

**A Proposal for (Future)
Apostate Jerusalem's Role in a
Progressive Dispensational
Eschatology**

Another Look at Revelation 17-18

Dr. J. Paul Tanner

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J. Paul Tanner, ThM, PhD
drtannerbeeworld.org

ABSTRACT

Among the interpretative problems pertaining to the book of Revelation, the identification of the harlot, Babylon the great, in Revelation 17–18 stands as one of the most significant. Suggestions range from preterist views identifying Babylon as either first-century Jerusalem or Rome, the historicist view of Babylon as the Roman Catholic Church, idealist views, and numerous futurist views fulfilled in the Great Tribulation. The latter would include both symbolic views (e.g., ungodly civilization in opposition to God's people) and literal views of a future city related to the Antichrist. Dispensational interpreters have upheld the futurist view, usually of a literal rebuilt city of Babylon or a combination of a religious system and a literal city (so Walvoord).

In this paper, I hope to show that Babylon the great is apostate Jerusalem (and Judaism) in the time of the Great Tribulation, and that such a position is consistent with a progressive dispensational eschatology. In our Lord's Olivet Discourse, Luke includes God's judgment on apostate Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Lk 21:20-24), seemingly to prefigure a greater end-times judgment on Jerusalem inaugurated with the abomination of desolation. Jerusalem as the harlot, then, looks at that unsaved part of Israel that is duped into entering into league with the Antichrist, only to find herself betrayed in the final analysis and a victim of the Antichrist's effort to annihilate Jerusalem.

This paper has two objectives. The first is to present the evidence in support of the theory of Babylon the great as apostate Judaism in the Great Tribulation with its focal point being the city of Jerusalem. The second is to show how this interpretation sheds valuable light on other prophetic portions of Scripture, such as Dan 9:27, the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24), and the man of lawlessness in 2 Thess 2.

INTRODUCTION

Progressive dispensationalism, in the opinion of this writer, has brought about a healthy reevaluation of dispensational eschatology, especially concerning the inauguration of the kingdom of God and the relationship of the Church and Israel. Despite the criticism it has received from some *Ryrian* dispensationalists, to its credit progressive dispensationalism has clearly maintained a premillennial eschatology and a commitment to seeing a future fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant with ethnic Israel, including a regathering of believing Israel to the land of promise following Christ's *parousia*. One significant interpretative matter that needs

further evaluation is a correct identification of the “harlot” of Rev 17–18 and the bearing this has on our understanding of the book of Revelation as a whole and broader eschatological concerns in general.

Within the development of dispensational theology over the past two hundred years, there has been no single interpretation of the harlot of Rev 17–18. Early on (ca. 1867), Darby understood the beast of Rev 13 to be a revived Roman Empire, with the second beast (false prophet) being the Antichrist.¹ Babylon of Rev 17 represented a “religious system,” apparently for him the Roman Catholic Church with its popery.² In the *Scofield Reference Bible* (orig. pub. 1909; rev. 1917), the harlot of Rev 17 is “apostate Christianity” headed up under the Papacy, though Babylon as a city is clearly *not* rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates.³ Lewis S. Chafer, founder of Dallas Seminary, argued that the first beast of Rev 13 will be the revived Roman Empire with its final emperor, whereas the second beast of Rev 13 (the false prophet) will be the Antichrist.⁴ Similar to Darby and Scofield, Chafer saw the harlot of Rev 17 as “professing Christendom” united under the authority of Rome (354).⁵ Chafer’s successor at Dallas, John F. Walvoord, differed slightly from his predecessors. He understood the first beast of Rev 13 as the Antichrist, rather than the second beast.⁶ As for Babylon in Rev 17–18, he advocated a dual view, distinguishing Babylon of Rev 17 from that of Rev 18. The harlot of Rev 17 he took to be “apostate Christianity” without tying it so directly with Roman Catholicism. Rather, “Babylon is the title that covers all false religions that claim to be Christian in their content.”⁷ He understood Babylon in Rev 18, however, as a political entity involving a literal city: “When all the evidence is studied, the conclusion seems to point to Babylon being rebuilt as the capital of the world empire in the end time rather than to Rome in Italy.”⁸ For him, Babylon of Rev 17 is probably destroyed at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, whereas Babylon of Rev 18 is destroyed “just prior to the second coming of Christ.”⁹ Quite a number of subsequent dispensationalists—though not all—have argued that Babylon on the Euphrates will be rebuilt as the capital of the Antichrist’s empire (this will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper).

Given that dispensationalism has always shown some degree of latitude in regard to the identity of the two beasts in Rev 13 and the harlot of Rev 17, it should not be thought *out of order* that a fresh interpretation (still a futurist view) should now be suggested, one that I believe rests upon a solid literal historical-grammatical hermeneutic. The issue is not a mute one, and it is of the upmost importance that we get this right. How one understands the Beast (Rev 13:1-10) and the

¹ J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 5:539-40.

² *Ibid.*, 5:549.

³ *Scofield Reference Bible*. See notes under “Babylon” at Isa 13:1.

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:351.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4:354.

⁶ J. F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, A Commentary*, 211.

⁷ J. F. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 604.

⁸ J. F. Walvoord, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2:973.

⁹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, A Commentary*, 259. In his commentary (262-63), Walvoord discusses the various options of a literal city, but gives preference to literal Babylon being rebuilt.

harlot Babylon of Rev 17–18 determines to a great extent how one interprets the book as a whole. Biguzzi rightly exclaims: “The interpretation of the Babylon spoken of in Rev 16–18 conditions the reading of the whole book of Revelation itself, since Babylon, along with the Beast rising from the sea, is the target of John’s attacks.”¹⁰

The view advocated in this paper is that the first beast of Rev 13:1-10 is the Antichrist, and the harlot of Rev 17–18 is Jerusalem . . . but Jerusalem (and apostate Judaism) of the future Tribulation, not Jerusalem of the first century A.D. I will also attempt to show that such a view is quite in keeping with what dispensationalism has always believed about a future for ethnic Israel (e.g., Rom 11), the Lord’s “salvation” of her at the climax of the Tribulation, and her regathering to the land of promise. The Old Testament, for instance, anticipated that Jerusalem and the Jewish people would be primary actors in the Great Tribulation. In Jer 30:7 this period is called “the time of Jacob’s distress” (עַת־צָרָה הַיָּא לְיַעֲקֹב), and God forewarns them, “I will not destroy you completely, but I will chasten you justly and will by no means leave you unpunished” (Jer 30:11). Hence, in light of this OT prophecy, we might have expected Revelation to *say more* about how God would accomplish this decreed chastisement.

REVIEW OF PRIMARY INTERPRETATIVE VIEWS

Before defending the thesis of this paper, I will first survey the primary interpretations that have been suggested for the harlot Babylon of Rev 17–18. The first to be considered will be the preterist views that the prophecy has already been fulfilled in the first century A.D. or within the first few centuries of early church history.

Preterist View 1: Ancient Rome

That the Roman Empire might be equated with harlot Babylon is not too surprising, since Rome ruled the ancient world at the time of John’s writing. Several of the early church fathers commented on the Antichrist to come, including Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Victorinus. These early church fathers favored a literal hermeneutic, were chiliasts (premillennial) but post-trib, and typically regarded the beast of Rev 13:1-10 to refer to the coming Antichrist who would be a Jewish false Messiah.

Irenaeus (writing ca. A.D. 180) was not clear in identifying the harlot, but seems to suggest that it is the kingdom that the Antichrist rules over. For him, the Antichrist would be a Jewish false Messiah, for in reflecting on 2 Thess 2, he indicated that the Antichrist will sit in the temple “to

¹⁰ G. Biguzzi, “Is the Babylon of Revelation Rome or Jerusalem?” 371.

show himself as Christ.”¹¹ Tertullian (writing ca. A.D. 203) was more explicit, indicating that “Babylon . . . is a figure of the city of Rome.”¹²

Hippolytus (writing ca. A.D. 202-230) wrote a *Commentary on the Prophet Daniel* as well as commenting abundantly on prophetic matters in his *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*. He understood the first beast of Rev 13 to be the Roman Empire, though he (like Irenaeus) expected the Antichrist to be a Jewish false Messiah arising from the tribe of Dan.¹³ The Antichrist, the beast from the abyss, would also be the “little horn” of Dan 7.¹⁴ He wrote,

. . . the Antichrist, who shall be shameless, a war-maker, and despot, who, exalting himself above all kings and above every god, shall build the city of Jerusalem, and restore the sanctuary. Him the impious will worship as God, and will bend to him the knee, thinking him to be the Christ.¹⁵

Although Hippolytus makes no clear-cut statement identifying the harlot Babylon, one of his comments seems to imply that it is the Roman Empire (responsible for John’s exile to Patmos): “Tell me, blessed John, apostle and disciple of the Lord, what didst thou see and hear concerning Babylon? Arise, and speak; for it sent thee also into banishment.”¹⁶

Victorinus (d. ca. A.D. 303 or 304), bishop of Pettau in present-day Slovenia, was the author of the earliest continuous or consecutive commentary on the Apocalypse now extant, and died a martyr under Diocletian. In his commentary, he identified harlot Babylon as “the Roman state.”¹⁷ Victorinus seems to imply that the Antichrist/beast will be one of the Roman emperors who will seek to have the Jews receive him as their Christ (“he shall so conduct himself as to be called Christ by them”).¹⁸

In more modern times, several scholars have taken the “ancient Rome” position. This viewpoint is found in R. H. Charles in his ICC commentary on Revelation, David E. Aune in the Word commentary, and by Richard Bauckham (“The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18”). Charles and Aune relate the beast to Nero returning (the Nero *redivivus* legend). Aune asserts,

¹¹ *Against Heresies*, 5.25.2. In 5.25.4 Irenaeus suggests that Jesus’ prediction in Jn 5:24 (“another will come in his own name, and you will receive him”) refers to the Jewish Antichrist. See also 5.27.2 and 5:30.2 (the Antichrist will be from the tribe of Dan).

¹² *Against Marcion*, 3.13.

¹³ *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 6 and 14

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28 and 47.

¹⁵ Hippolytus of Rome. “Fragments from Commentaries on Various Books of Scripture,” in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe; trans. S. D. F. Salmond (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886) 5:184.

¹⁶ *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 36. Hippolytus, however, is a bit confusing. Based on his comments in *Treatise* 30, one could interpret him to mean that the harlot Babylon is Jerusalem.

¹⁷ Victorinus of Pettau. *Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John*. In *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies*, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe; trans. R. E. Wallis (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886) 7:352.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7:358.

“The Nero legend anticipated the return of Nero from the east with a great army that would destroy his enemies in Rome” (*Revelation 17–22*, 3:961).

For Bauckham, the harlot image represents “Roman civilization, as a corrupting influence, rid(ing) on the back of Roman military power” (343). He draws upon a number of sources to focus on the lament for the destruction of Babylon (Rev 18:9-19) and show how it accurately reflects, and simultaneously criticizes, the economic life of imperial Rome. For some, the “downfall” of the harlot would come with the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313 which brought about an agreement to treat Christians benevolently within the Roman Empire.

Preterist View 2: Ancient Jerusalem

A number of scholars take a preterist view, but claim that ancient Jerusalem—rather than Rome—is in view.¹⁹ The destruction of the city, then, is Jerusalem’s destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70. This view is dependent on an early dating of the book prior to A.D. 70, a minority position.²⁰ The ancient Jerusalem view was popularized by J. Stuart Russell (1878) and is favored by “reconstructionists” (Dominion Theology) such as Kenneth L. Gentry, David Chilton and Gary DeMar. Others taking the “preterist” position of Jerusalem include Milton S. Terry, R. C. Sproul, Hank Hanegraaff, and J. M. Ford of the Anchor Bible commentary. Kenneth L. Gentry argues this position in the Zondervan counterpoints volume, *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*.

Historicist View

The Reformers (e.g., Luther, Calvin, Knox) generally saw the beast as the papacy and consequently interpreted Rev 17 in terms of ecclesiastical religion focused in the Roman Catholic Church (= the Harlot).²¹ The call in Rev 18:4 (“come out of her, My people”) gave justification to the Reformation. The fall of Babylon supposedly looked at the future overthrow of the papal system of religion and government. Although this view has few adherents today, it has been held by several scholars subsequent to the Reformation (e.g., Jonathan Edwards and Edward B. Elliott). Elliott’s four volume *Horae Apocalypticæ*, which ran through five editions during 1844-1862, is one of the most exhaustive treatments on the book of Revelation.

¹⁹ According to Biguzzi, (“Is the Babylon of Revelation Rome or Jerusalem?” 375), “The first to see Jerusalem in Rev’s Babylon were the French Jesuit J. Hardouin (1646-1729) and the French Calvinist F. Abauzit (1679-1767).” This position was made famous by J. Stuart Russell (*The Parousia*, 1878), which has greatly influenced a number of modern preterist advocates.

²⁰ This position was defended by K. Gentry (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, 1998) and D. Ragan Ewing, “The Identification Of Babylon The Harlot In The Book of Revelation” (ThM thesis, Dallas Seminary, 2002). For a rebuttal, see Mark Hitchcock, “A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005).

²¹ The idea of the Beast being the Pope and the harlot the Roman Catholic Church did not originate with the Reformers themselves. These ideas were previously developed by the followers of Joachim of Fiore (d. A.D. 1202). Beckwith (*The Apocalypse of John*, 329) explains, “With the followers of Joachim and with all who set themselves against the corruption of the Church and the hierarchy it became an axiom that the Pope was the Beast, the Antichrist, and that papal Rome, or the Roman Church, was the woman sitting on the scarlet-colored beast.”

Idealist View 1

The idealist view of Revelation is generally not concerned with a future fulfillment of the details of the book, but treats the symbolism as principles or lessons for all ages. Accordingly, the tendency of this view is to spiritualize most everything. An example of this view is found in William Hendriksen's *More Than Conquerors* (1940, 1967) and Sam Hamstra's "An Idealist View of Revelation" (*Four Views*, 1998). Hendriksen's other work, *Israel in Prophecy*, is a classic statement for replacement theology. According to Hamstra, Babylon can be understood in one of two ways:

- (a) Babylon represents the worldly city or center of wickedness that allures, tempts, and draws people away from God (Ezek. 27–28). Babylon is the pleasure-mad arrogant world, with all its seductive luxuries and pleasures, with its anti-Christian philosophy and culture, and with its teeming multitudes that have forsaken God and have lived according to the lusts of the flesh and the desires of the mind. . . .
- (b) . . . Babylon represents the world in the church, the unspiritual or earthly element that has infiltrated the body of Christ, or even a false church like Jerusalem.²²

There are other slight variations of the idealist view (see following).

Idealist View 2: Jerusalem Preterist View

In this variation of the idealist view, the apostle John is said to have had ancient Jerusalem in mind, but this is considered an archetype for apostate Christianity, the degenerate church. The Scottish theologian, William Milligan, *Commentary on the Revelation* (1883), is representative of this position.

Idealist View 3: Rome Preterist View

More recently G. K. Beale, in the esteemed New International Greek Testament Commentary (*The Book of Revelation*, 1999), has espoused an idealist view based on an understanding that ancient Rome is in view. For Beale (843, 850), the harlot Babylon represents the ungodly pagan world system—with both its economic and political aspects—in alliance with the state.²³ Supposedly both the apostate church and unbelieving Israel cooperate in this (886).

Futurist-Symbolic View 1: Ancient Rome as a Futurist Symbol

The category of "Futurist-Symbolic" takes the book of Revelation to have a generally futurist fulfillment. Details such as harlot Babylon, however, are not interpreted literally but as a

²² Hamstra, "An Idealist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, 117.

²³ Beale's "idealist" twist to his view is evident from his statement on page 850: "Therefore, Babylon is the prevailing economic-religious system in alliance with the state and its related authorities and existing throughout the ages." Then again (888) he states, "She includes the entire evil economic-religious system of the world throughout history."

symbolic entity. There are two variations to this view, the first understanding that ancient Rome is in view and the second that it is *not* in view. In either case, the fulfillment is in the future.

Futurist-Symbolic View 1 is represented by Robert Mounce in the NICNT series (2nd ed., 1997). For Mounce the beast of Rev 13 is the Antichrist, yet not an individual:

There is little doubt that for John the beast was the Roman Empire as persecutor of the church. . . . The beast is that spirit of imperial power which claims a religious sanction for its gross injustices. Yet the beast is more than the Roman Empire. . . . its complete fulfillment awaits the final denouement of human history. The beast has always been, and will be in a final intensified manifestation, the deification of secular authority.²⁴

Mounce attempts to take Babylon as a reference to both ancient Rome as well as symbolically to future opposition to the church. First, Babylon is an allusion to Rome as the center of satanic power and oppression against the fledgling church (303). He understands the "seven mountains" as a reference to Rome, the city built on seven hills (315). But elsewhere (311) Mounce claims that "it is that great system of godlessness that leads people away from the worship of God and to their own destruction Specifically she is Rome, who, like Babylon of old, has gained a worldwide reputation for luxury, corruption, and power." Hence, the harlot is Rome, but it stands for "a dominant world system based on seduction for personal gain over against the righteous demands of a persecuted minority," and at the close of history as "the final and intensified expression of worldly power" (308).

Futurist-Symbolic View 2: Ancient Rome Not in View

There are other scholars who take a futurist-symbolic approach, but argue that John does *not* have ancient Rome in view (e.g., George Ladd, Alan Johnson, and Merrill Tenney). Ladd (*A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 1972) understands Babylon as the symbol of human civilization with all its pomp and circumstance organized in opposition to God (221). The Harlot is then the final manifestation of the total history of godless nations (222). The "seven mountains" are not a reference to Rome, but seven empires with which the woman has formed an adulteress connection (227).

Alan Johnson (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., 2006) thinks Babylon has multiple equivalents and is better "understood as the archetypal head of all entrenched worldly resistance to God," and "the total culture of the world apart from God" (736). Johnson rejects the "seven mountains" as a reference to Rome, but takes them as a symbol for the fullness of blasphemy and evil (742). For him, the harlot reflects the common characteristics of many harlot-city societies

²⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 246. He is also forced to spiritualize the ten kings: "Whatever the immediate historical allusion, the complete fulfillment of the imagery awaits the final curtain of the human drama. Ultimately the ten kings are 'purely eschatological figures representing the totality of the powers of all nations on the earth which are to be made subservient to Antichrist.' The number ten is symbolic and indicates completeness" (319).

with their ungodly ways and attitudes. He states, “Amazingly, all the harlot-city societies mentioned in Scripture have certain common characteristics also reflected in John’s description of the great Babylon, in which he merges the descriptions of ancient Babylon, Tyre, and Jerusalem into one great composite” (738).

M. Tenney’s view (*Interpreting Revelation*, 1957) is similar: “... the symbolism of chapters 17 and 18 which must interpret this cryptic allusion in chapter 14 transcends the immediate empire of Rome. It stands for the entire world system of man’s rulership, the acme of a prosperous but faithless culture” (79; cf. 86). But he is open to the idea that it may involve a very real place, “a great world metropolis, the seat of the final world empire” (86), though neither Rome nor Babylon.

Futurist-Literal View 1: Ancient Rome as the Basis of the Imagery

Quite a number of scholars take a *more literal* futurist view of the Beast and harlot Babylon, though with slight differences in what they understand Babylon to be. View 1, represented primarily by Grant R. Osborne (*Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary, 2002) understands the Beast as the Antichrist (495) and the harlot Babylon “pictures Rome as leading the world into immorality and religious apostasy/idolatry” (608). By this he means not ancient Rome but Rome’s equivalent, namely, the future empire of the Antichrist. He states, “The ‘mystery’ then is ‘Babylon the Great, telling us specifically that she represents the empire of the beast’ (612). Yet Babylon is more than just an empire, for he states elsewhere that “the woman represents the blasphemous religion that seduces the nations and the economic system that draws them into its earthly luxury” (610). Beasley-Murray (*Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary, 1974) and Paige Patterson (*Revelation*, The New American Commentary, 2012) take a similar view, and Patterson emphasizes that the harlot is a religious system.

Futurist-Literal View 2: Babylon Represents Two Entities

John Walvoord, former president of Dallas Seminary, takes primarily a literal view of Babylon, although he distinguishes Babylon of chapter 17 from Babylon of chapter 18.²⁵ For him, the

²⁵ Walvoord, as one of the chief representatives of dispensational theology, built on the work of dispensationalists before him. John Darby (ca. 1867) understood the beast of Rev 13 to be a revived Roman Empire (*Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 5:539-40), with the second beast (the false prophet) being the Antichrist (540). He saw Babylon representing a “religious system,” which apparently for him was primarily the Roman Catholic Church with its popery (549). In the train of Darby, C. I. Scofield edited the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909, 1917) which became the most influential publication for dispensational premillennialism. In his reference notes, Scofield advocated that the harlot of Rev 17 was apostate Christianity (headed up under the papacy) and distinguished religious Babylon from political Babylon. Following Scofield, Clarence Larkin (*The Book of Revelation*, 1919) wrote that the first beast of Rev 13—not the second beast—was the Antichrist (103). Like Scofield, he made a distinction between Babylon of Rev 17 and that of Rev 18. The first represented the apostate church, “the Papal Church” (152-53), while the second would be a literal rebuilt Babylon (155). Writing in 1948, Lewis S. Chafer, founder of Dallas Seminary and Walvoord’s predecessor, equated the first beast of Rev 13 as the revived Roman Empire with its final emperor, and the second beast of Rev 13 as the Antichrist (*Systematic Theology*, 4:351). Chafer saw the harlot of Rev 17 as “professing Christendom” united under the authority of Rome (354). So, the

former depicts a religious system, including the apostate church that is destroyed sometime prior to the middle of Daniel's 70th week.²⁶ Babylon of chapter 18, however, is a literal city that will be destroyed at the end of the Tribulation. In fact, it will be literal rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates River: "When all the evidence is studied, the conclusion seems to point to Babylon being rebuilt as the capital of the world empire in the end time rather than to Rome in Italy."²⁷

Other dispensationalists at Dallas Seminary took a similar view to Walvoord on Babylon of Rev 17. J. Dwight Pentecost (*Things to Come*, 369), however, showed more restraint about Babylon of Rev 18, taking it as the unspecified "seat of the Beast's power." Charles C. Ryrie doubted that Babylon of Rev 18 would be a literal rebuilt Babylon.²⁸

Futurist-Literal View 3: Babylon Refers to Literal Rebuilt Babylon

Several commentators have taken the reference to Babylon as a literal city. Other aspects of the *total picture* may indeed be symbolical (e.g., the seven heads and ten horns), but it at least involves a literal city. The admonition in Rev 18:4 ("Come out of her, my people") hardly seems applicable if Babylon were merely a "religious system." It is doubtful in the Tribulation that true believers would be part of such a religious system.

A number of scholars (almost all of whom are dispensational) advocate that this literal city will be rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates River that will exist during the Tribulation period and which will serve as the world capital of the Antichrist's empire.²⁹

Even as a literal city, however, there is more to Babylon than just a city. Thomas notes, "A reference to the literal city does not exclude further implications regarding political and religious

ideas of (1) the harlot of Rev 17 as apostate Christianity and (2) a distinction between Babylon of Rev 17 and Babylon of Rev 18 did not originate with Walvoord, but were gleaned from others before him.

²⁶ See Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 603: "Revelation 17 . . . occurred during the first half of the last seven years. . . . Probably the best solution is to regard chapter 17 as the destruction of ecclesiastical Babylon, or Babylon as a religion, and chapter 18, the destruction of Babylon as a city and as an empire."

²⁷ Walvoord, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2:973.

²⁸ Ryrie (*The Living End*, 104) claimed that Babylon "is the fountainhead of all entrenched worldly resistance to God . . . it is an organized anti-God system." Ryrie saw it as a "great religious organization" that the Antichrist will use to his benefit in the first half of the seven-year period. Babylon of Rev 18 will be "a worldwide economic system" that also involves a literal city, but not rebuilt Babylon (115).

²⁹ Those advocating a literal rebuilt Babylon include Joseph A. Seiss (*The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, 1865); G. H. Pember (*The Antichrist, Babylon, and the Coming Kingdom*, 1888); George H. Lang (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 1948); Kenneth W. Allen ("The Rebuilding and Destruction of Babylon," *BibSac* 133 [1976]); Charles H. Dyer ("The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18; Part I," *BibSac* 144 [Jul-Sep 1987]); "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18; Part II," *BibSac* 144 [Oct-Dec 1987]; Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon; Sign of the End Times*, 1991); Robert L. Thomas (*Revelation 8–22; An Exegetical Commentary*, 1995); A. Woods ("Have the Prophecies in Revelation 17–18 about Babylon Been Fulfilled? Part 1," *BibSac* 169 [Jan-Mar 2012] plus parts 2-6); and M. Hitchcock ("A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 17:9-11 and Nero," *BibSac* 164 [Oct-Dec 2007]). Though differing on their overall interpretation of Rev 17–18, several scholars in Futurist-Literal View 2 also believe in a rebuilding of literal Babylon (e.g., John F. Walvoord, Clarence Larkin, and William R. Newell).

systems connected with the city."³⁰ This is an important hermeneutical reminder: the presence of symbols in the passage does not warrant the conclusion that everything must be understood symbolically!

Futurist-Literal View 4: Babylon Represents Future Apostate Jerusalem

Futurist-Literal View 4 agrees that a literal city is involved as the capital of the Antichrist's seat of power, but takes Babylon as a code name for Jerusalem. In this case, the harlot Babylon is not Jerusalem of the first-century A.D.—the preterist position—but rather Jerusalem as it will exist in the future Tribulation. This future Jerusalem, as the focal point of apostate Judaism, will be duped into embracing a false Messiah, the Antichrist.

Although this position does not have a great many adherents today, many of the same arguments used by preterists who argue for first-century Jerusalem would apply here (except that the futurist view retains the traditional dating of the book at the end of the first century rather than a pre-70 A.D. position). In other words, the notion that Jerusalem seems to be in view in Rev 17 is recognized by many scholars, the difference being a matter of where in history to look for the fulfillment.

This Futurist-Literal View 4 (apostate Jerusalem) is the position argued in this paper. It has also been favored by J. Lanier Burns of Dallas Seminary and by Chris White.³¹

EVALUATION

Although space does not allow a detailed evaluation of each view, I will seek to offer some brief evaluation of the preceding views before making a case for the Futurist-Literal View 4 (apostate Jerusalem).

The Preterist Position Evaluated

The preterist position has numerous problems.³² If one takes the view that Babylon represents ancient Jerusalem (and her destruction in A.D. 70), then obviously the book of Revelation would have been written before these events (since it predicts the destruction). Some scholars (e.g., Ewing above) have attempted to argue for an early date of the book in support of this position. But the best evidence indicates the book was written toward the end of the first century, long

³⁰ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 207.

³¹ J. Lanier Burns, "The Biblical Use of Marriage to Illustrate Covenantal Relationships," *BibSac* 173 (Jul-Sep 2016); and Chris White, *Mystery Babylon* (2013).

³² For a detailed refutation of the preterist interpretation of Jerusalem, see the six-article series by Andrew Wood beginning with "Have The Prophecies in Revelation 17–18 About Babylon Been Fulfilled? Part 1," *BibSac* 169 (Jan–Mar 2012) 79-100.

after the destruction of Jerusalem.³³ Those who argue that Babylon represents ancient Jerusalem also face a problem of identifying the Beast and explaining the seven heads (Rev 17:9-11). K. Gentry (*Four Views*, 68) states, “I understand the beast to portray the roman empire (kingdom) generally and Emperor Nero Caesar (king) specifically.” Also the description of the harlot’s luxury and power does not fit first century Jerusalem. Finally, the mention in Rev 16:19 that the cities of the nations fell does not correlate with what happened to Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Furthermore, the beast and the false prophet are personally destroyed by Christ according to Rev 19, and they must be human individuals (not trans-historical symbols) since they are cast into the lake of fire. Hence harlot Babylon must exist in the same time period as they do, namely, in the future Tribulation period. For those who argue for ancient Rome rather than Jerusalem, they face the dilemma that Rome's destruction did not come this way (burning and famine? – Rev 18:8).³⁴ Furthermore, there is no explanation for the attack by the vassal kings against Rome.

The Historicist Position Evaluated

This position has virtually been abandoned today, as commentators have realized that the Reformers were merely "reading in" their own interpretation to their historical situation (namely, their struggles with the Catholic Church). A problem for this view is that if the harlot is Roman Catholicism, then what is the beast? If one says it is the pope, then one would logically have to conclude that the pope turns against the Roman Catholic Church.

The Idealist Position Evaluated

The primary weakness of the idealist position is that it wants to see (in a general sense) the fulfillment of much of the book throughout history, and thus comes into conflict with what many would regard as a rather apparent futurist orientation to the book. The material in Rev 6–19 reflects events that transpire in the future *day of the Lord* (note 6:17) and that lead up to the second coming of Christ (Rev 19). This is in accordance with other prophetic passages like 2 Thess 2 that anticipate the “man of lawlessness” (the Antichrist) arising in conjunction with the day of the Lord and being slain by Christ Himself at His “coming” (παρουσία).

G. K. Beale understands the beast of Rev 13 in a multifaceted way. On the one hand, he understands it to be “Rome” (684), but then claims that “the Roman Empire transcends many

³³ The testimony of Irenaeus is still a strong argument favoring a date near the end of the first-century A.D. Irenaeus states that the Apocalypse “was seen no such long time ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian” (*Against Heresies*, 5.30.3). For a detailed defense, see see Mark Hitchcock, “A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005).

³⁴ H. B. Swete (*Commentary on Revelation*, 225) attempted an explanation of this problem though he could not offer anything specific: “... the Seer foresees that the downfall of Rome will come in this way. Already within his memory the capital had been twice in one year (A.D. 69) the scene of carnage and plunder . . . Domitian had no obvious heir, and his life was menaced by conspiracies; at any moment Rome might be sacked again. But St John looks beyond the end of Domitian’s reign to a future which he does not attempt to fix. He has a prevision of forces within the Empire taking shape under the leadership of men who, without the Imperial purple, would possess Imperial powers, and would use them for the destruction of Rome.

centuries and represents all world powers who oppress God’s people until the culmination of history” (685). This allows him to speak of the “transtemporal and multifaceted aspect of the antichrist figure in Revelation 13” (686). For him, the beast is the chief opponent of Christ who “cannot be limited to one historical person or epoch” (691). From this he confesses (691),

This analysis leaves open the possibility of an Antichrist who comes at the end of history and incarnates the devil in a greater way than anyone ever before. Whether this consummate expression of evil will be manifested in an individual or an institution is hard to say.

But such an understanding is very hard to reconcile with the fact that the beast is personally slain by Christ and then cast into the lake of fire (people spend eternity in the lake of fire, not institutions).

Moving on to Rev 17–18, Beale claims, “Therefore, Babylon is the prevailing economic-religious system in alliance with the state and its related authorities and existing throughout the ages” (850). Elsewhere he notes, “17:16-18 states that ‘the kings of the earth,’ the political arm of the wicked world system, will turn against the economic-religious arm and destroy it.” Yet this presents two significant problems. First, what logical reason is there for these kings destroying the economic-religious arm of the wicked world system? Second, the destruction envisioned in Rev 18 is the destruction of a literal city by fire at a particular moment in history.

The Futurist Symbolic Position Evaluated

Those taking the futurist symbolic position face a problem of hermeneutics. Yes, there is obviously symbolism involved in Rev 17–18, but where is one to draw the line? For example, when the author provides interpretation, he declares that the harlot represents a city. In fact, it is “the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth” (Rev 17:18). There is too much emphasis in these chapters regarding a literal city and a literal destruction to simply relegate it to a symbolic meaning. For those who believe that the imagery of Rev 17–18 has ancient Rome in view (so Mounce), they face several problems over this very point (see next section).

Futurist-Literal View 1 Evaluated (Ancient Rome as the Basis of the Imagery)

This view tends not to see a literal city involved in the interpretation of the harlot Babylon. But those embracing this position do see ancient Rome as the basis of the imagery. [Note that the identification of the imagery as Rome is found among all the major categories]. This is not too surprising, since the Roman Empire was the prevailing world power at the time John wrote, and it could be said that Rome was reigning over the kings of the earth (17:18). Also, the claim is made that Rev 17:9 refers to a city of “seven hills” which would be descriptive of Rome.³⁵ If the first Beast of Rev 13 is an emperor of the Revived Roman Empire, then one would expect Rome

³⁵ For ancient sources equating the city of seven hills with ancient Rome, see Osborne, *Revelation*, 617.

to be in view in Rev 17–18. Finally, the harlot being “drunk with the blood of the saints” (17:6) could certainly describe the Roman Empire at certain stages of her history.

Despite what some would consider a “slam dunk” case for Rome, there are serious problems with the view that John has ancient Rome in view in Rev 17–18. First, the destruction of “Babylon” as envisioned in these chapters does not really match Rome’s overthrow. Rome was sacked by the Visigoths and looted by others but not really burned and destroyed by fire (note 17:16 and 18:18).

Second, the imagery in Rev 17:9 (seven hills of Rome?) is probably better interpreted as “seven mountains,” with the mountains being representative of “kingdoms.” Notice carefully what Rev 17:9-10 say: “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings.” In the OT, a mountain was sometimes a symbol of a kingdom (Pss 30:7; 68:15-16; Isa 2:2; 41:15; Jer 51:25; Dan 2:35; Hab 3:6,10; Zech 4:7), and in the book of Daniel the “head of gold” for the image in Dan 2 represented both the kingdom and the king as its foremost representative (i.e., Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar). Also in Dan 7, each beast represented both the king and the kingdom with which he was associated (compare Dan 7:17, 23). That is the point in Rev 17:9, and it has nothing to do with the “seven hills of Rome.” Andrew Woods concurs:

. . . the symbolic nature of the mountains indicates that they do not represent Rome's topography. Such symbolism is apparent from the woman who "sits upon or beside the seven mountains (Rev. 17:9), just as she sits upon or beside 'many waters' (v. 1). Since the symbol of the 'many waters' is explained in verse 15, analogy would dictate that the seven mountains are also symbolic rather than literal hills.³⁶

Third, in explaining the Beast and the seven mountains and kings, John writes, “Here is the mind which has wisdom” (17:9; cf. 13:18). Such a call for wisdom would hardly be necessary if Rome was the intended interpretation.

Fourth, for those who take the harlot as depicting ancient Rome, they logically must see the successive kings in Rev 17:10-11 as successive Roman emperors in the first century A.D. Yet this is a great problem for the Rome view, since there is no convincing proposal for identifying the early Roman emperors in such a way that the “eighth” is either Nero or Domitian.³⁷

Futurist-Literal View 2 Evaluated (Two Entities: Rev 17 vs. Rev 18)

³⁶ A. Woods, “Have the Prophecies in Revelation 17–18 about Babylon Been Fulfilled? Part 1,” 98.

³⁷ For a summary of attempts at identifying the Roman emperors, see “Excursus 17B” in David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 946-48. Osborne (*Revelation*, 620) attempts to dodge the problem of identifying the eighth king: “He will not be another Roman emperor but will have ‘the same sort of role’ . . . namely, the same evil function as they. . . . The point is not that the eighth king is actually *Nero redivivus*, but that he is like Nero in his character and destiny.”

The view presented by Walvoord and others that Rev 17 depicts a religious system distinct from the literal city of Rev 18 faces several problems.³⁸ First, this overlooks the numerous statements reflecting the unity of these two chapters (see Appendix A for details). The evidence suggests that Babylon in chapter 17 and Babylon in chapter 18 are one and the same (and cannot be separated temporally). Different aspects of the city (and her influence) may be stressed, but the same basic city-system is in view in each. Second, the idea that Babylon as a city in Rev 18 has in view a future literal rebuilt Babylon does not hold up to careful scrutiny (see details in the next section).

Futurist-Literal View 3 Evaluated (Babylon on the Euphrates will be Literally Rebuilt)

As mentioned previously, a number of dispensational scholars believe that Babylon in Rev 17–18 means the same thing in both chapters and that this is the literal city of Babylon that will be rebuilt in the future along the banks of the Euphrates River as the capital of the Antichrist.

Without a doubt, there is some support for this position. In Rev 17:18, the "harlot" is clearly interpreted as being "the great city," and in Rev 18:10 this city is clearly said to be Babylon: "Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon" (cf. 18:21). As Dyer has demonstrated, the most compelling evidence for the interpretation of literal Babylon is the numerous parallels between what is said about Babylon in Rev 17–18 and what was previously said about ancient Babylon in Jeremiah 50–51.³⁹ There seems to be no doubt that the author of Revelation is clearly making reference to statements about Babylon in Jeremiah. Yet there are reasons why one should be cautious in assuming that these parallels substantiate that Babylon in 17–18 is meant to be understood as a rebuilt city on the Euphrates. Consider the following:

- (1) Although there are clear allusions to Babylon in Jer 50–51, one could also argue that there are a number of allusions in Rev 17–18 to the Tyre Oracles of Ezekiel:⁴⁰
 - (a) The statement in Rev 18:21 ("will not be found any longer") is similar to Ezek 26:21 ("you will be no more").
 - (b) The word that is used in Rev 18:19 for the "harlot" having been "laid waste" (Gk ἐρημόω — only 5x in the NT) is also used of Tyre in Ezek 26:19 ("I shall make you a desolate city"). Note the phrase "make her desolate" in Rev 17:16 (same word!).
 - (c) Both passages mention a silencing of song and harps (Ezek 26:13; Rev 18:22).

³⁸ For an evaluation of Walvoord's view, see A. Woods, "Have the Prophecies in Revelation 17–18 about Babylon Been Fulfilled? Part 6," 201-04.

³⁹ For details, see C. Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18. Part 2," *BibSac* 144:576 (Oct-Dec 1987) 433-49.

⁴⁰ Beasley-Murray states, "The chief quarries to which John has gone for his structure are the prophecies against Babylon in Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51, and that against Tyre in Ezekiel 26–7, together with significant snatches from the prophecies against Edom in Isaiah 34 and Nineveh in Nahum 3" (*Revelation*, 264).

- (d) Both passages emphasize the sea, ships, and merchandise (note Ezek 27:9).
- (e) Both passages call attention to the reaction of sea merchants, especially weeping, lamenting, mourning, and wailing (Ezek 26:16-18; Rev 18:15-19).
- (f) Both passages record a listing of wares and merchandise (Ezek 27:10-25; Rev 18:11-14).
- (g) In both, the "kings of the earth" are enriched (Ezek 27:33; Rev 18:9).
- (h) In both, an "arrogant attitude" is rebuked (Ezek 27:3; 28:2; Rev 18:7).

Furthermore, P. F. Gregory ("Its End is Destruction," 139) points out, "The lamentation over Babylon in Revelation 18 derives from the lamentation over Tyre in Ezekiel 27. In the latter, the merchants cry out, 'Who is like Tyre?' (Ezek 27:32); in the former, the kings, merchants, and sailors lament, 'What city was like that great city?' (Rev 18:18)."

Since there are deliberate allusions to the Tyre oracles here, this suggests that the author's intention by his allusions to Jer 50–51 was not to equate the harlot of Rev 17–18 with literal Babylon, any more than his allusions to the Tyre oracles were meant to equate her with Tyre. R. Bauckham (though he takes a Rome position) summarizes the matter quite well:

His portrayal of the fall of Babylon is a remarkable patchwork of skillful allusions to Old Testament prophecies of the fall of Babylon and the fall of Tyre. There are two major sources: Jeremiah's great oracle against Babylon (Jer 50–51) and Ezekiel's great oracle against Tyre (Ezek 26–28). But allusion is also made to all of the shorter oracles against Babylon and Tyre to be found in the Old Testament prophets (Babylon: Isa 13:1–14:23; 21:1-10; 47; Jer 25:12-38; Tyre: Isa 23). It seems that John has quite deliberately fashioned a prophetic oracle against Rome which gathers up all that his prophetic predecessors had pronounced against the two cities of Babylon and Tyre.⁴¹

(2) Dyer's case for literal Babylon rests heavily on his contention that the prophecy of Babylon's destruction in Jer 50–51 has never been *literally* fulfilled. Thus, he expects Babylon to be rebuilt, so that it can be more *literally* destroyed. This assumption, however, has been called into question more recently by Homer Heater, who has built a good case that Jer 50–51 has employed *stereotypical destruction language* that was not intended to be so literally understood.⁴² He argues, "The language of destruction belongs to a genre found in treaties that speaks generally and hyperbolically of devastating defeat and destruction without requiring detailed fulfilment."⁴³ If Heater is right, then Babylon has been judged and destroyed, and does

⁴¹ R. Bauckham, "The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18," 345.

⁴² Homer Heater, Jr., "Do the Prophets Teach that Babylonia Will Be Rebuilt in the *Eschaton*?", *JETS* 41:1 (Mar 1998) 23-43. Notice should be made of Jer 25:9, which even declared that Jerusalem itself would be utterly destroyed and made an "everlasting desolation."

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 36.

not need to be destroyed again. Furthermore, Jer 25:12-13 seems to indicate that this "everlasting desolation" of Babylon was intended to be a punishment inflicted on her when "seventy years are completed" (i.e., in the sixth century B.C.)—not at the time of the second coming of Christ.

A DEFENSE OF FUTURIST-LITERAL VIEW 4

Apostate Jerusalem in the Tribulation

A more likely interpretation is that "Babylon the great" is really a *code name* for Jerusalem. This would imply that the Antichrist (the Beast) and the ten kings will have a very close relationship to literal (apostate) Jerusalem during the Tribulation. Since Rev 17:18 says "the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth," this might imply that Jerusalem will serve as the capital for the Antichrist during the Tribulation.

Arguments in Support of the Future Apostate Jerusalem Interpretation

- (1) The city is frequently called "the great city" (17:18) or "the great city, Babylon" (18:10) in these chapters. In Rev 11:8, the same words are used to describe Jerusalem: "the great city . . . where also their Lord was crucified." Yet it is not the repetition of the words alone that argues for their equation. In the previous passage, the Beast (the Antichrist) is obviously involved at Jerusalem (see 11:7), just as the Beast in Rev 17:3 is clearly associated with the harlot city. This argues in favor of the label "the great city" being used in both contexts of the same location, i.e., Jerusalem.
- (2) Following the introduction of the seventh bowl in Rev 16:17, we read in 16:19, "The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. So Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath." In this verse, "the great city" is "Babylon the great," as Rev 18:10 clarifies (where it is called "the great city, Babylon." The fact that "the great city" is distinguished from "the cities of the nations" makes perfect sense, if "the great city" is Jerusalem.⁴⁴
- (3) Part of the final bowl judgment involves a "great earthquake," unlike anything ever experienced before and which results in "the great city" (Babylon the great) being split into three parts (Rev 16:18-19). According to Rev 11:13—a scene which is apparently at the end of the Great Tribulation—there is a "great earthquake" at "the great city" Jerusalem, the result being that a tenth of the city fell and seven thousand

⁴⁴ The word "nations" occurs 19x in Revelation, and typically refers to the Gentile nations as distinct from Israel (Rev 2:26; 10:11; 11:2, 9, 18; 12:5; 14:8; 15:3, 4; 16:19; 17:15; 18:3, 23; 19:15; 20:3, 8; 21:24, 26; 22:2). Note especially Rev 21:24, 26. The nations will bring their glory and honor into the New Jerusalem.

people being killed. Even if one does not wish to equate these earthquakes (both at “the great city”), the one in Rev 11:13 attests to the fact that Jerusalem is the recipient of God’s wrath at the end of the Great Tribulation.

- (4) The metaphor of a "harlot" would be most appropriate for Jerusalem, as this was an established label for Israel and/or Jerusalem in the OT (e.g., Isa 1:21; 57:8; Jer 2:2, 20; 3:1, 6; Ezek 16:15, 26, 28, 29; 16:35-41; 23:1-21, 30; Micah 1:7; and Hos 4:12). Based on a statistical study of the prostitution metaphor in the OT, Ben-Daniel points out, “Most significant of all is the fact that, in the OT, almost all the occurrences of the prostitution metaphor (86/91) apply to the people of the Covenant (Israel, Judah or Jerusalem).”⁴⁵ She was called a "harlot", because of her idolatrous ways and her spiritual unfaithfulness to God. Although the metaphor of "harlot" was in some cases also used of other nations (e.g., Tyre in Isa 23:15-18, and Nineveh of Assyria in Nah 3:4), it was far more commonly used of Israel and Jerusalem. For example, Isaiah, in his indictment of Jerusalem’s unfaithfulness declared, “How the faithful city has become a harlot, she who was full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, but now murderers” (Isa 1:21).

J. Lanier Burns of Dallas Seminary, having traced the biblical theme of marriage and related concepts as a hermeneutical model, comes to the very same conclusion in how the harlot imagery is used to depict Jerusalem as God’s people:

Revelation features a harlot, who is “the great city,” mother of evil forces facing the full wrath of God. . . . A futurist hermeneutic allows a striking literary contrast between the old Jerusalem as the great city and the new Jerusalem as the holy city.⁴⁶

- (5) Rev 17:5 indicates that the city's name of Babylon the Great is a "mystery," which implies that her actual name is something different. If so, this would accord with the non-literal names given Jerusalem in Rev 11:8: "the great city which mystically (πνευματικῶς) is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." While it is true that the word “mystery” (μυστήριον) differs from the word “mystically” (πνευματικῶς), the author’s *intention* is the same, namely, to make an association of Jerusalem with a location known in the OT as a place of evil.

In Isaiah’s indictment of Israel, he wrote, “Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah” (Isa 1:10; cf. 3:9; Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:44-58). In a similar indictment in Ezekiel, the LORD declared, “they played the harlot in Egypt” (Ezek 23:3), and again “Thus I will make

⁴⁵ John and Gloria Ben-Daniel, ““The Metaphor of Prostitution in the Identification of Babylon in Revelation 17–18” (online).

⁴⁶ J. Lanier Burns, “The Biblical Use of Marriage to Illustrate Covenantal Relationships,” 295.

your lewdness and your harlotry brought from the land of Egypt to cease from you, so that you will not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore” (Ezek 23:27; cf. 23:8, 19). Given that the principle of “name substitution” had already been established in Rev 11:8, it is very legitimate *hermeneutically* to understand that Jerusalem has been assigned the pseudonym “Babylon” in Rev 17–18 and that in doing so, the Holy Spirit is *likening* Jerusalem to the city so renown for idolatry and wickedness (i.e., Babylon, the city that once served as the capital of the world).

- (6) The words "outside the city" in Rev 14:20 are usually taken in reference to Jerusalem, yet the only near antecedent is "Babylon the great" mentioned in 14:8.
- (7) The harlot city is not just guilty of shedding the blood of saints (17:6), but also the blood of prophets and apostles (18:20, 24). Recall Matt 23:29-35 (cf. Lk 11:50-51; Acts 7:52). This would be very true of Jerusalem, but not of Babylon.
- (8) The description of the efforts of the Beast and ten horns to destroy Jerusalem in Rev 17:16 is strikingly similar to ancient Jerusalem’s destruction by Babylon in Ezek 23:22-35 (cf. 16:39), as though her punishment is being played out again. Mounce (*The Book of Revelation*, 320) has pointed out:

The fate of the prostitute is now related in phrases reminiscent of Ezekiel’s vivid allegory of Oholibah (Ezek 23:11–35), who doted on the Assyrians (23:12), was defiled by the Babylonians (23:17), and played the prostitute in the land of Egypt (23:19). The beast and the ten kings turn in hatred upon the prostitute (“they will deal with you in hatred,” Ezek 23:29), make her desolate (“strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry,” Ezek 23:26) and naked (“leave you naked and bare,” Ezek 23:29), eat her flesh (“cut off your noses and your ears,” Ezek 23:25), and burn her utterly with fire (“those of you who are left will be consumed by fire,” Ezek 23:25).

What God declared to ancient Jerusalem is appropriate for future Jerusalem: “These things will be done to you because you have played the harlot with the nations, because you have defiled yourself with their idols” (Ezek 23:30).

- (9) The idea of repaying her double (Rev 18:5-6) may be an allusion to Jer 16:17-18 in a judgment narrative against the land of Judah (cf. 17:18). There God declared:

¹⁷“For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes. ¹⁸I will first **doubly repay** their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted My land; they have filled My inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable idols and with their abominations” (Jer 16:17-18; NASB).

- (10) Rev 18:23-24 is based on Jer 25:9-11, which is an oracle against Judah and Jerusalem at the time of her first destruction in the sixth century B.C. (and now appropriate for her *latter days destruction*).

⁹ “behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,” declares the Lord, “and *I will send* to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and **I will utterly destroy them** and make them a horror and a hissing, and **an everlasting desolation**.¹⁰ Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.”

A Possible Objection to the Jerusalem Interpretation

A potential problem for the Jerusalem interpretation is the *destruction references*. Rev 18:19 says, “in one hour she has been laid waste.” According to Rev 17:16, the beast and ten kings will “burn her up with fire” (cf. 18:8-9). Rev 18:21 even says that the city “will not be found any longer.” Finally, Rev 19:3 states, “her smoke rises up forever and ever” (similarity to 14:9-11 and the judgment on those who worshiped the beast). Furthermore, the response of “Hallelujah!” in Rev 19:3 reflects the joy over her destruction.

In light of other Scripture, however, this would seem to conflict with Jerusalem's fate near the end of the Tribulation. Certainly Jerusalem is going to suffer prior to the Lord's return, but passages like Zech 14:1-11 indicate that the Lord Jesus is going to personally return to defend and save Jerusalem (cf. Zech 12:8; Joel 2:32), especially after her inhabitants “look (*in faith*) to the One whom they have pierced” (Zech 12:10).⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the destruction language found in Rev 17–18 is not completely incompatible with passages like Zech 12–14. From a reading of Zech 12:2 and 14:2, there is no doubt that Jerusalem is placed under great siege and brought to the brink of destruction. So even though the Lord returns to rescue the surviving remnant in the final analysis, that does not preclude the city suffering attack and virtual destruction before He does. Furthermore, passages like Ezek 40–48, Zech 14:4-5 and Jer 30:18 indicate not only that Jerusalem is going to be *rebuilt* at the end of the age, but that it will undergo significant topological changes and be physically quite different than Jerusalem of the Tribulation.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ For this interpretation, see J. Paul Tanner, “The Function of Zechariah 13 in the Prophet's Final Oracle” (ThM thesis, Dallas Seminary, 1981) 43-47.

⁴⁸ For further discussion, see Chris White, *Mystery Babylon*, 106-12. In addition to the destructive earthquake at Jerusalem mentioned in Rev 11:13 and 16:18, there is also the splitting of the Mount of Olives and creation of a new valley mentioned in Zech 14:4-5. There will also be a new river flowing out of Jerusalem (Ezek 47:1-12; cf. Zech 14:8). Finally, the temple itself will be significantly different in the millennium (both in size, design and location) than previous temples.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE JERUSALEM INTERPRETATION ON TRIBULATION ESCHATOLOGY

Whatever Babylon represents, it must be significant, because over two full chapters are devoted to her role and destruction. It is very hard to escape the fact that a literal city is involved. Of greater importance, perhaps, is the contrast that "Babylon" makes to the New Jerusalem. There are several parallels between Babylon and the New Jerusalem that suggest that Babylon is something of a *counterpart* to the New Jerusalem. First, we notice how each is introduced with the words "Come here, I shall show you" (17:1; 21:9). Second, they are both described in feminine terms. Babylon is the harlot (17:1), whereas the New Jerusalem is the bride of the Lamb (21:9). Third, both the harlot and the bride are called a "city" (17:18; 21:10). Fourth, in both cases John is shown these "cities" following the introductory statement "carried me away in the Spirit" (17:3; 21:10). Fifth, emphasis is given to the clothing of each. Babylon is dressed in worldly luxury (17:4; 18:11-12, 16), whereas the bride is adorned with fine linen, the righteous acts of the saints (17:7-8). Sixth, John goes "into a wilderness" (17:3) to see the harlot, but upon a great and high mountain (21:10) to see the bride. Seventh, the harlot is actively involved with committing acts of immorality and abominations (17:2, 4), but in regard to the bride/New Jerusalem it is said, "nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it" (21:27). Eighth, the harlot persecutes and kills the saints (17:6; 18:24), but into the New Jerusalem only the saints can enter, i.e., those "whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (21:27). All this highlights the fact that "Babylon," the earthly Jerusalem, is to the Antichrist (at least initially) what the New Jerusalem is to Christ. Babylon is the focus and epitome of the Beast's empire, a counterfeit of the New Jerusalem. Yet from God's perspective, she is a harlot.

If "Babylon" of Rev 17–18 is a reference to apostate Jerusalem during the period of Daniel's 70th week, this would certainly help explain other biblical data. Although space does not permit a full explanation here, it seems that the Antichrist actually presents himself as messiah to the Jewish people. Hence, he is a false messiah. [This would explain Jesus' warnings about a false messiah in such passages as Matt 24:4-5, 11, 23-24. This would also shed light on Jesus' comment in John 5:43, "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him"'].⁴⁹

If the Antichrist is a false messiah, then we would expect that Jerusalem would be his primary residence and the capital of his worldwide empire (at least until he turns against the city). This would help explain why the harlot is said to sit on many waters (Rev 17:1, 15). Osborne (*Revelation*, 609) points out the significance of this kind of imagery:

... possibly an allusion to Jer. 51:13, where Babylon is described as 'you who live by many waters,' an allusion to the city's location on the river Euphrates. . . . The 'many waters' are

⁴⁹ Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 5.25.4) identified the figure in Jn 5:43 as the Antichrist, whom he believed would be of Jewish descent (as did many of the early church fathers).

defined in 17:15 as ‘peoples multitudes and nations and tongues,’ referring to the many nations under the control of Babylon/Rome. To ‘sit upon’ a nation is to conquer and control it (see also 17:3, 9, 15; 18:7 [‘I sit as a queen’] for this image).

But rather than Rome, it is really future Jerusalem that is in view, and her authoritative position is not on account of her own conquests but on account of the fact that the Antichrist resides there. It is his militaristic endeavors that have elevated Jerusalem to such a position of power in respect to the other peoples and nations of the world.

According to Dan 9:27, he will “make strong (the) covenant with the many (Jewish people) for one week (of seven years).”⁵⁰ Some have thought this to be a reference to a *peace agreement* that Antichrist will make with Israel, but there is nothing in the context about a peace agreement.⁵¹ The word “covenant” (Heb בְּרִית) most often means “the Mosaic covenant, the Law,” though it can (more rarely) refer to other covenants or agreements. What favors the interpretation that it should be understood as “the Mosaic covenant, the Law” in Dan 9:27 is the fact that the same sentence goes on to say that he will put a halt to sacrifice and grain offering in the middle of the “week” (i.e., after 3 ½ years). Sacrifices, of course, go hand in hand with the Mosaic Law. The point of Dan 9:27, then, would be that he “makes strong” the ancient Mosaic covenant of the Law, i.e., he enforces or rejuvenates it. If he were parading himself as their messiah, this would be perfectly understandable (it would appear he was reinvigorating the ancient Jewish faith). The reality, however, is that he is only doing this (as part of Satan’s scheme) to lure them into his destructive trap in which he will attempt to destroy the covenant nation in the final analysis, thereby hoping to nullify the promises of God.

In the middle of the “week,” he begins to turn against them. He puts a halt to the sacrificial system, and he enters the (rebuilt) Jewish temple in Jerusalem to proclaim himself a divine being (2 Thess 2:4). [If he is going to be worshiped, this is a logical step]. This *may* coincide with the erection of the image to the beast (Rev 13:14-15) in the temple itself. This, then, would be the “abomination of desolation” mentioned by Jesus in Matt 24:15-16 that marks the onset of the Great Tribulation (the final 3 ½ years): “Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.” Those Jews in Jerusalem who heed these words would of course be ones who believe in the true Messiah, the Lord Jesus. They flee Jerusalem at that time, an event that fulfils Rev 12:6, “Then the woman [*of the Jewish*

⁵⁰ Some translations have “make a strong (or firm) covenant,” as though the covenant itself is a strong or firm one. Yet the Hebrew text has וְהַגְבִּיר בְּרִית. There is no adjective in the text, but rather the causative verb (make strong) indicates what he does in regard to the covenant. To make it strong would mean that he imposes it upon the people or enforces it, not necessarily against their will but more likely with their support and approval.

⁵¹ Not everyone understands the Antichrist to be the one making/enforcing the covenant in Dan 9:27, but I believe this to be the correct interpretation. I will be defending this interpretation in my forthcoming commentary on the book of Daniel in the Evangelical Exegetical Commentary series. Cf. Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary, 270-71.

line] fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”

With the *believing Jews* (faithful to Christ) having departed from Jerusalem, that leaves the remaining Jews (most of whom are probably in unbelief) at the mercy of the Antichrist. [The two witnesses of Rev 11 may be an exception to this].⁵² By this point, he has made his move to gain the allegiance of the whole world, those whom he wants to worship him (Rev 13:4). He also has the military might to back up his power play, not to mention Satan’s deceptive powers assisting him. “And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast” (13:3). Those who belong to the Lamb of God, however, will not be duped and will refuse to honor him . . . many of whom will pay for this with their blood. Once the “ten horns” give their authority to the Antichrist (Rev 17:12-14), they will conspire against the “woman” (apostate Jerusalem) to destroy her (Rev 17:16-17). This leads to the siege of Judah and Jerusalem depicted in Zech 12–14.

By no means should this viewpoint be considered “anti-Israel,” any more than God’s judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70 should be. In both cases, God’s plans for Israel are ultimately good. One of the primary purposes of the Great Tribulation is to discipline and humble Israel, in preparation for the Lord *saving* her. According to Jer 30:3, the LORD has a plan for restoring His people Israel and Judah and for regathering them back to the land of promise. But first they must pass through a period of time that Jeremiah calls “the time of Jacob’s distress” (עַתְּצָרָה הַיָּאָ (לְיִשְׂרָאֵל)), though the following line promises “but he will be saved from it” (Jer 30:7). According to Jer 30:8-9, God will break the yoke of those oppressing them, following which they will serve their God and “David their king” (i.e., Messiah Jesus).⁵³ Though the outcome will be “salvation” for those who call on the name of the LORD (Joel 2:32), the fact that this period is called “the time of Jacob’s distress” obviously reflects that terrible atrocities and suffering await the nation (so Zech 12:2; 14:2). Many Jewish people will not survive this period when the Antichrist turns against Israel and seeks to destroy Jerusalem and exterminate her people (Zech 13:8-9). Yet a destruction of earthly Jerusalem is not a defeat of God’s plan. When Israel finally turns to Jesus in faith and cries out to Him (Zech 12:10), the LORD will return to deliver the remaining people (Zech 14:4-5) and so fulfil Romans 11:25-27. In the final analysis “all Israel will be saved” (i.e., all true Israel; cf. Rom 9:6). Though earthly apostate Jerusalem may be destroyed by the Antichrist as part of the diabolical plan of Satan, yet the LORD’s promise remains:

Thus says the Lord, “Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwelling places; and **the city will be rebuilt on its ruin**, and the palace will stand on its rightful place” (Jer 30:18).⁵⁴

⁵² John A. McLean (“The Chronology of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11”) argues that the ministry of the two witnesses is in the second half of Daniel’s 70th week.

⁵³ For a defense of “David their king” as Messiah Jesus, see J. Paul Tanner, “The New Covenant and Paul’s Quotations from Hosea in Romans 9:25-26,” *BibSac* 162 (Jan-Mar 2005) 107-108 (ftn. 20).

⁵⁴ For similar rebuilding promises, see Jer 31:4, 24, 38; 33:7; Ezek 36:10, 33; Am 9:14.

Appendix A

Evidence for the Unity of Revelation 17 and 18

References to "the kings of the earth"

- 17:2 . . . with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality
- 17:18 the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth
- 18:3 and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality
- 18:9 And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality . . .

References to "Babylon the great" or "the great city"

- 16:19 And Babylon the great was remembered before God
- 17:5 And upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, Babylon The Great
- 17:18 And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth
- 18:2 Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
- 18:10 Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city!
- 18:16 Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen . . .
- 18:18 What city is like the great city?
- 18:19 Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich . . .
- 18:21 Thus will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence

References to "immorality"

- 17:2 with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality
- 17:2 those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality
- 17:4 having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality
- 18:3 the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality
- 18:3 and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality
- 18:9 And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality

References to persecution

- 17:6 And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.
- 18:24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth
- 19:2 . . . He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her

References to fire, burning or smoke

- 17:16 the ten horns ... and the beast ... will hate the harlot ... and will burn her up with fire
- 18:8 she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong
- 18:9 the kings of the earth ... will weep ... when they see the smoke of her burning
- 18:18 . . . crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning
- 19:3 Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever.

References to receiving God's wrath, judgment or destruction

- 16:19 Babylon the great . . . to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath
- 17:1 I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters
- 18:4 Come out of her [Babylon] ... that you may not receive of her plagues
- 18:6 Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double
- 18:7 to the same degree give her torment and mourning
- 18:8 in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine
- 18:8 for the Lord God who judges her is strong
- 18:10 For in one hour your judgment has come.
- 18:19 in one hour she has been laid waste
- 18:20 Rejoice . . . because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.
- 19:2 He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality

Appendix B

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Interpretations of "Babylon the Great" in Rev 17-18"

VIEW	Preterist (Past Only)		Historicist (In Hist.)	Idealist			Futurist (Symbolic)		Futurist (More Literal)			
	Rome	Jerusalem		Idealist (only)	Idealist-Preterist 1	Idealist-Preterist 2	Symbolic 1 (Pre-Futurist)	Symbolic 2 (Futurist)	Empire (like Rome)	Two Entities	Rebuilt Babylon	Future Jerusalem
DESCRIPTION	Ancient Rome (diff. views on time & manner of fulfillment)	Ancient Jerusalem (destroyed by the Romans in AD 70)	The Roman Catholic Church (with the Pope as the Antichrist)	Pagan Society of every age whose wickedness draws people away from God (or Baby. is the world in the church)	(Jerusalem in view) The author has Jerusalem in mind, but as an archetype for apostate Christianity	(Rome in view) The ungodly pagan world system throughout history & its economic-religious aspects in alliance with the state [apostate church and unbelieving Israel cooperate]	Ancient Rome is in view, but this is a symbol representing the <i>future</i> dominant system of godlessness and worldly power, which leads men away from the worship of God	The <i>final</i> manifestation of human civilization organized in opposition to God (tends not to see ancient Rome in view)	Ancient Rome is the basis of the imagery, but the Harlot represents the <u>empire</u> of the Antichrist in the Tribulation (Beas.-Murray: the city of the Antichrist)	Babylon in ch 17 depicts a religious system, including the apostate church (destroyed mid-Trib) Babylon in ch 18 is a literal rebuilt Babylon (destroyed end-Trib)	The "harlot" is the literal city of Babylon (on the Euphrates) to be rebuilt in the future as the capital of the Antichrist will turn against and destroy in the Great Trib)	The "harlot" is the literal city of Babylon (on the Euphrates) to be rebuilt in the future as the capital of the Antichrist will turn against and destroy in the Great Trib)
	ADHERENTS	<i>Early Ch:</i> Irenaeus Tertullian Hippolytus Victorinus	J. Stu. Russell M. Terry J.M. Ford D.R. Ewing A. J. Beagley R. C. Sproul H. Hanegraaff Reconstructionists: K. Gentry G. DeMar D. Chilton	Reformers: Luther, Calvin, Knox Jonathan Edwards E. B. Elliott	Wm. Hendriksen Sam Hamstra	Wm. Milligan I. Provan	G. K. Beale	R. Mounce	G. Ladd A. Johnson M. Tenney	Grant R. Osborne Beasley-Murray Paige Patterson is similar; but harlot is rel. system	J. Walvoord C. Larkin <i>Similarly:</i> C. C. Ryrie Wm. R. Newell J. D. Pentecost Ch 18 is Beast's unspecified seat of power	J. A. Seiss G.H. Pember K. Allen C. Dyer R. Thomas A. Woods M. Hitchcock

These views involve a literal city that will serve as the world capital of the future Antichrist (and the religious and economic heart of the Beast's kingdom)