Cush (38 verses), and Jerusalem (25 verses). The fourth principle is the principle of repetition. If an author repeats an item in his list, it could be important. In Isaiah 13-23 one nation is repeated twice--Babylon (13-14; 21).

This preliminary review of Isaiah 13-23 points out the importance of Babylon in Isaiah's messages against the nations. Isaiah begins his series of messages with Babylon, he spends more time on Babylon than on any other nation, and he has two separate messages against Babylon in the list. Thus Babylon must be important in the theme Isaiah is developing.

However, before continuing one key issue must be explored. Some scholars have argued that the prophecies against Babylon in Isaiah 13-14 are actually focusing on Assyria and its king instead of Babylon. If this is true, then Isaiah's prophecies against Babylon might have no significance for the future of Babylon. But why do these scholars see Assyria rather than Babylon in Isaiah 13-14? Three basic reasons are given. First, the structure of Isaiah 13-23 argues for identifying Assyria with Babylon. Each of Isaiah's messages against the nations is introduced with the word "oracle" ("an oracle concerning Babylon," etc.). But after describing the destruction of Babylon in 13:1-14:23, Isaiah does not use the word "oracle" to describe God's judgment against Assyria (14:24-27). "Many interpreters feel that these verses are a separate section. But it seems preferable to see them as part of the oracle beginning in 13:1" [\[58\]](#) Thus, the argument goes, Isaiah identifies the real subject of this oracle, Assyria, as he draws the oracle to a conclusion.

Second, identifying Babylon as Assyria would fit better historically in light of Assyria's dominant position on the international scene. "Many commentators have assumed that Isaiah's message in 13:1-14:27 about the fall of Babylon referred to its fall to Medo-Persia in 539. However, it seems better to see this section as pertaining to the Assyrian attack on Babylon in 689. This ties in better with the Assyrian threat Isaiah had written about in 7:17-8:10, beginning with the attacks under the rule of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727)." [\[59\]](#) Assyria, not Babylon, was the nation threatening Judah in Isaiah's day, and it would make more sense for Isaiah to start his list of nations with Assyria.

Third, identifying Babylon as Assyria can be justified since the kings of Assyria took on the title "king of Babylon." "But wasn't Sennacherib king of Assyria rather than Babylon? He was king of both because Babylon was a vassal of Assyria from the end of the 10th century B.C. Occasionally the vassal ruler over Babylon revolted against Assyria, but in 728 Tiglath-Pileser III, Assyria's aggressive ruler from 745-727, was crowned king of Babylon Sargon 11(722- 705) and Sennacherib (705-681), later Assyrian monarchs, also called themselves kings of Babylon." [\[60\]](#) Thus the "king of Babylon" in Isaiah 14 would, in reality, have been the current king of Assyria.

How strong are the arguments for identifying Babylon as Assyria in Isaiah 13-14? Each of the arguments is not as strong as it might first appear. First, Isaiah's use of the term "oracle" cannot be used to associate Assyria with Babylon. Isaiah does not consistently use "oracle" to separate each message against the nations. In 17:1 Isaiah introduces a new nation with his standard phrase: "An oracle concerning Damascus." Damascus and the Arameans lived northeast of Judah and were a constant source of trouble to the Israelites. However, in Isaiah 18:1 the prophet shifts to another nation-but he does not begin this new section with the word "oracle." "Woe to the land of whirling wings, along the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water" (Rev 18:1-2). Cush was the land south of Egypt in the area today known as Sudan. There is no way Cush can be identified with Damascus, but Isaiah moved from one nation to the other without using "oracle" to introduce the break. Not using "oracle" between Babylon and Assyria in 14:24 is no more unusual than not using "oracle" between Damascus and Cush in 18:1. The absence of the word "oracle" does not demand that one link together Babylon and Assyria.

Second, assuming that Babylon must be equivalent to Assyria because Assyria was the dominant nation in Isaiah's day limits God's ability to speak to events that were still future. Such a position does not take into account the fact that Babylon was theologically significant from God's perspective (cf. Gen. 11:1-9). Nor does it account for Isaiah 39 where God predicts that Babylon would be the nation that would destroy the kingdom of Judah. (A prophecy made while Assyria was still the dominant power internationally.) God can predict more than current events, and Babylon is later identified as the nation that will destroy Judah.

Third, claiming that the kings of Assyria took the title "king of Babylon" is not entirely correct. While some at times did take this title, this does not seem to be the rule during much of the time Isaiah was prophesying. In the Oriental Institute Prism Inscription (often called the Taylor Prism) Sennacherib gives a quite full listing of his titles: "Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the earth): the wise ruler (lit, shepherd, 'pastor'), favorite of the great gods, guardian of the right, lover of justice; who lends support, who comes to the aid of the needy, who turns (his thoughts) to pious deeds; perfect hero, mighty man; first among all princes, the powerful one who consumes the insubmissive, who strikes the wicked with the thunderbolt. . ."[61] His title in the Nebi Yunus inscription is very similar: "Palace of Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the world): favorite of the great gods; wise sovereign, provident prince, shepherd of peoples, ruler of widespread nations, am I." [62] Of all the titles Sennacherib took in these inscriptions, "king of Babylon" was not one of them.

Both the Oriental Institute Prism and the Babylonian Chronicle support the contention that Sennacherib did not assume the title "king of Babylon" as a permanent title. In the Oriental Institute Prism Sennacherib describes his defeat of "Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon" in 703 B.C. [63] In 700 B.C. Sennacherib conducted a second campaign against Merodach-baladan. Only after this defeat did Sennacherib replace Merodach-baladan with another king. "I placed on his (Merodach-baladan's) royal throne, Assur-nlin-shum, my oldest son, offspring of my loins (knees). I put him in charge of the wide land of Sumer and Akkad." [64] The Babylonian Chronicle provides a careful list of the kings of Babylon from Merodach-baladan on as well as the length of their rule. They included:

Merodach-baladan-13 years (721-710, 703 B.C.)
B8-ibni-3 years (702-700 B.C.)
Assur-nlin-shum-6 years (699-694 B.C.)
Nergal-ush&ib-1 year and six months (693 B.C.)
Mushib-Marduk-four years (692-689 B.C.)
Eight years there was no king (689-681 B.C.) [65]

Some kings of Assyria did claim the title "king of Babylon," but it was usually for a short period of time and was not automatically taken. Tiglath-pileser III claimed the title the final two years (729-727 B.C.) of his 19-year reign. Shalmaneser V claimed the title for most of his reign (726-722 B.C.). Sargon II claimed the title in the later part of his reign (710-705 B.C.), and Sennacherib may have claimed the title at the very beginning of his reign (704 B.C.). Isaiah prophesied from 739 to 686 B.C. From 739 to 700 B.C. (the period when the prophecies against the nations were likely given), the Assyrians claimed the title "king of Babylon" 14 years while 26 years the title was held by someone other than the king of Assyria. From 703 B.C. to 681 B.C. (the time when Babylon's destruction occurred) Sennacherib did not claim the title "king of Babylon."

Otto Kaiser includes one final distinction between the prophecies against Babylon and Assyria that indicate the two are to be kept distinct. "But a further difference is immediately obvious: whereas Babylon is to be annihilated in its own country, the Assyrians are to fall in the Holy Land." [66] On the whole, it seems best to take Isaiah's words at face value and to identify the subject of his prophecy in Rev 13:1-14:23 as Babylon.

But what does Isaiah say about Babylon in this initial prophecy? Isaiah provides three specific keys on the nature of the fulfillment one should expect for this prophecy. Each of these will be examined briefly.

The timing of the destruction. Isaiah's first key focuses on the timing of Babylon's destruction. Having described the massing of the armies to attack (Rev 13:2-5) Isaiah announces that "the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty"

(Rev 13:6). While the "day of the LORD" could refer to any time in history when God intervenes in judgment (cf. Amos 5:18-20), Isaiah uses eschatological imagery that seems to go beyond a mere temporal judgment in his day. Otto Kaiser, who does not hold to Isaianic authorship, still recognizes the universal themes of judgment used by his so-called "proto-apocalyptic redactor." "Obviously the person responsible for the chapter as we have it was prepared to tolerate the tension which results from the interweaving of prophecies of a local and a universal future event."[\[67\]](#)

Isaiah defines the "day of the LORD" as a time of universal cataclysmic judgment. As he returns to the "day of the LORD" theme in 13:9 he describes it as "a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger-to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it." His description of supernatural signs in the heavens is very similar to that of Joel and, depending on when one dates the prophecies of Joel, could be borrowed from that prophet.

[Isaiah 13:9-10](#) See, the day of the LORD is coming..... The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.

[Joel 3:14b-15](#) For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine.

The "day of the LORD" judgment in Isaiah 13 extends beyond just Babylon. The purpose for the day is to "punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins" (13:11). God's judgment on this day encompasses the world. After the judgment humanity will be "scarcer than pure gold" (13:12). Isaiah concludes his description on the time of judgment by stating it will be a time when God will shake both the heavens and the earth (13:13). While this could be a figure of speech, it also conjures up imagery of supernatural signs in the heavens and great earthquakes on earth that seem symbolic of the last days (Zech. 14:3-7; Matt. 24:7, 29) [which quotes Isa. 13:10]; Rev. 6:12-14).

The nature of the destruction. Isaiah began with Babylon, but his imagery of the "day of the LORD" soared from "Babylon" (13:1), to "the whole country" (13:5), to "the world" (13: 11), to "the heavens... and the earth" (13:13). However, beginning in 13:14 Isaiah returns to describe the nature of the destruction about to be inflicted on Babylon. Babylon is to experience total annihilation. "Whoever is captured will be thrust through; all who are caught will fall by the sword. Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives ravished" (13:15-16). Isaiah pictures a blood bath that will engulf warriors and women, soldiers and civilians.

In 13:17 Isaiah names one specific group participating in this attack. "See, I will stir up against them the Medes" Because Isaiah mentions the Medes many interpreters have assumed the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy took place in 539 B.C. when Cyrus and the Medo- Persian empire captured Babylon. However, a careful comparison of Isaiah 13 with the events of 539 B.C. show that this passage was not literally fulfilled at that time. Isaiah describes the Medes as those "who do not care for silver and have no delight in gold" (13:17b). Instead the purpose for the attack by the Medes will be to kill the inhabitants of Babylon. "Their bows will strike down the young men; they will have no mercy on infants nor will they look with compassion on children" (13:18). While the Medes were part of the army that captured Babylon, they did not attack or kill the inhabitants of the city. Both the Babylonian Chronicle and Cyrus's own account record the peacefulness of Babylon's fall. Cyrus wrote, "My numerous troops walked around in Babylon (DIN.TIRk) in peace, I did not allow anybody to terrorize (any place) of the [country of Sumerl and Akkad. I strove for peace in Babylon (K<.dingir.ra') and in all his (other) sacred cities." [\[68\]](#) The Babylonian Chronicle adds, "Until the end of the month the shield- (bearing troops) of the Guti surrounded the gates of Esagil. (But) there was no interruption (of rites) in Esagil or the (other) temples and no date (for a performance) was missed. On the third day of the month Marchesvan (i.e., October 29, 539 B.C.) Cyrus (II) entered Babylon There was peace in the city while Cyrus (II) spoke (his) greeting to all of Babylon." [\[69\]](#) It seems inconsistent to say the prophecy was fulfilled in 539 by interpreting "Medes" literally while disregarding the fact that what is said about the Medes was not literally fulfilled.

The results of the destruction. Isaiah focuses on two specific results of the attack against Babylon. First, he describes the permanence of Babylon's destruction. Babylon "Win be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah" (13:19). By comparing Babylon's destruction to that of Sodom and Gomorrah Isaiah conjurs up a vivid image of total annihilation. Sodom and Gomorrah were suddenly, totally, and permanently destroyed. Following their destruction they were never reinhabited.

Isaiah follows his pronouncement with three specific images that help define the extent of Babylon's destruction. (a) Babylon will never again experience long-term habitation. "She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations" (13:20a). Yet this could imply some type of semipermanent occupation, so Isaiah narrows the image still further. (b) Babylon will never again experience even short-term habitation. "No Arab will pitch his tent there" (13:20b). Nomadic settlers would often pitch their tents for months (sometimes even years) in one location before moving when supplies of water or grass for grazing became depleted. Babylon will not even experience the short-term occupation of nomadic settlers. But Isaiah adds a third illustration to reduce further the scope of habitation. (c) Babylon will never again experience any human habitation. "No shepherd will rest his flocks there" (13:20c). Shepherds were constantly on the move to find enough grazing land for their flocks. As they led their flocks from their semi-

permanent dwelling places, they would often find themselves at the end of the day far from their tents. When darkness came, the shepherds would find a suitable spot for a sheepfold to bed their flock down for the night. At the break of dawn the shepherd and his flock would then move on. Isaiah is saying that Babylon will not even serve as a dwelling place for an individual for a single evening.

Isaiah's imagery builds to a climax. Babylon's destruction will rival that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Once this destruction has come Babylon will never again experience long-term habitation ("generations"). Babylon won't even experience temporary, short-term habitation ("tents"). Babylon won't experience any habitation ("no shepherd will rest his flocks"). Isaiah has used the most dramatic imagery available to announce to his readers that one result of Babylon's fall will be her sudden, complete, and permanent destruction.

In Isaiah 14 the prophet describes a second result of Babylon's fall. In some way Babylon's destruction will serve as a catalyst for God's restoration of His people. "The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob" (14:1). Babylon's fall is connected with God's restoration of His people to the land.

When Babylon fell to Cyrus in 539 B.C. Jews were allowed to return to the land of Judah. Could this return be what Isaiah had in mind? The remainder of Isaiah 14 implies that the answer is no. The return described by Isaiah is not merely a physical return of a remnant who would still remain under Gentile domination. "And the house of Israel will possess the nations as menservants and maidservants in the LORD's land. They will make captives of their captors and rule over their oppressors" (14:2). Isaiah describes a return in which Israel becomes the dominant nation who will extend sovereign control over her former adversaries. One need only read Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, or Zechariah to realize that this was not the situation following Babylon's fall to Cyrus in 539 B.C.

The prophecies of Isaiah 13-14 were not fulfilled literally in 539 B.C. Babylon did fall, the Medes were involved, and a remnant from Israel did return to the land. However, Babylon continued to flourish as a city rather than being destroyed, the inhabitants of Babylon were not slaughtered, the day of the LORD did not extend to the world, and Israel did not return to the land making captives of her former captors. Either Isaiah's prophecies were not intended to be taken literally or else this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled.

Jeremiah 50-51

A century after Isaiah penned his prophecy against Babylon, the city rose to become the center of power in the ancient Near East. Under Nebuchadnezzar Babylon's influence extended from Persia to Egypt. In Judah the young prophet Jeremiah predicted that Babylon would attack and destroy Jerusalem. Jeremiah's predictions came true in 586 B.C.

The Book of Jeremiah is not in order chronologically. Instead, the book follows a thematic development. "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations" (Jer. 36:2). Chapters 2-45 focus on God's words to "Israel and Judah" while 46-51 focus on God's word to "all the other nations,"

As in Isaiah, one should look at the overall structure of Jeremiah's messages against the nations to determine where he is placing his emphasis. The nations addressed by Jeremiah include:

- Egypt (46:1-28)-28 verses
- Philistia (47:1-7)-7 verses
- Moab (48:1-47)--47 verses
- Ammon (49:1-6)-6 verses
- Edom (49:7-22)--16 verses
- Damascus (49:23-27)--5 verses
- Kedar and Hazor (49:28-33)-6 verses
- Elam (49:34-39)-6 verses
- Babylon (50:1-51:64)-i 10 verses

No chiastic structure is evident, and no nations are included twice in the list. The nations listed first and last are Egypt and Babylon so these could be significant. (Egypt is the nation that supported Judah in her rebellion against Babylon, and Babylon is the nation that ultimately destroyed Judah.) The law of proportion supports the fact that Babylon is the dominant focus in the section. Of the 231 verses devoted to the nations, 110 of the verses (47.6%) focus on God's judgment against Babylon. But what does Jeremiah say about Babylon? Jeremiah provides two specific keys on the nature of the fulfillment one should expect for this prophecy. Each of these will be examined briefly.

The timing of the destruction. After announcing God's message "concerning Babylon and the land of the Babylonians" (50:1), Jeremiah describes an attack that will "lay waste her land" (50:3). Beginning in 50:4 Jeremiah supplies a specific time marker to help identify when this destruction of Babylon will happen. "'In those days, at that time,' declares the LORD, 'the people of Israel and the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the LORD their God.'" In the days of Babylon's destruction Israel and Judah will experience a national regathering to the land.

Jeremiah's use of the phrase "in those days and at that time" ('MT 1 'r) is significant. The prophet uses this phrase in whole or in part nine times in his book, including twice in chapter 50. Of the seven occurrences outside Jeremiah 50, six of the occurrences have clear eschatological implications. The only exception is Jeremiah 5:18.

Jeremiah 3:16 "In those days, when your number have increased greatly in the land," declares the LORD, "men will no longer say, The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made."

Jeremiah 3:18 "In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your fore fathers as an inheritance."

Jeremiah 5:18 "Yet even in those days," declares the LORD, "I will not destroy you completely."

Jeremiah 31:29 "In those days people will no longer say, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

Jeremiah 31:33 'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Jeremiah 33:15 "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line: he will do what is just and right in the land."

Jeremiah 33:16 "In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."

Jeremiah 50:4 "In those days, at that time," declares the LORD, "the people of Israel and the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the LORD their God."

Jeremiah 50:20 "In those days, at that time," declares the LORD, "search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare."

Jeremiah predicts that in the days of Babylon's destruction Israel and Judah will return to the land. A limited return to the land took place under Zerubbabel after Babylon fell to Cyrus, but is this the return to which Jeremiah is referring? The specifics of the passage seem to argue against the return under Zerubbabel being the fulfillment. First, Jeremiah indicates that this return will involve "the people of Israel and the people of Judah together" (50:4). This phrase links the remnant from both the northern and southern kingdoms and implies a return of all Jews to the land. Eight times Jeremiah links future language ("in those days" 'I'r Tr MMI M M'MM] or "days are coming" 'I'; 'r Mill) with a reuniting of Israel and Judah.

Jeremiah 3:18 "In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance."

Jeremiah 23:56 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety."

Jeremiah 30:3 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess."

Jeremiah 31:27 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and animals."

Jeremiah 31:31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

Jeremiah 33:14 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah."

Jeremiah 50:4 "In those days, at that time," declares the LORD, "the people of Israel and the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the LORD their God."

Jeremiah 50:20 "In those days, at that time," declares the LORD, "search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare."

Second, Jeremiah indicates that the return to the LORD following the destruction of Babylon will be both physical and spiritual. Not only will Israel and Judah return physically to the land, "They will come and bind themselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten" (50:5). Jeremiah used the phrase "everlasting covenant" in 32:40 where it was parallel to the New Covenant. The return following the destruction of Babylon will bring a spiritual revival to the Jews.

Jeremiah adds additional information on this spiritual revival in 50:20. "'In those days, at that time,' declares the LORD, 'search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare.'" The return of Israel and Judah will be accompanied by a removal of their sin and guilt. This did not happen during the return under Zerubbabel. One need only read Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, or Malachi to see the sin that plagued the remnant who had returned to the land. But Jeremiah's vision of Babylon's destruction is associated with a spiritual renewal among the people of Israel and Judah unprecedented in history.

The results of the destruction. In addition to providing some time elements associated with Babylon's fall, Jeremiah spends a great deal of time focusing on the results of the destruction that God will pour out on this city. Jeremiah makes at least four specific statements on the results of Babylon's fall.

1. Babylon's population will be killed. "Attack the land of Merathaim [i.e., "double rebellion"] and those who live in Pekod. Pursue, kill and completely destroy them" (50:21). "Come against her from afar. Break open her granaries; pile her up like heaps of grain. Completely destroy her and leave her no remnant. Kill her young bulls; let them go down to the slaughter! Woe to them! For their day has come, the time for them to be punished" (50:26-27). "Summon archers against Babylon, all those who draw the bow. Encamp all around her; let no one escape" (50:29). "Therefore, her young men will fall in the streets; all her soldiers will be silenced in that day" (50:30). "Do not spare her young men; completely destroy her army. They will fall down slain in Babylon, fatally wounded in her streets" (51:3-4). "The whole land will be disgraced and her slain will all lie fallen within her" (51:47).
2. Babylon's buildings will be plundered and her fortifications will be destroyed. "So Babylonia will be plundered; all who plunder her will have their fill" (50:10). "She surrenders, her towers fall, her walls are torn down" (50:15). "No rock will be taken from you for a cornerstone, nor any stone for a foundation, for you will be desolate forever" (51:26). "Her dwellings are set on fire; the bars of her gates are broken" (51:30). "Babylon's thick wall will be leveled and her high gates set on fire" (51:58).
3. The city and country will remain uninhabited. "No one will live in it; both men and animals will flee away" (50:3). "Because of the LORD's anger she will not be inhabited but will be completely desolate" (50:13). "'As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah along with their neighboring towns,' declares the LORD, 'so no one will live there; no man will dwell in it'" (50:40). "The land trembles and writhes, for the LORD's purposes against Babylon stand to lay waste the land of Babylon so that no one will live there" (51:29). "Babylon will be a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and scorn, a place where no one lives" (51:37). "Her towns will be desolate, a dry and desert land, a land where no one lives, through which no man travels" (51:43). "So Babylon will sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall" (51:64).
4. Only those who flee from the city will be spared. "Flee out of Babylon; leave the land of the Babylonians" (50:8). "Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the LORD's vengeance; he will pay her what she deserves" (51:6). "Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the LORD" (51:45).

If these descriptions are taken at face value, Babylon's fall results from a bloody battle that devastates the city. Only those wise enough to follow God's warning and flee before the battle begins will be spared. Once the battle is over Babylon will remain permanently desolate. These descriptions do not match Babylon's fall to Cyrus in 539 B.C. That fall was relatively peaceful and involved almost no death or destruction.

Two additional observations must be made on Jeremiah's description of the results of Babylon's fall. First, Jeremiah compares Babylon's fall to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. In doing so, Jeremiah is identifying his destruction of Babylon with the one prophesied nearly a century earlier by Isaiah (Jer. 50:39-40; Isa. 13:19-20). Second, Jeremiah specifically commands those who are God's people to flee from Babylon before this attack begins. Daniel had access to the prophecies of Jeremiah (cf. Dan. 9:2()), and he was in Babylon the night it fell to the Medo-Persians (Dan. 5:30()). If Jeremiah's prophecy was being fulfilled that night, should not Daniel have already fled from Babylon? Either Daniel was unfamiliar with Jeremiah's warning, or he chose to ignore Jeremiah's warning, or he did not identify Jeremiah's warning with the attack under way against Babylon in his day.

Jeremiah's prophecies were not fulfilled when Babylon fell to Cyrus in 539 B.C. The city was not destroyed, nor were the people killed. The city and surrounding land remained inhabited and productive. Israel and Judah did not combine a physical return to the land with a spiritual return to the LORD to be joined to Him in an everlasting covenant. Like Isaiah 13- 14(), either Jeremiah 50()-Si were not intended to be taken literally or else this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled.

Zechariah 5:5-11

The third Old Testament prophecy relating to Babylon is Zechariah 5:5-11(). Zechariah began his ministry in 520 B.C. to the remnant who had returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. This group returned to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. when Cyrus permitted the remnant to return and to build their temple. However, shortly after beginning the rebuilding of the temple in 536 B.C. the people halted their work because of local opposition. One purpose for God raising up the prophet Zechariah was to

encourage the people to resume their work on the temple of the Lord (Ezra 5:1()). However, Zechariah looked beyond the temple to describe events leading up to both the first and second coming of the Messiah.

Zechariah's prophecy relating to Babylon is part of his series of eight night visions which form the first segment of his work (1:7-6:8). The prophecy itself is the seventh of the eight night visions. There is some evidence that these eight night visions are arranged in a chiastic structure. [\[70\]](#)

- A. The rider and horses among the myrtle trees (1:7-17)
(God is upset with nations who have oppressed Israel)
- B. The four ho1i1i and four craftsmen (1:18-21)
(The nations who have scattered Judah will be judged)
- C. The man with the measuring line (2:1-13)
(Jerusalem will be physically restored)
- D. Clean garments for the high priest (3:1-10)
(Israel will be blessed when the Branch comes)
- D' The gold lampstand and two olive trees (4:1-14)
(God will empower His servants to complete the work)
- C' The flying scroll (5:1-4)
(The land will be purged of sinners)
- B' The woman in the basket (5:5-11)
(Evil will return to the land of Shinar)
- A' The four chariots (6:1-8)
(God will conquer the nations who have opposed Israel)

In Zechariah's seventh night vision a "measuring basket" (lit. "ephah") appears before the prophet. Inside the basket is a woman. The angel speaking with Zechariah identifies the woman in the basket: "This is wickedness" (Zech. 5:8). One key question is the location of this wickedness. Zechariah identifies it as the iniquity (or "appearance" I "of the people throughout the land" (5:6). [\[71\]](#) The word for "land" is r' which can be translated "land" or "earth." Zechariah uses the word 40 times in his book. Excluding the passage in question Zechariah uses)' 21 times of the whole earth, 14 times to refer specifically to the land of Israel, and 4 times to refer to other specific lands (Shinar, Hadrach, Egypt, and Gilead). This personification of wickedness could refer to the wickedness residing in the land of Israel, or it could refer to the wickedness throughout the earth.

Whether Zechariah is referring to the wickedness in the land of Israel or the wickedness of the entire earth, one point is clear in the passage. This wickedness was being held in check in Zechariah's day. A "cover of lead" had to be raised off the ephah before Zechariah could gaze at this personification of evil. As soon as he had seen the woman who represented evil and she had been identified, "he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth" (5:8). Whatever this wickedness represented, God was not allowing it to escape in Zechariah's day.

As Zechariah gazed at the basket it was carried away by two additional angelic beings. Zechariah turned to his angelic guide and asked, "Where are they taking the basket?" (5:10). What was to be the final destiny of this container of evil? The angel's answer was very precise: To the country of Babylon" Flit. "to the land of Shinar". Shinar occurs seven times in the Old Testament. Four of the occurrences are in Genesis where it is associated with the city of Babel established by Nimrud following the flood (Gen. 10), with the tower of Babel (Gen. 11), and with the coalition of nations threatening the land God promised to Abram (Gen. 14). Isaiah 11:11 uses it in a list of places from which God will regather His people in the Messianic age. Daniel 1:2 identifies Shinar as the location to which Daniel and his friends were carried by Nebuchadnezzar. In short, every occurrence of Shinar identifies it as the land associated with Babylon. [\[72\]](#) Zechariah saw wickedness flying back to Babylon.

The angels were taking wickedness to Babylon "to build a house for it" (Zech. 5:11). Some have translated "house" as "temple," [\[73\]](#) but it seems to this writer that such a translation presupposes a religious character that is not obvious from the text. While r112 can be translated "temple," its basic meaning is "house" or "dwelling place." [\[74\]](#) The point of Zechariah's vision is that a new abode for wickedness will again be set up in Shinar. "When it is ready, the basket will be set there in its place" (5:11).

Zechariah penned these words 19 years after Babylon's fall to Cyrus. If the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah had been fulfilled in the fall of Babylon, then Zechariah's words seem out of place. However, if the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah were not fulfilled when Cyrus captured the city, then Zechariah's vision could relate in some way to those earlier prophecies. God was holding wickedness in check, but there would come a time when wickedness would once again have a dwelling place in Babylon.

Two specific points of note on Zechariah 5:5-11 must be made in closing. First, Zechariah personifies as a woman the evil that will one day dwell again in Shinar. Could this be the underlying imagery behind description of Babylon in Revelation 17? Second, if Zechariah's eight night visions are in a chiastic structure, then the end-time evil in Shinar (5:5-11) is parallel in some way to the vision of four evil empires ("horns") that oppress Judah until they are removed by the Lord. Zechariah's four nations are suspiciously parallel to Daniel's four Gentile powers that control Jerusalem during the "limes of the Gentiles" (Dan. 2; 7). The final Gentile power (the fourth horn) of Zechariah would be parallel to the "feet of iron and clay" of Daniel 2 or the "fourth beast" of Daniel 7). But how could wickedness in Shinar (Zech. 5) be associated with the fourth Gentile power (Zech. 1)? Once again Revelation 17 may provide the answer. John describes the evil woman named Babylon astride the "beast" that is parallel to the fourth beast of Daniel 7. Both Babylon and the fourth empire are associated in John's end-time vision as Zechariah's chiastic structure would suggest.

But while these parallels are interesting, one cannot make any positive identification from Zechariah alone. Having examined the three key Old Testament prophecies on Babylon, this study must now turn to John's vision of Babylon in the Book of Revelation. It is this writer's belief that John pulls together the threads of numerous Old Testament prophecies, including the prophecies of Babylon.

Revelation 17-18

One key factor in interpreting God's prophetic program is the identification of the eschatological Babylon described by the Apostle John in Revelation 17-18. These two chapters occupy a significant portion of the Book of Revelation, and they provide a graphic account of God's future judgment on evil. However, interpreters face many problems in trying to identify the end-time system of evil pictured in these two chapters. What is the "Babylon" described by John in these two chapters?

The relationship between Revelation 17 and 18 is crucial to a proper understanding of the Babylon referred to in both. Do Revelation 17 and 18 separately describe two distinct Babylons, as many Bible teachers have long held? Those who hold such a position believe that Revelation 17 describes "ecclesiastical" Babylon which will be destroyed by the Antichrist in the middle of the Tribulation period and that Revelation 18 describes "economic" Babylon-the capital of the Antichrist that will be destroyed at the end of the Tribulation period. Or, do these two chapters unite in presenting the fall of a single Babylon, whatever that Babylon might be? These questions must be answered.

The distinctions between the chapters. Any attempt to understand the relationship between Revelation 17 and 18 must take into account several distinctions that appear between the two chapters. Primarily because of these distinctions many expositors argue for the identification of two Babylons in the chapters. Four arguments against the unity of the two chapters have been advanced by various authors.

(a) Different settings. The first difficulty faced in trying to identify the subject of these two chapters is the different settings for each chapter. The chapters tell of two visions introduced by two different angels. Chapter 18 begins, "After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven." The problem centers on the expression "after this" (peTd raDra). John used this phrase a number of times in the Book of Revelation, and several times it indicated a major break between events. "The phrase is of great importance in Revelation 1:19 and 4:1 The phrase.. . suggests that after the events described in Revelation 17 have run their course, the judgment of Babylon in chapter 18] has still to occur."[\[75\]](#)

Does use of the phrase "after this" (J.IETd Tal'rra) demand a gap between these chapters? John used this phrase 10 times in the Book of Revelation. Six times it occurs with a word of perception, and four times it does not. When the phrase is used with a verb of perception ("I saw," "I heard") It simply indicates the time sequence in which the visions were revealed to John. This is the temporal use of /.LETI i-ai)ra. In this usage John was indicating that the time sequence was in his observation of the visions and not necessarily in the unfolding of future events. When John wanted to indicate a gap of time in future events, he did not include a verb of perception. The 10 occurrences are as follows:

Temporal Use

- 4: 1a "After this I looked, and there before me was a door open in heaven."
- 7:1 "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth..."
- 7:9 "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count."
- 15:5 "After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened."
- 18:1 "After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven."
- 19:1 "After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven

Eschatological Use

- 1:19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."
- 4: 1b "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."
- 9:12 "The first woe is past: two other woes are yet to come."

20:3 "He threw him into the abyss... to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time."

The four references not associated with verbs of perception do indicate chronological distinctions between future events. However, those with verbs of perception only indicate the order in which the parts of the vision are viewed by John. Thus the mere presence of /1E7d MUM in 18:1 does not indicate a chronological distinction between the chapters. It only shows that the events revealed to John by the second angel were shown after he had viewed the woman on the beast.

(b) Different destroyers. A second alleged distinction between [Revelation 17\(\)](#) and [18\(\)](#) is the apparent difference between the destroyers of Babylon. The Babylon of chapter 17 is destroyed by kings whereas the Babylon of chapter 18 is destroyed by fire. The destruction of the "harlot Babylon" occurs in 17:16, which says, "The beast and the ten horns... will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked" The destruction of the "commercial Babylon" occurs in 18:8, which says, "Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her."

A second distinction in destroyers between the chapters has also been suggested. The destruction is a contrast not only between the 10 kings and fire, but also between a destruction by man and a destruction by God. "The great harlot is destroyed by the ten kings ([Rev. 17:16b\(\)](#)); but the city of Babylon [chap. 18] is destroyed by God..." [\[76\]](#)

If these two distinctions are valid, then any attempt to view the chapters as a unit will be doomed to failure. However, are these distinctions consistent with the text? A careful evaluation shows that they are not. For example, it is held that the "harlot Babylon" of chapter 17 was destroyed by men while the "commercial Babylon" of chapter 18 was destroyed by fire. This does not explain 17:16b, which says, "They will... burn her with fire." Thus in reality the Babylon in both chapters is destroyed by fire.

The distinction is made between man's destruction (chap. 17) and God's destruction (chap. 18). This, however, fails to account for 17:17, which explains the destruction of the harlot by the beast and 10 kings as stemming initially from God. "For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose" Both chapters do ascribe the destruction to God.

[Revelation 17\(\)](#) and [18\(\)](#) are more similar than many expositors believe. A chart shows that, in fact, the chapters do not have different destroyers.

	Revelation 17	Revelation 18
Object of destruction	"Babylon the great... The great city"	"Babylon the great... O great city, Babylon" (18:10)
Instrument of Destruction	"The beast and the ten horns you saw" (17:16)	(not given)
Means of Destruction	"They will burn her with fire" (17:16)	"She will be consumed by fire" (18:8)
Source of Destruction	"For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose" (17:17)	"For mighty is the Lord God who judges her (18:8)

This chart shows that the only distinction to be found is the instrument of destruction. Chapter 17, focuses on the human instrument while chapter 18 does not. If the chapters are viewed synthetically, the alleged distinctions between the destroyers vanish. In their place stand a unified whole with each chapter focusing on a different aspect of one destruction.

(c) Different responses. A third distinction between Revelation 17 and 18 is the different responses to the destruction that are ascribed to the kings of each chapter.[\[77\]](#) The response of the kings in chapter 17 is recorded in 17:16. "The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire." The "ten horns" are identified in 17:12 as "ten kings."

In contrast to the hatred and destruction of Babylon by the kings of chapter 17, the kings of chapter 18 respond by mourning. "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her" (18:9).

Two opposite responses are attributed to the kings of each chapter. However, there is an explanation apart from assuming two Babylons. An alternative is to assume that two distinct groups of kings are in view in the two chapters. As Ladd has observed, "The kings of the earth [in 18:9-10] are to be distinguished from the 10 kings who joined with the beast to war against the Lamb (17:12-

14)."[78] Thus the kings who hate Babylon (17:16) are those 10 kings who unite with the beast to plot her overthrow. The remaining kings of the earth (18:9-10) are engaged in commerce with Babylon, so they mourn when their source of revenue is destroyed. This view is consistent with the particulars of the text but still seeks to harmonize the two chapters.

(d) Different character. The final difference between the chapters is the different character of each Babylon that is described. Chapter 17 is said to be religious in nature while chapter 18 is more commercial. Many feel that these differences can best be explained by the existence of two Babylons in the chapters. "[Revelation 17\(\)](#) sets forth a religious power centered at the seven-hilled city of Rome exerting control over all people until the Antichrist has no further use for its existence, while the city of Babylon [chapter 18] is a great commercial center controlling trade and commerce on a worldwide scale." [79]

Is there a difference in character between these chapters? Chapter 17 contains a vision with an interpretation. Babylon is referred to in the vision as a woman riding a beast. In a sense a vision is a word picture. However, the fact that something is presented in a pictorial fashion does not mean that it has no concrete reality. The nation Israel is no less Israel because it is pictured as a woman in Revelation 12. Likewise Babylon is no less Babylon even though it is pictured as a harlot. The key to the vision in chapter 17 is the divine interpretation given in 17:7-18. This gives the concrete reality behind the vision. What then is the truth about the harlot? Does she represent a religious system, a spiritual prostitute? Revelation 17:18 suggests that the answer is no: "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

Babylon is pictured as a woman in chapter 17. However, when God identifies the woman to John, He tells John that the woman represents a city. Therefore the entire argument crumbles because the chapters do contain the same character. Both chapters are talking about a city. This may not automatically mean that the Babylons in the two chapters are identical, but it certainly cannot be used to argue against such an identification.

Four distinctions between chapters 17 and 18 have been examined. Not one of the four distinctions contains compelling evidence for making a division between the chapters. The different settings are merely temporal aspects connected with John's viewing of the visions. Supposed differences between the destroyers vanish when the chapters are viewed synthetically. The different responses by the kings are explained by the existence of two distinct groups of kings within the chapters, and the alleged different character of the chapters actually vanishes when the spotlight of God's interpretation is focused on the woman in chapter 17.

The specific parallels between the chapters. A detailed examination of Revelation 17-18 uncovers a number of parallels between the two chapters. These can best be viewed in chart form.

THE DESIGNATION

The name is the same	"Babylon the Great" (17:5)	Babylon the Great" (18:2)
The identity is the same	"The woman is the great city" (17:18)	"Woe! Woe, O great city" (18:10)

However one wishes to interpret the Babylon of [Revelation 17\(\)](#), he or she must acknowledge that the divine identification of the prostitute in [Revelation 17\(\)](#) is a city, not a mystical system. These two chapters each present a city that has the same name in the same general context. The most natural interpretation is to take the cities as identical unless there is compelling evidence to the contrary.

THE DESCRIPTION

The clothing is the same	"The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was linen, purple glittering with gold, glittering precious stones, and pearls" (17:4a)	"Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine and scarlet, and with gold, precious stones and pearls" (18:16)
Both hold a cup	"She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries" (17:4b)	"Mix her a double portion from her own cup" (18:6)

Both Babylons are identified as a city, and both are described in the same fashion. Apart from the addition of "fine linen" in chapter 18, both cities are arrayed with exactly the same materials. Also both are associated with a cup that each possesses. Instead of seeing two different cities that happen to have the same name and the same description, it is easier to assume the existence of only one city.

THE DEEDS

The relationship to kings is the same	"With her the kings of the earth committed adultery" (17:2)	"The kings of the earth committed adultery with of her adulteries" (18:3)
The relationship to the nations is the same	"The Inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries" (17:2)	"For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries" (18:3)
The relationship to believers is the same	"I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus" (17:6)	"In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who had been killed on the earth" (18:24)

The Babylons in both chapters perform the same functions. Each commits fornication with the kings of the earth and causes all the nations of the earth to fall into a drunken stupor. Each also persecutes God's remnant who stand in opposition to evil. One cannot distinguish a political Babylon from a religious Babylon through a comparison of their deeds because the deeds are identical.

THE DESTRUCTION

The means of destruction is the same	"They will bring her to ruin ...and burn her with fire" (17:16)	"She will be consumed by "fire" (18:8)
The source of the destruction is the same	"For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose" (17:17)	"God has remembered her crimes....for mighty is the Lord God who judges her" (18:5, 8)

These final similarities surround the destruction of both Babylons. Physically both are destroyed by fire. And in both instances God is the ultimate source of destruction.

The parallels between the chapters are impressive. Each chapter refers to a city with the same name. Each describes a city in the same fashion. Each mentions a city that performs the same deeds, and each refers to a city that is destroyed in the same manner. These descriptions, going beyond mere similarity, point toward unity. Two distinct cities could hardly be described in such a similar way. It is better to view the chapters as two descriptions of the same city.

The larger context. The larger context in which Revelation 17 and 18 are positioned also underscores the parallelism between the chapters. The larger context actually begins in 14:8, which first predicts an angel flying in mid-heaven proclaiming proleptically, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." Several of the phrases used here are later repeated in [Revelation 17\(\)](#) and [18\(\)](#). The title "Babylon the Great" is used in all three chapters; and the proclamation "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great" is repeated in 18:2. The reference to the nations being intoxicated with the "wine of her adulteries" is also found in 17:2 and 18:3. This one proclamation is fulfilled by chapters 17 and 18, and yet there is only one Babylon in view in 14:8.

The next appearance of Babylon occurs during the outpouring of the seventh bowl in chapter 16. Part of the judgment is that "God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath" (16:19). Again only one Babylon is in view. Immediately after this pronouncement John recorded the destruction of "Babylon the Great" in chapters 17-18. What is important is that chapters 17-18 are an expansion of 16:19, which seems to refer to the destruction of a city called Babylon which is pictured as a literal city.

The larger context begins before chapters 17-18, but it does not end there. The subject of the fall of Babylon extends beyond these chapters into chapter 19. Revelation 19:1-5 presents the "Hallelujah Chorus" in heaven following the destruction of Babylon. As Ladd has noted, "The first paragraph of chapter nineteen continues the celebration of the fall of Babylon and consists of a song of thanksgiving in heaven that God had judged the great harlot."[\[80\]](#)

Chapter 19 begins with the phrase "After this"—referring to the visions of chapters 17- 18. In 18:20 the author calls on heaven to rejoice over the fall of Babylon; chapter 19 describes heaven's response to that call. The first part of the heavenly praise focuses on the prostitute of chapter 17. The multitude says, "He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants" (19:2). In response to the angels' call to rejoice over the fall of Babylon in 18:20

the heavens do respond-with a song of praise for the judgment of the harlot. The implication is that the harlot of chapter 17 and the Babylon of chapter 18 are identical.

The song of praise continues in Rev 19:3, which says, "And again they shouted: Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." The reference to the smoldering city is drawn from chapter 18, in which the kings of the earth and the shipmasters are said to look on "the smoke of her burning" (18:9, 18). The praise song in heaven over the fall of Babylon incorporates elements from both chapter 17 and chapter 18, and yet it seems to be a song celebrating just one fall and doing so in response to the command of Rev 18:20. Again this larger context can be understood best if chapters 17 and 18 are viewed as a unit that looks forward to the destruction of a single city of Babylon.

The interpretive keys within the chapters. John's picture of a prostitute astride a scarlet beast in chapter 17 could be entitled "Beauty on the Beast." The vision is described in the first 6 verses and then interpreted in the next 12 verses. Chapter 18 focuses on the response of individuals to Babylon's destruction. Within the two chapters are four interpretive keys that are crucial to the identification of Babylon.

(a) The description of Babylon as a harlot. The first interpretive key is the descriptive identification of Babylon in 17:1 as "the great prostitute, who sits on many waters." This allusion to a prostitute has caused many to identify Babylon as a false religious system. "The frequently recurring allusion to harlotry... is an echo of the Old Testament prophets, who used the term to describe the infidelity of man to God, especially in connection with idolatry."[\[81\]](#)

Admittedly the figure of a prostitute was used in the Old Testament to describe idolatry. However, the figure was also used in the Old Testament to show more than just religious apostasy. Literal cities such as Nineveh (Nahum 3:4), Tyre (Isa. 23:16-17), and Jerusalem (Ezek. 16:1, 15) were characterized as being prostitutes. "In the context of Revelation 17 and 18 the image is not that of religious profligacy but of the prostitution of all that is right and noble for the questionable ends of power and luxury."[\[82\]](#)

Babylon is identified as a prostitute. But the reference is not to her spiritual nature. Rather the focus is on the prostitution of her values for economic gain. The figure of a harlot was never applied to a religious system only. It was always used to describe a city or nation (Jerusalem, Israel, Samaria, Nineveh, or Tyre). Why did John describe Babylon as a harlot? One reason was to contrast Babylon and Jerusalem. Two cities in Revelation are described as "great"-Jerusalem and Babylon. John, through his use of literary parallels, highlights the contrast between the destruction of Babylon and the final triumph of Jerusalem.

Destruction of Babylon Revelation 17:1, 3-5, 18	Establishment of Jerusalem Revelation 21:1-11, 27
One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls	One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues
came and said to me,	came and said to me,
"Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute"	"Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."
Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert	And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high
The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet and was glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls	It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal
This tulle was written on her forehead: A mystery, Babylon the Great, The mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth The woman you saw is the great is city that rules over the kings of the earth.	and [he] showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what shameful or deceitful

(b) The explanation of Babylon as a mystery. The second interpretive key centers on the name written on the harlot's forehead. More specifically, it revolves around the explanation of the word (myst&iort) in 17:5. Babylon is described as a "mystery."

Two problems must be resolved before this interpretive key can be properly understood. The first is the determination of the grammatical relationship between the word pumptor and the title of the woman. According to Robertson pvcmtou could be taken

"either in apposition with *ortoma* ["name"] or as part of the inscription on her [i.e., the prostitute's] forehead."[\[83\]](#) So either John could be saying that the name on the woman is "Mystery Babylon the Great" or he could be saying that the name, "Babylon the Great," which is written on the woman's forehead, is a mystery. Of the two possibilities, the second offers the best explanation within the context. Whenever the woman is named elsewhere in the chapters she is simply called "Babylon the Great" not "Mystery Babylon the Great" (e.g., Rev 14:8; 16:19; 18:2).

The second problem that must be resolved is the exact nature of the mystery. In what sense is this Babylon a mystery? Many feel that the occurrence of "mysterion" means that Babylon is to be interpreted symbolically or figuratively.[\[84\]](#) However, the idea of equating "mysterion" with something mystical cannot be borne out in the New Testament usage of the word. The word "mysterion" does not denote the quality or character of the truth; rather it focuses on the availability of that truth.

But whereas "mystery" may mean, and in contemporary usage often does mean, a secret for which no answer can be found, this is not at all the connotation of the term *mysterion* in classical and biblical Greek. In the New Testament *mysterion* signifies a secret which is being, or even has been, revealed, which is also divine in scope, and needs to be made known by God to men through His Spirit. In this way the term comes very close to the New Testament word *apokalypsis*, "revelation." *Mysterion* is a temporary secret, which once revealed is known and understood—a secret no longer.[\[85\]](#)

Calling the harlot's name a mystery does not automatically mean a spiritual or mystical system of evil as opposed to a literal "brick and mortar" city. By designating Babylon as a "mystery" God was indicating to John that the vision being given had not been made known before. To understand the "mystery" in its context one must examine 17:7-18, for in these verses God reveals the meaning and significance of the vision.

The "mystery" that John saw was two end-time world powers (the prostitute and the beast on which she was riding) in existence at the same time. The Old Testament did point to the rise of Rome which was to rule the world just prior to the establishment of Christ's kingdom (Dan. 2:40-45; 7:23-27; 9:26-27). However, the Old Testament also predicted the restoration of Babylon as a major power in God's future prophetic program (Isa. 13-14; Jer. 50-51; Zech. 5:5-11). But how could both of these empires exist simultaneously and fit into God's program for the world? That was the "mystery" revealed to John. After viewing the vision (Rev. 17:1-6), the angel said to John, "I will explain to you the mystery (*ycrnpio*) of the woman and of the beast she rides" (Rev 17:7).

(c) The identification of Babylon as a city. There is no lack of opinion concerning the identification of the prostitute called Babylon. However, most of the identifications do not begin with the divine interpretation of the vision given at the end of chapter 17. In 17:18 the angel interpreted the harlot to John: "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." Whatever else is said about the prostitute, God identifies her first as a city, not an ecclesiastical system.

The divine interpretive key in Rev 17:18 identifies the Babylon of chapter 17 as a city. It is a city of worldwide importance, for it is said to reign over the other kings of the earth. It is true that the identification can go beyond the city to the system it controls. However, the interpretation given to John focused only on the identification of Babylon as a city. In the secularized West, society separates "church" and "state," but no such separation existed in antiquity. Babylon may have a religious aspect (for example, she persecutes believers), but this does not argue against Babylon being a literal city.

(d) The location of Babylon on seven hills. The beast on which the woman is sitting is described as having seven heads. When the angel interpreted this part of the vision to John he said, "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills [mountains] on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while" (Rev 17:9-10). What are the seven hills on which the woman is sitting? The traditional understanding of the seven hills is that they refer to the city of Rome, known in John's day as the seven-hilled city.[\[86\]](#)

This view that the seven hills refer to Rome has some serious flaws. The first flaw is the assumed relationship between the woman and the hills. The seven heads are associated with the beast, not the woman. There is a distinction between the woman and the beast; and it is the beast that has the seven heads. The angel said, "I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads" (Rev 17:7). If the seven hills refer to Rome, then the most that can be determined is that the Antichrist's empire will be centered in the city of Rome. It does not identify the location of the prostitute because she is not an organic part of the beast.

Some might argue that the harlot is still to be associated with the city of seven hills because they are described in Rev 17:9 as "seven hills on which the woman sits." However, the prostitute's sitting on the seven hills is a reference to her control or influence not to her location. In Rev 17:1 the woman is sitting on "many waters." These are interpreted in Rev 17:15 as "peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages." The purpose of this part of the vision is not to show Babylon's location or else the city would have to be parceled out throughout the world. Rather, the prostitute sitting on the waters is a reference to her control or influence over all the nations of the world. The woman is also said to sit on the entire beast (Rev 17:3). This would go beyond just the seven heads to include the Antichrist and the kings allied with him. Again the reference is to her control or influence, not to her location. If the

harlot's sitting clearly indicates control or influence twice in the chapter, is it not inconsistent to give that same figure a different meaning when it occurs for a third time? It is far more consistent to view the harlot's sitting as indicative of her control over the seven mountains, rather than having it point to her physical location.

Even if the seven hills are taken as a reference to Rome, that identification cannot be used to associate the harlot with Rome. The woman and the seven heads are distinct; and the position of the woman indicates control, not location. However, there is evidence to believe that the seven hills could refer to something other than the city of Rome. To understand properly the symbolism of the seven mountains one must go beyond the Greco-Roman society in which John wrote to the Jewish heritage in which he was raised. John was a Jew, and the Book of Revelation must be interpreted in light of the Old Testament. As Jenkins has said, "The book of Revelation is the most thoroughly Jewish in its language and imagery of any New Testament book. This book speaks not the language of Paul, but of the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel."[\[87\]](#)

To understand the seven mountains one must go to the Old Testament to see how this symbol was used. The word "mountain" was often a symbolic reference to a kingdom or national power. The following Old Testament passages show this usage of the word.

"In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all the nations will stream to it" (Isa. 2:2).

"I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth," declares the LORD. "I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned-out mountain" (Jer. 51:25). [The Lord is here speaking to the nation of Babylon: see Jer. 50:1. Jeremiah 50-51 are quoted extensively in Revelation 17-18.]

"But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (Dan. 2:35, 44). [God identified the mountain as the everlasting kingdom He will set up.] The figure of a mountain is used in the Old Testament to refer to a kingdom. However, there is yet another reason for identifying the seven mountains in Revelation 17() as a reference to seven kingdoms.

This interpretation is to be preferred because it best explains the dual identification of the seven heads as both mountains and kings.

If the seven mountains are applied to Rome, then the seven kings must be seven rulers of Rome. However, there is some difficulty in relating the known history of Rome's rulers to the seven kings of the vision. One must leave out three Roman emperors (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius) to have the history of Rome fit John's chronology. But this is not sound interpretation. "Such a procedure is arbitrary, for Galba, Otho and Vitellius, unimportant as they may have been, were bona fide emperors and were recognized as such by ancient historians."[\[88\]](#)

The divine interpretation associates each head with both a mountain and a king. This can best be explained by viewing the "mountain" as a figure of speech that refers to a kingdom and the king who was ruling it. This relationship is most clearly illustrated in Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. "You are the head of gold. After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours" (Dan. 2:38b-39). Daniel wrote that the head of gold was a king, but that the breast and arms of silver were another kingdom. Daniel was obviously viewing the kingdom of Babylon as personified in the king that stood before him. Thus he could switch from the king to the kingdom with no inconsistency. The Apostle John is using the ideas of kingdoms and rulers in the same way. The seven heads which are identified as "mountains" and "kings" in Revelation 17:9-10 refer to seven empires and their kings rather than to the city of Rome.

The four interpretive keys within Revelation 17-18() provide vital information on the identity of Babylon. Babylon is first and foremost a literal city that will dominate the world. It will be characterized as a harlot that prostitutes her moral values for material luxury. The entire city is viewed as a mystery in that her future position, relationship to the Antichrist, and ultimate destruction by the Antichrist had not been known before John's vision. Evidently Babylon will exert influence or control over seven nations, the Antichrist's growing empire, and eventually the entire earth. These keys do not unlock some mystical system of religion that will infiltrate the world. Rather, they open the door of prophecy on a brick-and-mortar city intoxicated with power and luxury. The Babylon in these chapters, though it might have religious aspects, is one that will exist geographically and politically.

The relationship to the Old Testament prophecies on Babylon. An examination of Revelation 17-18 shows that there is but one Babylon in view. That Babylon is a city that will extend its control throughout the world. However, the city itself still needs to be identified. Chapters 17 and 18 provide little insight by themselves into the identity of the city, but through a comparison with other passages a positive identification is possible.

The key to identifying the Babylon of Revelation 17-18 is to isolate and interpret the Old Testament themes John was drawing on in these chapters. One central Old Testament passages on which Revelation 17-18 is constructed is Jeremiah 50-51. This is the passage to which John alluded most frequently.

John's use of Jeremiah 50-51 can be observed by listing the many parallels between the passages. These parallels fall into three categories: the description, the destruction, and the response. Each category will be presented in chart form. Following the chart will be a brief analysis of the significance of those parallels.

The Description

Compared to a golden cup	"Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD's hand" (Jer. 51:7a),	"The woman held a golden cup in her hand" (Rev. 17:4; cf. 18:6).
Dwelling on many Waters	"You who live by many waters" (Jer. 51:13).	"Come, I will show you the punishment of the great Prostitute who sits on Many waters" (Rev. 17:1)
Involved with nations	The nations drank her wine; therefore, they have now gone mad" (Jer. 51:7b).	"...and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries" (Rev. 17:2b).
Named the same	"This is the word the LORD Spoke... concerning Babylon and the land of the Babylonians" (Jer. 50:1).	"Babylon the great" (Rev. 17:5) "Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power" (Rev. 18:10).

The Babylon of Jeremiah 50-51() and the Babylon of Revelation 17-18() are described similarly. Both are described in terms of a golden cup that influences the nations that partake of its contents. Both are also said to dwell on many waters. Obviously John was employing the terminology used by Jeremiah. Jeremiah was prophesying the destruction of the literal city of Babylon, and John was prophesying the destruction of a city with the same name.

The Destruction

Destroyed suddenly	"Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken" Jer. 51:8).	"Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine" (Rev. 18:10).
Destroyed by fire	"Her dwellings are set on fire" (Jer. 51:30).	"The beast and the ten horns will eat her flesh and burn her with fire She will be consumed by fire" (Rev. 17:16; 18:8).
Never to be inhabited	"It will never again be inhabited" (Jer. 50:39).	"With such great violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again" (Rev. 18:21).
Punished according to	"Repay her for her deeds: do deeds to her as she has done" (Jer. 50:29).	"Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done" (Rev. 18:6)).

Fall illustrated	"When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, 'So will Babylon sink to rise no more'" (Jer. 51:63-64).	"Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: 'With such violence the great city Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again'(Rev. 18:21).
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John and Jeremiah each described a city that is destroyed suddenly and completely. A city in full blossom is plucked up never to reappear. The destruction is meted out by God for past deeds and is pictured as a rock sinking in a body of water to rise no more.

The Response

God's people to flee	"Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives!" (Jer. 51:6).	"Then I heard another voice from heaven say: 'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).
	"Come out of her my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the LORD" (Jer. 51:45).	
Heaven to rejoice	"Then heaven and earth and all that is in them will shout for joy over Babylon, for out of the north destroyers will attack her,' declares the Lord" (Jer. 51:48).	"Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you" (Rev. 18:20).

Jeremiah and John recorded the same response to the destruction of their city. Those on earth are warned to flee from the destruction that has now been promised. In heaven there is a call to rejoice, for the destruction signals God's victory over a godless city.

The ultimate identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 depends on John's use of Jeremiah's prophecy. Was John describing the same event or simply using "biblical language" to describe a different event? It was shown earlier that Jeremiah 50-51 describes a still-future destruction of the literal city of Babylon. Jeremiah directed his prophecy against "Babylon and the land of the Babylonians" (50:1). As noted earlier in this paper, several key elements of Jeremiah's prophecy have never been fulfilled literally. John predicted the destruction of a city with the same name as the city in Jeremiah's prophecy, having the same physical characteristics as the city in Jeremiah's prophecy, and destroyed in the same manner as the city in Jeremiah's prophecy.

In addition to Jeremiah 50-51, John also seems to be borrowing imagery from Zechariah 5:5-11. Zechariah saw wickedness personified as a woman. John views a woman who "held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries" (Rev. 17:4). Zechariah predicted that wickedness would one day dwell again in Shinar, and John identifies a city named "Babylon the Great" that he describes as "the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth" (Rev. 17:5). Zechariah's vision implies that God will someday allow wickedness to become reestablished in Babylon. John pictures Babylon back in existence and describes the woman as the source of all wickedness that has been on earth.

These parallels lead to the conclusion that John, Jeremiah, and Zechariah are pointing to the future destruction of the same city. John so identified his prophecy with the unfulfilled prophecies of Jeremiah that the association is unmistakable. Therefore the identity of the Babylon in Revelation 17-18 is the future rebuilt city of Babylon on the Euphrates River in present-day Iraq. Babylon will once again be restored and will achieve a place of worldwide influence only to be destroyed by the Antichrist in his thirst for power.

Conclusion

It is this author's belief that the Old Testament and New Testament prophecies of Babylon, when interpreted literally, have never been fulfilled. There has never been a time historically when Babylon has been totally desolate and devoid of human habitation. Babylon's fall is said to coincide with God's restoration of His people and their entering into an everlasting covenant with Him.

Perhaps Babylon can serve as a lesson and an encouragement to dispensationalists. Prophecies that appeared incapable of having a literal fulfillment (whether it be the reestablishment of Israel or the rebuilding of Babylon) make more sense as the time for their fulfillment draws closer.

Of course, literal interpretation is not the exclusive property of dispensationalists. Most conservatives would agree with what has just been said. What, then, is the difference between the dispensationalists' use of this hermeneutical principle and the nondispensationalists'? The difference lies in the fact that the dispensationalist claims to use the normal principle of interpretation consistently in all his study of the Bible.^[89]

Those who hold to a pretribulational rapture and a dispensational theology would do well to continue to stress the literal interpretation of prophecy while reexamining their own interpretations to make sure they are being consistent themselves. The literal method of interpretation must remain the hallmark of dispensationalism. The rebuilding of Babylon is simply another example of how literal interpretation can unlock God's prophetic Word.

[1] 'Thus Berkhof devotes a chapter to grammatical interpretation and a second chapter to historical interpretation (Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950], pp. 67-132). Mickelsen discusses "context," "language," and "history and culture" in his section on general hermeneutics (A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963], pp. 99-177).

[2] Mickelsen describes three possible approaches: (a) "literal fulfillment of all details," (b) "the symbolic meaning of an entire prophecy," and (c) "equivalents, analogy, or correspondence" (Mickelson, *Interpreting the Bible*, pp. 296-98). He opts for the third method because a literal interpretation of passages such as Ezekiel 40-48 "should be abhorrent to everyone who takes seriously the message of the book of Hebrews" (*Ibid.*, p. 298).

[3] The literal interpretation of Scripture readily admits the very large place which figurative language has in the Scriptures Literal interpretation does not mean painful, or wooden, or unbending literal rendition of every word and phrase" (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, revised ed. [Boston: W. A. Wilde Co., 1956], p. 141).

[4] "it becomes clear from these late church fathers that Jerome, Vincent, and Augustine paved the way for two emphases that were to endure for more than a thousand years- allegorization and church authority" (Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991], p. 41). Ramm says, 'The allegorical system that arose among the pagan Greeks, copied by the Alexandrian Jews, was next adopted by the Christian church and largely dominated exegesis until the Reformation.. .' (Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 28).

[5] Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 16, *Lectures on Isaiah 1-39* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), pp. 136-37.

[6] Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 54, *Table Talk*, "Beware of Melancholy and Trust God," No. 461, February 19, 1533 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 76-77.

[7] Eric W. Gritsch, ed., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 41, *Church and Ministry III*, "Against Hanswurst," (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 206-7.

[8] *Ibid.*, "Against the Roman Papacy, An Institution of the Devil," pp. 273-74.

[9] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 2:313-14.

[10] *Luther*, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 133.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

[12] Josh McDowell, comp. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith* (Arrowhead Springs, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1972), p. 319. The specific prophecies are: (a) Babylon to be like Sodom and Gomorrah, (b) never inhabited again, (c) tents will not be placed there by Arabs, (d) sheepfolds will not be there, (e) desert creatures will infest the ruins, (f) stones will not be removed for other construction projects, (g) the ancient city will not be frequently visited, and (h) covered with swamps of water (*Ibid.*, p. 315).

[13] One example among many is Otto Kaiser who dates Isaiah 13 to the postexilic period because of its description of Babylon's fall to Cyrus. "An older, late pre-exilic or more probably exilic prophecy may lie behind 13:2-22. In its present form it is post-exilic, and its outlook allows us to describe it as proto-apocalyptic. The taunt on the fall of the tyrant in 14:b-21 is also likely to be a product of the post-exilic period. Interest in the fate of Babylon did not come to an end with the conquest of the city by Cyrus in the year 539" (Otto

Kaiser, Isaiah 13-39. A Commentary, trans. by R. A. Wilson, The Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974], p. 2).

[14] In fact, Babylon was first on Sennacherib's list of rebellious cities to attack. "In my first campaign I accomplished the defeat of Merodach-baladan, king of Babylonia. ." (Daniel David Luckenbill, The Annals of Sennacherib, 2 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924], 2:24).

[15] *Ibid.*, 2:84.

[16] *Ibid.*, 2:161.

[17] The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.. 1979 ed., s.v., "Babylon," by D. J. Wiseman, 1:385.

[18] A. K. Grayson, Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles in Texts from Cuneiform Sources, ed. A. Leo Oppenheim (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin Publisher, 1975), pp. 109-10.

[19] James B. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 316.

[20] Herodotus 3.159.

[21] *Ibid.* 1.180-81. Italics added to emphasize verb tenses.

[22] *Ibid.* 181. "In the midmost of one division stands the royal palace, surrounded by a high and strong wall; and in the midmost of the other is still to this day the sacred enclosure of Zeus Belus, a square of two furlongs each way, with gates of bronze. In the centre of this enclosure a solid tower has been built, of one furlong's length and breadth; a second tower rises from this, and from it yet another, till at last there are eight."

[23] Arrian Anabasis of Alexander 7.17.1. Strabo (63 B.C.-A.D. 24) seems to agree with Arrian when he writes, "Here too is the tomb of Belus, now in ruins, having been demolished by Xerxes, as it is said. It was a quadrangular pyramid of baked brick, not only being a stadium in height, but also having sides a stadium in length" (Strabo Geography 16.1.5). However, Strabo's account is both late and unreliable. He confuses the temple of Marduk with the tower of Babel. Based on his knowledge of Egypt he assumes that the tower structure marked a tomb (as did the Egyptian pyramids).

[24] Strabo Geography 16.1.5.

[25] Piai- Anabasis of Alexander 7.14.8.

[26] Joan Oates, Babylon, revised ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986). pp. 159-60.

[27] Anabasis of Alexander 7.19.4.

[28] So Oates writes, "The Greek theatre in Babylon was first built at or not long after the time of Alexander and was reconstructed under his Seleucid successors" (Oates, Babylon, p. 143).

[29] Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 317. An inscription from the time of Antiochus I reads in part, "I am Antiochus (An-ti-'u-ku-us), the great king, the legitimate king, the king of the world, king of Babylon (Eu), king of all countries, the caretaker of the temples of Esagila and Ezda, the first(-born) son of king Seleucus (Si-lu-uk-ku), the Macedonian (a-'Ma ak-ka-du-na-a-a), king of Babylon."

[30] So Strabo writes, "Now in ancient times Babylon was the metropolis; but Seleucia is the metropolis now, I mean the Seleucia on the Tigris as it is called. Near by is situated a village called Ctesiphon, a large village. This village the kings of the Parthians were wont to make their winter residence, thus sparing the Seleucians, in order that the Seleucians might not be oppressed by having the Scythian folk or soldiery quartered amongst them. Because of Parthian power, therefore, Ctesiphon is a city rather than a village.. ." (Strabo Geography 16.1.16).

[31] Josephus Antiquities of the Jews 15.2.2.

[32] William Whitson, trans. Josephus. Complete Works (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978), p. 315.

[33] Josephus Antiquities 18.9.8.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Ibid.* 18.9.9.

[36] Strabo Geography 16.1.5.

[37] Ibid. 16.1.6.

[38] Pliny Natural History 6.30.121-22.

[39] So Selwyn writes that Babylon is "a soubriquet for Rome The objection to the Mesopotamian Babylon being intended is that there is no local tradition of any Apostle other than St. Thomas being associated with those parts In the case of I Peter, reasons of prudence may have dictated the use of the symbolic name, as the letter might have to pass the censorship of police officers" (Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* [New York: Macmillan & Co., 1964], p. 243).

[40] Wuest cites six reasons for understanding Babylon in its literal sense. One reason is that "the other geographical references in First Peter have undoubtedly the literal meaning, and it would be natural to expect that Peter's use of the name Babylon' would be literal also" (Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966], 2:132-33).

[41] Cassius Dio Cocceianus Dio's Roman History 68.30.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid. 68.1-3.

[44] *The Travels of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela. A.D. 1160-1173*, Thomas Wright, ed. Early

Travels in Palestine, reprint ed. (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1968), p. 100.

[45] As cited by Thomas Newton, *Dissertations on the Prophecies* (London, J. F. Dove, n.d.), pp. 140-41.

[46] Pilgrims and other travelers from the west would journey inland through what is today Syria until they reached the Euphrates River. They would float downriver to Al Fallujah and then travel due east approximately 40 miles to Baghdad. For a map showing Al Fallujah and describing its historic significance see *Lands of the Bible Today with Descriptive Notes* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 1967).

[47] Robert Koldewey, *The Excavations at Babylon*, trans. By Anges S. Johns (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914), p. 22.

[48] Ibid., fig. I. See map on next page.

[49] L. Glynne Dairos, Assistant Secretary of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, to Charles H. Dyer, Dallas, 15 August 1978. Personal files of Charles H. Dyer, Dallas Texas.

[50] New York Times International, April 19, 1989, p. 4-Y.

[51] Washington Post, December 1, 1986, p. A- 11.

[52] Starting the festival on the day that Iraq began the war by invading Iran was, as the Baghdad Observer, the official English-language newspaper in Iraq, observed, "not a mere coincidence" (Baghdad Observer, September 23, 1987, p. 1).

[53] Baghdad Observer, September 23, 1987, p. 2.

[54] Quote attributed to Saddam Hussein in Babylon International Festival brochure for September 22, 1987.

[55] Paul Lewis, "Dollars Can Still Get You Scotch and Waterford Crystal in Baghdad," New York Times, May 12, 1991, p. 10.

[56] Personal correspondence from Dr. Mouayyad Said Damerji, Head of the Babylon Festival Organizing Committee, to Dr. Charles H. Dyer, 27 August 1992.

[57] Personal correspondence from Khalid J. Shewayish, Chief of Iraq Interests Section at the Embassy of the Republic of Algeria, to Dr. Charles H. Dyer, 28 June 1993.

[58] John A. Martin, Isaiah, " *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), p. 1062.

[59] Ibid., p. 1058.

[60] Ibid., p. 1061.

[61] Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, 2:23.

[62] Ibid., p. 85.

[63] Ibid., p. 24.

[64] Ibid., p. 35.s

[65] Ibid., "Excerpts from the Babylonian Chronicle," pp. 158-61. For a concise listing of the rulers and their dates see Faraj Basmachi, *Treasures of the Iraq Museum* (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, Directorate General of Antiquities, 1976), P. 84.

[66] Kaiser, Isaiah 13-23, p. 2.

[67] Ibid. p. 9.

[68] Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 316.

[69] Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylon Chronicles in Text from Cuneiform Sources*, pp. 109-10.

[70] Baldwin, though she sees a slightly different chiasmic structure in the eight night visions, notes the presence of chiasm throughout the Book of Zechariah (Joyce G. Baldwin, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972], pp. 80-81, 92-93). Instead of the pattern a b c d d c b' a she sees the pattern abbcbbba (Ibid., p.80).

[71] The difference between "appearance /resemblance" (NASB, KJV) and "wickedness" (NW) is based on a textual variation. Ken Barker presents a succinct summary of the problem and the likely solution. "' (I am) presents a text-critical problem. As it stands, it means "their eye" [i.e., their appearance), which does not yield a good sense (cf. the parallel in v. 8, where the woman in the basket is interpreted as wickedness personified). NW, probably correctly, follows one Hebrew MS, the LXX, and the Syriac in reading) ('an-, "their iniquity"). (The pronominal suffix refers to the people, perhaps with special reference to the godless rich.) The only significant variation between these two readings is the waw instead of the yod. Even here it should be borne in mind that in many ancient Hebrew MSS the only perceptible difference between the two letters is the length of the downward stroke. A long yod and a short waw are virtually indistinguishable" (Kenneth L. Barker, "Zechariah," In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, Daniel-Minor Prophets [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985], p. 635).

[72] Barker concludes that Shinar "roughly corresponded to ancient Babylonia" (Barker, "Zechariah," p. 635).

[73] Baldwin assumes the reference must be to a temple. "Another temple will be erected, perhaps a ziggurat like the tower of Babel. . ." (Baldwin, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, p. 129). Barker, though more tentative in his identification, still suggests that the word is "perhaps referring to a temple or ziggurat" (Barker, "Zechariah," p. 635).

[74] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v., pp. 108- 10.

[75] Kenneth W. Allen, *The Rebuilding and Destruction of Babylon*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (January-March, 1976):25.

[76] Ibid., p.26.

[77] In observing these different responses Tenney comments, "Why should the kings both hate her and then bewail her fate at their hands? Perhaps the explanation lies in the difference between religious and commercial Babylon" (Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957], p. 85).

[78] George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 235.

[79] Allen, "The Rebuilding and Destruction of Babylon," p. 26.

[80] Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 244.

[81] Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, p. 83.

[82] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), P. 307.

[83] Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), 6:430.

[84] Ibid. Robertson wrote, "In either case the meaning is the same, that the name Babylon is to be interpreted mystically or spiritually (cf. *prteymatik* 11:8) for Rome."

[85] *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1974 ed., s.v. "Mystery," by S. S. Smalley, p. 856. Barker agrees with Smalley. "The Greek term, however, refers to a mystery of divine nature that remains hidden from human beings because their normal powers of comprehension are insufficient. Nonetheless, these mysteries are intended for human beings and when known prove profitable to them" (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1986 ed., s.v., "Mystery," by G. W. Berker, 3:451-52).

[86] Mounce writes, "There is little doubt that a first-century reader would understand this reference in any way other than as a reference to Rome, the city built upon seven hills" (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 313-14).

[87] Ferrel Jenkins, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), P. 22.

[88] Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 229.

[89] Charles Caidwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 89.