folds there." Such a total desolation of Babylon seems to be well beyond what Persia did to them, and may take us forward to something that will happen in the coming tribulation period.

Babylon at the time of Christ was greatly diminished in importance. Other than historical references, it is mentioned only in I Peter 5:13. "**She who is in Babylon, elect together with *you,* greets you; and *so does* Mark my son.**" Babylon was so unimportant at that time that some have speculated Peter used Babylon as a code name for Rome, but there is no Biblical reason to think this. It is possible Peter was in Babylon when he wrote I Peter. We do know that there were many Jews scattered in that eastern part of the Roman Empire, which later was split off from Rome and became the Byzantine Empire.

Though Babylon did not figure much in the history of the New Testament, it has a prominent part in the tribulation period as described in the book of Revelation. Babylon there is identified in Revelation 17:5 as "**Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth**." Harlots are often used as a symbol for pagan idolators, and this probably refers back to the origin of all post-flood paganism at the tower of Babel in Genesis. This has led some to suggest that Babylon in Revelation merely symbolizes false, ungodly, pagan religion, and does not refer to the actual city of Babylon at all. We would suspect, however, that both the symbolic and the literal meanings are true. There is no reason why the rebels against God's kingdom in the future would not center their false religion at the original locus of apostacy against the true God.

The final destruction of Babylon is recorded in Revelation 18-19. Revelation 18:2 describes it, "**And he** [a heavenly angel] **cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, '<u>Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!</u>**'" Thus the center of mankind's apostacy against God in both government and religion is at last done away with for good. This is far harsher treatment than either Egypt, a Biblical symbol for the world, or even Sodom, a symbol for wickedness, will at last receive. There is grace for these other places, but none for Babylon. Thus we realize the great wrath and punishment God has stored up against all rebellion and paganism. We should learn a lesson from this, and stay far away from all foul things that derive their origin from ancient Babylon, for many such things in government and religion exist in this world even today.

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Babylon: Its Rise and Final Fall

By Nathan C. Johnson

The name Babylon refers to an ancient city in the Middle East located in what is modern-day Iraq. Our Biblical name for that ancient city comes from the Greek. The Hebrew word is Babel, pronounced baw-VEL, and means *confusion*. Per the *Companion Bible*, in Semitic Babylonian the word is Bab-ili, which means *the gate of the god*. This city is first mentioned in Genesis 10:10, which says of the mighty hunter Nimrod, **And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar** (*New King James Version* throughout). Shinar appears to be the ancient name of the land of Babylon.

The early history of the city is recorded for us in Genesis 11. The post-flood earth was probably a difficult place in which to survive, and it would have been much easier for those ancient people to have lived as a unified society rather than in many small, independent tribes. Yet this was contrary to God's command to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth," Genesis 9:1. In Genesis 11:4, we read, **And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.**"

While there has been some disagreement about the meaning of this tower, the *Companion Bible* argues that there should be no ellipsis in the phrase "whose top *is* in the heavens." (Notice that the word *is* in the *New King James* above appears in italics, indicating it is a word supplied as an ellipsis by the translators.) Instead, Bullinger suggests it should read, "'and its top with the heavens,' i.e. with the Zodiac depicted on it, as in ancient temples of Denderah and Esneh in Egypt." The point of the city was to rebel against the true God by setting up a new, universal religion around the worship of the heavens. They tried to unify around this tower, and Jehovah could not leave their rebellion unanswered. Genesis 11:5 continues the story. **But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6. And the LORD said, "Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. 7. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8. So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building**

the city. Jehovah caused mass confusion, and so Babel means *confusion* in Hebrew, rather than *the gate of the god* in the original Babylonian.

Babylon disappears from the history of the Bible from this point until the conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel by the nation of Assyria. Assyria migrated some of the people of Babylon into the conquered territory of northern Israel. Yet the powerful leaders of Babylon were discontent to be under the sway of Assyria, and when God delivered the southern kingdom of Israel from the Assyrian invaders, those in Babylon heard of it and apparently were impressed. We read in II Kings 20:12, **At that time Berodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick.** King Hezekiah was influenced by the present, and without consulting Jehovah, he showed the Babylonian representatives all of his treasuries and all of his defenses. He apparently felt no threat from this far-away city. Yet he ought not to have boasted in his defenses, rather than in Jehovah, Who was the One Who had truly delivered Judah. II Chronicles 32:25 sums up Jehovah's assessment of his actions: **But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor *shown* him, for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem.** Hezekiah humbled himself when confronted by the prophet Isaiah, and so wrath did not come on Judah at that time. Yet Isaiah assured him by the word of the LORD, "**17.** '**Behold, the days are coming when all that *is* in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,**' **says the LORD. 18.** '**And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.**'"

This prophecy did not take long to fulfill. Hezekiah's son and heir King Manasseh was very wicked, and Jehovah sent the king of Assyria against him, who subsequently had him carried away to Babylon. When he sought Jehovah in his trouble and humbled himself before Him, God heard him and brought him back to Jerusalem. Generations passed, and Babylon, with the aid of the Medes and Persians, conquered Assyria and its capital city Nineveh and took over the empire that Assyria had built. In the days of King Jehoiakim, Hezekiah's great-great grandson, we read in II Kings 24:1, **In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his vassal *for* three years.** At this time the best and brightest of the nobility of Judah were carried away into Babylon, and this included Daniel and his three friends, as we learn in Daniel 1. They were made eunuchs in the palace of the King of Babylon, as Isaiah had prophesied.

There are many interesting statements made about this Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. Three times in the book of Jeremiah, Jehovah calls Nebuchadnezzar His servant, the most powerful of which is Jeremiah 27:6, "**And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him.**" Jeremiah's statement is confirmed by the prophet Daniel, in Daniel 2:37-38. "**You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all.**" These words may not have their complete fulfillment in Nebuchadnezzar's reign in the past, but may refer to a high position he will hold in the kingdom of God to come.

Judah was subjected, but they were not willing to remain as a vassal country under Babylon. They rebelled, and in the days of Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim's son, we read in II Kings 24:10, **At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged.** The siege was successful, and Nebuchadnezzar carried away the whole army, as well as the craftsmen and smiths, so only the poor and uneducated were left. The prophet Ezekiel was one of those carried away to Babylon in this captivity. Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin to Babylon also, and set up Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah as vassal king in his place, renaming him Zedekiah.

The hope of King Nebuchadnezzar was probably that the poorest sort of the people he had left in the land would be too ignorant and powerless to rebel against him, including the bumbling king Zedekiah, whose reign was largely a failure. Sadly, the people he left in charge seemed too unintelligent to realize their own lack of ability, and they again rebelled against Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar was probably not used to having to conquer the same people three times. He came up and conquered Jerusalem again, this time all but wiping them out, and carrying away only about a thousand Jews into captivity.

Yet the kingdom of Babylon was starting to erode as the kingdom of Assyria had done before it. At the same time their allies, the kings of Media and Persia, were gaining power. In the days of Nebuchadnezzar's descendant Belshazzar, these allies finally decided they had had enough of Babylon's rule. They sent their armies against the city, and as we learn in Daniel 5:30-31, they conquered it in one night. This turned out to be a fortuitous event for Israel, for Darius' son Cyrus, who Bullinger suggests was the son of Darius and his queen Esther, herself a Jewess, allowed the people of Judah to return to their land and rebuild their temple.

Besides the historical books, the prophets are replete with references to Babylon. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all predicted the conquest of Judah by that powerful nation. However, they also predicted the ultimate punishment and destruction of that city. Yet some of their predictions were so dramatic that they do not seem to have been fulfilled in Babylon's destruction in the past. For example, consider Isaiah 13:19-20. "**And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, The beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, Nor will it be settled from generation to generation; Nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, Nor will the shepherds make their sheep-**