

UNDERSTANDING REVELATION

Part II

“Interpretation” in the Book of Revelation

By Arlen L. Chirwood

And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

And the angel said unto me...I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 17:5, 7).

Note that the identification of the “harlot” in Rev. 17:1ff with “Babylon” is associated with the word *mystery*. And, as well, the identification of “the beast,” the last king of Babylon, is also associated with this word.

A Mystery

The word, “mystery,” is not part of the harlot’s name — such as *mystical*, etc. Rather, the word, “mystery,” states something about the harlot, aiding in the identification of the harlot.

“A mystery” in the New Testament does not have to do with something completely new, something not dealt with at all or unknown in the Old Testament (a common misconception which is often taught concerning the meaning of the word). This, of course, couldn’t be true, for, as previously seen (Part I), there is nothing in the New that cannot be found after some form in the Old.

Rather, “a mystery” in the New Testament has to do with *an opening up and an unveiling of something previously introduced and dealt with in the Old*

Testament. “A mystery” has to do with *additional revelation, commentary, on that already seen in the Old Testament, allowing the Old Testament revelation to be fully opened up and revealed (e.g., note that a full revelation of the Son in the Book of Revelation allows the “mystery of God” [Rev. 10:7] to be correspondingly fully opened up as well, for Christ is God manifested in the flesh).*

And the preceding is exactly what is in view through referring to “the woman” and “the beast” by the use of the word *mystery*. There is an opening up, an unveiling of that previously revealed concerning the woman and the Beast, which, of course, would necessitate prior revelation on the subject.

This alone would tell a person that *foundational material for both can, and must, be found in the Old Testament, for, again, there is nothing in the New that does not have its roots someplace in the Old.*

And, as previously seen (Part I), a relationship of this nature between the two Testaments can be seen in the opening verse of the last book of Scripture, the Book of Revelation, stating at the outset the nature of the book’s contents.

The entirety of the Old Testament is about *the person and work of Jesus Christ* (Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39-47). And the New Testament, continuing from the Old — with “the Word” (the Old Testament Scriptures) *becoming “flesh”* (John 1:1, 2, 14) — must be viewed *in exactly the same light.*

The New is an opening up and unveiling of the Old; and the Book of Revelation, forming the capstone to all previous revelation (both the Old and New Testaments), *completes the unveiling.* The Book of Revelation, by its own introductory statement — an introductory statement peculiar to this book alone — forms the one book in Scripture which brings *all previous revelation to its proper climax.*

Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots

Thus, “the harlot” being inseparably identified with *Babylon* is not something which suddenly appears in chapter seventeen, apart from prior revelation — revelation which would allow one to

know *who is being referenced and why an identification of this nature is being used.*

The word “mystery” alone would tell a person that *prior revelation exists, allowing the referenced identification to be easily understood.*

Most of the prior revelation is in the Old Testament, but some can be found in the immediately preceding chapters of the Book of Revelation. And, even without these immediately preceding chapters — knowing that these are central entities dealt with during “the time of Jacob’s trouble” — plain common sense would seemingly tell any individual with a good grasp of the Old Testament Scriptures what and who is being dealt with, *for that seen throughout Rev. 17:1-19:6 is a major subject of Old Testament Scripture.*

Metaphors and other forms of figurative language are used extensively in these chapters, not only relative to “the harlot” and “the beast,” but numerous other places as well (*e.g., the descriptive destruction of the harlot, “with fire,” the harlot referred to as “that great city, Babylon,” or the “great riches” enjoyed by the nations at the harlot’s expense.* And the use of metaphors or other forms of figurative language is seen throughout the book, in line with “signified [*semaino*]” in the opening verse of the book.

And, with the preceding in mind, relative to the inseparable association of the harlot with Babylon along with the harlot’s identification, note three previous verses — Rev. 11:8; 14:8; 16:19.

In the first verse (11:8), where the first of nine references in the book to “the [or, ‘that’] great city” is found, this city is associated with both Sodom and Egypt and is identified as “Jerusalem”:

“And their dead bodies [the two witnesses] shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.”

In the second verse (14:8), where the second reference to “that great city” is found in the book, the destruction of the harlot is seen (detailed

more fully in chs. 17-19a); and the harlot, previously associated with *Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem* (through an identification with “the great city”), is here associated with *Babylon*:

“And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

(The inclusion of “that great city” in this verse is often questioned on the basis of manuscript evidence. But the question, in reality, is mute. Note Rev. 16:19; 18:10, 21, where no manuscript variance exists, with “Babylon” referred to as *that great city* in all three verses.)

In the third verse (16:19), where the third reference to “the great city” is found in the book, the end of the harlot is seen again. But in this verse, additional explanatory material is given. “The great city... Babylon” (cf. 18:10) is seen separate from “the cities of the nations.” And, with “the great city” having previously been identified as *Jerusalem* (metaphorically, also with *Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon*), a separation from the nations, as seen in this verse, could only be expected (cf. Num. 23:9; Deut. 14:2):

“And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.”

(The identification of “the great city” [or, ‘that great city’ (same structure in the Greek text throughout)] with *Jerusalem* is dealt with more fully and after a different fashion in Chapter II of this book.

Note also that “Jerusalem” is used a number of times in Scripture as simply another way of referring to the *Jewish people*. Even “the land of Israel” is used this same way at times in Scripture [cf. Isa. 1:21, 26; Lam. 1:7, 8; Ezek. 14:11-13; 16:2; Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:33; 19:41].)

Thus, to see “Babylon” used as a metaphor for *Jerusalem* — i.e., referring to the *Jewish people* — in the Book of Revelation, one could only expect to

find a prior *Jerusalem-Babylon* association in the Old Testament, for, again, there is nothing in the New Testament that does not have its roots somewhere in the Old Testament.

In this respect, not only should a *Jerusalem-Babylon* association be found in the Old Testament, one which would allow “Babylon” to be used as a metaphor for *Jerusalem*, but an association of this nature should also exist as it pertains to the numerous other things dealt with throughout Revelation chapters seventeen through the first part of nineteen as well. And this is exactly what one finds when going back to the Old Testament, comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Note again that “Babylon” in Revelation chapter seventeen is referred to as not just “Babylon,” but as “a mystery, [which is] Babylon...” (v. 5, NASB), and, as also previously seen, the word “mystery” is used of “the beast” as well (v. 7).

(Note how the preceding would negatively reflect on the false teaching that “the harlot” in Rev. 17-19a is a reference to the *Roman Catholic Church*.

“The harlot” is a mystery, necessitating that the harlot be found in the Old Testament. And to carry such a teaching pertaining to the harlot and the Roman Catholic Church through to its logical conclusion, this Church, of necessity, would have to be found in the Old Testament, which, of course, it isn’t.)

Dealing with *Babylon, Jerusalem, and the Beast* in the Book of Revelation, one would naturally turn to the Book of Daniel. Though *Babylon, Jerusalem, and the Beast* are first mentioned early in Genesis (3:15; 10:10; 14:18), Daniel is the book which deals with the whole of the matter in relation to the beginning, progression, and end of the Times of the Gentiles.

The kingdom of *Babylon* is brought into full view in this book, Daniel deals with *Israel* and the nations in relation to this *Babylonian* kingdom, and Daniel places a particular emphasis on details pertaining to the latter days — details having to do with *Babylon’s* end-time ruler, the *Beast*, exactly as seen in the Book of Revelation (though this man

had previously been introduced in different ways and places in the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis, then quite extensively in Exodus).

The complete period of the Times of the Gentiles is depicted through two main means in the Book of Daniel — through a four-part great image in chapter two (revealed through a dream) and through four great beasts in chapter seven (revealed through a vision). That depicted by the great image in chapter two is *Babylonian* in its entirety (from the head of gold to the feet part of iron and part of clay), as is that depicted by the four great beasts in chapter seven (from the lion to the dreadful, terrible, and exceedingly strong beast). The great image and great beasts present exactly the same picture, though from two different perspectives.

That seen through the great image and the great beasts centers around and sets forth *Gentile world rule during the Times of the Gentiles, from its beginning to its end, as this period relates to Babylon*. The Times of the Gentiles began in *Babylon*, and this period of time will end in *Babylon*.

God used the first king of *Babylon* (*Nebuchadnezzar* [the first king during time covered by the great image, or the great beasts]) to complete the removal of the Jewish people from their land — because of their prior, continued disobedience, extending over centuries of time — resulting in an end to the Old Testament theocracy.

And God will use the last king of *Babylon* (*Antichrist*) to complete the reason for the removal of His people under the first king of *Babylon* — to effect repentance, resulting in a reestablishment of the theocracy at a future time.

The former theocracy was established under the old covenant, and the latter theocracy will be established under a new covenant (cf. Ex. 19:5, 6; Jer. 31:31-33).

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