

## THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Systematic Theology

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TITLE: A THEOLOGICAL AND CONTEXTUAL STUDY OF “BABYLON” IN REVELATION 17-18

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A proper interpretation of *Babylon* in Revelation 17-18 is a key to a better understanding of the meaning, identity and time of the fulfilment of Babylon in prophecy.

The identification and fall of Babylon has been a topic of endless debate in biblical studies. Almost every item of the passage has been debated. The Preterist holds that the fulfilment of Babylon prophecy primarily addresses the situation of the Christian church in Roman province and it does not contain any predictive prophecy. The Idealist sees the fulfilment of this prophecy solely as the ongoing struggle between good and evil which cannot be applied to any historical time period. The Futurist places the entire significance of the study in the future.

However, the Historicist interprets the future course of history from the Apostolic times until the time of the end. In spite of some previous studies on the symbol of Babylon and its judgment, some questions are yet unanswered such as: why was Babylon singled out as a whore? The fall of Babylon—is it historical or futuristic? What is the nature of the judgment of Babylon?

This thesis seeks to examine this passage from theological views in order to understand the original intent of the author. This study is limited to Revelation 17 and 18. Hence, it uses the theological and contextual approach. This engages the biblical text and seeks the meaning its author most likely intended for its original audience and the theological aspect is to help historically.

From this study, it appears that *Babylon* in Revelation 17 and 18 can be seen as an *apostate church* which can as well be the Roman Catholic Church. It is clearly seen that the symbol of the *woman* sitting on a scarlet beast stands for the apostate church. Therefore, Babylon can not be identified as imperial Rome, for it is not political but rather a religious system dominating political powers of the world at the conclusion of this world's history.

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IN REVELATION 17-18

A thesis

presented in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

by

Akinola, Oluseyi Caleb

May 2016





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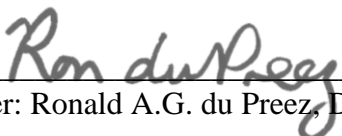
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This thesis is dedicated to the Almighty God who gives us His word to guide,  
to teach, to reproof, to correct, and to instruct us in righteousness.

To Him be honour, glory, and majesty forever and ever.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**Background to the Study**

The harlot Babylon in Revelation Chapter 17 has been a subject of much discussion in biblical scholarship. There is a view that the harlot represents Roman Catholicism—a belief that became popular in the days following the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> This view was held by some reformers.<sup>2</sup> Another view perceives the harlot Babylon as the city of Jerusalem in the first century, being judged by God in her desolation by Rome.<sup>3</sup> The proponents of this view are; Ford,<sup>4</sup> Russell,<sup>5</sup> Terry,<sup>6</sup> and Gentry.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ragan Ewing, “The Identification of Babylon the Harlot in the Book of Revelation” (MA Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, 2002), 7.

<sup>2</sup> See, Edward Hickman, ed., *The works of Jonathan Edwards* (London: Billing & Sons, 1834), 2:807; Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible* (New York: Abraham Paul, 1823), 6:617-23; E. B. Elliot, *Horae Apocalypticæ*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Seeleys, 1851), 4:24-46.

<sup>3</sup> Ewing, 12.

<sup>4</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), 240-41.

<sup>5</sup> J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrines of Our Lord’s Second Coming* (London: Unwin, 1887), 482-98.

<sup>6</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1898), 426-39.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 73-79.

Further, there are views that the harlot Babylon in Revelation 17 represents rebuilt Babylon,<sup>8</sup> apostate Christianity,<sup>9</sup> Rome,<sup>10</sup> and the evil world system.<sup>11</sup> Ranko Stefanovic points out that “Revelation 17 describes the end-time apostate religious power named “Babylon the great” (Rev 17:5) in terms of a prostitute seducing the governing secular and political powers of the world with the wine of her fornication.”<sup>12</sup>

The text explains that the fall and complete destruction of Babylon results from the withdrawal of support by the secular and political powers after recognizing that they have been deceived. They turned against Babylon and destroyed it completely.<sup>13</sup> The destruction of end-time Babylon is introduced in Revelation 17:16-17, and it is depicted in terms of the ancient practice of punishing a prostitute with fire as prescribed in the laws of Moses (cf. Lev 20:14; 21:9; Ezek 16:38-41; 23:22-29).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 307; See also, Charles H. Dyer, *Bibliotheca Sacra 144* (1987): 305-16, 433-49; also, J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Cook, 1909) 397-400; G. H. Lang, *The Revelation* (London: Oliphants, 1945), 299-305.

<sup>9</sup> William Milligan, *The Book of Revelation* (New York: Armstrong, 1903), 904.

<sup>10</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22, Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger et al., (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998), 52c:959.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 117-18.

<sup>12</sup> Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 523.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

Based on the judgment of ancient Babylon as found in Jeremiah 51:63 and the judgment of Tyre in Ezekiel 26:12, the end of eschatological Babylon will be like that of a giant millstone flung into the sea to sink into oblivion (v. 21).<sup>15</sup>

Revelation chapter 18 continues to follow the theme of chapter 17. It describes the judgment of end-time Babylon in details. The fall of Babylon is portrayed in terms of the collapse of a rich commercial city—ancient Babylon in particular—that has grown wealthy through economic trade.<sup>16</sup> G. K. Beale posits that the judgment of historical Babylon becomes a type of the judgment of end-time Babylon.<sup>17</sup>

### **Statement of the Problem**

There has been much theological debate concerning the identity or what Babylon in Revelation 17-18 represents. In spite of some previous studies on the symbol of “Babylon” and the judgment that would fall upon her, some questions are yet unanswered while some have not been adequately discussed. These questions include:

1. What does “Babylon” represent in Revelation and what is its theological significance?
2. What does the fall of Babylon mean and its theological implication?
3. What are the implications of the various schools of interpretations on the understanding of “Babylon” in Revelation 17 and 18?

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<sup>15</sup> Sam Storms, “The Fall of Babylon: A Study of Revelation 18:1-24,” accessed 13 January 2015, <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/the-fall-of-babylon: a-study-of-revelation-18:1-24>.

<sup>16</sup> Stefanofic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 523.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to perform a theological and contextual study of “Babylon” in Revelation 17 and 18 in order to ascertain its meaning in its context and interpret the text correctly in which there have been varied interpretations. To achieve this, this study critically examined the meaning of “Babylon” in its immediate and larger context.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research attempted to answer the stated questions and enhance a better understanding of “Babylon” in Revelation 17 and 18. Further, this study fits in the interpretation of “Babylon” of Revelation 17 and 18 into the historicist’s interpretation. The findings of this study would help to understand “Babylon” in its right perspective and context and present the answers to the text in which there have been diverse understandings.

### **Delimitation**

This study was limited to “Babylon” in Revelation 17-18. Although the historical background of Babylon in Old Testament was studied too. This work focused extensively on the theological and contextual interpretation of Babylon in Revelation 17-18.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a contextual approach in which the meaning and interpretations of the text was derived from the immediate and larger context of the text. This method of interpretation included the contextual analysis of a text and helped to assess the text within the context of its historical and cultural setting.

## **Overview of the Study**

This research is divided into four chapters. Chapter one provides a concise background to the study, states the problem and explains the method that is employed in this study. Chapter two provides a survey of interpretations by different scholars while chapter three examines the texts theologically and contextually and considers. The final chapter summarizes the study and conclusion is drawn based on the study. Hence, recommendations for further studies are made.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The book of Revelation is the climax of both Old and New Testaments. Thus, one needs to have a better knowledge of the Scripture for a proper understanding of the book of Revelation.<sup>1</sup> Although the book does not contain a single quoted verse for the Old or New Testament, except for the nine words directly quoted from the fourth commandment ('the heaven and the earth and the sea'), thus highlighting the Sabbath commandment of Exodus 20:11. However, not only is the book filled with allusions especially to the Old Testament but also through the New Testament. For instance, the background of Revelation 4 is Ezekiel 1 and 10, and the background of Revelation 6 is Zechariah 1 and Matthew 24.<sup>2</sup>

However, this chapter considers the previous studies on the interpretations of Babylon in Revelation 17-18. It examines the insights and the shortcomings scholars have made in a bid to interpret "Babylon" in Revelation 17-18. In addition, much of the argument has been on the identity of the harlot of Babylon. Consequently, various interpretations are examined. This will help to have a broad knowledge of the subject matter and enhance the proper understanding of "Babylon."

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Pfandi, ed., "Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers," *Biblical Research Institutes Studies 2* (2010): 86.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. See also, Oladosu Opeyemi and Alu Caleb, "The Use of Old Testament in the Book of Revelation," accessed 13 January 2015, <http://www.biblicaltheology.com>.

## Historical Background of Babylon

The Hebrew word for Babylon is *Babel*.<sup>3</sup> The word *Babel* means “confusion” and it is derived from a root which means “to mix.”<sup>4</sup> This was the name given to the city that the disobedient descendants of Noah built in order not to scatter over all the earth (Gen 11:4, 9) as the Lord commanded them (Gen 9:1).<sup>5</sup> It is in the record that Babylon’s earliest history is obscure because of the lack of written sources.

Although, it was revealed that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the last quarter of the reign of Hammurabi, he transformed the city into extraterritorial state which controlled most of Southern Mesopotamia (Akkad in the north and in the south) and however briefly, territory in the middle Euphrates region (Mari) and Assyria.<sup>6</sup>

The kings of Hammurabi’s dynasty lavished extensive resources on fortifying and beautifying the city, and its cultural and religious pre-eminence waxed. Thereafter, Babylon remained the psychological if not always the actual center of political and religious life in southern Mesopotamia.<sup>7</sup>

However, subsequent rulers witnessed their realm diminished, and in 1595 BC the Hittites sacked Babylon. After their withdrawal, members of the Kassite tribe seized the throne. The Kassite Dynasty ruled for over four centuries, a period of

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel C. Browning, “Babylon” in *Holman’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 2003), 155.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> David Vanderhooft, “Babylon,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedmans (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 138.

<sup>7</sup> Browning, 156.

relative peace but also stagnation.<sup>8</sup> Little is known up to about 1350 BC when Babylonian kings corresponded with Egypt and struggled with the growing power of Assyria to the North. After a brief resurgence the Kassite dynasty was ended by the Elamite invasion in 1160 BC.<sup>9</sup>

From the end of the Kassite period until the ascendance of the northern Mesopotamian Assyrian state in the first millennium, a series of unremarkable dynasties ruled Babylon. The most notable monarch was perhaps Nebuchadnezzar I (1125-1104).<sup>10</sup> Babylon's greatest period of prosperity and power came under the Neo-Babylonian dynasty founded by Nabopolassar. The city became the capital of an imperial state that spanned much of the Near East under the rule of his son, Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562).

The Neo-Babylonian kings undertook massive building projects and Nebuchadnezzar partly copied the accomplishments of Hammurabi, sought to make Babylon the economic and administrative centre of the world, a project in which he achieved some measure of success.<sup>11</sup>

### **Babylon in the Old Testament**

The links between Revelation and the Old Testament are very important to the understanding of its message.<sup>12</sup> Genesis 11 records the story of the building of the city and the tower of *Babel*. The people who had migrated to the plain of Shinar said, “come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in heavens, and let us

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Vanderhooft, 138.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 2:1.

make a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4). God saw what they were attempting and thwarted their purpose, confusing them to be scattered “over the face of all the earth,” so that “they left off building the city” (vv. 5-8). Thus, the city was named *Babel*/Babylon “because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (v. 9).<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, *Babel*/Babylon<sup>14</sup> in Old Testament record signifies rebellion and an affront to God. Reynolds summarizes Babylon’s elements in Old Testament. They are:

1. Babylon is portrayed as “the glory of kingdoms, the splendour and pride of the Chaldeans” (Isa 13:19); also as “you who dwell by many waters rich in treasures” (Jer 51:13), “a golden cup in the Lord’s hand” (v. 7).
2. Isaiah 13-14; 47:5-15 and Jeremiah 50-51 provide a fairly thorough catalog of the accusations made against Babylon: (a) she was oppressive, plundered Yahweh’s heritage, showed no mercy, made her yoke heavy on the aged, and slew many in the earth (Isa 14:4, 6, 16-17, 20; 47:6, Jer 50:11, 17, 33; 51:24-25, 34-35, 49).

Babylon relied on sorceries, enchantments, divination, astrology, and her own wisdom and knowledge for guidance (Isa 47:9-10, 12-13, 15; 50:36). She was a land of images, and her people were mad over idols (Isa 50:38; cf 50:2; 51:47, 52); she desecrated Yahweh’s temple (Isa 50:28; 51:11, 51).

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<sup>13</sup> Maxwell, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Edwin Reynolds, *The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif in the Book of Revelation*, PhD Thesis, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1994), 142-143.

3. In response to these charges, Yahweh declares many times that He would punish Babylon (Jer 25:12; 50:18, 27, 31; 51:6, 18, 44, 47; cf. Isa 13:11). This judgement takes three forms in the prophecies: (a) the sword, i.e. military action, resulting in plunder destruction, and exile (Jer 25:14-17, 26-29; 50:35-37); by drying up of her waters, making her a heap of ruins, without inhabitants forever (Jer 50:38-40; 51:36-37); and (c) burning her with fire so that she would be perpetual waste (Jer 50:32; 51:25-26, 30, 32, 58).
4. In the context of Babylon's judgement, urgent appeals were made for people to come out of her (Isa 48:20; Jer 50:8; 51:6, 45; Zech 2:6-7; cf. Jer 50:28).
5. Besides a temporal, partial judgement against Babylon, there is a proof also for a final, permanent judgement upon Babylon. (Isa. 13:6, 9, 11, 19-20 cf. Jer 25; 29-30, 15, 26, 30-31, 33; 50:25-26).<sup>15</sup>

### **Babylon in the New Testament**

Reynolds, points out that outside of the book of Revelation, the New Testament has little to say about Babylon, but what it does reveal is significant.<sup>16</sup> The genealogy in Matthew 1 reveals that the Babylonian captivity was an important point in the history of the Jews, in much the same way as the earlier Exodus from Egypt and the Davidic monarchy (vv. 11-12, 17).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Josephus Antiquities 1.4.3 used both terms interchangeably in describing the location of the tower. The Hebrew word in 11:9 is the same as that in 10:10.

<sup>16</sup> Reynolds, *The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif*, 154-157.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

It is noted that the only other New Testament passage outside of Revelation which mentions Babylon is 1 Peter 5:13, in which Peter sent greetings from “a certain woman who is at Babylon.” Most scholars believe that Peter here used “Babylon” as a code name for Rome.<sup>18</sup> If this is so, then we have in the New Testament outside of Revelation, an example of the symbolic use of Babylon, demonstrating that Babylon had already become a code word that was recognised and used by Christians in the first century AD<sup>19</sup>

### **Babylon in the Extra-Biblical Literatures**

There is an extra-biblical Babylon tradition which begins with Nimrod and the Tower of *Babel*, as in the Old Testament tradition. Philo ascribed to Nimrod the responsibility for turning men from “the path of reason” to following “the lifeless and inert nature of the flesh.”<sup>20</sup> Philo argues that:

It was Nimrod who began this desertion. For the lawgiver says “he began to be a giant on the earth (Gen 10:8), and his name means “desertion.” To that most wretched of souls it was not enough to stand neutral, but he went over to the enemy, took up arms against his friends and withstood them in open war. And therefore to Nimrod, Moses ascribes Babylon as the beginning of his kingdom. Now the name Babylon means alteration, a thought akin to desertion both in name and in fact, for with every desert change and alteration of purpose are the first steps.<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, Josephus credited Nimrod with instigating a rebellion against God at Babylon after the deluge. He recounted how God repeatedly admonished the

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<sup>18</sup> W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 26:5.

<sup>19</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, 1 Peter, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 49:310-11; See also; James Moffatt, *The General Epistles: James, Peter, and Jude*, *Moffatt New Testament Commentary* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928), 170; Donald Senior, *1 & 2 Peter, New Testament Message*, (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980), 20:94.

<sup>20</sup> Reynolds, *The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif*, 161.

<sup>21</sup> *Philo on the Giants* 15, (trans. Colson and Whiteaker, LCL, 2:477-479).

dwellers in Shinar to send out colonies for the thorough peopling of the earth. Further, he cited the following account of the Tower of *Babel* from *Sib Or* 3.98-104:

They were all of one language and they wanted to go up to the starry heaven. But immediately the immortal one imposed a great compulsion on the winds. Then the winds cast down the great tower from on high, and stirred up strife for mortal among themselves. Therefore humans gave the city the name Babylon.<sup>22</sup>

Other accounts of the Tower of *Babel* experience may be found in Juba 10:18-26 and Philo 6:1-2; 7:1-5 and even on an ancient Chaldean cuneiform tablet.<sup>23</sup>

Babylon's arrogance before God is portrayed by tradition as one of its major faults. For example, in *Sib Or* 5.143, 159, where Babylon appears to be used as a code for Rome, the accusation against Rome, like that against Babylon, is that it is evil, lawless, full of adulteries, practices sorcery, and has "a murderous heart and impious spirit." (5.165-167, 171, 177). It has persecuted the people of God (5.160-161). Above all, it boasts, "I alone am, and no one will ravage me" will remain utterly desolate forever" (5:163-164, 174-175).<sup>24</sup>

### **Various Views Regarding Babylon**

There are four major interpretive translations of the Apocalypse which are preterist, futurist, idealist, and historicist. This section will help to espouse more on the views about Babylon. In order to achieve this, there is the need to survey the primary interpretive options for the identity of the "harlot." Some of these are considered more viable than others at the modern table of academic discussion, but

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<sup>22</sup> Josephus Antiquities 1.4.1-3 (4:55-57).

<sup>23</sup> W. St. Chad Boscawen, trans., "The Legend of the Tower of Babel," *Records of the Past. Being English Translations of the Assyrian and Egyptian Monuments*, ed. S. Birch (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1874), 7:129-32.

<sup>24</sup> Reynolds, *The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif*, 169.

this step should help to form a well-rounded perspective on how the issue has been handled historically. It should be noted that, to a great extent, one's choice of reference is tied inherently to one's approach to the book as a whole.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, to have understanding on the matter at stake this survey will also include a basic introduction to notable difficulties for each position, i.e., weaknesses that should caution us from embracing these options hastily. However, it is not the object of this chapter to accomplish a thoroughgoing critique of all of the views. The reason for this is that the very enigmatic nature of apocalyptic writing inevitably creates a situation in which several different interpretations may be made to plausibly fit the evidence.

### **The Preterist View**

The preterist interpretation or viewpoint wants to take seriously the historical interpretation of Revelation by relating it to its original author and audience.<sup>26</sup> This means John addressing his book to real churches that faced dire problems in the first century AD. It places the fulfilment of Revelation in the first AD,<sup>27</sup> and it intended to interpret either the entire book or virtually all of it as ancient history,<sup>28</sup> which was regarded as the presentation of Christian age (e.g., Amillennianism).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> C. Marvin Pate, *Reading Revelation; A Comparison of Four Interpretive Translations of the Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 5.

<sup>26</sup> Pate, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies Book 2*, (Silver Spring: MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 7:453.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, "Foundational Principles of Interpretation," in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring: MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 6:5.

<sup>29</sup> William G. Johnsson, "Biblical Apocalyptic," *The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 794.

Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. writes of two quandaries that provided the impetus for the recording of the book:

Revelation has two fundamental purposes relative to its original hearers. In the first place, it was designed to steel the first century church against the gathering storm of persecution . . . it was to brace the church for a major and fundamental re-orientation in the course of redemptive history, a re-orientation necessitating the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, having understood the historical background of Preterism we will explore their interpretation of Babylon within the text under review. There are two camps of biblical Preterists regarding Revelation 17 and 18—those who equate Babylon with the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and those who equate it with the fall of Rome in AD 476.<sup>31</sup> Both views will be incorporated in the interpretation given here.

By far, the majority view among modern scholars is that the Babylonian whore represents first-century Rome. This view is held by prominent commentators like; Aune<sup>32</sup> and Mounce,<sup>33</sup> and Beale who incorporates elements of it as well.<sup>34</sup> Probably the strongest evidence for this interpretation is the well-attested fact that after A.D. 70 Jewish literature often used Babylon as a metaphor for Rome.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 15-16.

<sup>31</sup> Gentry Jr., 18

<sup>32</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22: Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger et. al. (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998), 52c:959.

<sup>33</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 308.

<sup>34</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 886. Other works that take this view include R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John: International Critical Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920).

<sup>35</sup> Ewing, 16.

Peter himself could even be identified as one who uses this device (1 Pet 5:13), assuming he is writing from the traditional location of Rome.<sup>36</sup> Rome's world dominance, paganism, and persecution of the saints (all traits of the harlot) in the first century are a matter of historical infamy. Who else so perfectly fits the title "the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth?" (Rev 17:18).<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, who held such great economic sway as that described in chapter 18? The connection is obvious. Especially with the assumption of a late date of the book, Rome, the "city on seven hills,"<sup>38</sup> is a prime candidate for Babylon.

However, Babylon is also considered as Jerusalem. Many students of the Book of Revelation are perhaps, not even aware of this position.<sup>39</sup> Ewing declares, "I am persuaded thus far that the many lines of evidence that illuminate our understanding of this mysterious metaphor are best synthesized in the view that the harlot Babylon is intended first and foremost to represent the city of Jerusalem in the first century, being judged by God in her desolation by Rome."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 794.

<sup>37</sup> Ewing, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Ewing, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Robert H. Mounce, "The Prostitute is Rome" in *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 308.

<sup>40</sup> Ewing, 17.

Others who share this view include Ford,<sup>41</sup> Russell,<sup>42</sup> Terry,<sup>43</sup> Chilton,<sup>44</sup> Gentry<sup>45</sup> and, apparently, N. T. Wright.<sup>46</sup> The preterist critical analysis of some verses in Chapter 17:6, 8, 11, 14, 18 talks about the woman, the city, and the beast. Like it was explained above, to Preterists, the vision was of Rome and the new Babylon—seen as Roma dressed expensively as a harlot with her scarlet and purple attire and gaudy jewelry. She personified Rome and its empire—the beast—including Nero and Domitian.<sup>47</sup>

Their demand to be worshipped oozed of blasphemy.<sup>48</sup> The ten kings did their bidding, Roma and the beast plunged the world into spiritual immorality. Roma, is a mystery—amor (love)—spelled backwards; she inspired the beast (Nero then Domitian) to persecute Christians because they worshipped Jesus, not Caesar.<sup>49</sup>

“The beast who was and he is not” was Nero according to this view, and he would be revived and sent from hell to stir up civil war in the Roman Empire. The seven heads are the first-century Roman Caesars: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero (the five who had fallen), Vespasian (the one who is), and Titus. The

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>42</sup> J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* (London: Unwin, 1887), 482–98.

<sup>43</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypstics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1898), 426–39.

<sup>44</sup> Ewing, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 73–79.

<sup>46</sup> A. J. Beagley, *The ‘Sitz im Leben’ of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church’s Enemies* (New York: de Gruyter, 1987), 93–102.

<sup>47</sup> Pate, 142.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 143.

one who was is Nero; the one who is to come briefly is Titus. The eight is Domitian.<sup>50</sup> The seven hills are the hills upon which Rome is located.<sup>51</sup> The ten horns are the ten kings appointed by Rome to be puppet governments who would join to fight the army of the Messiah.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Historicist View**

This view argues that Revelation supplies a prophetic overview of church history from the first century until the return of Christ. There are many in the past who advocates for historicist approach but very few today.<sup>53</sup>

The historicism approach has its root long in the history long before the outburst of Protestant Reformation. This was seen clearly in the work of Leroy Edwin Froom about Joachim who gained far greater repute as an expounder of prophecy than any other personage of the Middle Ages.<sup>54</sup> Joachim, expounded on Revelation 12 and 17 in which he asserted that the symbolic woman is the church, clothed with Christ, the sun of Righteousness.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 143. There are indications that Ante-Nicene Fathers wrote in support of the position of Preterist on their interpretation of the said verses reading through, *The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts, & James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 7:357.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>53</sup> Some other commentators such as E. F. Scott, *The Book of Revelation* (Southampton: Camelot Press, 1939), 84-85.

<sup>54</sup> Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald), 1:685.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 688.

This approach was very popular during the Protestant Reformation as reformers identified the Antichrist and Babylon with the Pope and Roman Catholicism of their day.<sup>56</sup>

The primary strength of this approach lies in its attempt to make sense of Revelation for the interpreter by correlating the prophecies directed to the seven churches of Asia Minor with the stages comprising church history. The vast majority of scholars agree that this single strength far outweighs the weaknesses.

Further, a Historicist holds the idea that the harlot represents Roman Catholicism. This view is tied closely to the historicist view in general, which sees the Book of Revelation as describing the whole of church history. With the continuing demise of historicism, however, proponents of this interpretation have become few and far between.<sup>57</sup> It should nevertheless be recognized that this identification was once quite dominant, and has been held by Jonathan Edwards,<sup>58</sup> Adam Clarke,<sup>59</sup> E. B. Elliott,<sup>60</sup> and a host of others.<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that this position is probably best understood as a natural Protestant outgrowth of the Reformation controversies.

Support for this view has been found in several areas. A key argument would be the nature of the adultery motif, which may imply that the harlot is a character that

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<sup>56</sup> Pate, 142.

<sup>57</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, interpretation, ed. James Luther Mays (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1989), 49.

<sup>58</sup> Edward Hickman, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (London: Billing & Sons, 1834), 2:807.

<sup>59</sup> Adam Clark, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible* (New York: Abraham Paul, 1823), 6:617-23.

<sup>60</sup> E. B. Elliot, *Horae Apocalypticae*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Seeleys, 1851), 4:24-46.

<sup>61</sup> Steve Gregg, ed. *Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1997), 32.

has at one time been allied with God and has since apostatized, rather than a merely pagan figure.<sup>62</sup>

In other words, the Apocalypse would be portraying Catholicism as an institution that at one time in history constituted the very people of God, but at some point forsook her God, presumably by corruption and abandonment of the gospel (the primary contentions of the Protestant Reformers).<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, the adornment of the adulterous woman (Rev 17:4) has been seen to exemplify pompous worship in Catholicism, or perhaps even the actual colors of the robes of the popes and cardinals.<sup>64</sup> Also, the woman's drunkenness from the saints' blood (Rev 17:6) could be read to align with the Catholic persecution of Protestants throughout history.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, the Historicist sees the harlot as the Pope, whose scarlet and purple robes and lavish jewelry speaks about the corruption of the ornate Roman church. The beast is the Roman church, which embodies the syncretistic alliance of Christianity and paganism.<sup>66</sup> Catholic Church mercilessly persecutes the followers of the Protestant Reformation, the true church. The seven heads/hills represent the seven forms of government under the Roman Empire throughout its existence.<sup>67</sup> The ten horns are subordinate Kingdoms that comprise the Roman Empire, and culminate in

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<sup>62</sup> Ewing, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Elliot, 30.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>66</sup> Pate, 143.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

the Roman papacy. The mystery of Babylon is the antichrist that persecutes the church.<sup>68</sup>

### **The Idealist View**

The idealist approach to Revelation has sometimes been called the “spiritualist” view in that it interprets the book spiritually, or symbolically.<sup>69</sup>

Accordingly, Revelation is seen from this perspective as representing the ongoing conflict of good and evil, with no historical connection to any social or political events.<sup>70</sup> This was well described by Raymond Calkins who says:

If we understand the emergency which caused the book to be written, the interpretation of it for its time, for our time, and for all the time, it becomes as clear as day light. In the light of this explanation, how far from the truth becomes that use of it which finds the chief meaning of the book in the hints it gives us about the wind-up of creation, the end of the world, and the nature of the Last Judgment. . . . To use Revelation in this way is to abuse it, for the book itself makes no claim to be a key to the future.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, the Idealist sees mystery Babylon as the mystery of evil that permeates any society and turns it against Christ. Babylon in Revelation simply represents pagan society or forces as a whole, regardless of the age.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>70</sup> Pate, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Raymond Calkins, *The Social Message of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Womans Press, 1920), 3-4.

This allows the Idealist to include portions of previous options under the more generic umbrella of “the world.” Representatives of this position are Beale<sup>72</sup> and Hendriksen,<sup>73</sup> as well as a more cautious Hamstra.<sup>74</sup>

The obvious advantage with this position is its inherent inclusiveness. By its very nature, it can make room for most interpretive requirements, gladly incorporating apparently correct observations from any of the other camps.

### **The Futurist View**

The futurist view tends to interpret Revelation 4-22 as still unfulfilled (awaiting the events surrounding the second coming of Christ), it is not completely unified.<sup>75</sup> There are two camps of interpretation: dispensationalism and historic premillennialism.

However, some strict Futurists see in Revelation the expectation of a renewed Babylonian empire in the *eschaton* that will dominate the world and persecute the followers of Christ. While a view like this could merely expect a generic future empire in the vein of historic Babylon’s tyranny,<sup>76</sup> This of course, due to adherence to a strict literalism in interpreting prophecy that is not generally regarded very highly among scholars.

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<sup>72</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 858.

<sup>73</sup> William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1944), 200–202.

<sup>74</sup> Sam Hamstra Jr., “An Idealist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 117–18 117.

<sup>75</sup> Pate, 10.

<sup>76</sup> Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming* (New York: Bantam, 1975), 189–90.

First of all, the harlot's name (or at least the presentation of the character)<sup>77</sup> is a "mystery," which should already give us pause regarding a literalistic interpretation. Beale regards the term as describing "a hidden meaning of 'Babylon the Great' that needs further revelatory interpretation."<sup>78</sup>

Similarly, Morris remarks, "*Mystery* will indicate that the significance of the harlot's name is not open and obvious to all."<sup>79</sup> This is not determinative for a non-literal assessment of the name.

Moreover, it should be noted that even Robert Thomas is unable to consistently apply a strictly literal hermeneutic in this passage. Amazingly, after arguing that the term "mystery" should not lead us away from a face-value handling of Babylon, he proceeds to claim that, "the 'seven hills' can and probably does have a non-literal meaning."<sup>80</sup>

All in all, this view is attractive if we are seeking easily accessible answers, but it is ultimately unsatisfying in light of the greater complexities of the apocalyptic genre that are now so widely recognized. And, as we have noted, the real issue for our study is not whether or not a case can be made for a given view, but rather whether one particular interpretation seems to have the most evidence that it is the best answer.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Beale, 858.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 200.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas, *Revelation*, 289

<sup>81</sup> Ewing, 13.

## The Seventh-day Adventist View of Historicism

There are divergent views of Historicism approach in interpreting the Apocalyptic books of the Bible such as Daniel and Revelation. However, for Seventh-day Adventists, the distinctive frame that holds together the picture of biblical truth is their understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.<sup>82</sup> Their theological frame work has made Jesus Christ at the center of the prophetic Word, and its dynamic in the Adventist Faith (John 14:29; 2 Pet 1:19).<sup>83</sup>

Seventh-day Adventists arrived at their interpretation of Bible prophecy by employing the principles of the historical school of prophetic interpretation, sometimes called the historicist method or continuous historical method.<sup>84</sup>

Prominent Adventist scholars like: Paulien,<sup>85</sup> Strand,<sup>86</sup> Hasel,<sup>87</sup> Pfandl,<sup>88</sup> Maxwell,<sup>89</sup> Froom,<sup>90</sup> and others Adventist writers, including S. N. Haskell, R. A. Anderson and Uriah Smith,<sup>91</sup> agreed on the historical method that, the prophecy of Revelation are intended to unfold and to find fulfilment in historical time-in the span

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<sup>82</sup> Frank B. Holbrook, 6:175.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Jon Paulien, "The End Of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part Two." *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006):180-208.

<sup>86</sup> Strand, *Foundation Principles of Interpretation*, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press), 182-86.

<sup>88</sup> Gerhard Pfandi, ed., "Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers," *Biblical Research Institutes Studies*, 2 (2010): 86.

<sup>89</sup> Maxwell, *God Cares*, 2:70.

<sup>90</sup> Le Roy Edwin Froom, 1:690.

<sup>91</sup> Uriah Smith, *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1944).

between the prophets Daniel and John respectively and the final establishment of God's eternal kingdom.<sup>92</sup>

Meanwhile, it is believed that Jesus employed the historicist method when He announced the time of His ministry as a fulfilment of prophecy (Mark 1:15; cf. Dan 9:25),<sup>93</sup> and later when He referred to the prophesied ruin of Jerusalem and the Temple (Matt 24:15; cf. Dan 9:26). William G. Johnsson writes to substantiate this position taken by Seventh-day Adventists:

The terminus of these prophetic forecasts is the establishment of God's kingdom. A first century A.D. Origin of the book of Revelation is generally accepted datum. The end point of the NT Apocalypse is the second coming of Christ, the subsequent millennium, and the setting up of a new heaven and a new earth . . . in contrast with the local contemporary messages of the prophetic writers, the visions of Daniel and the Revelation offer outlines of history that have a universal sweep. Hence interpretation of the apocalyptic visions must respect the cosmic range that begins in the writers' own day and takes the reader down to the end.<sup>94</sup>

It is noteworthy, that the Adventist historicist approach towards apocalyptic prophecy is clearly not a recent invention of the Millerite in the nineteenth century, but consistent view of the Protestant Reformers, and the Seventh-day Adventist church is virtually the only church left that holds aloft this biblically-based, Reformation torch on apocalyptic prophecy!<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, the consensus of the scholars is that the historicist method is the only procedure consonant with the Biblical data. The method recognizes that some prophecies were fulfilled in the prophet's day; some have found fulfilment over the

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<sup>92</sup> Holbrook, 6:175.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> William G. Johnsson, "Biblical Apocalyptic." *The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 796.

<sup>95</sup> Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Principles For Interpreting Apocalyptic Prophecy," in *Prophetic Principles; Crucial Exegetical, Theological, Historical & Practical Insights*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., ed. Ron du Preez (Lansing, MI: Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, September 2007), 54.

centuries; some are presently being fulfilled; and some will find fulfilment in the end-time in connection with the second coming.

This chapter has been able to examine succinctly “Babylon” in Old and New Testaments, including extra biblical literature and various views of theological schools of thought. It is worthy of note that in all these sources, the meaning and understanding are parallel. However , the next chapter focuses directly on the meaning of Babylon, its identification and fall in context, using historicist approach.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGICAL AND CONTEXTUAL STUDY

The book of Revelation is perhaps the most notoriously cryptic work of literature ever composed. The history of the interpretation of this book leaves most students with more questions than answers. Commentators have come to little, if any, consensus on the interpretation of many key passages, and many of the best scholars of Christian history have simply thrown up their hands in bewilderment of the challenge of scaling its enigmatic heights.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, approaching the Apocalypse theologically and contextually it requires the possession of a couple of key items: one, an interpretive grid integrating one's hermeneutics and general theological viewpoints, and two, a healthy dose of respectful reservation.<sup>2</sup> That said, it is the intent of this study to examine what is hopefully a sufficiently narrow issue in the interpretation of the Apocalypse: the identification of "Babylon," in Revelation 17-18, using theological and contextual approaches.<sup>3</sup>

However, discussion of this topic involves the consideration of issues such as authorship, audience, purpose, socio-historical milieu and date, genre and structure of

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<sup>1</sup> Ragan Ewing, "The Identification of Babylon," accessed 19 June 2009, [http:// www.preteristarchive.com/books/2002\\_ewing\\_jerusalem\\_babylon.html](http://www.preteristarchive.com/books/2002_ewing_jerusalem_babylon.html).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> That is, sufficiently narrow in the sense that we will hopefully not be biting off a larger portion that can adequately be addressed in a work of this size.

the book of Revelation. It is my conviction at this point that a harmonization of the evidence for “Babylon’s identity” can potentially go a long way in contributing to the ever tapering spiral one’s hermeneutical approach.

### **Author of Revelation**

God is the divine Author of Revelation (Rev 1:1; 22:6). The human author of Revelation identifies himself in the book as John (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). He describes himself as the servant of God (Rev 1:1); the writer of the letters to the seven churches in Asia (Rev 1:4); the brother and companion of those in tribulation, who wait for the kingdom with the patience of Christ; an exile at the isle of Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Rev 1:9); and “the one who heard and saw these things [visions]” (Rev 22:8).<sup>4</sup>

John’s immediate audience certainly knew who he was.<sup>5</sup> This is not the case with several modern scholars who have a hard time identifying which John, out of several in the New Testament, wrote Revelation.

This situation has generated an unending debate over the authorship of Revelation.<sup>6</sup> This debate notwithstanding, it is pertinent to mention that the case for the apostle John as the author of Revelation has been well demonstrated.<sup>7</sup> As early as

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Onyedikachi Akpa, *The Identity and Role of Michael in the Narrative of the War in Heaven: An Exegetical and Theological study of Rev. 12:7-12*, (PhD Thesis, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines, 2007), 136.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. (Manila: OMF, 1998), 469.

<sup>6</sup> For the multiplicity of views expressed in the debate on the authorship of Revelation, see David E. Aune, “Revelation, Book of,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1125; Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 8-10; Ford, *Revelation*, 3-4, 28-30, 50-56; Beasley-Murray, 32-38; Rissi, 4; François Bovon, “John’s Self-Presentation in Revelation 1:1-10,” *CBQ* 62 (2000): 697-700; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Redemption as Liberation: Apoc 1:5f. And 5:9f.,” *CBQ* 36 (1974): 220.

<sup>7</sup> Akpa, 137.

the third century, Christian writers (with a few exceptions such as Marcion, Papias, and Dionysius)<sup>8</sup> generally attribute the book of Revelation to John the apostle. Such writers include Justin Martyr at Rome, Melito at Sardis, Theophilus at Antioch, Irenaeus at Lyons, Tertullian at Carthage, Hippolytus at Rome, Clement at Alexandria, and Origen.<sup>9</sup> As Donald Guthrie notes, it is impossible to obtain a satisfactory conclusion from the mass of arguments in the debate on the authorship of Revelation.<sup>10</sup>

### **Audience of Revelation**

The book of Revelation clearly indicates its intended audience. The revelation of Jesus Christ from God was intended for the seven churches in Asia (Rev 1:4, 11), perhaps synonymous with God's servants (Rev 1:1). However, a closer examination of the message to each of the seven churches suggests that each message was meant for a wider audience than the immediate church to which it was addressed. Two reasons are given to substantiate this claim. First, the message for each church ends with the same formula, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).<sup>11</sup>

This suggests that the message addressed to each of the seven churches was circular in nature. It is also intended for the rest of the churches and was not exclusively meant for the original addressee.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 931-32.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 930-31.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 947.

<sup>11</sup> Akpa, 139.

<sup>12</sup> Charles H. H. Scobie, "Local References in the Letter to the Seven Churches," *New Testament Studies* 39 (1963): 606.

Second, the blessings pronounced on the one who reads, those who hear the words of the prophecy, and those who heed the things which are written in it (Rev 1:3; 22:7) indicate an extended audience beyond John's immediate audience.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, in as much as John's immediate audience was the seven churches in Asia (Rev 1:4, 11), the content of the messages in Revelation indicates that they are intended for every congregation of believers in Christ that would read them from the time of John to the consummation of everything written in the book.<sup>14</sup>

### **Purpose of Revelation**

Scholarly opinion is divided on the purpose of the book of Revelation.<sup>15</sup> Some commentators believe that the purpose of Revelation was to encourage the believers to faithfully endure suffering and persecution with the assurance of ultimate deliverance from God.<sup>16</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, Herschel H. Hobbs, and Ray Frank Robbins propose that the purpose of the prophecies in Revelation was to call the hearers to repentance, faith, and obedience, and not just to reveal the future.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Akpa, 140.

<sup>14</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 36. J. Ramsey Michaels argues that "quite possibly John's choice of seven out of all the congregations that existed in Asia Minor at the time he wrote was a literary device related to his symbolic use of the number seven throughout the book." Michaels, 36. This tends to play down on the idea that John wrote to seven literal and historical congregations.

<sup>15</sup> Reynolds, *The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Elisabeth Schussler Florenza, "Apocalyptic and Gnosis in the Book of Revelation and Paul," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1975): 36.

<sup>17</sup> R. G. Beasley-Murray, Herschel H. Hobbs, and Ray Frank Robbins, *Revelation: Three Viewpoints* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1977), 17-18.

Reynolds proposes a threefold purpose; namely, explicit, implicit, and parenetic.<sup>18</sup> The explicit purpose is to pass on the revelation of Jesus Christ from God to His servants concerning what must soon take place.

The imminence of these coming events is repeated in several portions of the book (Rev 1:1, 3; 3:11, 20; 4:1; 6:17; 10:6; 11:15, 17-18; 12:10, 12; 14). The implicit purpose is to call the readers and hearers of the book to patient endurance and faithfulness in the face of opposition, persecution, and even death (Rev 2:7,10, 11, 25-28; 3:5,11-12, 21; 12:11; 21:7).<sup>19</sup>

The purpose is “to encourage those facing trials and persecutions to be faithful until the end, in the light of God’s sovereignty, the victory of the Lamb, and the promises of coming vindication and reward for the saints and judgment on their enemies.”<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the division of opinion on the purpose of Revelation, it is pertinent to understand the purpose of the book in the light of the cosmic conflict. In this direction, John calls on the readers and hearers of the messages in Revelation to side with God and His allies, not the dragon, and his allies, since God will ultimately triumph in this conflict.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Edwin, E. Reynolds, “Ten Keys for Interpreting the Book of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11 (2000): 261-276.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 261-276.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>21</sup> Akpa, 142.

## **Socio-Historical Milieu and Date of Revelation**

The discussion on the date of the Apocalypse takes into account its socio-historical milieu as well, since it plays a vital role in ascertaining the date of the book. The language of Revelation suggests that it was not written for people who live in peaceful times.<sup>22</sup> Instead, internal evidence in the book points to the imminence of persecution, tribulations, conflicts, catastrophes, martyrdom, vengeance, judgment (Rev 1:9; 2:10, 13, 19; 3:10; 6:1-17; 8:1-9, 21; 12:1-20:15),<sup>23</sup> and restoration (Rev 21:1-22:16).

In fact, more than two-thirds of Revelation deals with the development and consummation of these issues.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, the later part of Revelation (Rev 15:1-20:15) focuses largely on God's response to the persecution of His people in the earlier part of the book. This perhaps explains why the repeated appreciation of and call for faithfulness and perseverance on the part of the saints are abundant in the earlier part of Revelation (Rev 2:2-3,7,10-11,19; 6:9-11; 13:10; 14:12), but practically absent in the later part of the book.<sup>25</sup>

External evidence also highlights the persecution of Christians as a common phenomenon in the NT era, including the time of writing of Revelation. Christians

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<sup>22</sup> Joel N. Musvosvi, "The Issue of Genre and Apocalyptic Prophecy," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 5 (2002): 43-60.

<sup>23</sup> Akpa, 143.

<sup>24</sup> The expression, ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, "things which you saw and things which are and things which are about to take place after these things" (Rev 1:19, translation mine), probably marks the historical framework for the visions of Revelation, since it tends to refer to past, present, and future events, with John's time at the centre. Akpa, 143.

<sup>25</sup> For other biblical evidence of persecution of Christians in the NT era, see the four gospels, the books of Acts, the Pauline corpus (especially 2 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians), and 1 Peter.

throughout the NT era, at different times in different places, were tried in Jewish and Roman courts. Several of them were either imprisoned, tortured, or executed.

Extra-biblical evidence demonstrates that Christians suffered persecution at the hand of Jewish authorities and Judaism.<sup>26</sup> Also, Christians suffered severe persecutions from Roman authorities during the reign of leaders such as Herod Agrippa I, Nero, Domitian, Trajan,<sup>27</sup> and other unnamed Roman emperors. The primary intention of the persecutions was to compel Christians to “renounce their faith and offer incense to the emperor.”<sup>28</sup>

The letter of Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bythynia and Pontus, to Emperor Trajan<sup>29</sup> affirms the persecution of Christians during Trajan’s reign (ca. AD 98-117). From this correspondence, it is clear that people were brought before Roman authorities just for being Christians. In his letter, Pliny explained to Trajan how he treated Christians who refused to denounce their faith and revile Christ as well as how he dealt with those who denounced being Christians and reviled Christ, making distinctions between Roman and non-Roman citizens.<sup>30</sup> The reply of Trajan to Pliny confirms that it was precarious to be identified as a Christian in the Roman Empire under Trajan.<sup>31</sup> Other examples of the persecution of Christians by Roman authorities

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<sup>26</sup> Joel N. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993), 17:155-166.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-166.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>29</sup> Wilfrid J. Harrington, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, *Revelation: Sacra Pagina Series* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1993), 16:9.

<sup>30</sup> Part of Pliny’s report to Trajan reads: “I have never been present at an examination of Christians. Consequently, I do not know the nature or the extent of the punishments usually meted out to them, nor the grounds for starting an investigation and how far it should be pressed. Pliny Letters 10.96.2-3 (trans. Radice, LCL, 2: 285-287).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.97.1 (2: 291-293).

include the accounts of the martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, and Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch.<sup>32</sup>

Musvosvi concludes that the picture of the presence of persecution of Christians during the reign of emperors such as Domitian and Trajan “seems to fit in well with that which is painted by John in the Apocalypse.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, in spite of some opposing views,<sup>34</sup> the presence of persecution in the book of Revelation has been adequately demonstrated.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, concerning the date of the writing of Revelation, internal and external evidence suggest that the most favorable date for the writing of Revelation was toward the end of the first century, during the reign of Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96).<sup>36</sup>

### **Genre of Revelation**

The first word in the book of Revelation, Ἀποκάλυψις “an unveiling, uncovering, or a revelation” (Rev 1:1), suggests that Revelation is apocalyptic in nature. Scholars recognize the presence of several markers of apocalyptic literary genre in Revelation.<sup>37</sup> Also, Revelation itself claims to be a prophecy, announcing things which must happen in a short time (Rev 1:3; 22:6). The prophetic claim, which

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<sup>32</sup> Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History* 4. 15. 1-46 (trans. Lake, LCL, 1: 339-359).

<sup>33</sup> Musvosvi, *Vengeance*, 166.

<sup>34</sup> Akpa, 146.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, See also Carson, Moo, and Morris, 474; W[illiam] M[itche]ll Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, Updated ed., ed. Mark W. Wilson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 64-81; Musvosvi, *Vengeance*, 166-176; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1920), 1:37-47, 361-370; R. H. Mounce, 177, 240- 242; Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth* (Washington, DC: Corpus, 1968).

<sup>36</sup> Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerston, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 11.

<sup>37</sup> Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretations of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988, 11:17-32.

is made both at the beginning and the end of the book (Rev 1:3; 22: 7, 10, 18, 19), attests to the prophetic nature of the book. Still, the overall layout of Revelation compels one to believe that it is a modified epistle. It has an epistolary introduction that identifies the author and audience (Rev 1:4), a prayer of grace and peace from God to the recipients (Rev 1:4-8), and a final benediction and greeting (Rev 22:21).<sup>38</sup>

The multiplex genre evident in the book of Revelation has generated a long-standing debate as to what precise genre the book belongs.<sup>39</sup> The issues in the debate are compounded by several factors. First, there is no scholarly consensus on the definition of apocalyptic as a genre.<sup>40</sup> To this, Reynolds cautions that there is no need to define apocalyptic “in mutually exclusive terms.”<sup>41</sup> Second, there are apparent similarities between Revelation and other non-biblical apocalyptic literature of its time.<sup>42</sup> In response to this, J. Daryl Charles observes that “the NT Apocalypse is no typical piece of Jewish apocalyptic propaganda.”<sup>43</sup>

In addition, Musvosvi points out remarkable differences in both the sources and use of symbolism among three major categories of apocalyptic literature; namely, pagan, Jewish, and biblical.<sup>44</sup> He cautions that “we do not expect to find a one-to-one

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<sup>38</sup> Akpa, 149.

<sup>39</sup> Reynolds, *The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif*, 10-15; Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 31-32.

<sup>40</sup> Richard E. Sturm, “Defining the Word ‘Apocalyptic’: A Problem in Biblical Criticism,” in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989), 24:17-18.

<sup>41</sup> Reynolds, *The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> J. J. Collins, “Pseudonymity, *Historical Reviews and the Genre of the Revelation of John*,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977):329-343.

<sup>43</sup> J. Daryl Charles, “An Apocalyptic Tribute to the Lamb (Rev 5:1-14),” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (1991): 466.

<sup>44</sup> Musvosvi, “The Issue of Genre,” 45.

correspondence in meaning between non-biblical and biblical apocalyptic.”<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, Reynolds warns of the danger of a reversal mode of interpretation whereby one reasons from non-biblical apocalyptic writings back to Revelation.<sup>46</sup>

It has been acknowledged that “the issue of apocalyptic genre is far too complex to be settled.”<sup>47</sup> Also, opinions are divided on the efficacy of pursuing the determination of the genre of Revelation. For instance, Vern Sheridan Poythress argues that the “question of genre is closely related to how we distinguish between symbolic and literal description.”<sup>48</sup> On the contrary, J. Ramsey Michaels argues:

There is room to be skeptical about how crucial the determination of genre is for the interpretation of specific passages . . . In short, one must be prepared for variety in attempting to read and interpret the Book of Revelation. The judgment that it is a letter, an apocalypse, or a prophecy will not necessarily take the student very far. The form of a specific passage under discussion is at least as important to the interpretive task as the genre of the entire book.<sup>49</sup>

Consequently, this study treats the book of Revelation according to its claim as an apocalypse and a prophecy, composed in the form of a modified epistle, as the content reveals.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Reynolds, *The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpet*, 32.

<sup>48</sup> Vern Sheridan Poythress, “Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1-6,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1993): 41. Poythress also opines that “The literary genre of Revelation guides readers in deciding what in Revelation is intended as symbol and what is intended as a literal or straightforward description of an historical event.”

<sup>49</sup> Michaels, 32-33.

## Structure of Revelation

In spite of the observation that the structure of the book of Revelation is a significant key to the interpretation of its messages,<sup>50</sup> one of the most controversial aspects of the study of the book, perhaps, is its structure.<sup>51</sup>

The lack of a scholarly consensus on the structure of Revelation<sup>52</sup> has grown to the point that the claim is true that almost every interpreter of the book produces a different structure.<sup>53</sup> In fact, Michaels encourages every exegete to produce his/her own detailed structure of Revelation because it “should become the one most useful to you, precisely because it is yours. It makes the Book of Revelation your own, and it will be your framework for approaching specific texts.”<sup>54</sup>

This view implies that there would be as many structures of Revelation as there are exegetes of the book. In essence, this reduces the study of the structure of Revelation to absurdity.<sup>55</sup>

The issue of structure continues to intrigue students of Revelation. A sincere exegete cannot deny that the book of Revelation is “a remarkably well-constructed

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<sup>50</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 82.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher R. Smith, “The Structure of the Book of Revelation in Light of Apocalyptic Literary Conventions,” *Novum Testamentum* 36 (1994):373.

<sup>52</sup> Leo Raines, Percer “The War in Heaven: Michael and Messiah in Revelation 12.” (PhD dissertation, Baylor University, 1999, Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1999), 44.

<sup>53</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1976.), 8.

<sup>54</sup> Michaels, 51.

<sup>55</sup> Akpa, 153.

literary piece”<sup>56</sup> and “an extraordinarily complex literary composition.”<sup>57</sup> It is possible that John deliberately arranged the visions he was given to form the structures that are evident in Revelation. It is also possible that the arrangement of Revelation naturally emerges from the idea that John wrote the vision as he was commanded (Rev 1:11, 19).<sup>58</sup>

Guthrie’s observation regarding the structure of Revelation is both persuasive and plausible. According to him, in the composition of Revelation, John might have arranged his words and thought “without conscious effort on his own part . . . It is important to recognize this fact, for it means that the book is more than a dramatic compilation; it is an experience under the control of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, there is no clear indication in the text of Revelation that John intentionally decided what structure and arrangement to use in writing the visions he saw.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, regardless of when and where John wrote these visions,<sup>61</sup> he must have written them according to what was shown to him in the visions, guided by the Holy Spirit.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, “The Eight Basic Visions,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, 6:35-49. *Daniel and Revelation Committee Series* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 107.

<sup>57</sup> Bauckham, Richard J. *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1993), 1.

<sup>58</sup> Akpa, 159.

<sup>59</sup> Guthrie, 966.

<sup>60</sup> R. H. Charles, ed. “The Testament of Naphtali,” *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2:335-339.

<sup>61</sup> For discussions on the possibilities of John having written Revelation while in exile at Patmos or after his release at Ephesus, see Osborne, 81.

<sup>62</sup> See 2 Peter 1:21; Richard J. Bauckham, “The Role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 52 (1980): 66-83.

## Characteristics of Babylon

The purpose of the Book of Revelation is not to give us exact knowledge of every little detail of future events. Some things we can not understand clearly until the end comes.<sup>63</sup>

The characteristics of Babylon are identified thus:

1. A system based on human power and perspectives rather than divine teachings. This suggests that Babylon is a human-oriented system of religion, one that seeks power through human alliances and ways of doing things,
2. While the true church of God directs people to Jesus Christ as its only head, the false system points people to religious leaders rather than to Jesus alone (Col 1:18),
3. Finley buttresses that Babylon is an earthly system of religion based primarily on human tradition and redirects the focus from a divine Saviour to human priests.<sup>64</sup>
4. A system of religion based on the false teaching of the soul immortality. The Babylonians believed that an immortal soul left the body at death and lived on. Most of Christianity continues this false teaching in its doctrine of the immortal soul. Finley affirms that “any church that neglects, overlooks, or rejects the biblical teaching on the

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<sup>63</sup> Robert J. Wieland, *Revelation of Things to Come* (Grantham, England: Stanborough Press, 2014), 169.

<sup>64</sup> Mark Finley, *The Next Superpower* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 199-200.

non-immortality of the soul is drinking from the false doctrines of the wine cup of Babylon.” Also, it is a persecuting church (Rev 17:6).<sup>65</sup>

Moreso, it is described as a false system of religion tinged with sun worship. This characteristic of Babylon infiltrated even God’s Old Testament people (Ezek 8:16). It is interesting that not only the Egyptian and Babylonians, but also the Romans worshipped the sun. Sir James G. Frazer observes that “among the Romans the worship of the sun was from immemorial antiquity.”<sup>66</sup> Revelation 18:1, 2, 4 declare:

I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. 2. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. . . . 4. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

At the time brought to view in this prophecy, it is declared that Babylon’s “sins have reached unto heaven (Rev 18:5). She has filled up the measure of her guilt, and destruction is about to fall upon her. However, God still has his people in Babylon; and before the visitation of His judgments these faithful ones must be called out, that they partake not of her sins and “receive not of her plagues.”<sup>67</sup>

Further, it claimes to have authority to forgive sins. John was viewing this apostate church subsequent to the centuries of persecution, she was holding in her hand a cup “full of abominations.”<sup>68</sup> In scripture the words “abomination,” “lie”

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<sup>65</sup> Wieland, 180.

<sup>66</sup> James G. Frazer, *The Worship of Nature*, 1:529.

<sup>67</sup> Mark Finley, *The Next Superpower*, 199-200.

<sup>68</sup> Anderson, 171.

“graven” are all used synonymously (1 Kgs 11:17, 2, 3; Isa 44:15, 19, 20).<sup>69</sup> Her cup is full of false gods and abominations, such as the counterfeit doctrines of false priesthood which claims power to forgive sins and decide cases.<sup>70</sup> It is believed that the priest has the power of the keys, or the power of delivering sinners from hell, of making them worthy of paradise, and of changing them from the slaves of Satan into children of God. And God himself is obligated to abide by the judgement of his priests, and either not to pardon or to pardon.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, based on the above review it appears that the woman who possesses those characteristics represents the apostate church which persecutes the saints and the church of God.

### **Babylon in the Context of Revelation 17-18**

As the work of Steve Moyise has demonstrated, the Apocalypse is a multivalent work that transcends the either/or options that are so easily read into it.<sup>72</sup> There is much about Revelation’s meaning that has never been fully explored.<sup>73</sup> Moreso, this section will concentrate on biblical text applying historical method itself rather than on supposed extrabiblical sources of apocalyptic.

In contrast with other modes of exposition, historicism method appears as the most valid hermeneutical approach to the biblical apocalypses. The temporal markers guide the reader like signposts on a journey that commences in the writers’ own day

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Anderson, 171.

<sup>72</sup> Steve Moyise, ed. Stanley E. Porter. “The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, supplement series, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 115 (1995): 110.

<sup>73</sup> Jon Paulien, *The End Of Historicism?*.

and ends in God's eternal kingdom.<sup>74</sup> The path historicism takes does not vanish after a few short steps, (as preterism or idealism does) nor does it appear out of nothing (as futurism would argue). Rather it advances in a continuous line.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, it must be noted that, there are kinds of composite symbolism in the chapters under review. Though, 'symbol in itself has a timeless representation of truth.'<sup>76</sup> This kind of composite symbolism was common in the ancient Near Eastern countries such as Babylon and Medo-Persia, and thus God using the kind of language these nations would understand.<sup>77</sup>

In Revelation chapter 17, after John describes the appearance and the behavior of the woman that he sees in the vision (vv. 4-6), the angel explained to John and gave him detail of historical sequence. Here the angel spoke of seven heads of the beast (v. 10), says, "they are also seven kings, five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come" The crucial question is how to interpret the sequence of the seven heads of the beast.

The answer to the sequence of the seven heads of the beast lies in the principle of vision and its interpretation.<sup>78</sup> Jon Paulien has stated:

In a vision, the prophet can travel from earth to heaven and range back and forth from time past to the end of time. The vision is not necessarily located in the prophets's time and place. But when the vision is explained to the prophet

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<sup>74</sup> Johnson, 797.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Principles For Interpreting Apocalyptic Prophecy," in *Prophetic Principles; Crucial Exegetical, Theological, Historical & Practical Insights 1*, ed. Ron du Preez (Lansing, MI: Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, September 2007), 47.

<sup>77</sup> Davidson, "Biblical Principles For Interpreting Apocalyptic Prophecy."

<sup>78</sup> Jon. K. Paulien, "The Hermeneutics of Biblical Apocalyptic," in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 1:267.

afterward, the explanation always comes in the time, place, and circumstances of the visionary.<sup>79</sup>

According to Kenneth A. Strand, three times in the vision of the book of Revelation a symbolic beast with seven heads and ten horns is presented (chapters 12, 13, 17). The first and third are red in color, whereas the second is described as a leopard-bodied animal.<sup>80</sup> He continues to explain that the first beast has crowned heads; and the second has crowned horns; the third appeared without crowns on either heads or horns.<sup>81</sup>

Strand argues against the traditional preterist interpretation which identifies the second or leopard-bodied beast with the Roman Empire and its seven heads with a succession of seven Roman rulers who reigned during the first century of the Christian Era. This view of Preterists based on the assumption that fulfillment of Revelation is limited to John's era, the first century.<sup>82</sup> The challenge with the preterist view was that, during this time, eleven men ruled not seven, and Preterists are not in agreement on which seven to select and on what rationale.

Furthermore, it has been proven in the history as against the argument of scholars that "animal heads" are never used to denote single individuals in the apocalyptic book Daniel. The four heads of the leopard (Dan 7:6; cf. 8:8, 22)

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, "The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?" in *Symposium On Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies Book 2*. ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 7:177.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

symbolized “kingdoms.”<sup>83</sup> In the same light, it would be expected that the seven heads of Revelation beasts to represent kingdoms or world powers as well.<sup>84</sup>

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, the angel immediately goes on to explain that expression to John that the seven mountains on which the woman sits are seven kings, which is another expression for world powers that dominated the world throughout history<sup>85</sup> and “through which Satan has worked to oppress God’s people throughout the ages.”<sup>86</sup> The five that have fallen are evidently the empires which ruled the world before time of John: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece; the sixth one is the Rome of John’s time; and the entity that has not yet come is seen as a future manifestation from John’s perspective.<sup>87</sup>

Stefanovic posits that John is obviously referring not to imperial, but rather eschatological Babylon. This indicates that this worldwide political power will remain a little while, that is, it is doomed to destruction for Christ’s coming will bring the ultimate and definite victory over the forces of darkness (cf. 2 Thess 2:8).<sup>88</sup>

Meanwhile, Revelation 17 describes the end-time apostate religious power, named “Babylon the great” (Rev 17:5),<sup>89</sup> In terms of a prostitute seducing the governing secular and political powers of the world with wine of her fornication. The

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Smith, “Thoughts on the Book of Revelation,” 286. Other commentators like; Jon K. Paulien, “Reflections: A BRI Newsletter, no. 9, (January 2005), 6,” Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2009), 525, Also agreed with this point

<sup>85</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 525.

<sup>86</sup> William G. Johnsson, “The Saints’ End-Time Victory Over the Forces of Evil,” in *Symposium On Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies Book 2* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992): 7:177.

<sup>87</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 525.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 523.

text explains the reasons for the fall and total destruction of Babylon which is as a result of withdrawal of support by both secular and political powers, having recognized that they have been deceived.

The destruction of end-time Babylon is introduced in Revelation 17:16-17, and it is depicted in terms of the ancient practice of punishing a prostitute with fire as prescribed in the laws of Moses (cf. Lev 20:14; 21:9; Ezek 16:38-41; 23:22-29).<sup>90</sup>

It is noted that “Babylon the great” in the book of Revelation designates, in a special sense, the united apostate religions at the close of time (Rev 14:8; 16:13, 14; 18:24).<sup>91</sup> The term is used to refer to “the great threefold religious union of the papacy, apostate Protestantism and spiritism” (Rev 16:13, 18, 19; cf. 14:8; 18:2; Dan 4:30; Zech 10:2, 3; 11:3-9).<sup>92</sup>

The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* declares that the term “Babylon” refers to the organizations themselves and to their leaders, and not to the members as such.<sup>93</sup> Smith comments that the term Babylon, as applied to them, is not a term of reproach, but is simply expressive of the confusion and diversity of sentiment that exists among them.<sup>94</sup>

In Revelation 17, John speaks of an evil woman on a strange beast that has her allegiance to Babylon written on her forehead:

There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet and was glittering with gold, precious stones and

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<sup>90</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 525.

<sup>91</sup> Francis D. Nichol, Raymond F. Cottrell, Don F. Neufeld, Julia Neuffer, eds. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 7:851-52.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 852.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Uriah Smith, *Daniel and Revelation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1944), 662.

pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the fifth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” (Rev 17:3-5) (emphasis mine)

The book of Revelation contains many prophetic symbols. One of them is that of a woman. “Woman” in scripture is a symbol of a church (Eph 5:23, 24; 2 Cor 11:2). Finley observes that the scripture depicts the church as the bride of Christ—when she is faithful to her Lord, the Bible pictures her as a pure woman, but when she drifts away from her Lord into apostasy, the church commits spiritual adultery.<sup>95</sup> This stresses that fornication and adultery are terms the Bible uses to describe unfaithfulness by God’s people.

Thus, whenever the church leaves its true husband and lover, Jesus Christ, and takes up the practices of the world, it commits spiritual adultery.<sup>96</sup> The woman in Revelation 17:2 presents the impure church. She commits adultery with “the kings of the earth.” This is a picture of false religion. The bejeweled woman passes around the wine of her false doctrines, and the world becomes drunk. Now a harlot, she has left her true lover and is no longer the true church of Christ but the false church.<sup>97</sup>

However, in Revelation 18, G.K Beale points out, the judgment of historical Babylon becomes a type of the judgment of end-time Babylon.<sup>98</sup> The cup of her

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<sup>95</sup> Finley, 199-200.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>98</sup> Beale, 901.

abomination is filled up and now is the time for her to be remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath (Rev 16:19).

To help tackling what appears ambiguous about Babylon in Revelation 17-18 is hard but if we know the right combination it is no longer an enigma. It has been severally argued from different theological schools of thought about the identity of the woman called “Mystery Babylon the Great” which has been discussed in chapter two of this work but to explore it here further from the contextual study, there can be no doubt as to her identity. As we have already noticed, a woman in prophecy represents a church.

According to Anderson, “The woman in chapter 12 is a beautiful symbol of the true church of Jesus Christ, but this woman in chapter 17, corrupt in character and deceptive in nature, contrasts in every way with that virtuous woman.” In Old Testament prophetic discourse the imagery of the harlot is commonly used to denote religious apostasy.<sup>99</sup> Isaiah laments that the once faithful Jerusalem has become a harlot (Isa 1:21). Jeremiah speaks of Israel adulteries and neighing (Jer 2:24).<sup>100</sup>

Daniel and Revelation shares same line of thought about what Babylon always for; it begins with false, idolatrous worship.<sup>101</sup> Revelation uses it as the name for the enemy of God’s people.<sup>102</sup> Daniel 3 records the account of Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image, then at the dedication ceremony,

Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and *men of every* language, 5. that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, you

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<sup>99</sup> Mounce, 307.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Peter F. Gregory, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 73 no. 2, (April 2009):146.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 137.

are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up, 6. And whoso fall not down and worship shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. (Dan 3:4-6)

Revelation describes the authority which was given to the first beast,<sup>103</sup> as being “over every tribe and people and language and nation” (ἐπὶ πᾶσαν φυλὴν καὶ λαὸν καὶ γλῶσσαν καὶ ἔθνος, Rev 13:7), four times which appear in Daniel 3.<sup>104</sup>

In Daniel, the people worshipped the image of gold and likewise, in Revelation, the first beast and his image receive the worship. In the chapters under review, the beast the woman sits on the water,<sup>105</sup> like the other beasts of prophecy, represents the civil or political power. Upheld by the power of the state, this woman, symbol of the apostate church, is seen guiding and controlling the nations for her own ends.<sup>106</sup>

“The woman which you saw is that great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth” (Rev 17:18). Nine times in the Revelation we find the expression, the “great city,” as applied to this apostate system. The woman represents ecclesiastical power; the beast, political power.<sup>107</sup> In this symbol we find the complete union of the church and state.<sup>108</sup>

Abundant testimonies might be produced from persons in high standing in various denominations, written, not for the purpose of being captious and finding

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<sup>103</sup> The beast of Revelation 13 rolls into one figure the four beasts of Daniel 7.

<sup>104</sup> Gregory, 146.

<sup>105</sup> Anderson, 173.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 173.

fault, but from a vivid sense of the fearful condition to which these churches have fallen.<sup>109</sup>

The term Babylon, as applied to them, is not a diversity of sentiment, but is simply expressive of the confusion and diversity of sentiment that exists among them.<sup>110</sup>

However, one of the angels who executed the plagues of the wrath of God on the wicked summons John to view the judgment of the great Babylon.<sup>111</sup> In Revelation 17:5 John identifies her as “Babylon the Great.” In the Old Testament Babylon is seen as a symbol of oppression and of rebellion against God.<sup>112</sup> George E. Ladd correctly observes that “the city had a historical manifestation in first-century Rome, but the full significance of the wicked city is eschatological.”<sup>113</sup>

End-time Babylon is a worldwide religious confederacy with the satanic trinity – Satan, the sea beast, and the earth beast or false Prophet—arrayed against God and his faithful people and supported by the secular and political powers (cf. Rev 13:12-17).<sup>114</sup> The angel explains the waters on which the prostitute sits have a deeper meaning; they figuratively refer to the secular powers of the world, “People and multitudes and nations and tongues” (Rev 17:15).<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Uriah Smith, 662.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 662.

<sup>111</sup> Stefanovic, 513.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 222.

<sup>114</sup> Stefanovic, 513.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 514.

Though, most commentators argue that this is undeniable evidence that the great harlot is imperial Rome, the prostitute sits on many waters. This is seen as the woman symbolizes a city but the Old Testament can also use streams or rivers to refer to peoples but the argument of some scholars is water to be seen as city not people.<sup>116</sup>

Leon Morris suggests that, for his symbolical Babylon John has taken a conventional description of Old Testament symbolism to give a picture of a world empire exercising dominion over many subject nations. Babylon is interpreted as an Empire rather than religion, the traditional understanding of the seven hills is they refer to Rome.<sup>117</sup>

This view is popular among both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars that the Babylonian harlot (Rev 17) symbolizes the ancient city of Rome, situated on seven literal hills and ruled by seven selected dynasties of Roman emperors from Augustus to Domitian. Some have attempted to combine this preterist position with a futurist fulfilment, so that the Babylonian harlot/beast may have both a first century and an end-time application.<sup>118</sup>

However, LaRondelle disagrees with preterist/historical-critical position because neither view is in agreement with the prophetic data in the scriptural setting. The view fails to take into account all the features described of the related beasts in Revelation 13 and 17.<sup>119</sup> He demonstrates his argument by providing the strong link

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<sup>116</sup> Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), 348-49. See also, G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 881-882, E. F. Scott, *The Book of Revelation* (London: Camelot Press), 84-89.

<sup>117</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation* (England: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 201-202.

<sup>118</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, "Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire" in *Symposium On Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 7:151.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

between the sea beast (Rev 13) and the little horn (Dan 7). The two prophecies identify the same anti-Christian power because Revelation 13-14 provides the immediate contextual basis for identifying the Babylonian harlot.<sup>120</sup>

Therefore, the Babylon of Revelation 17 is not a political but a religious entity. The typological links between the NT harlot (Rev 17) and the OT harlotry in Israel indicate that the Babylonian harlot is not being used as a symbol of political Rome but of a predicted Christian and apostasy that would develop within the church, break covenant with God and become of God's people oppressor.<sup>121</sup>

Meanwhile, Stefanovic also argues that, Babylon cannot be identified as imperial Rome, for it is not political but rather a religious system dominating political powers of the world at the conclusion of this world's history.<sup>122</sup>

Babylon is a cryptic name for the end-time worldwide religious confederacy made up of the dragon, the sea beast, and the earth beast, its ambition has been to reach heaven in order to usurp the place and the ruling power of God.<sup>123</sup>

Babylon of old had become archetypal source of all rebellion and resistance to God throughout history.<sup>124</sup> The children of Babylon in Revelation have the mark with the name of the beast on their foreheads (Rev 13:17), while the offspring of the woman of Revelation 12 have the name of God written on their foreheads (Rev

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> LaRondelle, "Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire."

<sup>122</sup> Stefanovic, 517.

<sup>123</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 346.

<sup>124</sup> Allan Johnson, "Revelation," in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* 12:397-603 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 554.

14:1).<sup>125</sup> End-time Babylon has a long history of persecuting the faithful followers of Christ. John sees her as drunk from the blood of the saints and from the witnesses of Jesus. This element evidently points to the persecution of the saints in Revelation

13:14-17.<sup>126</sup> According to Allan Johnson,

Babylon is an eschatological symbol of satanic deception and power; it is a divine mystery that can never be wholly reducible to empirical earthly institutions. It may be said that Babylon represents the total culture of the world apart from God, while the divine system is depicted by the New Jerusalem. Rome is simply one manifestation of the total system.<sup>127</sup>

Therefore, having understood what the harlot woman stands for, apostate religion rather than imperial, the word and warning of the apostle Paul in his second epistle to the Thessalonians that a great religious apostasy was arising in his day, and that it would develop as time went on. He says,

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there comes a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things. And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

*Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might

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<sup>125</sup> Stefanovic, 517.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 518.

<sup>127</sup> Johnson, 554.

be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thess 2:1-12)

However, we will look for an apostate religious power whose characteristics fit into Paul prophetic descriptive picture. It is a power that started then and was to get stronger and stronger, and will continue to until the Lord comes.<sup>128</sup> Going through history and through the Bible, and bring all the evidence possible, there is no power that fits into this picture like the papacy.<sup>129</sup>

Having received state recognition at the time when Justinian's decree became effective in AD 538, this apostate power in Rome began her dominance, which was to last 1260 years.<sup>130</sup> During those centuries she practically controlled the political scene in Europe but she received a "deadly wound" in the Napoleonic Wars and the Pope himself was taken prisoner, this occurred August 9, 1798.<sup>131</sup> During the last century the Church of Rome has been regaining her political influence until today she is strong once more. The city and tower of Babel set the pattern of the unholy alliance between civil government and a religion of self-effort and ritual which continued for thousands of years and was exemplified both in pagan Rome and in Christian Rome following Constantine's conversion.<sup>132</sup>

According to Uriah Smith, the apostate woman is a symbol of the Roman Catholic Church, which was generally believed by Protestants. Between the church

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<sup>128</sup> J. H. Meier, *What Catholics and Protestants Should Know* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1953), 150-51.

<sup>129</sup> Meier, 51.

<sup>130</sup> Anderson, 174-75.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), 54.

and the kings of the earth there has been an illicit connection. With the wine of her fornication, her false doctrines, the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk.<sup>133</sup>

It has been made known through history that papal Rome grew out of and succeeded pagan Rome which represents the papacy, with all its mixture of so-called Christian doctrines with pagan superstitions and observances.<sup>134</sup> As part of the characteristics Paul mentioned, this man would sit in the temple of God and represent himself to be as God. From Roman Catholic authorities, Pope Leo XI said: “The supreme teacher in the Church is the Roman Pontiff. Union of minds, therefore, requires, together with a perfect accord in the one faith, complete submission and obedience of will to the Church and to the Roman Pontiff, as to God Himself.”<sup>135</sup>

In chapter 17:18, “the woman whom you saw is the great city which rules over the kings of the earth,” the prostitute Babylon and the great city Babylon are the same entity. They symbolize the same end-time religious system that stands in opposition to God. God’s divine judgment is described in Revelation 18 in terms of destruction of the ancient city of Babylon.<sup>136</sup>

The Church of Rome is exclusively called Babylon. Is Rome, then, Babylon, to the exclusion of all other religion bodies?—she cannot be, from the fact that she is called the mother of harlots, as already noticed, which shows that there are other independent religious organizations that constitute the apostate daughters and belong to the same great family.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Uriah Smith, 707.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 709.

<sup>135</sup> Meier, 153.

<sup>136</sup> Stefanovic, 529.

<sup>137</sup> Smith, 708.

The ambitions and objectives of the mystical Babylon is to rule the world (Rev 18:7, 17:18), and to annihilate the saints (Rev 17:6) and her strategy is to use universal religious-political union, her policies and teachings, satanic miracles, deception and to have absolute control of men's mind (Rev 17:3,7; 17:4).<sup>138</sup>

Based on the nature, origin and activities of Babylon, one can conclude with some historical facts and textual context that apostate church in Revelation 17 and 18 is the Roman Catholic Church (Apostate Church) and not Imperial Rome as some scholars assert.

### **The Fall and Judgment of Babylon**

Chapter 18 continues to follow the theme of the previous chapter. It gives better explanation on how this end-time apostate religious system is brought to her end. This time the fall is described in terms of the collapse of a rich commercial city - ancient Babylon in particular that has grown wealthy through economic trade.<sup>139</sup> In portraying the demise of spiritual Babylon, John uses language that the prophets Isaiah (chapters 13 and 47) and Jeremiah (chapters 50-51) employed in predicting the destruction of ancient Babylon, and Ezekiel in reference to Tyre (Ezek 26-28).<sup>140</sup> From a literary point of view the two chapters are quite distinct.<sup>141</sup>

Revelation chapter 18 discusses: i. The prediction of Babylon's fall (vv. 1-3); ii. An exhortation to God's people to separate from Babylon before judgment comes (vv. 4-8); iii. The lament of those who cooperate with Babylon (the kings of the earth

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<sup>138</sup> Nichol, 866-68.

<sup>139</sup> Stefanovic, 529.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 306.

vv. 11-17), the mariners (vv. 17b-19); and, iv. The rejoicing of the faithful once Babylon's judgement is complete (vv. 20-24).<sup>142</sup>

It is crucial to note that John "is not writing a literal description, even in poetic or figurative language, of the fall of an earthly city but in portraying the destruction of a city, he describes God's judgement on the great satanic system of evil that has corrupted the earth's history." Beale points out that the judgment of historical Babylon becomes a type of the judgment of end-time Babylon<sup>143</sup>

Babylon has filled up her cup of abomination. The time is now that the great Babylon was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the fury. The wrath of Babylon's false teaching, the teaching directly responsible for the violence in the world today, such as; the law of God is no longer binding, a false Sabbath is exalted in place of the true Sabbath, baptism by immersion is upturned for any other forms, drinking and smoking no more seen as sins, immortality of the soul and many others.<sup>144</sup>

Two reasons are given for separation from the city: so as not to have fellowship with her sins and so as not to receive her plagues. To share in her wickedness is to reap her recompense.<sup>145</sup> Babylon has always been symbolic of opposition to the advance of the kingdom of God. As it fell in times past, so also will it be destroyed in the future.<sup>146</sup> Before she is judged, however, God's people are

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<sup>142</sup> Sam Storms, "The Fall of Babylon: A Study of Revelation 18: 1-24," accessed 13 January 2015. <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/the-fall-of-babylon:a-study-of-revelation-18:1-24>.

<sup>143</sup> Beale, 901.

<sup>144</sup> Wieland, 18.

<sup>145</sup> Mounce, 325.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 323.

exhorted to cut all ties with this end-time apostate religion system dominating the world and turn back to God.<sup>147</sup>

God promised to pay her double, many scholars think that the word double does mean that the punishment was twice as much as the wrong doing, but an exact equivalent.<sup>148</sup> This would suggest, according to Meredith G. Kline, that “Babylon’s iniquities were to be balanced by their equal weight of punishment in God’s scales of justice.”<sup>149</sup>

The proclamation of the angel was not to gloat over the fallen but the gospel, to announce the triumph of God’s purposes and the final liberation of God’s people.<sup>150</sup> The repetition of the word fallen and the past tense in the future use is for the purpose of assuring God’s people that the fall is imminent and certain.<sup>151</sup>

Gregory K. Beale notes,

The assurance of the worldwide Babylon’s fall in the future is rooted in the fact that the fall of old Babylon was predicted in the same way, and the fulfilment came to pass; John believes that God will continue to act in the future as he had acted in the past. The prophecy and fulfilment of Babylon’s past fall is viewed as a historical pattern pointing forward to the fall of a much larger Babylon.<sup>152</sup>

There are three mournful lamentations over the destruction of Babylon by those who licentiously cooperated with her, namely; the kings of the earth—denotes the end-time governing political powers of the world that have put their authority and

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<sup>147</sup> Stefanovic, 536.

<sup>148</sup> Isbon, Beckwith. T., *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1967), 715.

<sup>149</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “Double Trouble,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 32 (1989): 171-179.

<sup>150</sup> Stefanovic, 538.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Beale, 893.

influence into the service of Babylon;<sup>153</sup> The merchants of the earth—denotes commercial retailer of corrupt doctrines and policies.<sup>154</sup> And the last group of mourners is, every shipmaster and everyone who sails by ship and sailors and as many as make their living by the sea (Ezek 27: 29-32).

The announcement of Babylon's downfall is a strong wake-up call to God's people to break off personal identification with any religious system that is not in line with the gospel. The judgement on Babylon is permanent not temporal as many scholars had claimed to be.

One purpose of Revelation 16-18 is to provide God's oppressed people throughout Christian history with the firm assurance that their unjust suffering will come to an end that God will judge his and their enemies.<sup>155</sup> The conclusion of the gospel proclamation in God's end-time appeal to the earth dwellers to turn to him and escape what is about to befall Babylon (the apostate church) and its worshipers.<sup>156</sup>

Kenneth Strand expresses it in the following way:

In scripture there is assurance that God has always cared for His people: that in history itself He is ever or sent to sustain them, and that in the great eschatological denouement He will give them full vindication and an incomprehensibly generous reward in life everlasting . . . indeed, as Revelation emphatically points out, "the Living One"—the one who conquered death and the grave (1:18) will never forsake His faithful followers and that even when they suffer martyrdom they are victorious (12:11), with "the crown of life" awaiting them (see 2:10; 21:3-4 and 22:4).<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Stefanovic, 544.

<sup>154</sup> Nichol, 7:864.

<sup>155</sup> Stefanovic, 548.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 549.

<sup>157</sup> Strand, "The Seven Heads," 206.

Thus, in vision, John was brought forward in our own time, and as the scroll of prophecy and history unrolled before him, he was instructed to write what he was seeing. While the messages have been studied with profit and inspiration throughout the centuries, they have their special application to earth's last generation.<sup>158</sup>

In these last days, the studying of Babylon is important to the mission of the church "because the calling of God's people out of Babylon implies that they are not doomed yet but to show that destruction is imminent." So, there should be a wake up call to reach out to those who are still in Babylon (apostate church).

The call of God's people out of Babylon is the ultimate focus of all Bible prophecy and salvation history is the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>159</sup> The focus in the Advent awakening, both before and after 1844, was on the end-time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

It was in the light of these prophecies that the SDA pioneers began to develop their theological self-understanding as a new movement in Christian history. Believing they were a special chosen people—the remnant people of God.<sup>160</sup>

Furthermore, to prepare His people for that great crisis, God is sending His last message of mercy. The whole world will be illuminated with the glory of that message.<sup>161</sup> The call of God in Revelation 18:4, is God's call today;

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

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<sup>158</sup> Anderson, 175.

<sup>159</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, "The Remnant and the Three Angels's Messages," in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 12:857.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 857.

<sup>161</sup> Anderson, 180.

There are many who have never seen the special truths for this time. Not a few are dissatisfied with their present condition and are longing for clearer light.<sup>162</sup>

According to E. G. White; this message is the last message that will ever be given to the world; and it will accomplish its work.<sup>163</sup> The Three Angels' messages to be proclaimed by the end-time remnant is essential at this time to revive the church within and to make a call to God's people within apostate church. E. G. White proclaims:

God requires everyone to be a worker in His vineyard. You are to take up the work that has been placed in your charge, and to do it faithfully . . . were everyone of you a living missionary, the message for this time would be proclaimed in all countries, to every people and nation and tongue . . . God expects personal service from everyone to whom He has entrusted a knowledge of the truth for this time. Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods.<sup>164</sup>

Therefore, not only religious separation was demanded—that you may not participate in her sins—but physical, geographical separation was necessary as well (cf. Matt 24:16-21), that you may not receive of her plagues. The language is reminiscent of God's call to His people to come out of Babylon at the end of the captivity. The Old Testament texts speak in terms of three ideas: the coming destruction of Babylon, the coming redemption of the faithful Covenant people, and the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 1:2-3; Isa 48:20; 52:11-12; Jer 50:8; 51:6, 9, 45).

Similarly, the New Covenant people were to separate themselves from Israel. The persecutors were about to suffer destruction at God's hands, the Church's

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> E. G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Coldwater, MI: Remnant, 2001), 390.

<sup>164</sup> E. G. White, *Christian Service* (Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1996), 9.

redemption was drawing near (Luke 21:28, 31), and the new Temple was about to be fully established.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 499.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

A study of the parallelism between Revelation 17 and 18 has led to the conclusion that only one Babylon is present in the two chapters. Based on the findings this chapter draws conclusions on the meaning of Babylon, its identity and the fulfilment in Revelation prophecy.

#### **Summary**

Through history and the Bible, it is made clear that there was the existence of Babylon in the Old Testament that was destroyed because of apostasy. Admittedly, the figure of a harlot was used in the Old Testament to describe idolatry and it shows more than just religious apostasy (Ezek 23, Jer 3). Babylon is identified as a harlot. Also, the religious apostasy of the last day is called Babylon which is also due for destruction for the reason God destroyed the Old Testament Babylon.

Based on the literature available at the time of this research, various authors agreed that Babylon is structured in opposition to God. The righteous woman was likened to the Church of God while the adulterous woman likened to apostate church (Babylon). However, it must be noted that contrary to popular opinion by some scholars that Babylon is regarded as Imperial Rome, this research has helped to affirm through the context of the chapters of Revelation 17 and 18 that Babylon is basically religion where she wields both religious and political powers.

## Conclusion

This study underlines some important points that should be noted and they are stated thus: First, through the use of sound principles of interpretation we can have more reliable insight into the meaning of an apocalyptic prophecy than would otherwise be the case. We can identify things that are clear and things that are less clear.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, upon the basis of the evidence heretofore presented, the conclusion is reached that the fall of Babylon as prophesied by Revelation shall take place in the future after the call to the people of God to come out of Babylon.

Thirdly, the opinion that Babylon is apostate church and can be seen as Roman Catholic Church is based on the evidences from the characteristics of Babylon and its identification analyzed in the third chapter of this work.

Fourth, the opinion that Babylon is fallen is consistent with the testimony of the ancient writers. The final destruction of the enemies of God is Biblically eschatological; its conquest is permanent, not temporal.

Fifth, the call to come out of her is a final call to the inhabitants of the earth in which you and I are to benefit because it is call of God to be saved rather than to stay in Babylon and participate in her woes. We also have a duty to make this call to rescue the perishing.

Sixth, no matter how carefully one works with apocalyptic texts, some puzzles and questions will remain. These stimulate curiosity and invite further effort to unlock

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<sup>1</sup> Jon K. Paulien, "The Hermeneutics of Biblical Apocalyptic," in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD : Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 268.

God's fascinating revelation.<sup>2</sup> Lastly, the historicist view remains the best approach to apocalyptic prophecy. It gives the complete interpretation to the book of Revelation in entirety.

### **Recommendation**

Having studied this passage, the following suggestions are made for further study. Based on the arguments and facts in this research, it has been shown that Roman Catholic Church may be the "Babylon," but for further studies I recommend a research that will focus mainly on Catholic Doctrine or Teaching about "Babylon" of Revelation 17 and 18.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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