

BABYLON IN THE LAST DAYS

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Before the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ to set up the kingdom of God on earth, there are certain signs we are instructed to look for. Jesus said, “When you *see these things coming to pass*, lift up your heads for your redemption draws near.” (Luke 21:28) And a couple of verses later, “Even so you, too, *when you see these things happening*, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.” (Luke 21:31) The Kingdom comes with observation!

One of these signs that many of God's people know about is the coming of Satan's man; a masterpiece of Satanic deception and power, variously called the Antichrist, the Beast, the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition. However, one of “these things” that has not received much attention is the prediction that this brazen enemy of God is going to head up a confederation of ten kingdoms whose headquarters will be on the banks of the Euphrates River where the ancient city of Babylon stood. Whenever the Scriptures look into the future in the days just before the Lord Messiah sets up His earthly reign, they point to a time of 'Big Trouble' for Israel in particular, and the world in general, from a Middle Eastern country called Assyria (Micah 5:6), the King(dom) of the North (Dan.11) or the Land of Shinar (Zech. 5:11). World history will return to its roots in Babylon, and will revolve around a man, a super-government, and a city (Rev. 17:12-13).

Yes, a real city of bricks and mortar, with unimaginable wealth: A city controlling a system that will gratify every humanistic lust and greed; a city that harnesses the best that science can produce; a city to pamper the senses and feed the pride of men; a city whose king will demand the absolute allegiance and soul of every citizen. It is this remarkable prophecy that is the subject of this paper.

Students of the Bible know that all of the great themes revealed in Scripture are found in seed-form in the Book of Genesis. The first time the subject of Babylon appears in Genesis chapters 10 and 11 is no exception and carries far-reaching prophetic and typical significance.

After the Noahic Flood God gave a specific command to men. They were to go forth and resettle the whole earth. “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth!” was the Lord's clear command. But in open defiance we read:

“Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. And it came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.' And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.' And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech” (Gen. 11:1-7).

Note the rebellious spirit that characterized these people. God had said, “fill the earth” but they said, “No way! We will make bricks... we will build for ourselves a city and a tower reaching up to heaven... We will make for ourselves a name.” Here is a confederacy in open rebellion to challenge the God of Heaven. They will stop in one place. They will build a city, and a name for themselves. This apostasy first happened on “a plain in the *land of Shinar*”, that is, at Babel.

“The Bible says that it was further arranged for the people to make for themselves “*a name*,” -- *a Sem*, a token, sign, banner, ensign, or mark of confederation..as an undivided people, lest they should become dispersed over the earth... By this standard they would become known and

would boast. That *Sem*, or *Sema*, was to be a mark of consolidated greatness...that is, in the language of the time, a *Sema-Rama*. Thus we have the name of the mythic *Semiramis*, the Dove-Goddess, which was the ensign of all the Assyrian princes...Semiramis is said to have been the wife of Nimrod; so that the *Sem*, or token of the Nimrodic confederation was probably the image of his wife, with a dove upon her head, with wings spread like the horns of the new moon.”¹

Another symbol of their hatred of God was that tower that would pierce the sky. Not that they hoped to physically reach heaven by it. Rather would they build a ziggurat to scan the skies. From this tower the Chaldean priests searched the constellations. By their horoscopes they mapped out the destinies communicated by demonic deities to control mankind. In fact, their pursuit of the occult was so intense, that the very name of their region, Chaldean, came to be the identification of a person who was found in the company of conjurers, magicians, sorcerers, and soothsayers. The Chaldeans were famous for their astrologers, their signs of the zodiac, and the monthly prognosticators. They worshipped the planets and consulted demonic spirits, and opposed the truth of the One true God. How typical of Satan's hatred of God that here, where the Garden of Eden first was located, where the Paradise of God was, where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flowed, that this conspiracy first gathered momentum.

And who was the earthly king and authority behind this confederacy? We read,

“Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one of the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore, it is said, 'Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.' And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar” (Gen. 10:8-10).

The name “Nimrod” means “rebel”. Three times we are told this rebel was “mighty” and specifically that he was “mighty before the Lord”. This is an unfortunate translation, for the expression “before the Lord” means rather *against* the Lord as his name suggests. We can confirm this by comparing the same phrase in Genesis 6:11 (“Now the earth was corrupt before the Lord”) which means “in the sight of God”. Nimrod was a rebel to God's face.

The significance is that Nimrod brazenly set his own ambitions against the Lord. And the fact that he was a “hunter” probably means that he hunted down men who opposed his designs of self-aggrandizement. Note he “began” to be mighty in the earth, which implies that Nimrod forced and fought his way into this greatness as the king of Babylon. “It is said of him that he professed to have seen a golden crown in the sky, that he had one made like it, and that he put it on his own head, and thus claimed to rule in the name and as the earthly impersonation of the powers of the sky, either as Orion or the Sun.”² “And every intimation concerning him shows that he was the Heaven-defying founder of a new system of rule and worship, instituting a government by brute force and earthly wisdom and policy, and a religion which quite abolished the true God, and set men to the adoration of the sun, moon, and stars, impersonated in himself, (and his wife)...and represented in the idol standards of his kingdom.”³

Putting all this together so far, helps us see that united anti-God rule in the Bible is first connected with a rebel of a man whose seat of power was in the land of Shinar, in Babel. We see here the first outlines and forebodings of a yet future “Lawless One” who will head up a kingdom of apostasy against the Lord and His Christ.

Nimrod is the proto-type of the last Antichrist “whose coming is in accord with the activity of

¹ Seiss, Joseph A., *The Apocalypse, an Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1987) p. 388-389.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish..." (2 Thess.2:9). Just as Nimrod promoted his own ambitions against the God of heaven, so too will the final Rebellious One do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods..." (Dan.11:36).

"Babel" originally meant "the gate of God". But in judgment upon Nimrod, his city and tower of defiance, God inflicted confusion. In contrast to their "Let us make...Let us build...Let us make a name for ourselves..." the LORD announces to the heavenly high court, *Let us* go down and there confuse their language..." God knew that this first attempt to build a new world order, would succeed beyond all expectation, if allowed to progress unhindered. Humanism joined with the occult must be checked if God's redemptive purpose for the world was to be accomplished. So God took away from them the key ingredient to success -- harmony. And thereafter in the Bible Babylon stands for confusion and that which lies under the curse and judgment of God.

It is instructive to read that God called Abram to come out of Ur of the Chaldees, out of Babylon. Here again the book of Genesis gives us a prophetic hint when in the last days, the Lord will say to His faithful people, "Come out of her (i.e. Babylon), my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues". (Rev. 18:4) This connection between the Jews and Babylon is always linked with trials and tribulations for God's people. (Note for instance that the first sin that brought judgment on Israel as soon as they entered the Promised Land involved "a beautiful mantle from Shinar (Babylon)..." (Josh. 7:21)

This connection between the Jews and Babylon is also hinted at in the book of Exodus.

"Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Ex. 1:8).

To understand who this new king was we need the light of other scriptures. By turning to Isaiah 52:4 we discover that this new king who persecuted the Hebrews was of another nationality than the native Egyptians altogether:

"For thus says the LORD God, 'My people went down at the first into Egypt to reside there, then *the Assyrian* oppressed them without cause."

This fact removes an apparent difficulty in Exodus 1:9-10. This new king who did not know Joseph says to his people,

"Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply and in the event of war, they also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us..."

It is unlikely that the Hebrews had become more numerous than the local Egyptians. But when we understand that this king was not an Egyptian, but an *Assyrian* who had conquered Egypt, the difficulty is cleared. Note that this new king said to "*his* people" (not *the* people). His people were the Assyrians who had invaded Egypt and he evidently feared an alliance between the Hebrews and the Egyptians.

The New Testament commentary agrees with this:

"There arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph" (Acts 7:18).

The Greek word here for "another" king means "another of a different kind". But the salient point for our discussion is that once again Scripture throws out a little hint about the Assyrian who will play out the last great conflict in the Great Tribulation at the end. (Who can fail to see the parallels between the ten plagues of the Exodus and those described in the Revelation?)

Now, historically Babylon plays no further significance in Biblical history until king Nebuchadnezzar. God raised him up as an instrument of judgment on idolatrous Israel. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and razed the Temple. He ruled over Babylon for 40 years. And he boasted that he had built the city of Babylon the Great by his own strength. Like Nimrod, the proto-

type Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful warrior-king who defied God. Daniel 3:1 says,
“Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.”

How significant that again here on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon a king attempts to deify himself. He attempts to create a universal, humanistic-occultic religion. He raises up a giant image, an idol of himself and forces all subjects on pain of death to so worship.

It is indeed strange that here for the first time, the number 6 is introduced in relation to Babylon. In the Bible the number 6 is the number for man. Man was created on the sixth day. In Rev. 13 the Lord says, “Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six” (v. 18).

And here we have Nebuchadnezzar raising the image that deifies man sixty cubits high and six cubits wide! Man always falls short for 7 is the number for completion. (cp. The seven Spirits of God, etc. in the Revelation). Nebuchadnezzar unconsciously demonstrates his own lack of spiritual understanding and the true source of his ambition.

And the final Beast who sets up his own image to coerce universal worship, like Nebuchadnezzar (Rev. 13:14-18) will do so again in Babylon. It is to these prophecies we turn now for such detail.

The terrifying dream that Nebuchadnezzar had in Dan.2 was of a colossus of a man whose head was of gold, whose chest and arms were of silver, whose belly and thighs were of brass, whose legs were of iron and whose feet were of iron mixed with clay. Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that this image represented four great world-empires. (cp. The four beast-empires of Daniel 7).

In Dan. 2:45 there appears “a stone cut out of the mountain” that crushes “the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold”. This stone speaks of the Lord Christ returning to earth to pummel the forces of evil and set up his own universal empire:

“Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed *all at the same time*, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found” (Dan. 2:35).

Other translations say that the stone strikes the metals so that they are “broken in pieces *together*”. If they are broken in pieces *together*, or all at the *same time* they must all be there in composite form at the time of Christ's Return when he comes from heaven to set up his millennial kingdom! *This means that each of these ancient empires will be raised up together, all at the same time under the Antichrist!* There will be a super world-power, a composite of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome dominating the world, a diverse 'beast' generically called Babylon.

We can confirm this interpretation by comparing the four beast-kingdoms of Daniel 7 with Rev. 13:1-2. There we have a **perfect parallel description** of the final empire over which the Antichrist will yet reign. Daniel 7 shows four awesome beasts which are “four kings who will arise from the earth”. These four beasts or four kingdoms are the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Grecian and the Roman.

Dan. 7:4 says “the first was like a lion”. V.5 says the second “resembled a bear”. V.6 indicates the third was “like a leopard”. And v.7 tells that the fourth beast was “dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong.”

Now Rev.13:1-2 parallels Daniel's vision. Here John sees “a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads...” This is a vision of the final, composite empire that the Antichrist will head up at the end of this age. This beast is likened to a leopard, a bear, and a lion. And his power comes from the Dragon who is Satan.

Now the fourth beast in Daniel's vision had “ten horns”. Here in Rev. 13 the beast has “ten horns”. It would seem consistent and logical to conclude that Rev. 13:1-2 confirms that the four great world-kingdoms of the past are to be revived just prior to Christ's Second Coming.

The fact that this beast-kingdom of Rev. 13 has “seven heads” indicates that it is symbolic of a composite kingdom. We remember that in Dan. 7 the third beast has “four heads” (v. 6). But the first, second and fourth beasts have only one head each. Thus, *the beasts of Dan. 7 have seven heads in total which number corresponds perfectly with Rev. 13:1!*

Other Old Testament prophets predict this coming revival of Babylon at the end of this age and the intimate connection between the Antichrist and Babylon. The Old Testament often calls this man the Assyrian:

“O Assyrian, the rod of my anger and the staff of my indignation...it will be when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, 'I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness' (Is. 11:5, 12).

God says in verse 23 that He has decreed a “complete destruction” upon this arrogant king of Assyria. These words “*complete destruction*” are repeated in Daniel 9:27 where the Antichrist is termed as the “one who makes desolate” but will himself suffer “*complete destruction*”.

If there is any doubt that both prophecies speak of the same fate of the final Antichrist, the Apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 11:4 in 2 Thess. 2:8 (!) Read them together:

“...and He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and *with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked*” (Is. 11:4).

“And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will *slay with the breath of His mouth* and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming” (2 Thess. 2:8).

The very words that Isaiah applies to the Assyrian, the king of Babylon are in the N.T. ascribed to the Antichrist. Here is another indication that the Antichrist is going to be connected to a revived Babylon.⁴

Further on in Isaiah is more evidence of this great city destined for destruction in the “coming Day of the Lord”. I cannot improve on A.W. Pink's commentary on this remarkable prediction concerning Babylon:

“Isaiah 13 and 14 contain a remarkable prophecy ...it is termed in the opening verse, 'The oracle concerning Babylon'. It tells of the terrible judgment which God shall send on this city. It speaks of the total and final destruction of it. It declares that 'Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldean's pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorroah'. (Vs. 19-20) Now the one point pertinent to our present inquiry is, Whether Isa. 13 describes the doom which befell the Babylon of Belshazzar's day, or the judgment which shall overtake the Babylon of the coming day. Upon this point there is, for those who desire to be subject to God's Word, no room for uncertainty. The sixth verse expressly declares that this 'oracle of Babylon' is to receive its fulfillment in 'the Day of the Lord'. This, we need hardly add, is the name for that Day which follows the present Day of Salvation. (2 Cor. 6:2)...'the Day of the Lord' never refers to a period now past, but always has reference to one which is yet future! If any doubt remains as to whether or not Isa. 13 is speaking of a *future* Day, the contents of v.10 should forever remove it. There we are told that 'the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light.' All students of prophecy will see at a glance that these cosmic phenomena are to be witnessed during the Tribulation period –cf Matt. 24:29. There is not a hint anywhere either in Scripture or (so far as we are aware) in secular history, that such disturbances among the heavenly bodies occurred at the captivity of Babylon by Darius. And it is at *that* time, in 'the Day of the Lord' when the sun is darkened and the moon shines not, that Babylon is overthrown (v. 19). This one

⁴ See Anthony Buzzard, “The Assyrian in Messianic Prophecy,” www.restorationfellowship.org.

Scripture is quite sufficient to establish the futurity of Babylon and its coming overthrow.”⁵

Notice that the time for this dreadful Day of the Lord not only coincides with the utter destruction of Babylon, but in the same context following also concerns the national restoration of Israel:

“When the LORD will have compassion on Jacob, and again choose Israel, and settle them in their own land, then strangers will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob. And the peoples will take them along and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them as an inheritance in the land of the LORD as male and female servants; and they will take them as their captors, and will rule over their oppressors” (Is. 14:1-2).

And at this exact time these liberated peoples will raise a taunting song “against the king of Babylon” (v. 4)...“How the oppressor has ceased, and how fury has ceased!” And they will taunt the king of Babylon, “Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, and who made the world like a wilderness...?” (v. 16).

To conclude this prophecy Isaiah gives one of the most beautiful visions of a renewed earth under Messiah's government...when “the whole earth is at rest and is quiet. They break forth into shouts of joy” (Is. 14:7). Isaiah asserts that this is the plan of the LORD of Hosts and “who can frustrate it”? (Is. 14:27).

In view of such clear predictions there can be no doubt that this prophecy is yet future because the liberated descendants of Jacob exult “no cutter comes up against us”. Long after the days of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, the Romans came up against Israel and cut them off. And they are still to this day scattered. But none will ever do this again when the *last* king of Babylon is destroyed at Messiah's return to earth.

Indeed, there are a number of prophecies in the Old and New Testaments that indicate a future destruction of Babylon that have no past fulfillment. Compare Is. 47:1,9 with Jer. 51:8 and Rev. 18:10:

“Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; Sit on the ground without a throne. O daughter of the Chaldeans...who dwells securely, who says in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me. I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children'. But these two things shall come on you *suddenly in one day*; loss of children and widowhood. They shall come on you in full measure in spite of your many sorceries, in spite of the great power of your spells” (Is. 47).

“*Suddenly* Babylon has fallen and been broken; wail over her!” (Jer. 51).

“Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For *in one hour* your judgment has come” (Rev. 18:8, 10, 17, 19).

Add to the suddenness of God's judgment the fact that Babylon is to be burned with fire:

“Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation...And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldean's pride, will be *as* when God overthrew *Sodom and Gomorrah*” (Is. 13:9, 19).

“The mighty men of Babylon have ceased fighting...their dwelling places are *set on fire*...thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'The broad wall of Babylon will be completely razed, and her high gates will be *set on fire*...’” (Jer. 51:30, 58).

“(They)...were crying out as they saw *the smoke of her burning*, saying, 'What city is like the great city?’” (Rev. 18:18).

⁵ Pink, Arthur, W., *The Antichrist* (Kregel Publications, 1988) p. 240-241.

There has been nothing in past history which corresponds in any way with these prophetic announcements. We know this because for a number of centuries after Christ, Babylon was still a city of importance. In fact, even in the days of Peter the apostle Babylon was still a regional city of some significance. (I Pet. 5:13) There was no sudden burning annihilation of Babylon that left it like Sodom and Gomorrah suddenly in the space of one day or one hour! Therefore, according to the prophets the city of Babylon must be re-built at the end of this age, for not one jot or tittle of the word of God can fail. As Joseph Seiss states, "The sentence upon Babylon is therefore not yet fulfilled, and cannot be unless that city comes up again."⁶ Or Pember who writes, "It would seem then that Babylon must be rebuilt, and become again the centre of the world and the glory of kingdoms, as we have it represented in the eighteenth chapter of the Apocalypse."⁷

Micah 5 contains a prophecy etched in our minds because it has already been so wonderfully fulfilled. It tells of our Lord Jesus' first coming:

"But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, from you will go forth for Me a future ruler of Israel, whose origins can be traced to the distant past, to the days of old" (v. 2).

This foretelling of the birth of Messiah, the heir of David's Throne is however, only half of Micah's prophecy. From v. 4 onwards we have a prediction yet to be fulfilled:

"And He will arise and shepherd them (Israel) in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the Name of the LORD His God, and they will remain (margin, live in safety) because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. And this One will be our peace, when the Assyrian invades our land, when he tramples on our citadels... and He (Messiah) will deliver us from the Assyrian when he attacks our land and when he tramples our territory."

It can hardly be said that Israel has ever remained secure and safely in peace to this day. Nor has the Messiah ever delivered Israel from an invading Mesopotamian king. The Messiah has yet to arrive in the power of His God to rescue Israel in such a dramatic national way.

If our faith is to be consistent then, we must not only trust in the already fulfilled words of God concerning the birth of Messiah in Bethlehem, but also in the Messiah's future liberation of Israel from an Assyrian oppressor.

Barton-Payne points out, "Micah 5:6 states that the armies of the Messiah will waste the land of Assyria...the important fact to maintain in the *still unfulfilled* Micah passage is that whatever be the particular weapons, **there will be a conflict at that time and place identified**, and with the results that are indicated."⁸

B.W. Newton concurs with these sentiments. He says that the testimony of Scripture constrains us to say that "the predictions against Babylon have not yet received their *final* accomplishment. The Scripture marks the period of Babylon's fall as contemporaneous with three great concurrent events -- the destruction of the Antichrist ---the forgiveness of Israel ---and the coming of the Day of the Lord -- events which are still future. The Scripture also declares that its fall shall be most *sudden*; that the land of Babylon, as well as Babylon itself, shall be ...desolate...(and) that no such desolation rests at present upon Babylon, much less upon THE LAND of Babylon, has been proved by the evidence of well authenticated facts."⁹

⁶ Seiss, *The Apocalypse, an Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, p. 389.

⁷ Pember, George, H., *The Great Prophecies Concerning the Gentiles, The Jews, and the Church of God* (Schoettle Publishing Co., Inc. Hayesville, NC 1998) p. 172.

⁸ Barton-Payne, *Encyclopaedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Baker, 1973) p.

⁹ Newton, Benjamin W., *Babylon & Egypt, Their Future History and Doom* (Houlston & Sons, London 1890) p. 62.

REVELATION 17 & 18

All of these yet unfulfilled O.T. prophecies about a coming revival and subsequent destruction of the Babylonian empire under a wicked Assyrian king are gathered up and finally developed in the book of the Revelation. The vision given to John in Rev. 17 & 18 shows Babylon to be the last great wicked city/empire of the future just before the Lord Jesus returns in glory.

George H. Lang helpfully points out that these two chapters deal with two different subjects. Rev. 17 speaks of Babylon the godless **system** under the symbolism of a Woman, whereas Rev. 18 treats of the **city** of Babylon. If we confuse these two themes, Lang suggests that we will experience confusion. Lang's four contrasts between Rev. 17 & Rev. 18 show that:

1. The system of Babylon is destroyed by the Beast before his universal sovereignty, but the city of Babylon itself is not destroyed until after he himself has been overthrown. (Rev. 14:8 is expanded in chap. 17 and Rev. 16:19 expanded in chap. 18)
2. In chap. 17:16 the ten kings hate and destroy the Woman; in 18:9 the same kings of the earth bewail the destruction of the city.
3. When the kings have killed the Woman they then "eat her flesh," or enrich themselves from her: but when the city is suddenly and completely destroyed nothing is left for anyone to seize and so the merchants wail.
4. The Woman is destroyed by a process: she is hated, isolated, stripped, devoured, burned. But the City is to be annihilated suddenly. Therefore, I agree with Lang that the subjects of Rev. 17 & Rev. 18 are to be treated separately, even if they are related in fact... "Not till these four contrasts are obliterated can the two chapters have the same subject."¹⁰

With this distinction G. H. Pember agrees. "The Woman called Mystery Babylon represents...that great **Society** founded in connection with Nimrod...But in the eighteenth chapter of the Apocalypse we find something quite different: there a **literal city** is depicted, the commercial centre of the world."¹¹

Pember's rationale is not dissimilar to Lang's:

1. The subject of the 17th chap. is "Mystery, Babylon the Great." That of the 18th chap. is simply "that great city Babylon."
2. Mystery Babylon is to be destroyed by the Ten Kings. (17:17) But the great city Babylon meets its doom under the seventh vial, which is poured out at the end of Antichrist's career.
3. The Woman is hated by the 10 kings who make her desolate and naked and eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.
4. The human agency of the Ten Kings works the ruin of the Woman and by a lengthened process, whereas in contrast the city perishes by a frightful and instantaneous judgment and is engulfed in a moment and disappears immediately.

Pember continues, "If, then, we find so many differences in the details given of them, it is clear that we cannot absolutely identify the Woman and the city. At the same time there is doubtless a close connection between them..."¹²

¹⁰ Lang, George H., *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Oliphants Ltd, London, 1945) p. 298-299.

¹¹ Pember, George H., *The Great Prophecies Concerning the Gentiles, The Jews, and the Church of God*, pp. 169-170.

¹² Unger, Merrill F., *Zechariah* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1963) p. 94.

A.W. Pink introduces these chapters in a slightly different approach but with the same general conclusion:

“An exposition of the Revelation or any part thereof should be the last place for dogmatism...(amongst the many difficulties of interpretation may be added)... “the probability, that many of the prophecies of the Revelation are to receive a double, and in some cases, a treble fulfillment.”

“Since all Scripture is given by God's inspiration and is 'profitable' the saints who have read the prophecies of the Revelation throughout the running generations have found their faith strengthened through the relevance of its pages. In other words, ever since John received the Revelation there has always existed a system which, in its *moral features*, has corresponded to the Babylon of the 17th chapter. There exists such a system today; ...and there will also come into existence another and final system which will exhaust (finalize) the scope of this prophecy.”¹³

The Protestant Reformers spiritualized the Babylon of Rev. 17 & 18. They believed that Babylon was the Church of Rome headed by the Pope...i.e. Apostate Christendom. In their milieu this was understandable.

But in the light of the O.T. Prophecies and types already studied, a more literal interpretation is surely in keeping with the contexts already considered.

The difficulty of John's vision then, is that some of his descriptions are literal, and some figurative. When we come to chapter 17 the language is plainly symbolical. We are definitely told we are dealing here with a “mystery” and the various symbols are explained for us...”The seven heads are...” (v.9) “And the ten horns which you saw are...” (v.12) “The waters which you saw are...” (v.15) “And the woman whom you saw is...” (v.18). With these keys before us we can unlock the mystery.

“And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me saying, 'Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality’” (Rev. 17:1-2).

That the woman is a city is certain. Verse 18 reads, “And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” The Protestant Fathers used v. 19 to justify their belief that the city is Rome because she sits “on seven mountains”. (v.9) But they forgot that the woman sits on two other objects as well. In v. 1 she sits “on many waters” and in v. 3 she sits on “a scarlet beast.”

Each of these three objects is interpreted for us. The many waters are not literal waters; they “are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues”. (v.15) The scarlet beast is not a literal animal; rather is he the Antichrist. Just so, the seven mountains are not literal hills but are explained as representing “seven kings” (v. 10).

It is thus inconsistent interpretation to understand the mountains literally, when the waters and the Beast and its heads are clearly symbolical. The seven mountains are therefore not necessarily a hidden reference to Rome at all. They are symbols of governmental power.

In the Revelation Babylon is referred to six times (!) and nowhere is there a hint that the name is not meant to be understood literally. We are told that the harlot represents a city. That city is named in Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,21. ***If Babylon is not meant to be understood as a literal city we would have the anomaly of a symbol representing a symbol! It is the harlot who is figurative, not the city she represents.***

Surely then, here is a prediction that there is yet to arise a real, literal city that will be the capital of an idolatrous system that is an abomination before God.

Furthermore, this great harlot who sits on many waters cannot be the Roman Catholic Church as

¹³ Pink, Arthur W., *The Antichrist*, p. 255-256.

the Protestant Fathers held, because v. 5 terms Babylon “the *Mother* of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth.” And there are in Scripture other religions called “abominations” such as the idolatrous systems practised by the Ammorites, the Zidonians, the Moabites. (e.g. I Kings 11:5-7) Since the Papacy had not yet appeared when John wrote, Rome cannot be called the *Mother* of Harlots and Abominations.

We must go back earlier than Roman Catholicism to find the source and spring of such abominations as have covered the earth. We are clearly told where to look for this mystery...the name on the harlot's forehead is, “Babylon the Great.”

And Babylon takes us back to Nimrod and the plain of Shinar and that godless city where the feral stream of idolatry began to pollute the earth after the Flood. Now if this much is clear in the Scriptures why are we told that we are dealing with a mystery here? A mystery is that which we can never know by our own natural reasoning. A mystery is that which God must tell us or we could never guess it. In order to answer this we must look at another O.T. Prophet...

The prophet Zechariah sees a number of visions relating to Israel and Jerusalem. One such is the vision of the “ephah”:

“Then the angel who was speaking with me went out, and said to me, 'Lift up now your eyes, and see what this is, going forth.' And I said, 'What is it?' And he said, 'This is the ephah going forth'. Again he said, 'This is their appearance in all the land (and behold, a lead cover was lifted up); and this is a woman sitting inside the ephah'. Then he said, 'This is Wickedness!' And he threw her down into the middle of the ephah and cast the lead weight on its opening. Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and there two women were coming out with the wind in their wings; and they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heavens. And I said to the angel who was speaking with me, 'Where are they taking the ephah?' Then he said to me, ' To build a house for her in the land of Shinar; and when it is prepared, she will be set there on her own pedestal” (Zech. 5:5-11).

The ephah was a standard measuring pot used by Jewish merchants. It was their largest measure for dry goods, and was sometimes called a bushel. The ephah then, is here a symbol for trade, commerce, business and marketing. On this all commentators agree.

In this vision the prophet sees the angel slide a lead cover off the top of the ephah. Behold, inside is sitting a woman. But who does she represent? Pink suggests that in the light of Zechariah's earlier visions concerning Jerusalem and her people it is reasonable to suggest that she is a symbol for the apostate Jews. Every other commentator that I have been able to read on it however, is clear that the Woman who is “Wickedness” represents “the Satanic world system in its godless *commercial* and *economic* aspects.”¹⁴ So what happens to this woman inside the ephah?

The lid is put back over the ephah and covers the woman. That is, she is Divinely restrained. We are told twice that the ephah 'goes forth' and is carried off to 'the land of Shinar'. (v.11) There, when the time is ready 'she will be set on her own pedestal' inside her own 'house'...no longer hidden in an ephah, but displayed for all the world to see.

According to Pink the vision is saying that the centre of Jewish commerce is going to be transferred from where it was in the prophet's day (Jerusalem) to 'the land of Shinar' which is Babylon. According to others, such as Unger, the wicked woman represents “the removal of godless commercialism first and foremost from 'the land...’” Unger rejects the view that this woman represents the apostate Jewish nation because Zechariah's vision is “*not* intended to portray *the judgment of Israel* but her cleansing as a restored people with wickedness itself purged from her in preparation for kingdom blessing.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Unger, Merrill, F., *Zechariah*, p. 94.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 95.

Most commentators appear to adopt this second interpretation. Either way, all agree that this vision of the wicked woman transported in the ephah to Babylon for the purpose of destruction contains important background information to understanding what is developed in Rev. chapters 17 & 18. For here we are shown that the 'house' which is prepared for the system of commerce is 'Babylon the Great'.

If Pink is correct, the Spirit of God is telling us that in the last days in a revived Babylon that Jewish financiers will be helping to control the wealth of this corrupt system/city. There is a prophecy in Isaiah 31 that may throw some weight behind this thought. Isaiah 31 contains the prophecy about the destruction of the Antichrist by Divine intervention, when “the Assyrian will fall by a sword not of man, and a sword not of man will devour him (v. 8). In the two verses preceeding this obvious reference to the return of Christ in power when He slays the Antichrist by the breath of His mouth, the LORD makes a plea to apostate Israel:

“Return to Him from whom you have deeply defected, O sons of Israel. For in that day every man will cast away his *silver* idols and his *gold* idols, which your hands have made as a sin” (v. 6-7).

This is part of the material that Paul draws on for his famous passage in 2 Thessalonians 2 where the apostle predicts that two clear events precede the Return of Jesus: The apostasy and the revelation of the man of lawlessness. The traditional and popular view is that the apostasy (falling away) is the massive doctrinal departure of the Church from the apostolic faith.

I suggest this interpretation fails to take Paul's source - material into due account. Surely Paul has in mind this Isaiah 31 prophecy where these precise two signs clearly precede the Lord's Second Coming! And there *the LORD appeals to apostate Israel* who have “**deeply defected**” to give up their gold and their silver idols! The great apostasy, the falling away seems to be Israel's end-time love-affair with materialism, gold and silver.

Should more corroboration of this view be sought, we could turn to Daniel chapter two again. When the stone crashes into the feet of the giant colossus, at the end of the seventieth week, at the end of this age, we note that the feet are a mixture of iron and clay. (Dan.2:41 f) And the feet and toes forecast the fourth kingdom in its final form. We know that the iron symbolizes the Gentiles controlling the territory ruled over by the old Roman Empire. But who or what does the clay represent?

In the Hebrew Bible clay is used symbolically for Israel. For instance in Isaiah 64 the faithful in Israel cry to the LORD in the last days, “But now, O LORD, Thou art our Father, We are the clay, and Thou our potter...” Or in Jeremiah 18 the same figure is used. The prophet sees a potter shaping a clay vessel which becomes spoiled. The potter then remakes the clay into another vessel.

The interpretation is given in verse 6, “ 'Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?' declares the LORD. 'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.' ”

Pink adds this interesting bit of information:

“That the Hebrew word for “clay” in these passages is a different one from that employed in Dan. 2 is exactly what a reflecting mind would naturally expect. Isa. 64 and Jer. 18 treat of Israel that shall be restored, whereas Dan. 2 speaks of the *apostate* portion of Israel, irrevocably given up to judgment. In striking accord with this, we may add, that the word used in Isa. 64 and Jer. 18 refers to clay in its native and mouldable stage; but the word in Dan. 2 signifies “*burnt clay*”, which denotes its *final* condition: here, as always, “burning” tells of Divine judgment!”¹⁶

Added to this fact, we also note that many times in the Hebrew Scriptures God calls faithless,

¹⁶ Pink, Arthur W., *The Antichrist*, p. 299.

idolatrous Israel a “Harlot “ which is precisely the figure, the mystery alluded to in the Revelation! (See Jer.2: 20; 3: 6, 8; Ezekiel 16:15; 20: 30; 43: 8-9; Hosea 2: 5, etc.) It seems if this is correct, that the prophets are indicating that the character of the final composite kingdom over which Antichrist reigns is partly Gentile and partly Jewish.

That the Antichrist will preside over an uneasy alliance between the territory of the old Roman Empire and Israel is intimated in Dan. 2:43 for “they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery.” And finally, the “covenant” that the Antichrist makes with Israel to cement this alliance will end by his treachery (Dan. 9:27).

Thus, if Pink is correct, apostate Jews will combine with a revived Gentile Roman Empire under the rule of the Antichrist. But it shall not long cling together. (Dan. 2:43) This explains why in Rev. 17:16 “... the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.” This interpretation has the merit of being consistent with the general background of antipathy between Babylon and Israel already considered in the Hebrew Scriptures. It represents a logical culmination.

If so, who could have guessed this mystery, this astounding prophecy that wealthy and apostate Israel would be in league with the Antichrist in a renewed centre in Babylon!?! In the light of present day developments Pink's interpretation has some merit. Who will be the great men of the earth in the days just prior our Lord's return? Are the prophets telling us that powerful Jewish bankers will be housed in Babylon on a pedestal, as it were, for all the world to see?

If on the other hand, the majority of other commentators are right, the Spirit of God is telling us that in the last days at the very least “that system of organized godlessness, which has dominated society from Nimrod's day on, will collapse...” and that “not until this evil system is removed from Palestine will it become 'the holy land.' and not until it is rooted out of the whole earth in its entirety will God's kingdom come and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”¹⁷

Thus, the Bible predicts that at the close of this age, the world will be ruthlessly controlled by a Satanic economic system, with its administrative headquarters in a literal city, presided over by a ruthless individual, who is the final Nimrod, the final Nebuchadnezzar, “the king of Babylon” who will be energized by all the deceptive power and hatred of Satan himself.

The system, symbolized by the woman in the Ephah established on her own base in the land of Shinar is the great harlot of the Revelation. **The city** is “Babylon the great”. **The king** is “the Assyrian”, “the king of Babylon.” And all the abominations and wickedness that had their beginnings in Nimrod's Babylon, and that flowed out to every place where men settled, will finally regroup and culminate in this rebuilt Babylon. According to all the prophets of both Old and New Testaments “Babylon will be the very last of the powers of the earth compelled to drink of the cup of the divine wrath in the great day of the Lord.”¹⁸

Pat Robertson in his best-selling book *The New World Order* has an insight into the Persian Gulf War of 1990. He says the significance of that war transcends Kuwait and President George Bush's (senior) announcement about a new world order:

“The Gulf War is significant because the action of the United Nations to authorize military action against Iraq was the first time since Babel that all of the nations of the earth acted in concert with one another. I find it fascinating to consider that this union took place against the very place where the nations had been divided, the successor nation to ancient Babel. It is as if some power reached out from Babel, where the first world rebellion against God was quashed, and once again called the nations of the world to unity.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 94-95.

¹⁸ Seiss, *The Apocalypse, an Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, p. 399.

¹⁹ Robertson, Pat, *The New World Order* (Thomas Nelson Inc., 1991) p. 252.

Robertson goes on to note that in the book of Revelation “there is a cryptic reference to ‘four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ Is it possible that at the Tower of Babel, Almighty God not only confused the language and scattered the people, but He bound the demonic powers that had energized the earliest form of anti-God world order?”²⁰

“Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they might kill a third of mankind” (Rev. 9:13-15).

This coming world horror will be energized by demonic spirits. These demons evidently have been restrained and bound by God's decree from sometime in the early dawn of history, until the precise hour, day, month and year for them to be released and wreak havoc at the end of this age.

Whilst any application of such prophecy to specific current world events is only speculative, the very least we can gauge is that the political events in the Middle East today are surely setting the stage for the fulfillment of all that the prophets have spoken. Until this generation, the nations have been separated by language, customs and geography so that there has been no opportunity for the people of the Babylonian humanistic - occultic tradition to unify against the people of the Abrahamic faith. The prophets testify that under the control of the humanistic - occultic branch of humanity a one-world order will emerge just prior to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. World history will return to Babylon.

This word of prophecy is given that we might be protected from the “strong delusion” that is coming. Already there is great deception rampant on the earth. But all who read and understand will know “these signs” must happen *before* the Kingdom of the Messiah comes. We who believe His word look for “these things”, knowing that our redemption in His Kingdom draws near.

APPENDIX

In his book on *The Antichrist*, pp.287-390 Arthur Pink lists some amazing correspondences between Rev. 17 & 18 and the O.T. prophets. Here are some of them:

In Rev. 17: 1 the great harlot “sits on many waters”. In Jer. 51:13 Babylon “dwells on many waters”.

In Rev. 17:2 it says “those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality”. In Jer. 51:7 “Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the Lord, intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are going mad”.

In Rev. 17:4 the great harlot has “a gold cup in her hand”. In Jer. 51:7 Babylon is called “a golden cup in the hand of the Lord”.

In Rev. 17:5 we read, “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes, abundant in treasures...and nations and tongues”. In Jer. 51:13 we read, “O you who dwell on many waters...” speaking of Babylon.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 253.

Rev. 17:16 says Babylon will be burned with fire. (see also Rev. 18:8) So in Jer. 51:38, “Thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'The broad wall of Babylon will be completely razed, and her high gates will be set on fire...’”

Rev. 17:18 says the woman who represents the great city “reigns over the kings of the earth”. In Is. 47:5 Babylon is termed “The queen (or, lady) of kingdoms”.

Rev. 18:2 tells that after its destruction, Babylon becomes a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird”. Is. 13:21 says, “But the desert creatures will lie down there, and their houses will be full of owls, ostriches also will live there, and shaggy goats will frolic there.”

Rev. 18:4 records God's call to His people, “Come out of her my people”. In Jer. 51:45 God also says, “Come forth from her midst, My people”.

In Rev. 18:5 it is said, “Her sins have reached up to heaven”. Likewise in Jer. 51:9 we have, “For her judgment reaches up to heaven”.

Rev. 18:6 “Pay her back even as she has paid”. Jer. 50:15 “Take vengeance on her; as she has done to others, so do to her”.

In Rev. 18:7 Babylon says, “I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning”. In Is. 47:8 we read that Babylon also boasts, “I am, and there is no one besides me. I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know loss of children”.

Rev. 18:8 “In one day her plagues will come”. Is. 47:9 declares, “But these two things shall come upon you suddenly in one day”.

Rev. 18:21 “And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, 'Thus will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer’. Jer. 51:63-64 “And it shall come about when you have finished reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, and say, 'Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again, because of the calamity I am going to bring upon her”.

Rev. 18:23 “And the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer, and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer”. Is. 24:8,10 “The gaiety of tambourines ceases, the noise of revelers stops, the gaiety of the harp ceases...the city of chaos is broken down; every house is shut up so that none may enter, all joy turns to gloom...”

Rev. 18:24 “And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth”. Jer. 51:49 “As indeed Babylon is to fall for the slain of Israel, as also for Babylon the slain of all the earth have fallen”. 4.

Surely these and many more parallels teach that the Babylon of the O.T. Prophecy is to yet be a literal, re-built city in “the land of Nimrod” (Mic. 5:6).