

2.

THAT GREAT “CITY”

As we read through these chapters probing for the identity of Babylon, two things are readily evident. One is that it is a “great city” (Rev 17:18). Also, it will be destroyed by fire (Rev 17:16). So we can conclude that this is in fact a real, physical place and not merely a kind of “spiritual” entity. Although – as we will see – there is a spiritual aspect to Babylon, it is clear that there is also a definite, physical place epitomizing the spirit of Babylon, which will be destroyed by fire.

In the Old Testament there was a real city of Babylon. It was the capital of an empire which was also referred to as “Babylon.” The city was the center of and thus a kind of symbol for, the entire empire. Therefore, it could be that this

New Testament “city” is more than merely an individual city but an entire nation which is typified by the city. So what we are going to be studying about the city Babylon probably applies to an entire country and its culture. Although there is some speculation here, the evidence for it will become clear as we proceed.

THE WORLD'S MARKETPLACE

In searching for the identity of Babylon, we will begin with the clearest parts of the biblical revelation. One thing which is strikingly evident upon the reading of these two chapters is that this final Babylon is the marketplace of the world. This fact is very important. Here we see that she is not merely a spiritual entity.

Babylon is a major center, or even *the* center of world commerce. It is a place where everyone who has anything to sell is marketing it. This one location buys so much that the merchants of the entire earth are becoming wealthy selling their goods to Babylon.

We read that: “...the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury” (Rev 18:3). So when we wish to identify this woman, we must look for some real place on this earth which fits this description.

Then we are given a long list of luxury goods which Babylon has been buying. Verse 12 reads: "merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron 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 bodies and souls of men."

This is quite a list. It includes every kind of item which was considered expensive, attractive and desirable in the day in which this revelation was given. It represents the best of all the things the world has to offer.

Since almost 2,000 years have passed since the writing of this list, a few things have changed. We have concluded that the Babylon which will be destroyed is not the ancient one but a modern day entity, consequently it would not be stretching the sense of the scriptures to speculate that this list today might include other items.

Perhaps presently the list might read: jewelry items, clothes (linen, purple, silk, scarlet), automobiles (chariots), furniture (precious wood), granite and marble (the current rage in bathrooms and kitchens), all sorts of imported

foods, fruits and vegetables, perfumes, spices and all kinds of domesticated animals and even laborers who are exploited because they are not citizens.

In short, everything made in the world which is desirable Babylon is importing to satisfy her lust for luxury. Therefore, to identify her today, we must find a city/nation which has an insatiable desire for every kind of ornate and beautiful item.

Notice that this “city” does not appear to manufacture much herself. Many of the goods which she consumes with abandon are imported. So, we may conclude that she is primarily a consumer nation.

This is clear in the verses which we have already read about the “merchants of the earth” who are selling her what she craves. Also, in verse 15 of the same chapter, when Babylon is destroyed, we read that “The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing.” This shows us that they and their goods have survived the judgment, indicating that they did not live or produce much in Babylon.

Not only this, but the word of God tells us how these goods come to Babylon’s shores. This gives us an important clue to her identity.

Please pay careful attention to this. These goods arrive by ship. This is not just any ship or a few ships, but it appears that the appetite of the prostitute requires the services of almost everyone who owns or works on ships.

Verses 17 and 18a read: "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." Then again in verse 19 this fact is repeated, the sailors and shipowners are weeping and wailing, saying "Alas, alas, that great city, in which *all who had ships on the sea* became rich by her wealth!"

(The ancient city Babylon which Saddam tried to reconstruct could not be a fulfillment of this prophecy. The Babylon of Iraq lies hundreds of miles up the Euphrates river which is not navigable by oceangoing ships.)

So we can understand that Babylon is a place which produces little and imports much. Most of what she imports arrives by sea. She is a consumer more than a producer. Possibly, her balance of trade is very out of balance. This might mean that the economy of Babylon is oriented around the providing of services rather than the production of goods.

The sheer volume of the trade which is done with Babylon supports the idea that she is not

merely a city but a city which represents a larger nation. No one city, no matter how large, could ever consume so much that it would require the services of virtually every shipowner in the world to satisfy her desires.

Further, we may safely conclude from these scriptures that Babylon must have access to the sea. In fact, it must be very accessible. She is a location that requires most goods which are imported to arrive by ship. The main route of these items is not by land but by sea. Therefore, Babylon must have many, many seaports to provide access for "every shipmaster" (Rev18:17) in the world to service her. No one city in the world has anywhere close to enough harbor space to accommodate so many tens of thousands of vessels.

Babylon is exceedingly rich. Therefore, she must be one of the world's most wealthy nations or even the most wealthy. This is a very reasonable conclusion to draw, since in order to purchase so much of the earth's most valuable items, she must have a great abundance of money. In Revelation 18:19 we are told that "*all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth.*"

So when we are seeking to identify modern Babylon, we must certainly look for a place in the world which is known for its profligate spending and abundant wealth. Her popula-

tion in general must have a very high level of income which they spend with abandon on themselves.

When we speak about Babylon, naturally we are referring to the general characteristics of the population. It is the people who live in Babylon who act in specific ways which give her a certain international fame.

Of course there must be exceptions. Among the inhabitants of the Babylon of today there must exist, just as in the days of Sodom, at least one righteous man. In fact, we can be sure of this since God calls His people who are in her to come out of her (Rev 18:4). But in general we understand that even though there are righteous men and women who live in this place, the principal character of the population is what is described in Revelation.

BABYLON LOVES LUXURY

Another important characteristic of Babylon, one that will help us to identify her, is that she loves luxury (Rev 18:7,9,14). In fact, she is addicted to it. She pampers herself with every imaginable purchase with which she can gratify her soul. Perhaps her houses are full of every kind of knickknack and decoration. We can imagine that her "chariots" are shiny and new.

No doubt, her attention is constantly on herself, seeking how she can try to satisfy more fully the constant itch for more comfort and ease. This probably includes such pursuits as more and more clothes, more and more jewelry (Rev 17:4) and an unending search for the finest foods and beverages.

We may speculate that she spends much of her time shopping and trying out new restaurants and tea and coffee shops. Entertainments probably occupy a large part of her time. Every kind of movie, sports event, theater or party might be the focus of her attention. It may even be true that new cars, sporting goods, boats, ATV's, snowmobiles, motor homes, jet skis and many other such things consume a considerable portion of her disposable income.

It is probable that the average person in the final Babylon lives at a level which until very recent times only kings and nobles enjoyed. Perhaps the inhabitants of Babylon can buy almost any kind of food or drink their heart could desire.

It could be that the homes of Babylon's inhabitants are filled with every kind of convenience, luxury and even extravagance. Their televisions are large and their sofas comfortable. Their closets are never big enough to accommodate all the clothes they have jammed

in them. They have their electronic “servants” to wash the clothes and the dishes. Increasingly, instead of having to cook their own meals, they dine in restaurants where they are waited on. If they could want anything, they simply hop in their “chariot” and within a few minutes their desires are satisfied. They live royally in every respect.

Perhaps you think that I am going too far afield in my postulations concerning the character of Babylon. But the Bible tells us plainly that Babylon lives “luxuriously” (Rev 18:7). In our world today, to live “luxuriously” must be to live exactly as we have described. She is the epitome of self-indulgence.

Babylon lavishes upon herself anything and everything that she can possibly afford. Her economy appears to be very dependent upon consumerism. She has gained worldwide fame for her self-indulgence. She loves the world and all the things which are in the world.

Her heart is completely devoted to and seeking after all that this present world has to offer. All the sensual pleasures, entertainments, goods and comforts available are her constant pursuit. Truly, “she glorified herself and lived luxuriously” (Rev 18:7). Nowhere, ever, in the history of the world has there been a nation like Babylon.

WORLD DOMINATION

Another characteristic of Babylon which will help us identify her is that she holds a commanding position on the world scene. God's word tells us that: "the woman whom you saw is that great city which *reigns over the kings of the earth*" (Rev 17:18).

This is amazing! Babylon is some city / nation which is dominating the world scene. She is so powerful and influential that she can be said to be "reigning" over the other rulers of the earth. This tells us that we must look for some place that is a kind of superpower, perhaps *the* superpower.

Babylon must be a very obvious, prominent location. Although she probably does not rule the world directly, she dominates the other rulers and nations. She finds ways to influence the other countries to cause them to do her will. We cannot tell from the scriptures if this is done diplomatically, militarily or by economic pressure, but it is clear that her power and influence are tremendous.

Undoubtedly because of her dominant position, Babylon is proud. Her heart is lifted up because of her position and power. She is totally self-centered and thinks of herself as being

the best in every respect. Some of Babylon's merchants (and perhaps corporations) are world famous. Their financial influence is dominating. Perhaps some of these merchants have become billionaires and their names are known almost everywhere. The scriptures teach us that: "...[her] merchants were the great men of the earth" (Rev 18:23).

The prostitute is utterly confident of her strength and invincibility. Probably, she exists in a location which is isolated from the rest of the world and so feels quite safe and secure. She imagines that no one could ever bring her down.

The Bible reveals that: "She says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow' " (Rev 18:7). Perhaps she even believes that her position and affluence is because of God's blessing. This attitude of pride, world dominance and sense of great security are characteristics which we can use to identify modern-day Babylon.