

CONSISTENT BIBLICAL FUTURISM

Part XIV

by Thomas Ice

And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, and upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

—Revelation 17:4–5

Another major viewpoint that was developed during a time when historicism dominated premillennialism is the belief that Babylon in Revelation 17 and 18 is a code word that really refers to Rome, usually the Roman Catholic Church. The point is that futurism is the product of consistent literal interpretation of the biblical text. Thus, if one says that one place name, in this case Babylon, is a code word for Rome or the Roman Catholic Church, whether they like it or not, such a view is an allegorical or non-literal hermeneutic. The biblical text in Revelation says Babylon and to take it to refer to anything other than what it says is not consistent with literal interpretation. If it refers to Babylon, then it has to be a future reference.

BABYLON IN SCRIPTURE

Babylon is introduced early in history, shortly after the flood, as the city where cooperate rebellion against God and the kingdom of man began after the flood (Gen. 10:10; 11:9). The influences of Babylon are still with us today throughout the world and are growing stronger each day. Babylon is used 296 times in the Bible¹, all but the last 11 occur in the Old Testament. No Evangelical doubts that Babylon in the Bible refers to the city of Babylon in history, except some, when they come to 1 Peter 5:13 and the six references in the Book of Revelation (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). Most futurists today believe that Babylon means Babylon and did not somehow change to Rome (Jerusalem for preterists) during the last few verses out of almost 300 occurrences throughout the Bible. Further, we see that Babylon refers to the city on the Euphrates River is strengthened by the many allusions to Old Testament prophetic passages in Revelation 17 and 18.

The most frequent passage alluded to in Revelation 17 and 18 is Jeremiah 50 and 51 (Rev. 17:1, 4; 18:2–4, 6, 8–9, 20–21).² Another important passage that is referenced in Revelation 17 and 18 is Isaiah 13–24 (Rev. 17:2; 18:2, 10, 22).³ These Old Testament passages provide extended prophecy about the second most referenced city in the Bible, second only to Jerusalem. They teach that the city of Babylon will be totally destroyed at a point in history. For example: "And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation; nor will the Arab pitch *his* tent there, nor will shepherds make *their flocks* lie down there" (Isa. 13:19–20). The Isaiah passage describes a complete destruction of Babylon and that did not happen when the Medes took the city with virtually no bloodshed or destruction, as noted in Daniel 5:30–31.

Historicists have long taught that the prophecies of the Old Testament relating to Babylon have been fulfilled in the sixth century B.C. through the Medio-Persian Empire

that conquered Babylon. When futurism was revived around the turn of the nineteenth century, things began to shift away from the historicist view that Babylon was the Roman Catholic Church. The reason historicists held such a view is because of their basic belief that the church age of the last two thousand years is equal to the tribulation and prophetically mapped out by the symbols and prophecies of Revelation 6–18. Thus, since Babylon has been pictured in Revelation as the source of evil and opposition to God and the gospel, it made sense when Martin Luther taught that the Beast of Revelation and Babylon were Roman Catholicism. It is true that Rome has been responsible for killing millions of true Christians down through the centuries, but historicism is a greatly flawed approach to the Book of Revelation.

THE FUTURIST VIEW

Since Babylon means Babylon throughout the Old Testament and in the Book of Revelation, God's purpose for specifically focusing on its final destruction in Revelation is because the last book of the biblical canon brings to a satisfactory conclusion the many problems that arose in Genesis, especially the first eleven chapters. Babylon, the birthplace of cooperate rebellion against God is raised up during the tribulation in order for the Lord to judge her once and for all. The influence of Babylon in the areas of false religion, false coercive global government, and enslaving economics are all exposed and judged as part of the tribulation. Such cooperate characteristics all had their nativity shortly after the flood in Babylon, on the plains of Shinar. Since God is judging those cooperate human activities that began at Babylon and have been controlled and restrain throughout history, they break forth into full maturity under the antichrist with his capitol in Babylon, literal Babylon.

Zechariah 5:5–11, in conjunction with Revelation 17 and 18 teaches, "that in God's providence, mankind's wickedness, commerce, and religion will once again return to the land of Babylon. . . . Zechariah's vision appears to predict a futuristic, rebuilt Babylon. Revelation 17—18 records the circumstances by which this vision will be fulfilled."⁴ After the flood Nimrod (Gen. 10:8–11) lead a rebellion against God and built a tower and city called Babylon. During the tribulation, the Beast or antichrist will temporarily succeed in leading a global rebellion against the God of creation and His Son, Jesus. Just like in Genesis, the final Babylon will be totally destroyed and wiped off the face of the earth. In Genesis, God responded to Babylon by judging it and called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans (Southern Babylon) in order to start His Kingdom or counter culture. In Revelation, God judges the global capitol of cooperate rebellion and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ ushers in His millennial reign.

MYSTERY BABYLON

Still some insist that so-called "mystery Babylon" is a reference to the Roman Catholic Church (Jerusalem for preterists) and her influence throughout the current church age. One clear problem with this view is that the biblical text in Revelation 17:5 does not say "mystery Babylon," which could allow for a hidden or spiritual reference to another entity behind literal Babylon. Instead, the text says, "and upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, 'BABYLON THE GREAT.'" Robert Govett is an example of an otherwise futurist interpreter who takes a Roman view. "The Holy Spirit thought not good to say openly, it is Rome. . . . He gives them to Rome a mystic name."⁵

Govett's view is not possible grammatically. Futurist commentator Robert Thomas notes that the Greek word for "mystery" "is a noun, not an adverb."⁶ Nor is "mystery"

an adjective, the form it would have to take in order to function as a modifier of the noun "Babylon." A Greek lexicon says the Greek noun "mystery" in the New Testament means, "the unmanifested or private counsel of God, (*God's*) *secret*, the secret thoughts, plans, and dispensations of God."⁷ Further, the syntax of the passage makes best sense when "mystery" is seen in apposition to "Babylon" and would have the following sense, "a name written, which is a mystery."⁸

What is the mystery or secret that is about to be revealed? The latter half of 17:5 tells us: "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." "Babylon the great" is a reference to the famous or renown city spoken of in Genesis 10 and throughout the Old Testament. "The mother of harlots" refers to the origin or source of something. This is why Genesis 10 and 11 record the events of postdiluvian Babylon, because it is the source where cooperate unfaithfulness to God originated. "The abominations of the earth" in the Greek text is linked with the phrase "the mother of." This is true because there is a single Greek article modifying the entire clause, connected with the conjunction "and." This the third appellation would have the sense of "the mother of the abominations of the earth." Thomas says that this phrase "makes her the progenitress of everything anti-Christian. This includes all false religions, not just those that are Christian in name only, but also everything that is pagan and idolatrous under Satan's control." Again, Thomas sums-up Babylon: "It is a city, but it is also a vast religious system that stands for everything God does not tolerate."⁹

The mystery or secret is stated clearly for the reader in Revelation 17:18 as follows: "And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth." Thus, Babylon is clearly a city that will be built in modern day Iraq on the Euphrates River that will wield a global influence over the kingdoms of this world. So Babylon means Babylon! Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, 9.4.1.

² Based upon Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "Appendix XI: Old Testament References in the Book of Revelation," in *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), p. 806.

³ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 806.

⁴ Andy Woods and Tim LaHaye, "Babylon" in Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), p. 43.

⁵ Robert Govett, *Govett on Revelation*, IV vols. (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Company, [1861] 1981), Vol. IV, p. 28.

⁶ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 289.

⁷ W. F. Arndt, F. W. Danker, F. W. Gingrich, & Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 663.

⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, p. 289.

⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, p. 290.