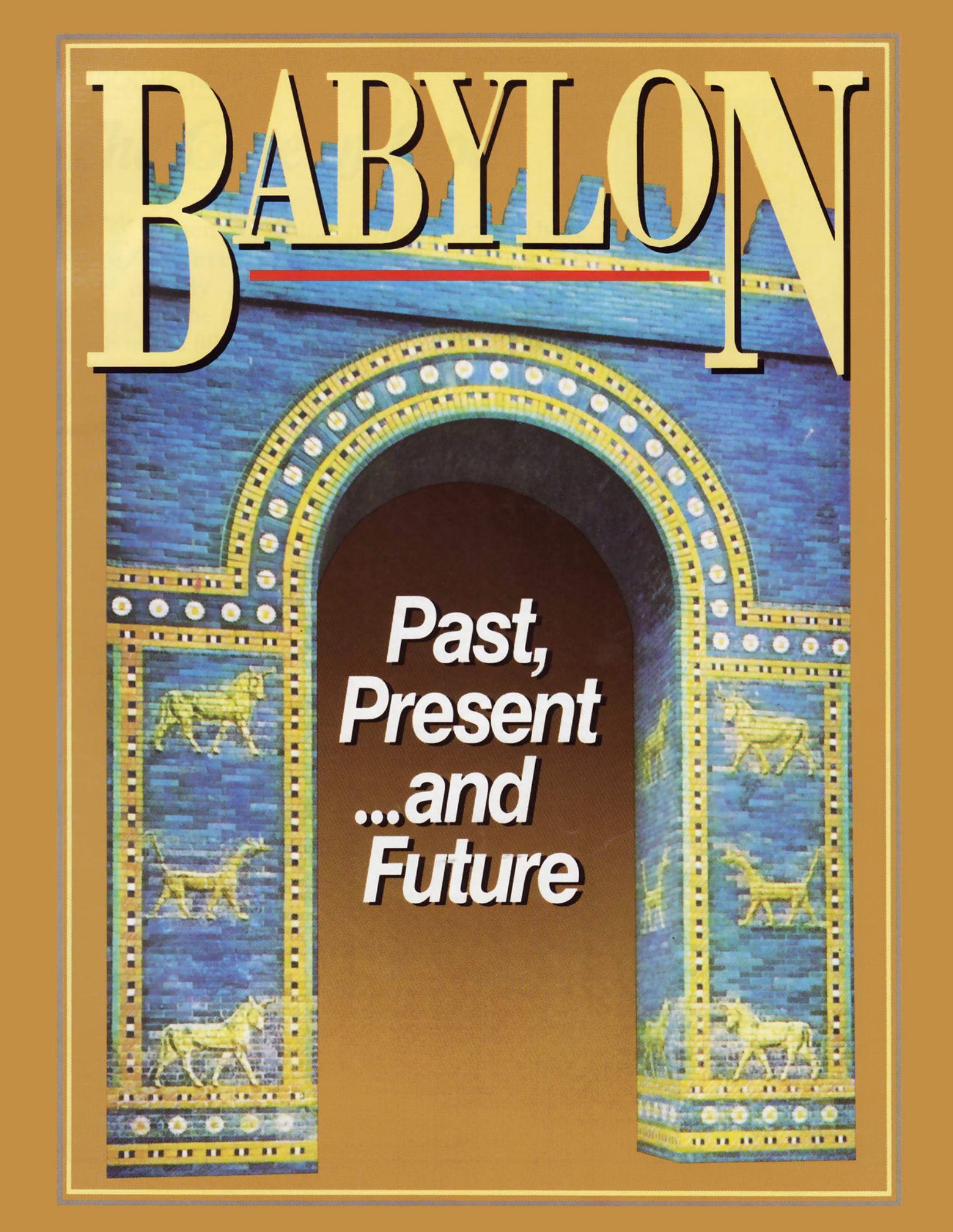


BABYLON



*Past,
Present
...and
Future*

The Gate of God

When we think of the places where the events of the Bible took place, we usually picture Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, maybe Egypt, and of course Jerusalem. But much of the Bible took place in a land hundreds of miles away from these places. It is known as Mesopotamia, “the land between the rivers.” It is also known as the “cradle of civilization.”

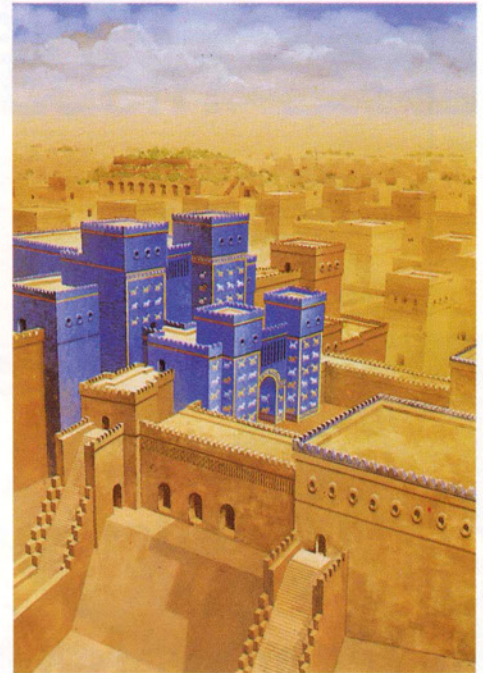
Today, much of ancient Mesopotamia lies within the borders of the Republic of Iraq. Baghdad is the capital, a bustling modern city with more than 4.5 million inhabitants. Most would consider it an old city, since it was established in A.D. 762 by the Caliph al-Mansur. But Baghdad is a relative newcomer to the Mesopotamian plain. To the north and south are scores of other cities, whose history stretches back long before the birth of Jesus, long before Moses, and some even before the wonders of ancient Egypt. They go back to the very beginning of recorded time. They include cities like Nineveh and Nimrud to the north and, to the south, Ur and Eridu. And the most famous of them all, Babylon.

Babylon means “gate of god” and it was once one of the most elaborate and influential cities in the world. Inside its great defensive walls, which enclosed the largest city of its time, were palaces, temples and the Hanging Gardens that were listed among the wonders of the ancient world.

They are gone now. Babylon is in ruins. A small section has been excavated by archaeologists and a part of that is being restored as an archaeological park by the Iraq Department of Antiquities. But most of the ancient city is still buried beneath the sand. Even the river that once flowed through this magnificent city has changed its course.

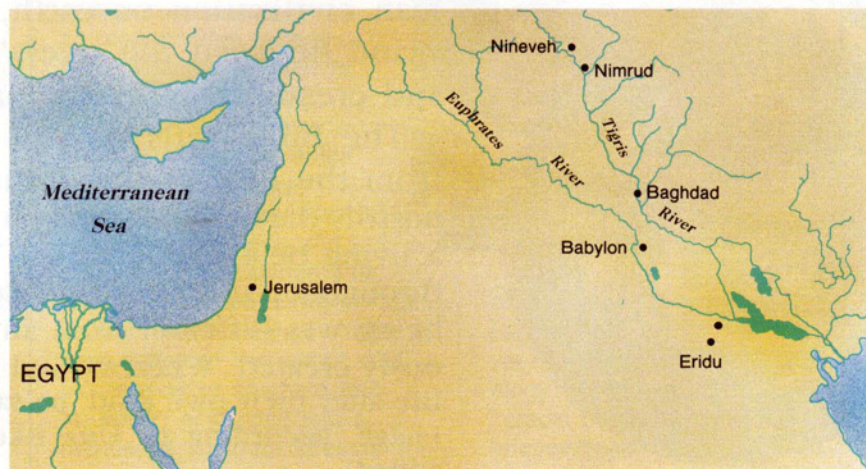
But Babylon lives on in a different way. Like Jerusalem and Rome, Babylon is more than just a geographical location. The name Babylon has come to symbolize utter confusion and mankind’s resistance to God. Twice in the past—and once more in the future—God has intervened dramatically in mankind’s attempts to build a “Babylon.”

For this reason, the story of Babylon, as recorded in history and prophecy, holds an important lesson for all mankind.



ISHTAR GATE

MAP OF MESOPOTAMIA



From Eden to Babel

To understand the significance of Babylon for us today, we must go back in time to the beginning of human civilization.

In one sense, the story of Babylon begins long before there was a city by that name. It begins with the founding of human civilization on earth, when somewhere in the “land between the rivers” God prepared a garden and created the first human beings.

The Bible tells us that the Creator shaped man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the first breath of physical life “and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7, New King James Version throughout unless otherwise noted). This first human being was different from anything that had been previously created. Whereas God had made all other forms of life after their own kind, he said, “Let Us make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness” (Genesis 1:26, italics added).

Since man was made after God’s image, and according to God’s likeness, there was a vast difference—a qualitative, not just quantitative difference—between animals and human beings. Animals do not have the ability to question what is morally acceptable or what is right and wrong. They do not question the greater meaning of existence or search for immortality. People do, and that is what sets them apart. Human



ANCIENT “TREE OF LIFE” SYMBOL

beings were created with “minds of their own,” and God wanted to know how they would use those minds.

The Forbidden Fruit

Many people are familiar with the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit tree in the Garden of Eden. But very few have really understood its significance. The Garden of Eden was a carefully planned habitat. As Adam and Eve looked after the garden, they would learn, in the familiar words of the King James Version, how to “dress and to keep” the environment (Genesis 2:15).

God focused their attention on two trees in the garden. He gave Adam and Eve the right to eat from the “tree of life.” This tree represented God’s ultimate purpose for creating man—that he should have LIFE! Not just a temporary mortal existence but *eternal* life.

The other tree in the garden was the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” but God placed it very firmly “off limits.” There were some aspects of creation that lay outside the human ability to understand or control. In some areas, God knew best and mankind needed to take his word for it. “In the day that you eat of it [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you shall surely die,” he warned (Genesis 2:16-17).

But would man heed?

The answer to the question determined the direction that human progress would take. Would this newly created species, made in the image of God himself, choose to remain under the authority of God? Or would the man and the woman choose to go their own way, deciding for themselves what was right and what was wrong? It was a crucial moment in human history.

Enter the Devil

At this stage Satan, in the form of a serpent, entered the picture. He sowed the seeds of doubt in Eve’s mind. The tree was beautiful; the fruit looked good to eat. If the tree represented the authority or power to decide what was good

Where Was the Garden of Eden?

The location of the Garden of Eden has been a topic of discussion and debate for centuries. During the Middle Ages, many people believed it still existed and could be rediscovered. Some Spanish explorers searched for the garden paradise in the New World, but without success.

Where was the garden? The Bible does not definitively fix the site. We’re told simply that “the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed” (Genesis 2:8). One additional clue is provided: “Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads” (verse 10).

Since two of those four river names are those of the Tigris (ancient Hiddekel) and the Euphrates (see verse 14), many have felt the garden was in Babylonia or southern Mesopotamia (in modern Iraq), where ancient Sumerian legends place a similar garden.

Deposits of silt have radically altered the entire configuration of lower Babylonia over the millennia. Moreover, the Tigris and Euphrates have shifted their river beds several times through history. Archaeological studies have indicated that about 4000 B.C., a river of southern Iraq “braided” or divided into a number of separate streams (the four riverheads of Genesis 2?) before entering what is now called the Persian or Arabian Gulf.

Other suggested locations for the garden have included Armenia, near the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates; Dilmun

(modern Bahrain in the Persian Gulf); or sites in southwest Persia. Southern Babylonia, however, remains the generally accepted locale. If so, the book



of Genesis thus places the beginning of human life in the very region that modern archaeology has shown to be the “cradle of civilization,” the original home of the races of men.

Where is Eden today? It’s gone! Adam was ordered to dress and to keep the garden. He sinned and was driven out. The garden became overgrown and went to ruin as would any garden without human care.

The God of This World

It is impossible to really appreciate the significance of Babylon in history and prophecy without also understanding the role of Satan the devil.

The concept of a malevolent spirit that is the embodiment of all evil sounds farfetched and superstitious today. But the Bible shows that there is a devil who has played an invisible, but significant role in the history of mankind. It tells us that he was once a powerful angel, Lucifer, the "light bringer" holding a high position at first at God's throne and later on earth. He became warped through jealousy and pride and ultimately led one third of the angels in a rebellion against God. Thus Lucifer the angel of light became Satan the adversary and the leader of the powers of darkness.

Satan works behind the scenes, quietly and insidiously. He often appears as a benefactor, a friend and servant of mankind. The apostle Paul warns that Satan "transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness" (II Corinthians 11:14-15). Much of what is done through his influence may appear to be good at first. Its true intent is not exposed until it is too late. It is important to understand this if we are to fully understand the lesson of Babylon.

The Bible reveals Satan as the

Ancient coin, minted in Tyre, features coiled serpent, familiar symbol of Satan the devil.

"god of this world" or age (II Corinthians 4:4, KJV), "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," advised the apostle James (James 4:7). "We are not ignorant of his devices," Paul reminded us (II Corinthians 2:11).

His devices are to tempt us through our human lusts as he manipulates our attitudes, feelings and moods. He looks for the negative emotions like vanity, pride, greed, lust, hurt feelings and envy. He fans the embers of discontent into flames of hatred and is always ready to coax the first stirrings of temptation into the reality of sin. That is what he did to Eve and that is what he will try to do to everyone who descended from her. No wonder, then, that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13).

The Western world is experiencing a resurgence of interest in devil worship and the occult. This is dangerous, but it is even more dangerous to believe that Satan's influence is only limited to those who seek trendy "enlightenment" or involvement with gruesome practices. Satan's influence is potentially universal. He can affect the powerful and strong as easily as the insignificant and insecure. We will see this as we understand the story of Babylon. Satan may not appear often on stage, but he is always there in the wings, waiting for those moments when a man, a woman, or a nation can be tempted to declare independence from God.



and what was evil, why did God not want Adam and Eve to have it? Because, explained Satan, God knew that "in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be [as gods—KJV], knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). And, Satan suggested, didn't they *want* to be like that?

It was indeed tempting. First Eve, then Adam succumbed. God had learned what he wanted to know. These new creatures, made with minds that could think and choose, could and *would* choose to disobey. That was a serious matter. It has always been God's intention that human beings, made in his image, would eventually become even more like God. But not until they had learned to *behave* like God.

Since they had chosen not to obey, Adam and Eve and their descendants would have to learn the consequences of that decision. Otherwise, it would mean everlasting confusion, dispute, argument, and frustration, and life eternal would not be worth living!

And so God banished Adam and Eve from the garden. He did not abandon them entirely, but by denying them access to the tree that provided spiritual understanding, man would eventually be forced to learn through hard, cold experience that obedience to God was the only way to go. As Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden behind them, the human race took its first steps in the direction of Babylon.

The Tower of Babel

It took more than 17 centuries for mankind to get from the innocence of Eden to its first attempt to build Babylon.

The Bible record shows us that this was a violent period in history. It began when Cain slew his brother Abel, and culminated in the great Flood in which human life, except for the family of Noah, perished.

As the flood waters drained away, God brought Noah and his family from the ark. He instructed them to begin again, living in harmony with creation and each other.

It was the opportunity for a fresh start. Some heeded, but the desire to be self-reliant and independent was a strong temptation. The old attitudes quickly sprung up again as men and women thought they knew better than God. A few score years after the Flood a group of travelers wandered into Mesopotamia. As they journeyed “they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there” (Genesis 11:2).

They needed a base, a central rallying point. The plain of Shinar seemed like an ideal location. There they found resources and materials to build a substantial city. But it wouldn't be just any city. “They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens’” (Genesis 11:3-4).

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the leader of these people was Nimrod, a grandson of Noah's son Ham. The Bible tells us that he gained the reputation for being a “mighty hunter before the Lord” (Genesis 10:9), an expression that implies opposition to God.

There have been many artist's impressions of what the Tower of Babel may have looked like. Most are fanciful, some ridiculous. The tower was almost certainly a far less ambitious building. The plain of Shinar is generally flat, and even today a building a hundred or so feet high can be seen for miles around. A tower that “reached to heaven” would not have had to be any higher to be a landmark in this region. The attitude of the builders was “let us make a name for *ourselves*, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:4, italics added).

This was not what God had intended. The earth had to be repopulated, and the human race diversified. God allowed the builders to continue to work on

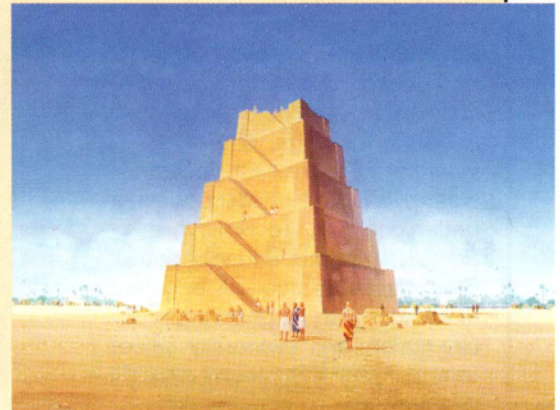
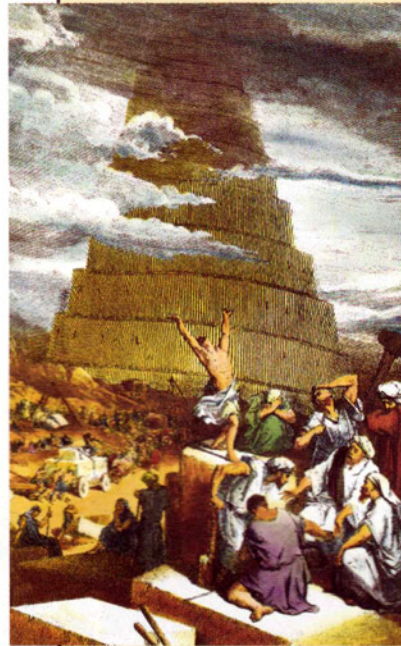
the tower for a while (Sumerian tradition has it for two years), but eventually he decided to intervene. “But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built” (Genesis 11:5).

The little, baked brick tower, protruding impudently out of the plain posed no threat to God, but

wrong direction.

So as God reviewed the progress at Babel, he knew what had to be done. He would not prevent humans from following their chosen course, but he would slow them down.

Genesis tells us what happened. “And the Lord said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have



Artists' conceptions of biblical Tower of Babel, early focus of mankind's defiance of God.

it was a symbol of defiance and an expression of the self-confident, independent attitude that had gotten Adam and Eve and their descendants in trouble. God could not allow it to continue unchecked.

The Tongues Are Confused

The Bible tells us that at this time mankind shared a common language (Genesis 11:1). Other languages existed before the Flood, but it is quite logical that the first few generations of the descendants of Noah would have shared a common family tongue. It should have been a great advantage, but this fledgling civilization was clearly developing in the

one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech” (Genesis 11:6-7).

The builders were unable to communicate clearly with each other, and so the building of the Tower of Babel came to a halt. Families went their separate ways, to be scattered over the face of the earth and eventually to become tribes and nations.

It was the first time that God intervened in the development of a “Babylon,” but it would not be the last.

Hammurabi's Babylon

Hammurabi, an Amorite, was the sixth king of the first dynasty of Babylon. He ruled Babylon over a millennium before Nebuchadnezzar. Though he has been sometimes (mistakenly) identified with Amraphel, king of Shinar (Genesis 14:1), Hammurabi was contemporary not with Abraham but with Jacob and Joseph, Abraham's grandchildren and great grandchildren.

During his reign, one of Hammurabi's greatest desires was to bring all of Mesopotamia under one rule. To achieve this goal, Hammurabi sought control over the Euphrates. He engaged in conflict with neighboring city-states, and eventually gained total control. Hammurabi also devoted time to construction projects and internal reforms.

Trade especially flourished during his reign. Cloves—indigenous to the Moluccas or Spice Islands of faraway Indonesia—were among the many products imported.

But perhaps Hammurabi is best known for his set of laws that have been preserved to this day, the famous "Code of Hammurabi." Based on older collections of Sumerian and Akkadian ordinances, it was one of the first law codes in history. It



is inscribed on a polished black diorite stele or pillar (see photo) bearing a bas-relief of Hammurabi receiving laws from the sun-god Shamash, god of justice. The stele stands about 7½ feet (2¼ meters) high and carries more than 4,000 lines of Akkadian cuneiform script, containing nearly 300 legal provisions.

Hammurabi's code was unique in many respects. Covering business, criminal, family and agricultural matters, the code was far more

comprehensive and detailed than what any civilization had previously attempted. Its main principle was that "the strong may not oppress the weak."

In the 12th century B.C., the famous stele was carried off as war booty by the Elamites to their capital, Susa. It was discovered there in 1902 by the archaeologist Jean-Vincent Scheil. The largest cuneiform document yet discovered, it now resides in the Louvre in Paris.

During Hammurabi's reign of more than four decades, he forged one of the great but short-lived empires of ancient Mesopotamia and laid the basis of the Babylonian civilization that would continue for more than a thousand years after his death.

Today, little of Hammurabi's Babylon remains. The Babylon visible to the visitor today is largely that built by Nebuchadnezzar.



Sculpture of Hammurabi kneeling in worship (left); famous Law Code Stele of Hammurabi, on which is inscribed one of the first law codes in history (center); detail showing Hammurabi standing before the sun-god Shamash, the god of justice (above).



CHAPTER TWO

'Is Not This Great Babylon?'

Under Nebuchadnezzar's leadership, Babylon became the greatest and most impressive city of the ancient world.

Warfare often rocked the cradle of civilization. Mesopotamia was the scene of many battles in the centuries that followed the attempt to build the Tower of Babel. The city of Babel—or Babylon as we know it in later history—waxed and waned. Built on the banks of the Euphrates River, Babylon was attacked and destroyed several times, but rose from its ruins even more magnificent than before. Under Hammurabi (see page 6) the Babylonians controlled an empire that stretched from the Persian Gulf to the upper reaches of the Tigris River. In the mid-second millennium B.C., this dynasty fell into the hands of enemies and Babylon's power declined.

Others now had control over Mesopotamia. For several centuries, Babylon's influence would only play a secondary role. But in 612 B.C. the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, fell to a combined force of Babylonians and Medes. Seven years later, the Babylonians (also known by this time as the Chaldeans) defeated the Egyptian forces of Pharaoh Necho at



KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon

Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon grew to become the most impressive city of its time—the largest city on earth. The Greek historian Herodotus declared that it surpassed in splendor any city in the known world. Its population may have exceeded 200,000.

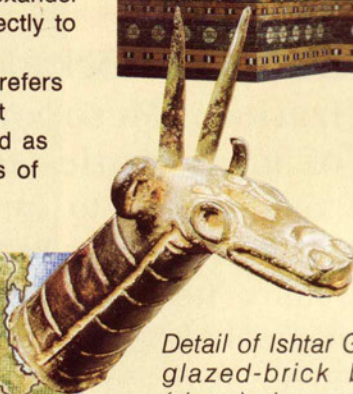
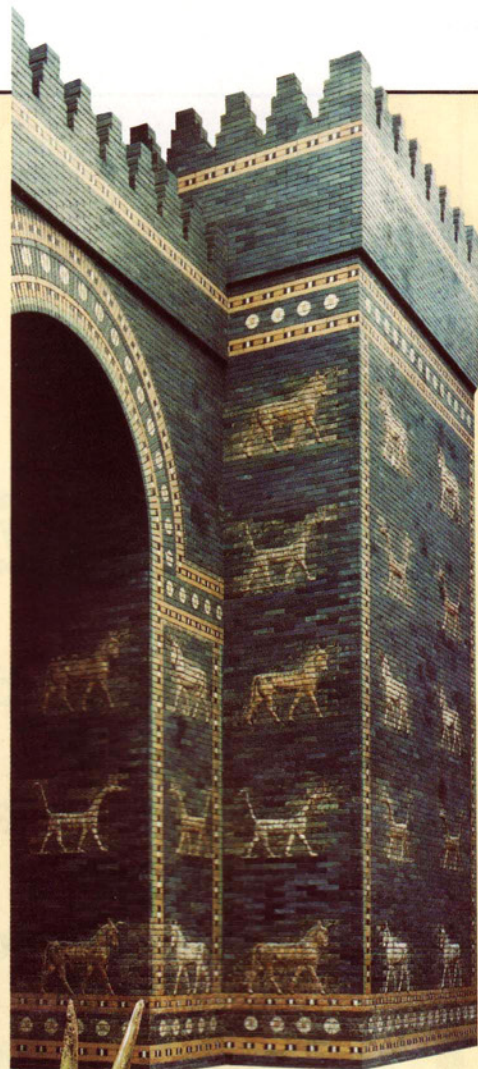
Nebuchadnezzar's vast city included immense fortifications. Babylon was the best-protected city of ancient times. It had two walls, inner and outer, impossible to scale or breach. A hundred gates of bronze were set in the impregnable wall, which was buttressed at regular intervals by defensive towers.

Nebuchadnezzar also undertook a vast rebuilding program. Babylon's impressive architectural splendors had no equal in Mesopotamia. The city's central feature was the great Temple of Marduk, chief of the Babylonian gods. Just to the north was its associated ziggurat or temple tower known as Etemenanki, "the house that is the foundation of heaven and

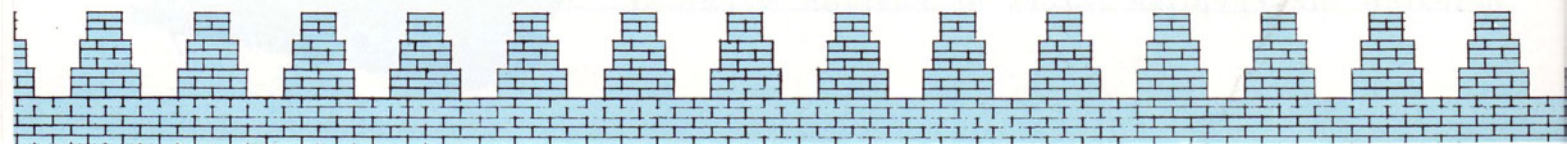
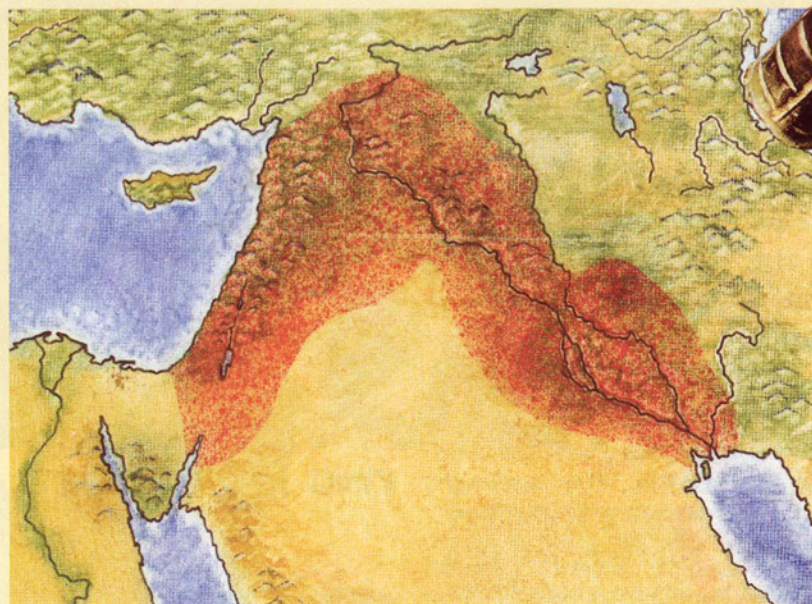
earth." The seven-storied tower was topped by a temple in magnificent blue glaze.

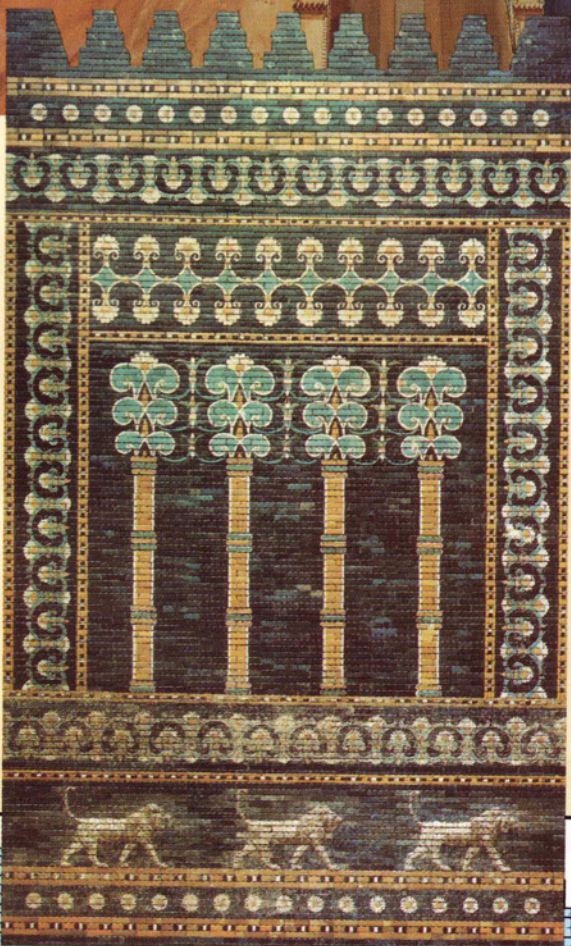
From the Temple, the paved Processional Way led northward to the spectacular Ishtar Gate, decorated with magical bulls and dragons molded in relief in the colorful glazed brickwork. The avenue—its walls decorated with enameled lions—continued through the Ishtar Gate and northward to a temple outside the city walls.

Nebuchadnezzar's immense royal palace (called the Southern Palace) lay between the Processional Way on the east and a thickly walled citadel to the west. The palace contained five great courtyards. Nebuchadnezzar's throne room—probably also the site of Belshazzar's feast and Alexander the Great's death—lay directly to the south of the central courtyard. Greek tradition refers to the palace's magnificent Hanging Gardens, regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.



Detail of Ishtar Gate, ornamented with glazed-brick bulls and dragons (above); bronze head of dragon of Marduk, chief god of Babylon (left); detail of bull of Adad, Babylonian storm god, from Ishtar Gate (below).





Artist's view of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon (above); reconstruction of glazed-brick frieze on facade of throne room (left); Ishtar, Babylonian goddess of love and war (right); relief of lion of Ishtar from Processional Way (below).



Excavating Babylon

It was the German architect and archaeologist Robert Koldewey (1855-1925) who revealed the Babylon of the Bible as an historical reality.

In 1897, Dr. Koldewey announced his intention to uncover Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. He mounted a major excavation under the auspices of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft (German Orient Society). Digging began in March 1899 among desolate mounds of crumbled mud bricks near the village of Hilla, south of Baghdad. It would continue for the next 18 years.

Slowly and painstakingly, Koldewey began uncovering the metropolis of Nebuchadnezzar. Among Koldewey's first discoveries were the remains of the city's massive walls.

Koldewey's workmen — some 200 strong — next cleared the Processional Way, the main north-south avenue bisecting the city. The Way led to the magnificent Ishtar Gate.

Several seasons of digging revealed Nebuchadnezzar's palace with its five courtyards. At the northeast corner of the palace, near the Ishtar Gate, Koldewey discovered a building with 14 arched vaults, and nearby a unique well with three shafts. He postulated that the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon grew on the roof of this vaulted building. Many modern archaeologists, however, believe the vaulted chambers served as a warehouse, as lists of

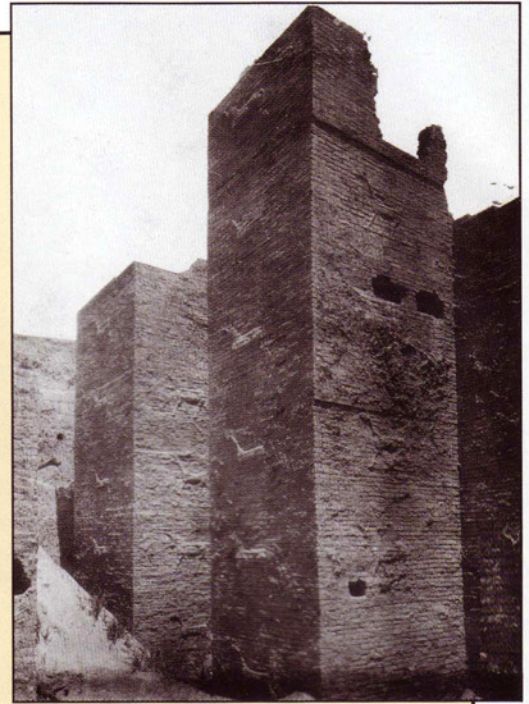
rations for the Jewish exiles were found in them.

The remains of the great Ziggurat of Babylon was another of Koldewey's finds. Unfortunately, nothing was left but the crumbling brickwork of the base of that colossal tower, reputedly built on the site of the original Tower of Babel of biblical fame.

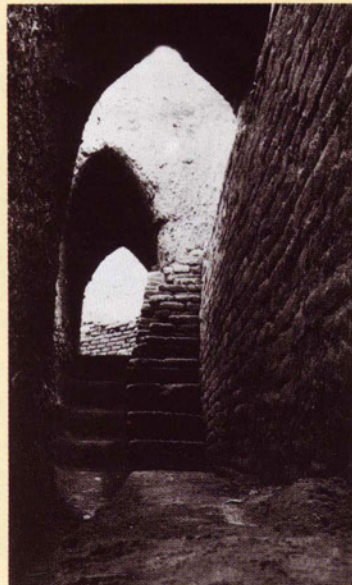
An assistant wrote that Koldewey "lived for Babylon and thought of Babylon . . . day and night." The approach of the British Expeditionary Force in March 1917 forced him to close down the excavations, with much of his work unfinished.



DR. R. KOLDEWEY



Photographs of early 20th-century German excavations at Babylon. Dr. Robert Koldewey's precise way of tracing mud-brick walls and building foundations pioneered a new approach to excavation.



Carchemish, and Babylon once again became the dominant power in the region under the leadership of the brilliant Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar was an ambitious and capable ruler, who had planned an extensive building program of palaces, temples and waterways for his capital. Under his rule, Babylon would become the most impressive city the world had ever seen.

What Nebuchadnezzar did not realize was that his rise to power was part of a divine plan. The proud king saw himself as undisputed master of the world. God chose this moment to teach him, and all who followed him, who really controlled the destiny of nations. His empire would now confront a nation that was not like the others he had subdued.

This nation was Judah, remnant of the kingdom of Israel that had been established by God when he had led their ancestors out of Egyptian captivity more than 800 years earlier. They were a chosen people, who had entered into a covenant with God. Their destiny depended not on their military power, or the strength of their alliances, but on whether or not they obeyed God's laws.

The Fall of Judah

There was a moment when both Babylon and Judah maintained distant but cordial relations when both were under Assyrian domination. The Bible tells us how, about a century earlier, the Babylonians had sent a goodwill mission to Judah's King Hezekiah to congratulate him on his recovery from serious illness. Hezekiah had shown the Babylonian emissary the treasure of the Temple, built by an earlier king, Solomon. This proved to be a costly mistake (see II Kings 20:12-19).

The Babylonians' sentiments toward Judah changed now that they were the chief power in the region. Nebuchadnezzar demanded the subjugation and tribute of the kingdom of Judah, which was now in serious decline. Several times the Babylonians invaded, each time taking away captives and trea-

sure. Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed in July 587 B.C.

Nebuchadnezzar brought the most intelligent and capable of his foreign captives to his court to receive special training in the language and literature of the Chaldeans (Daniel 1:3-4).

The stage was set for an unusual partnership between the great Babylonian king and a young Jewish captive named Daniel. We find the story of Daniel's relationship with the king in the book of the Bible that bears his name.

What neither Daniel nor Nebuchadnezzar understood at this time was that they were living at a landmark moment in history. For nearly a thousand years, God had been working with his chosen people of Israel and Judah. He had sent them warning after warning about what would happen if they did not obey, but they had not heeded. So God had allowed them to be taken captive by the hostile nations around. The inhabitants of Samaria, Israel's capital, were finally taken captive, in 721 B.C., by the Assyrians. Now Judah had fallen prey to the forces of Nebuchadnezzar. It seemed like the end of the nation that God had brought out of Egypt and established in a promised land. Actually, as one chapter of God's dealing with mankind was ending, another was about to begin.

In a series of dramatic visions, God began to outline the course of future events.

A Lesson for a King

It began with a strange dream that Nebuchadnezzar had one night. None of the magicians and astrologers of his court could interpret his dream. Daniel was summoned and with God's help was able to explain what the dream meant. You can read the entire story in the second chapter of the book of Daniel.

Daniel reminded the king that he had seen a great image, with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron, with feet of iron mixed with clay. He then explained that the image repre-

sented a succession of empires that would dominate the world from that time on. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was only the first, represented by the head of gold. Later it would fall, to be replaced by three others. Eventually, God would destroy the last of these empires and establish his kingdom on earth.

This was not what Nebuchadnezzar wanted to hear. Was he not the all-powerful "king of kings"? Wasn't he the one who had to be addressed "O king, live forever"? His Babylon was the greatest city the world had seen. It was unthinkable that its glory would fade. God was giving this king a lesson in humility that he was at first reluctant to accept. But God was using this situation to teach not just Nebuchadnezzar, but all who followed him in positions of leadership, an all-important lesson.

In the book of Daniel, chapter 4, another dream greatly disturbed the king. He saw a great tree that was cut down to the ground until only a stump was left. He once again summoned Daniel for an explanation. Daniel explained to the king that this dream was a warning from God. The proud tree represented Nebuchadnezzar, who would soon be cut down.

The king did not heed Daniel's warning. The fourth chapter of Daniel tells us what happened next.

"At the end of the twelve months he [Nebuchadnezzar] was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke, saying, 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?' While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it

to whomever He chooses.’ That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar” (Daniel 4:29-33).

Nebuchadnezzar’s fit of insanity lasted for seven years. At the end of that time his mind was restored. He learned his lesson. He passed it on to posterity, in his own words, recorded in Daniel 4:34-37: “And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to gen-

Nebuchadnezzar’s experience should have served as a warning to successive rulers of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded on the throne by his son, the unpopular Amel-Marduk (562-560)—the Evil-Merodach of scripture. He, in turn, was murdered and succeeded by his brother-in-law Nergal-sharra-usur (Neriglissar) (560-556), a general and son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar. Following Neriglissar’s death under obscure circumstances, his young son, Labashi-Marduk, reigned for three months before being removed in a rebellion. Nabu-na’id (Nabonidus) came to

him safe. In Daniel, chapter 5, we read that he planned a great feast. In a great show of conceit, he ordered the drinks and the meal to be served in golden goblets and on plates plundered from the Temple in Jerusalem.

Even as he sat feasting, the party was stunned into silence as a mysterious hand appeared and began to write on the wall of the throne room. None of the king’s magicians could understand. Once again Daniel was summoned. He explained that the writing was a message from God. God was bringing the proud rule of Belshazzar to an end. Babylon was finished. The kingdom would be divided between the Medes and the Persians, who were even as they spoke entering the city.

On that night, in October 539 B.C., God intervened in the affairs of Babylon again. What happened was a dramatic confirmation of God’s earlier hand in history. God had prophesied the end of Babylon, in a detailed prophecy delivered through Isaiah, *nearly two hundred years before!*

The Fall of Babylon

Isaiah prophesied that God would make it possible for a king, Cyrus by name, to conquer the many kingdoms that ultimately would make up his empire:

“Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors [or, two leaved gates], so that the gates will not be shut” (Isaiah 45:1).

The “double doors” that would not be shut or locked is a reference to the remarkable way in which Cyrus was able to capture the city of Babylon.

With its massive high walls, Babylon appeared impregnable from the outside. When Cyrus’ main army encamped around the city, the Babylonians laughed! Aware of his advance, they had stored up provisions for many years, and could survive a siege indefinitely.

Unknown to the Babylonians, however, Cyrus was implement-



Painting by Rembrandt depicts Belshazzar and prophetic handwriting on the wall. Inset shows partially restored throne room—probable location of Belshazzar’s banquet and Nebuchadnezzar’s meetings with Daniel.

eration. . . . At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. . . .

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to abase.”

the throne. His son and crown prince was Bel-shar-usur (the biblical Belshazzar).

Belshazzar was as proud and arrogant as Nebuchadnezzar once had been. Although Babylon at this time was besieged by enemies, Belshazzar remained unconcerned, trusting that the city’s formidable defenses would keep

ing an ingenious plan. Some of his men were busy upstream diverting the Euphrates River, which normally flowed through massive river gates into the city. They dug a channel to redirect the river into an old lake. The river level soon sank, permitting the Persians to wade under the gates and into Babylon under cover of darkness.

Cyrus apparently had also gotten a spy into the city, who on the appropriate night had unlocked a set of gates—the prophesied “double door”—in the wall that stretched along the bank of the river. Through these gates, Cyrus’ army swarmed into the metropolis. The Babylonians were surprised and offered no effective resistance.

So large was the city that when the outer parts were already taken, those living in the center of Babylon remained unaware of the city’s demise. Celebrating what may have been the New Year Festival, they continued their merriment until the truth became all too apparent.

The greatest city of the ancient world had fallen! (Over the next few centuries, it slowly declined and finally crumbled into ruins.)

The time of the “head of gold” was over. Now the empire represented by the chest and arms of silver would control the world for a season. The Medo-Persian Empire ruled over Babylon and many countries for just over two centuries, until it fell to the forces of Alexander the Great (the belly and thighs of bronze of Nebuchadnezzar’s image). Alexander wanted to make Babylon the capital of his empire, but his dreams were thwarted when he died of a fever, probably in the throne room of Nebuchadnezzar’s old palace.

In the years that followed, the desert slowly took over. Babylon’s palaces and temples crumbled. Shifting sand buried the parks and waterways. Even the river shifted its course. Nebuchadnezzar’s once great city was no more.

But, in another sense, it was not the end.

The Bible tells us of another Babylon—destined to be the greatest of them all! We find it in the last book of the Bible—the Apocalypse or book of Revelation.



The ‘Cyrus Legend’

Cyrus II—called “the Great”—was king of Persia from c. 558 to 529 B.C. He brought the whole of the Near East—including mighty Babylon—under his rule, from the Aegean Sea to the Indus River. Significant among his deeds was his granting of permission to the Jewish captives in Babylonia to return to their homeland.

That much is history. But what is not widely realized is that almost two centuries before Cyrus, the prophet Isaiah recorded (Isaiah 44:28) that a man named Cyrus would permit the exiled Jews to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple—which, in Isaiah’s day, had not yet been destroyed! Isaiah also prophesied Cyrus’ overthrow of Babylon (Isaiah 45:1-3).

Not only did God call Cyrus by name long before he was born, he saw to it that Satan the devil was prevented from putting the infant Cyrus to death and thwarting his plan. Greek sources—Herodotus, Xenophon and Ctesias—provide considerable information about Cyrus’ early life. Notice the remarkable story surrounding Cyrus’ birth and childhood, according to a version related by Herodotus in his *History* (1.107-130):

Astyages, king of the Medes, was overlord of the Persians.

Astyages gave his daughter Mandane in marriage to his vassal Cambyses, king of the Persians.

From the marriage of Mandane and Cambyses, Cyrus was born. Astyages, however, had a dream that the baby would grow up to overthrow him. So he ordered his adviser, Harpagus, to personally kill the infant. Harpagus, however, entrusted the execution to a herdsman named Mitrdates.

On finding that his wife had just given birth to a stillborn child, the herdsman substituted Cyrus, and reared him as his own son. When Cyrus was 10 years old, Astyages discovered the deception. In spite of the dream, the king was persuaded to let the boy live.

When he reached manhood, Cyrus ascended the Persian throne (c. 558 B.C.). In 553 he led a rebellion against his maternal grandfather. In 550 Astyages marched against Cyrus, but his army deserted him and surrendered to the Persians. Astyages—the last ruler of Media—was captured and dethroned, though he was permitted to live out his life in peace. Thus Cyrus became king of the Medes and Persians, firmly established on his throne and poised to fulfill his amazing prophetic destiny.

‘Mystery, Babylon the Great’

Bible prophecy reveals that a great military and economic superpower—“Babylon the great”—will dominate the world.

The Apocalypse or book of Revelation is often considered to be one of the most difficult books of the Bible to understand. Its strange imagery, peculiar visions and complicated language baffle laymen and scholars alike. And yet the book is intended to be a revelation—not an obscuring. It was given by Jesus Christ to John, the last survivor of the original apostles, so that the Church would understand the framework of events that were to occur between their time (the late first century A.D.) and the return of Christ to earth to establish the kingdom of God.

The events it describes occur at a time the Bible calls the “end of the age,” in a world that is very different to what we know today. Revelation is set in the future—but not the *distant* future. It describes a series of events that bring mankind to a crisis point unparalleled in history.

Let’s pick up the story in chapter 17, at a point where centuries of greed, violence and mismanagement have finally caught up with the human race. Vast areas of the earth have been ravaged by war, famine and disease. As civilization is poised on the edge of disaster, the world’s affairs are dominated by a strange power. The Apocalypse describes the situation like this:

“And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns” (Revelation 17:3).

Much of the information in the book of Revelation is revealed in symbols. This peculiar beast and others like it are described in several other places throughout the Apocalypse. Other prophecies make it clear that they represent a series of regimes that have controlled the territory once ruled by the old Roman Empire and its heirs. The Roman Empire fell in A.D. 476, but Rome had a continuing influence, particularly on central Europe. A succession of governments based on the Roman model have ruled the area for most of the time between the fall of the Empire and today. But Revelation 17 is describing more than a regional power.

John describes the woman riding on the beast as a “great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication” (Revelation 17:1-2). This great harlot has influence that extends far beyond the confines of the old Roman Empire. Who is she to wield such extraordinary power? Obviously not a real person. Like the beast, she is symbolic.

“And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. . . . ‘And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth’ ” (verses 5, 18).

Babylon again! Not this time limited to a city. Babylon is personified as a harlot, a prostitute, who seduces and influences the destiny of the world. The rest of Revelation 17 describes a violent, turbulent world, dominated by the woman on the beast. Together they are preparing the inhabitants of the earth to fight against the returning Messiah.

This is certainly not the world we know today. We have our problems, but we have not

reached a crisis like this. We may not have a world of peace and plenty for all nations, but the leaders of the world’s major nations are generally sensible, reasonable men and women. In spite of their differences, they have enough common sense and self-control not to bring down civilization. In some ways there seems to be more prospect of international cooperation and coexistence today than at any time since the beginning of this century.

So how does this grim world described in the Apocalypse come about? Major changes in the world situation don’t just happen. They are *caused*, even while most people do not recognize what is happening.

This is because most of us tend to understand the news in terms of the headline events, like an assassination, a revolution or a declaration of war. We forget that these are only the ultimate effect of pressures that have been building sometimes for decades. The forces of economics are far more

economic and diplomatic decisions made in the years following the First World War.

Then for four decades after the Second World War, East and West glared at each other across the Iron Curtain. It seemed that the precarious status quo was only able to be maintained by an ever-accelerating arms race. But it has been economic pressures, caused by decisions made since the war, that have largely been responsible for upsetting the balance of power and breaking the diplomatic log jam, making possible the recent changes in Europe.

So even though the world described in the book of Revelation may seem unlikely now, if we look carefully we may see how the future could be dominated by a system like “Babylon the great.”

Sounding the Alarm

There never has been a time quite like this. Although we have unprecedented prosperity and progress, it has been bought at a price. We are now beginning to



WOMAN AND BEAST OF REVELATION 17

influential in framing the mood of the world than we realize.

For example, in the 1920s, few people foresaw the Great Depression, the rise of Nazi Germany, and the Second World War. But the roots of those calamitous events were planted firmly by the

face up to the fact that our civilization has some critical, and perhaps terminal problems. The earth has been polluted, poisoned and stripped of resources.

Experts may argue over the details, but there is no question that something must be done, if we are

to avert a catastrophe.

But what? Industrial nations may be waking up to the fact that they cannot keep on polluting, but modern technology has as its by-product a whole range of ever more potent waste material. The technology for conservation is available, but it is expensive, and nations choose to afford it late in their development cycle. Prosperity is their priority; taking care of the environment can be postponed. Everyone pays lip service to "saving the future," but not if it means doing without *now*.

But all nations, small and great, rich or poor, ultimately depend on food, water and air for their survival.

Waking Up Is Hard to Do

It has been estimated that in 10 years, 82 percent of the earth's population will be living in developing nations. Newcomers in the technological race are beginning to flex their muscles and many are already experiencing the first wave of prosperity. As they grow, they will demand an ever-increasing share of the earth's resources.

In this crowded, interdependent world, no nation can solve the problems even within its own boundaries on its own. Rich nations cannot just pull up the ladder of progress after themselves and self-righteously preach restraint. Starving people, desperate for food and fuel, will not sacrifice today for the sake of tomorrow. Their crisis is now.

A worldwide effort is needed, with all nations showing tolerance, patience, goodwill, generosity and common sense. But that is not the way the world works. What is more likely to happen is that nations with a common interest will band together to stake out and preserve at least their share of the earth's resources.

Divided We Fall

Already, regional trading blocs and cartels are forming. It is happening between the United States and Canada, in East Asia, Central America and South America, the South Pacific, the Caribbean, and significantly, in the nations of Eu-

rope. By 1992, the members of the European Economic Community are planning to dismantle the remaining trade and customs barriers among them, creating a vast common market of more than 320 million people. It will become the largest economic community the world has ever known. But open borders *within* usually mean barriers against those outside. They needn't, but economic unions usually lead to protectionism and trade sanctions. Trade sanctions lead to trade wars, and trade wars are the opening act for hot wars, something that must not happen in a nuclear-armed world.

But this seems to be the direction we are headed. If we do not find a way to resolve these difficulties, we run the risk of losing all the progress of centuries of civilization.

We *must* discipline ourselves. It will take an iron will—or an iron fist!

History has shown that it does not take long for a desperate, frightened world to become even more selfish and cruel. In times of crisis, even the most freedom-loving people are willing to surrender some of their rights and freedoms in the interest of preserving their lifestyle and values. This can bring to power a form of government we have come to know as fascism, where all power—military, economic, political and even religious—is gathered in the hands of the state. It is not an attractive way of life to contemplate, especially while things are going well. But modern history has shown that in a crisis, people turn to a strong party, or a strong man, for leadership.

To preserve their prosperity, certain nations or groups of nations may look again to a form of fascism in the years ahead. A fascist government seems to bring stability and preserve the prosperity of those who go along with the system, while those who do not cooperate become "enemies of the state," to be ruthlessly suppressed. Nationalism and religion become tools to be manipulated by the authorities, and history has shown that patriotism and piety

can be a potent mixture. Ordinary, decent folk are sincerely deceived and swept along in the current, for the regime seems to be upholding and preserving values and traditions that are being threatened. In this paranoid, emotionally supercharged political climate, values and loyalties blur and people become intimidated, willing to betray friends and even family members to gain favor or to identify with the prevailing mood.

Most of us have never known a time like this, and it may seem farfetched. But this century has seen just such a tragedy befall some of the most cultured and advanced nations on earth, and the Bible tells us that it will happen again. Only this time on a terrifying worldwide scale.

The End of Freedom

The book of Revelation describes humanity held in the grip of just such a totalitarian superpower. The harlot woman of the Apocalypse represents a system that dictates the way the world ought to work. Those who go along with her decisions survive and even prosper. She wields her authority through a military and economic superpower—the symbolic "beast." It imposes its harsh regime on the world, deciding who lives, who eats, who starves, who trades. It takes its cue from rigid regimes of the past. It makes the decisions over who gets which resources, who can produce what, and where they can dump their toxic wastes. It is ruthless and efficient and allows no opposition.

It might not be the ideal, but it may seem to be the only alternative to a complete collapse of the world system. So, the Bible tells us, most of the world will cooperate with this system, allowing "Babylon" increasing control of all aspects of life—economic, political, military, even religious.

"And he [the symbolic "beast"] causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his

name" (Revelation 13:16-17).

Who will fill these roles in this nightmare vision of the future? The book of Revelation is like a screen play. The script has been written, and the main characters' roles established. But the cast has not been chosen.

It is certainly not the intention of the reasonable leaders today to lay the foundation of such a monstrosity. They are careful architects, diligently drawing up plans for a peaceful, law-abiding future that will ensure peace and prosperity. But architects cannot always be sure what will become of the buildings they design.

These Bible prophecies should send a chilling note of caution through the corridors of power today. The nations of the world are like animals being herded into a trap. They feel the pressures driving them in new directions. They may still snarl and snap at each other, as their old animosities surface. They don't realize that they are all being driven to the brink of ruin.

For behind the woman riding the beast is another power—the evil genius of Satan. This is his best effort to deceive mankind, using a religious, political, economic and military superpower by which he can direct the destiny of the world to his own end. He has but one goal. In the Garden of Eden, he attempted to thwart God's plan. Once more, in Babylon the great, Satan is behind the scenes. He has never been more tempting—or more dangerous. He has succeeded in deceiving the whole world (Revelation 12:9).

God Steps In

Across the centuries, God has allowed mankind to make mistakes. But, like a watchful father, he has never taken his eyes off us, for he has never lost sight of his purpose for creating us.

When the world groans under the yoke of Babylon the great, it will be time for God to come to the rescue. Mankind, blinded by Satan,

Rebuilding Babylon?

Is Babylon being rebuilt today? This is important because prophecies in the Bible say that Babylon will never again be rebuilt as a thriving, inhabited city.

For example, Isaiah 13:19-20 tells us: "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 sheepfolds there."

The book of Jeremiah says "Babylon shall become a heap, a dwelling place for jackals, an astonishment and a hissing, without an inhabitant" (Jeremiah 51:37).

Most of the area that lay within Babylon's great walls fits the description. It is a desolate wasteland. Nothing can be seen of what was once a vast city except the occasional outcrop of jagged ruins, broken potsherds and broken bricks with fragments of cuneiform inscriptions.

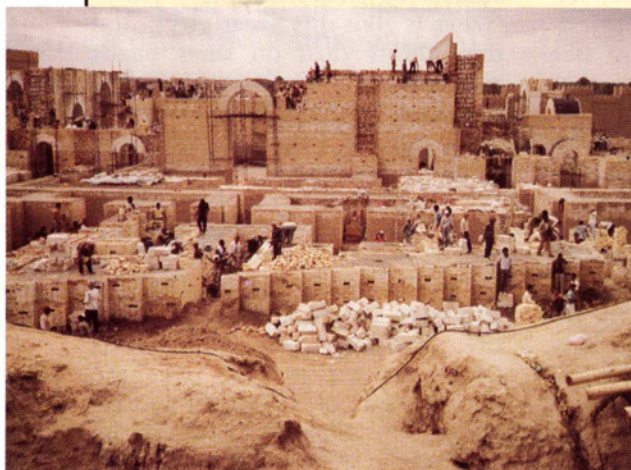
A section of the northern city has been fairly extensively excavated and some of it is being reconstructed by the Iraq Department of Antiquities. It includes the site of the Ishtar Gate, the Processional Way and



Nebuchadnezzar's palace. They are being restored to something like their original appearance. When it is finished, Iraq will have a world class tourist attraction.

But Babylon, as a living, vital city is not being rebuilt. The Euphrates River has shifted course, and no longer flows through the city. It is as if New York had been destroyed, and future inhabitants of the North American continent had decided to recreate the Empire State Building, Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty to show something of what the city had been like. The reconstruction of the northern part of old Babylon is both a monument to the genius of the ancient people who built the city, and a testimony to the certainty of the prophecies that foretold its downfall.

Scenes of restoration work being carried out at Babylon by Iraq Department of Antiquities.



may have thought there was no other choice but to submit to this oppressive system, in which humanity might survive, but freedom, mercy, love and *truth* cannot.

And so, once again, God will intervene in the affairs of Babylon. "After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury'" (Revelation 18:1-3).

Babylon the great may have been ruthless with all those who opposed her, but she has made the world work for those who go along with her system. She has given mankind the economic, political and religious fruits of the world chosen in the Garden of Eden. For those who cannot see through her deceit, Babylon seems to be the last hope for preserving civilization. God cuts her off at what seems like the high point of her success. It will seem like a disaster.

"And the kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come'" (Revelation 18:9-10).

It will mean the collapse of the world's economic system. "And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore" (verse 11). Babylon has organized trade in "merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of cit-

ron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots . . ." And more sinisterly, "bodies and souls of men," meaning slaves (verses 12-13).

International trade in the modern world has become one vast intricate network. Massive deals are made at a touch of a button. Fortunes hang in the balance, and messages go back and forth between computers at the speed of light. Cargoes are sold, resold, diverted and diverted again, even as the great containerships and tankers ply the oceans.

Then, in one awful hour, the screens go blank, the telephones stop ringing, the telexes no longer clatter, as the intricately balanced, carefully controlled, ruthlessly enforced network of a final Babylon the great suddenly ceases to function.

No wonder, then, that "the merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' And every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?' And they threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate'" (Revelation 18:15-19).

Surely, only an enemy of mankind would want to see all this destroyed. So when Jesus Christ returns to take over the governments of the world and establish the kingdom of God, he will not at first be greeted as a liberator. He will seem like a

usurper, another threat to be resisted and suppressed. What is actually the greatest day in history will be thought of as a calamity. Christ will return to establish a new world order of peace, love, cooperation and harmony among all the nations of the world. But the dawn of this new era of hope will seem like the end of the world. Satan will have done his work well.

Babylon's Final Fall

Nothing can be salvaged from this greedy, selfish, ruthless, evil empire. It is the opposite of all that Jesus Christ stands for—the antithesis of everything he plans to accomplish as he rebuilds the world. The Babylonish system must be purged from the earth once and for all. So, symbolically, "a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, 'Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore'" (Revelation 18:21).

Babylon as a system will not so easily disappear. It will take time for its memory to fade for it has produced a way of life, politics, economics, religion, and dealing with problems between nations and individuals that is the opposite to God's way. It is a way of life based on *human* reasoning and *human* understanding, aided and abetted by the perverted thoughts of Satan. It has persisted on the earth from the days of the Garden of Eden and it won't be changed overnight.

Christ cannot build his new society on the foundations of the old. He cannot use its systems, its administrations, its habits or its customs. Those who were deceived into prolonging the old system will need to be reeducated. Christ will have to start again, with new administrators who have learned, over the centuries, to think like he does, and who have proved they will be competent and loyal in applying and enforcing the laws of God.

But where will he find such people in a world that has been so thoroughly misled by Satan?

CHAPTER FOUR

'Come Out of Her, My People'

The Bible warns us not to become a part of end-time Babylon. How can we avoid her alluring appeal?

Two women are described in symbols in the book of Revelation. One we have already met—a corrupt, cunning, treacherous harlot, who sits astride the beast, seducing the governments of the world to follow her ways. The other could not be more different. She is a chaste bride, much persecuted but always patient and virtuous, diligently preparing for marriage. She represents the spiritual people of God that he has called from every age. They have overcome their sins, and have learned to live in obedience and harmony with the laws of God. The book of Revelation tells us that they will be resurrected at Christ's return, to live and reign with him a thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

Satan hates this woman. Her very existence is a threat to him. He persecutes her mercilessly whenever he has the opportunity. As the end approaches, he tries desperately to divert her from her loyalty to her husband-to-be, the Messiah or Jesus Christ, and absorb her into his system.

Across the centuries, many of those whom God has called to follow his way of life have died, often violently, for their faith. They are awaiting resurrection at Christ's return, their salvation assured. But many are alive today, and many more are yet to be

Babylon and Rome

Aside from some passing historical references in the books of Matthew and Acts, the name "Babylon" is mentioned in two other books of the New Testament—I Peter and Revelation. These passages have been the source of much discussion since the earliest days of Christianity.

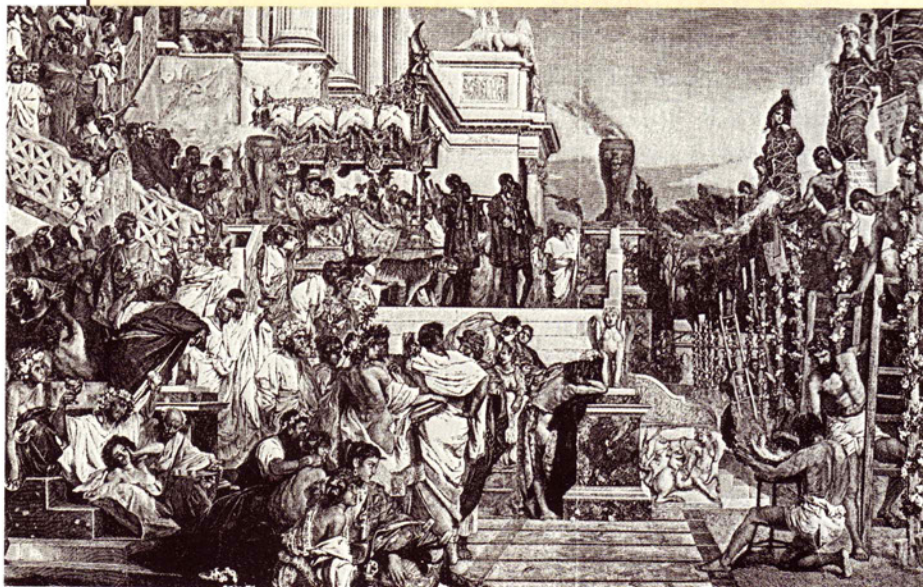
A few biblical commentators have considered the "Babylon" of I Peter 5:13 to be a reference to the literal city on the Euphrates. The majority of modern scholars have held it to be a symbolic or figurative reference to Rome. Jewish and Christian communities did exist in Babylon in the middle half of the first century A.D. when merchants from Palmyra founded a trading colony there in A.D. 24. Babylon was abandoned a half century later when the colony was transferred to a new settlement across the Euphrates River.

The "Babylon" passages in Revelation, however, are a wholly different matter. Those passages (Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21) are widely recognized today as being in a prophetic end-time context, referring to a great world power yet to emerge on the scene.

To early Christians, Babylon in those passages symbolized Rome—the "city on seven hills" (compare Revelation 17:9). The Jews had once been carried captive to Babylon. Thus, that ancient name came to stand for any power hostile to God's people. Prophetic "Babylon" clearly denoted the world-ruling empire of the Caesars—with its false gods, its manifold sins, its persecution of Christians. To Christians, Rome's name had become a synonym for moral corruption and political tyranny—and must surely be intended in a figurative sense in the prophetic passages about "Babylon."

When the Roman Empire became Christianized in the fourth century A.D., it became difficult to continue portraying Rome as the personification of evil and symbol of opposition to God. Yet a minority of Christians—outside the mainstream and critical of the church's alliance with the secular sphere—persisted in regarding Rome as prophetic Babylon.

Christians in Rome suffered intense persecution by the Emperor Nero, who had them nailed to stakes and set ablaze.



called. Nothing would give Satan more satisfaction in his ages-long quest to thwart God, than to deceive the end-time spiritual people of God, and make them a part of Babylon the great.

So, they will have to face some of the greatest challenges that any of God's people have ever confronted.

The Satan we read about in the third chapter of Genesis is restrained, cunning and persuasive. He subtly deceived Eve. The Satan that confronts mankind in the book of Revelation is violent, vengeful and angry, "having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Revelation 12:12). He must work quickly before his opportunities to deceive are brought to an end. While there are still those on earth who are loyal to God, and looking to him for guidance, inspiration and salvation, he feels there is still a chance to thwart God's plan. It would not prevent Christ from winning, but it would certainly spoil his victory.

Overt persecution tends to strengthen God's people. Satan's best weapon has always been deceit. How, then, could he destroy the end-time people of God? He could lure them away from their calling and their commitment through a clever trap.

Kill Them With Kindness

During the last few decades, most of us who live in the developed world have enjoyed a standard of living and prosperity greater than anything that has ever gone before. What in earlier times would have been considered the height of luxury we now take for granted. Yesterday's marvels are today's trinkets. Progress and prosperity are not wrong of themselves, for it is God's will that we be in health and prosper (III John 2). But not if it means compromising with what is right.

Babylon the great, as described in the Apocalypse, will be alluring. Those who conform will continue to enjoy the fruits of prosperity. Those who reject Babylon and her ways will be thrust out, left to fend for themselves, and to

risk persecution, slavery, even death—for a totalitarian system is ruthless in crushing all who oppose it.

Yet those who know the truth must not compromise. This is the challenge facing this last generation of the people of God. They are a Church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, called to overcome their sins, Satan and the world, as they prepare to live and reign with Jesus Christ. Like Daniel, who resisted the temptations of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, they must remain faithful to their calling and their God as Babylon the great dominates all aspects of life around them.

So, as the great harlot sits confidently astride her beast, edging the world ever closer to disaster, God pleads with his people, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

This may not be so easy for a people used to prosperity and comfort. They have come to expect freedom and tolerance, and perhaps even take it for granted. Perhaps they have come to regard their high level of material pros-

perity as a blessing from God, the natural consequence of their faithfulness to him.

As people around them sell out on their principles and conscience for a few more years of materialism, will this end-time generation of the Church have the faith and the conviction to hold fast? In the face of mounting opposition, will the richest, most materialistic Christians who have ever lived be able to face poverty, become social outcasts, and endure persecution as those who preceded them in the faith so often had to do?

Jesus Christ has promised to sustain them, to provide for their needs, and even to protect them from the full horror of end-time events. But will they *claim* that promise and endure to the end? "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" asked Jesus in Luke 18:8.

It depends on the decisions that are being made even now. Spiritual muscles, like physical ones, cannot be built instantly. When Babylon the great is unleashed on this earth, it may be too late to begin building enduring faith. That is why Jesus Christ tells his

Church to always be in a state of readiness, and not to put undue trust in material possessions.

The Bible emphasizes that no one can know the exact day or hour of Jesus Christ's final intervention in the affairs of mankind, but there are ominous indications that the revival of Babylon may not be far off. It would be foolish to ignore them.

The story of Babylon is a sobering one. The old city beneath the Mesopotamian plain has come to represent human society as it develops apart from God. It has been both the pinnacle of man's achievements, and a millstone around his neck. When the angel lifts that millstone and symbolically casts Babylon the great into the depths of the sea, a great weight will have been lifted off human civilization.

When Jesus Christ returns, he will replace it with a kingdom that the Bible tells us will never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44). Under his firm but gentle rule, the nations and races of mankind will begin to work together, in mutual trust and cooperation, toward the great purpose for which we were all created.