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The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif in the book of Revelation

Reynolds, Edwin Earl, Ph.D.

Andrews University, 1994

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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE SODOM/EGYPT/BABYLON MOTIF
IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Edwin Earl Reynolds

April 1994

ABSTRACT

THE SODOM/EGYPT/BABYLON MOTIF
IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

by

Edwin Earl Reynolds

Adviser: Jon Paulien

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: THE SODOM/EGYPT/BABYLON MOTIF IN THE BOOK OF
REVELATION

Name of researcher: Edwin Earl Reynolds

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Jon Paulien, Ph.D.

Date completed: March 1994

This study observes in the book of Revelation the motif of a Great City which was variously characterized as Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon. It sets out to determine the significance of this characterization by tracing the Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon traditions in the OT, the NT, and the relevant extrabiblical literature. Then it seeks to learn how John used the motif throughout the book of Revelation and to understand the implications of the motif for John's theology.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the dissertation, to the book of Revelation, and to the literature relevant to the dissertation.

Chapter 2 outlines the evidence for the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif in Revelation, then explores the three traditions in the background literature to observe the significance which these traditions may have contributed to John's use of the motif. Several significant features shared by the three traditions emerge, which shed light on John's choice of Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon to characterize the Great City.

Chapter 3 shows first how the key elements shared by the three traditions were used by John in highlighting certain features of the Great City and its impending judgment in Revelation. A broad study of the book follows, to determine the extent of the motif in the book. Elements of the motif may be found throughout the book, but are particularly prominent in the latter half of the book, beginning with chap. 11. The limits of the motif are considered, with special focus on the role of Jerusalem in John's theology. Finally, some theological implications of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif are discussed. The OT record of God's dealings with people and nations in the past seems to have become, for John, a key to understanding His present and future dealings.

Chapter 4 presents the conclusions of the study.

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THE SODOM/EGYPT/BABYLON MOTIF
IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

A dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy


by

Edwin E. Reynolds

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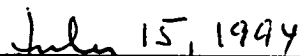
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Date Approved

To those who endured:

Connie, my elect and beloved wife

Beth, my firstborn

David, my only begotten son

Brandon, my son by election

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This inspiration was further nurtured in classes in Revelation studies under Professors Kenneth A. Strand and Jon Paulien, both of whom have themselves been inspired with a love and fascination for the book of Revelation.

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Finally, I must mention my wife, Connie, and my children, to whom this dissertation is dedicated, who have provided the emotional support necessary for such a task.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For a book which is titled an ἀποκαλύψις (1:1), an unveiling or disclosure, the book of Revelation presents the reader with a multitude of problems in interpretation. Yet if it is to be truly an unveiling, there must be some interpretive clues which will help to unlock its apparent mysteries. The language in which the message of the book is conveyed must have been intelligible to its original readers. If we are to recover the message of the book today, even in part, there must be a means by which we can see the images through their eyes and hear the words through their ears. In order to do this, we must become familiar with the language and literature of the period, especially that specifically echoed in the language of the book itself.

Statement of Problem and Purpose

One of the problems facing the interpreter of the book of Revelation is the high degree of symbolic language used by John in recording the visions which he claims to have seen and heard while "in the Spirit" (1:10; 4:2; 17:3;

21:10).¹ What are the keys to unlocking the apparent mystery of this language? Are these keys readily accessible to the contemporary reader of the book, or does the historical, geographical, cultural, and semantic gap between the first century and the twentieth century prevent the contemporary reader from having any access to them?

It is my purpose in this dissertation to study one of the motifs in the book of Revelation which uses symbolic language. If it is possible to understand the message of the book of Revelation better as a result of tracing this motif throughout the book and looking at the backgrounds to the symbolic language used, this process may assist in further investigation along the same lines and provide answers to some of the above questions. At the same time, a hermeneutic may be established for working with John's sources on his own terms.²

There is a "great city" in the book of Revelation which is spiritually called "Sodom and Egypt" (11:8) and is also enigmatically called "Babylon" (14:8; 17:5, 18; 18:23, 10, 21).³ This Great City is so broadly represented in

¹All English quotations from Scripture are from the RSV unless otherwise indicated. For the original Greek, this study uses the common text of Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed. (1979) and the United Bible Societies' *The Greek New Testament*, 3d ed. (corr.) (1983).

²For a discussion of this issue, see the sections later in this chapter entitled "John's Use of Sources" and "A Hermeneutic for John's Reading of the Traditions."

³Like Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*:

the book that it forms a motif with particular characteristics which the reader needs to understand. The symbolic names by which John identifies it become significant pointers to the characteristics of this Great City, aiding the interpreter of the book in better understanding the motif and its role in the theology of the book. Because of the great significance attached by John to these names and all that they represent, this motif has been called the "Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif" for the purposes of this study.

By first identifying this motif in the book of Revelation, then attempting to explore John's development of the motif through a study of the OT, NT, early Jewish traditions, and other relevant backgrounds to Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon, we can approach the task of determining the role of the motif in John's theology. In the process, increased light may be shed on the function of symbolism in the expression and development of the theology of the book.

Limits and Scope of the Study

In order to maintain its focus, this study does not attempt to debate such peripheral issues as the date and authorship of the book of Revelation, and it discusses only briefly the questions of the genre and structure of the book. Greater attention is given to the issue of John's

Apocalypse and Empire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 82, many scholars readily acknowledge this varied application of the symbol of the Great City in the book of Revelation, as is shown in chapter 2.

use of sources, with special attention to the sources of the motif under study and a hermeneutic for John's reading of those sources. While potential extrabiblical sources are also explored, primary emphasis is given to the examination of the OT traditions¹ and to the NT development of those traditions.

This is a motif study, using a particular motif from the book to provide insights into the theology of Revelation. Some exegesis is necessary in order to identify traces of the motif and to show how various aspects of the imagery relating to Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon combine to form a single Great City motif; however, this is not primarily an exegetical study.

¹By "tradition" we mean only the records as they have been preserved. Nothing else is implied. Scholarship widely affirms that the OT provides the major background source for the language of the book of Revelation. See, for example, R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 1:lxv-lxxxiii; André Feuillet, *The Apocalypse*, trans. Thomas E. Crane (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, St. Paul Publications, 1965), 77-80; David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy*, New Foundations Theological Library (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 84, 91; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, assisted by M. K. Ross, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), xxiv-xxviii; William Milligan, *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1892), 70-72; Paulien, 12-17, 46 (n. 4), 119; Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16, 17-19, 10*, European University Studies, ser. 23, vol. 376 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 177; Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1957), 101-17.

Neither is this a theological study, though I do discuss certain theological implications of the motif at the end of chapter 3. In discussing these implications, only certain selected areas of theology have been addressed, namely, theodicy, soteriology, and eschatology. The limits of the study forbid a more exhaustive approach.

It should also be noted that the limits of this dissertation prevent a development of all of the unique or distinctive features of Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon and the implications resulting therefrom. The fact that there is only one Great City in John's theology, as chapter 2 shows, suggests that the Great City which is Sodom and Egypt must have many features in common with the Great City which is later called Babylon. Our purpose is to search for these common features which illumine John's concept of the Great City, rather than to seek to distinguish two or three Great Cities.

This does not imply that the Great City in Revelation is uniformly represented throughout the book, since, as I attempt to show, John used the Great City as a symbol for different institutions throughout history, each of which varied somewhat in its particularities. While the use of the three names to identify the same Great City may have also suggested certain key features distinctive to each, it is the characteristics which all three had in common which seems to have made them suitable representatives

of the same Great City for John. It is the purpose of this study to discern what those features are. At the same time, however, I do take note of the key features which distinguish the three cities/nations in the tradition, but it is left for another study to take up the question of individual particularities as they might have been intended by John to point to different historical entities.

Method and Development of the Study

This is an inductive study, meaning that it begins with the content of the book of Revelation and seeks to identify and elucidate the motif under study first within its own literary context. Once the motif is inductively established, the backgrounds to the symbolic names used to characterize the motif must be reviewed. Finally, it is necessary to attempt to discover what light this fuller understanding of the motif sheds on the message of the book of Revelation.

The remainder of chapter 1 is devoted to addressing introductory questions about the book of Revelation, its genre, structure, and use of sources. A brief overview of the literature most relevant to the specific task of the study is also provided.

In chapter 2 an attempt is made to demonstrate the existence of a single Great City motif in the book of Revelation, then to trace the OT, NT, and other relevant

backgrounds to its characterization as Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon.

In chapter 3, informed by the backgrounds to the characterization of the motif, this study returns to the book of Revelation to pursue the motif more fully through the book and to attempt to discern its full significance in the light of John's broad use of OT sources. The limits of the motif are also explored, with special attention to the question of the role of Jerusalem in John's theology. Finally, some implications of the motif for John's theology are explored in three selected areas.

Chapter 4 summarizes the conclusions and contributions of the study.

Questions of Introduction

As noted above, this study does not debate the questions of the authorship and date of the book of Revelation. It is assumed for the purposes of this study that the author was a man named John, a man known by name to the churches of Asia Minor to whom he wrote (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), who was exiled to Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (1:9; cf. 6:9), and who claimed to be recording things which he had seen and heard while he was "in the Spirit" (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), things which pertained to the present as well as to the future (1:19).

Internal and external evidence are widely regarded as favoring a date toward the end of the first century,

probably during the latter part of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96).¹

The provenance and destination of the book are explicit. John clearly stated that he received his visions and the command to write them out while he "was on the island called Patmos" (1:9-11) and that he was writing "to the seven churches that are in Asia" (1:4), namely, those located in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (1:11).

The purpose of the book seems to have been to challenge the readers (1) to recognize that God was in ultimate control, had already redeemed to Himself a people through the blood of the Lamb, and would bring to a triumphant victory what at present seemed to be a situation dominated by evil powers, and (2) to live in that consciousness lives of faithfulness, patient endurance, and exemplary personal conduct such that they would be

¹Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* ([New York]: Macmillan Co., 1919; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 197-208; Charles, 1:xcix-xcvi; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 54-77; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 20; Kiddle, xxxvi-xl; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices*, [3d ed.] ([New York]: Macmillan Co., [1909]; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., [1951]), xcix-cvi; Thompson, 13-15.

partakers of the promised inheritance and would escape the judgment which God would soon bring upon the evil powers.¹

¹This formulation is mine. There is no complete consensus on the purpose of the book. Earlier commentators like Swete (xciv-xcviii) and Beckwith (208-13) generally viewed the Apocalypse as a response to the persecution of Christians at the hand of Rome, with John attempting to exhort the believers to faithfulness and to encourage them in the face of suffering, assuring them that "God will carry through unflinchingly his purpose to deliver his people and establish his kingdom" (Beckwith, 213). Some recent commentators have denied that there is any substantive evidence that a major persecution of Christians at the hand of Rome was taking place. A. Y. Collins, 70, holds that there is "no reliable evidence supporting the theory that Domitian persecuted Christians as Christians." She concludes that there was nothing more than an "expectation of persecution" (71). The crisis which John was dealing with was a "perceived crisis" (84). He responded to rejection, suspicion, and repression on the part of outsiders by calling for a Christian communal life of social radicalism (107), which "involves the establishment of Christian independence and identity by withdrawing from Greco-Roman society into an exclusive group with rigorous rules and an intense expectation of imminent judgment against their enemies and of their own salvation" (137). Thompson not only denies any persecution of Christians by Rome (171-75) or any persistent hostilities on the part of their non-Christian neighbors (191), but goes so far as to deny any conflict, tension, or crisis whatsoever (91, 197). Rather, "in all aspects the language speaks from unbroken wholeness to unbroken wholeness" (91).

Such conclusions clearly have a significant effect on one's view of the author's purpose. Schüssler Fiorenza, on the other hand, declares that, while there is no generally accepted consensus in regard to the composition or theological interpretation of Revelation (35), "a general consensus exists among scholars only as to the purpose of the book: the author seeks to give courage and perseverance to Christians threatened by persecution insofar as he refers to the nearness of the final eschatological salvation" (36). She contends that "the apocalyptic question 'Who is Lord over the world?' is the central issue of Rev." (24). David E. Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre," *Semeia*, no. 36 (1986): 90-91, writes: "The message of the Apocalypse of John centers on the promise of final salvation for believers and terrible punishment which will be meted out to unbelievers (Rev 21:5-8). . . . A central purpose of the author was to

Genre of the Book of Revelation

The question of the genre of the book has not been fully resolved. That Revelation claims to belong to the genre of prophetic literature is clear (1:3; 10:11; 22:6-10, 18-19), but it is also apocalyptic by definition, since it provides the model from which the genre takes its name and characteristics.¹ It must be observed, however, that the determining features of the genre are not drawn from Revelation alone, but from certain formal correspondences between it and a number of other writings which bear a

motivate the audience to pursue a life of faithfulness and purity in order to avoid the punishments awaiting those who follow the wrong path."

¹The fact that John calls his book an ἀποκάλυψις does not mean that he was trying to identify it with other writings which today are classified as apocalyptic, since Revelation was the first writing to identify itself in this way and has provided the initial model for the genre. See David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, Library of Early Christianity, vol. 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 226-27; James L. Blevins, "The Genre of Revelation," *Review and Expositor* 77 (1980): 393; John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia*, no. 14 (1979): 2; Fiorenza, 150; Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 428; Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, trans. Margaret Kohl, Studies in Biblical Theology, 2d ser., no. 22 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, [1972]), 18; Morton Smith, "On the History of ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ and ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. David Hellholm, 2d ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989), 14; P. Vielhauer, "Apocalypses and Related Subjects: Introduction," trans. David Hill, in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, English ed. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 582.

range of similarities to it.¹ It is when scholars begin to reverse the analogy, reasoning from these other documents back to the book of Revelation, that questions begin to arise as to whether or not Revelation should be classified as prophecy or apocalyptic.² Of course, as some have

¹Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 3 vols., trans. John Moore Trout et al., under the direction and supervision of Melancthon Williams Jacobus, assisted by Charles Snow Thayer (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1953), 3:387. Fiorenza, 18, as recently as 1985, wrote, "Scholars have not yet succeeded in delineating the literary types of prophecy and apocalypse, nor in identifying essential component elements and stylistic characteristics of an apocalypse."

²On the characteristics of apocalyptic there is no unanimity, but for a variety of ideas and categories, see: Aune, "Problem of Genre," 81-91; J. J. Collins, 5-9; idem, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1984), 2-8; Hanson, 428-31; idem, "Apocalypse, Genre," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, supp. vol. (1976), 27-28; David Hellholm, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John," *Semeia*, no. 36 (1986): 22-25; Koch, 23-33; H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to the Revelation*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Bros., [1952]), 13-14, 22-25, 35-41; D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 BC-AD 100*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1964), 104-139; E. P. Sanders, "The Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. David Hellholm, 2d ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989), 447-59; Walter Schmithals, *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 14-49; Vielhauer, 582-94. Revelation may certainly be classified as apocalyptic according to the comprehensive definition of John Collins: "'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world" ("Morphology of a Genre," 9).

pointed out,¹ such a dilemma occurs only when one defines apocalyptic and prophecy in mutually exclusive terms, à la von Rad.² Otherwise, one is free to see Revelation as both prophecy and apocalyptic, as Fiorenza prefers to classify it.³

Still, it is not illegitimate to distinguish between the apocalyptic nature of Revelation and that of the Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature with which it is often compared. This has been done by a number of studies,⁴ but the results vary because of a wide variety

¹M. Eugene Boring, "The Apocalypse as Christian Prophecy: A Discussion of the Issues Raised by the Book of Revelation for the Study of Early Christian Prophecy," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1974 Seminar Papers*, ed. George MacRae (Cambridge, MA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974), 2:43; Fiorenza, 133-34, 137-38, 168-69; Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 4-8.

²Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 2:303.

³Fiorenza argues that the scholarly alternative—either prophetic or apocalyptic—should not be applied to Revelation (137) because it is "a genuine expression of early Christian prophecy whose basic experience and self-understanding is apocalyptic" (140). Cf. *ibid.*, 168-69; Beckwith, 336; Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretations of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 31-32; Swete, xxii. Robert W. Wall, *Revelation*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 12-13, asks how a composition can function as both apocalypse and prophecy. His answer is that Revelation is apocalyptic in form, but prophetic in its overarching function.

⁴See, e.g., Aune, "Problem of Genre," 67-91; Richard Bauckham, "The *Figurae* of John of Patmos," in *Prophecy and Millenarianism: Essays in Honor of Marjorie*

of presuppositions regarding such factors as the distinguishing characteristics of apocalyptic, the function and purpose of the book of Revelation as related to its historical setting, and the eschatology of the book.¹ More work apparently remains to be done in this area before a satisfactory result may be attained.

Some have noted the epistolary characteristics of the book, particularly in the prologue and epilogue, but most do not conclude that the genre of the book as a whole is epistolary.² J. Ramsey Michaels goes further, however.

Reeves, ed. Ann Williams (Essex, U.K.: Longman Group, 1980), 110-11; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary, paperback ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981), 14-19; J. J. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 210-14; idem, "Pseudonymity, Historical Reviews and the Genre of the Revelation of John," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 329-43; Fiorenza, 146-52; Hellholm, 43-54; James Kallas, "The Apocalypse—An Apocalyptic Book?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): 69-80; George Eldon Ladd, "The Revelation and Jewish Apocalyptic," *Evangelical Quarterly* 29 (1957): 94-100; Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987), 24-27; Pierre Prigent, "Apocalypse et apocalyptique," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 47 (1973): 280-97; Swete, xxii-xxxii.

¹Hansen, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 428-43.

²See, e.g., Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message, vol. 22 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), 6; Fiorenza, 18, 51; idem, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 39-41, 114-15; Wall, 13.

He argues that Revelation is a circular letter, and "most resembles the style of a letter."¹

If a more specific genre than letter or circular letter is needed, the Revelation should be classified as either a *prophetic letter* on the basis of the long title prefixed to the letter proper (1:1-3) or an *apocalyptic letter* because of its content.²

Still, he adds,

Many literary theorists have suggested that good, and especially great, works never quite belong to a single genre. They are highly individual creations that expand the categories to the breaking point. This is certainly true of the Book of Revelation. If a letter, it is like no other early Christian letter we possess. If an apocalypse, it is like no other apocalypse. If a prophecy, it is unique among prophecies.³

For the purposes of this study, Revelation has been treated as both apocalypse and prophecy, in harmony with its own claims and characteristics. However, it seems to stand more in the tradition of classical OT prophecy than in the tradition of classical Jewish apocalyptic.⁴

¹J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 30. See also Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2, 18; M. Eugene Boring, "Narrative Christology in the Apocalypse," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992): 704-5; and Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John E. Alsup (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 7-8. This seems to be the trend in narrative criticism of Revelation.

²Michaels, 31.

³*Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁴This is not to imply that Revelation does not fit the characteristics of apocalyptic prophecy as outlined by Kenneth A Strand, "Foundational Principles of Interpretation," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1: Introductory and*

Having said that, though, it would be appropriate to observe a final caution put forward by Michaels: "There is room to be skeptical about how crucial the determination of genre is for the interpretation of specific passages."¹

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.²

Exegetical Studies, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 12-14, but rather to suggest that it is distinguished from classical Jewish apocalyptic more than from OT prophecy, which includes apocalyptic prophecy. In addition to the discussions of the problem of the genre of Revelation cited above, see also Hill, 70-93; idem, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St John," *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971-72): 401-18; Robert Michael Kuykendall, "The Literary Genre of the Book of Revelation: A Study of the History of Apocalyptic Research and Its Relationship to John's Apocalypse" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1987); Frederick David Mazzaferri, "The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-critical Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1986; Wetherby, West Yorkshire, U.K.: British Library Document Supply Centre, 1987). The latter two are dissertations completed the same year but arriving at very different conclusions. While Kuykendall claims Revelation is a Christian apocalypse, falling "squarely within the apocalyptic genre, according to the common core of traits constitutive of all apocalypses" (222), Mazzaferri views John as a neo-classical prophet, not an apocalypticist (462). John would probably agree more with the latter view. Cf. Rev 22:9; Bauckham, *Theology*, 1-12; Wall, 12-13.

¹Michaels, 32.

²Ibid., 33.

Structure of the Book of Revelation

In her analysis of the structure of the book of Revelation for her dissertation, Adela Yarbro Collins noted that there is very little consensus on the overall structure of the book and how that structure should be interpreted. "There are almost as many outlines of the book as there are interpreters."¹ That this assessment is still valid has been confirmed by other recently published studies.² Donald Guthrie thus concludes: "We cannot assume that it is possible to arrive at a definitive conclusion."³

With this in mind, it would seem unwise to be dogmatic about any thoroughgoing structure of the book as a basis for interpretation.⁴ This is perhaps what prompted Feuillet to observe, "It seems prudent to study the

¹Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, no. 9 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 8.

²David L. Barr, "The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis," *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 43; Donald Guthrie, *The Relevance of John's Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987; Exeter, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1987), 20; Ruiz, 243.

³Guthrie, 20. Aune, *Literary Environment*, 241, declares that the structure of Revelation "has yet to be satisfactorily analyzed."

⁴Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), 46, observes: "This rather complete lack of consensus about the structure of Revelation should caution the reader about accepting any one approach as definitive."

structure of the Apocalypse according to the text itself, as it is, separating insofar as is possible the problem of the literary composition from that of interpretation."¹

Nevertheless, it is wise to have in mind some concept of the general structure of the book as we approach the task of doing theology, lest statements become isolated from their context, resulting in a distortion in meaning.²

Rather than attempt to review the many varied structures proposed for Revelation or to propose an intricate structure for the book, this study merely notes some of the features that are more evident from the text and which are therefore widely recognized.³

¹Feuillet, 35.

²Note the caution in Guthrie, 20.

³One of the better reviews and overviews of the problem of the structure of the book, in my opinion, is found in the dissertation by Wayne Richard Kempson, "Theology in the Revelation of John" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1987), 38-142. Other efforts at reviewing what has been done in this area and proposing some guidelines include: A. Y. Collins, *Combat Myth*, 4-44; Charles F. Darling, Jr., "The Angelology of the Apocalypse of John As a Possible Key to Its Structure and Interpretation" (Th.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976), 74-111; Feuillet, 23-36; Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 159-77; Guthrie, 20-28; Ugo Vanni, *La struttura letteraria dell' Apocalisse*, 2d ed., rev. and updated, Aloisiana, vol. 8a (Brescia, Italy: Morcelliana, 1980), 7-104; Vester Eugene Wolber, "A Study of the Literary Structure of Revelation as an Aid to Interpretation" (Th.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950).

First, it should be noted that most contemporary scholarship acknowledges the unity of the book, in contrast to various source-critical theories of the past.¹

Second, the book begins with an epistolary pre-script and ends with an epistolary postscript, providing an epistolary framework for its message.² This epistolary framework, however, is usually considered to be of minor significance in light of the title in 1:1-2, the prior introduction of the vision form in 1:9, and the subsequent lack of epistolary structure and dominance of the visions.³ The prescript and postscript are usually called simply the epilogue and prologue to the book.

¹Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Revelation," in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and George W. MacRae, *The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 411; Paulien, 11-12. For a comprehensive review and rebuttal of source-critical analyses, see Beckwith, 216-39. See also such recent studies as Aune, *Literary Environment*, 240-46; Ruiz, 70-72; Thompson, 37-52. While A. Y. Collins argued for two sources in Rev 12 in her 1975 dissertation (*Combat Myth*, 101-145), she defends the essential unity of the book in *Crisis*, 31.

²Aune, *Literary Environment*, 240-41; A. Y. Collins, *Combat Myth*, 5-8; Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 149-50; Ulrich B. Müller, "Literarische und formgeschichtliche Bestimmung der Apokalypse des Johannes als einem Zeugnis frühchristlicher Apokalyptik," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. David Hellholm, 2d ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989), 600-8; Thompson, 37, 39-40.

³Aune, *Literary Environment*, 240; A. Y. Collins, *Combat Myth*, 6-7. Even the seven letters to the churches do not follow the conventional letter form, according to A. Y. Collins, *Combat Myth*, 6. But see Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 170, 175-77.

Third, the letters to the seven churches are usually viewed as a unit distinct from all that follows. While chaps. 2-3 represent specific parenetic instruction sent to the seven named churches, chaps. 4-22 are generally held to be comprised of a series of apocalyptic visions.¹

Fourth, the significance of the number seven as an organizing principle has been widely debated. Certainly, there are four explicit series of sevens in Revelation, namely, the seven letters, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls. That these form literary units is widely acknowledged. However, the efforts of some to forge the remaining portions of the book into similar septenaries raise serious questions.² Most commentators,

¹Swete, xlv, noted this trend among English commentators, and Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 173, also remarks on it, though she questions whether such a division "does justice to the author's intention since it separates parenesis and apocalyptic vision." Cf. E.-B. Allo, *Saint Jean l'Apocalypse*, 4th enlarged ed., *Études bibliques* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1933), xcvi-xcviii; Aune, *Literary Environment*, 241-42; Domingo Muñoz León, "La estructura del Apocalipsis de Juan: Una aproximación a la luz de la composición del 4.º de Esdras y del 2.º de Baruc," *Estudios Bíblicos* 43 (1985): 136; Vanni, 175, 182, 249.

²Even Austin Farrer, one of the notable proponents of this system of organization, admits as he begins to develop his sevenfold structure that there is a "firmly built structure" in chapters 1-11, based on three explicit series of sevens, but "it is at XII that we lose our way" (*A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St John's Apocalypse* [London: Dacre Press (A. & C. Black), 1949; repr., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1970], 36). Others utilizing the septenary as an organizing principle include: John Wick Bowman, "The Revelation to John: Its Dramatic Structure and Message," *Interpretation* 9 (1955): 440-47; A. Y. Collins, *Combat Myth*, 13-16, 19; R. J. Loenertz, *The Apocalypse of*

while acknowledging the symbolic significance of the number seven in the book, reject it as an organizing principle.¹

Fifth, many scholars have discerned a "great cleavage"² in the book between chaps. 11 and 12.³ Some,

Saint John, trans. Hilary J. Carpenter (London: Sheed & Ward, 1947), xiii-xviii; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, vol. 16 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1926), 1-2, 181-82; Arne Unjehm, *The Book of Revelation*, LCA School of Religion Series (Philadelphia: Lutheran Church Press, 1967), 46-50. The latter criticizes Farrer's overall plan (16), while failing to criticize adequately her own rationale for creating two "appendices" in order to fit her own schema into a pattern of sevens. Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, sees the pattern of seven as one of three structural patterns and compositional techniques which "appear to be most decisive for the structuring of the book" (174), and proceeds to outline the surface structure of Revelation in a seven-part "concentric" (chiastic) pattern (175), yet she criticizes those who reconstruct the book into seven series of sevens for "their failure to explain why the author clearly marked four series of seven but did not mark the others, even though the existing septets prove that he was quite capable of doing so" (167). Kenneth A. Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25 (1987): 107-8, argues for eight visions chiastically arranged, rather than seven, and these do not all consist of septets.

¹Kiddle, xxxii, represents this group when he states, "It is, of course, obvious that John attached great importance to numbers, and especially to the number 7, the sacred symbol of divine perfection. But it is pressing this fact too hard to insist that the whole literary structure of Revelation is based on the number 7, and that all the material not included in one of the seven-fold series is an 'interlude,' or, alternately, an interpolation." Cf. Feuillet, 36.

²Swete, xxxix, uses this term for it.

³See also Allo, xcix-c; Barr, 44-45; A. Y. Collins, *Crisis*, 111-12; Feuillet, 36; Martin Hopkins, "The Historical Perspective of Apocalypse of 1-11," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965): 43; D. T. Niles, *As Seeing the Invisible: A Study of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1961), 102-5; Wolber, 102, 104.

however, place such a transition between chaps. 14 and 15 instead.¹ For those who view these visions as prophecy, this division is usually held to reflect a separation of historical prophecy from eschatological prophecy.² The relationship of chaps. 12-14 with what precedes and what follows continues to provide a point of controversy in discussions on the structure of Revelation.

Sixth, many scholars have noted the complexity of the structure of Revelation due to such literary devices as interlocking, intercalation, prefatory passages, interludes, numerical structuring, chiasmic structure, and ring composition.³ In fact, this is one of the most powerful arguments for the unity of the book.⁴

¹E.g., Strand, "Eight Basic Visions," 107-121; idem, "Foundational Principles of Interpretation," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 29; cf. Günther Bornkamm, "Die Komposition der apokalyptischen Visionen in der Offenbarung Johannis," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 36 (1937): 134.

²Strand, "Foundational Principles," 29-30, 34.

³Aune, *Literary Environment*, 241-42; Barr, 43-44; Bauckham, *Theology*, 18; Beckwith, 239-55; A. Y. Collins, *Combat Myth*, 16-19; Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 170-74; M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Revelation: Holy Living in an Unholy World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, Francis Asbury Press, 1990), 57-59; Strand, "Eight Basic Visions," 107-121; idem, "Foundational Principles," 28-33; idem, "Literary Structure—a Key to Interpreting the Revelation," *Ministry*, March 1977, 17-20; Thompson, 40-46.

⁴Barr, 43; Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 170-73.

Seventh, since the revival of the recapitulation theory by Günther Bornkamm in 1937,¹ this method of understanding the structure of the book has gained increasing credibility, even among critical scholars, though some still avoid the term due to its association with a certain method of interpretation.² The major evidence of the correctness of this theory lies in the fact that each of the major literary units in the apocalyptic portion of the book closes with a notice of the end of the world and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ.³

¹Bornkamm, 132-49.

²See, e.g., Barr, 43-44; Beasley-Murray, 30-31; A. Y. Collins, *Combat Myth*, 11-13, 32-44; Jan Lambrecht, "A Structuration of Revelation 4,1-22,5," in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed. Jan Lambrecht, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*, vol. 53 (Gembloux, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1980), 88-90; Niles, 101-6; Matthias Rissi, *Time and History: A Study on the Revelation*, trans. Gordon C. Winsor (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966), 14, 20; Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines, with Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis*, 2d ed. (Worthington, OH: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1979), 49.

³The vision of the seven-sealed scroll reaches to the parousia at 6:12-17 and 7:9-8:1. The vision of the seven trumpets reaches to the end at 11:15-19. The vision group contained in chaps. 12-14 ends with the coming of "one like a son of man" at 14:14-20. The vision of the seven bowls closes with the end of the world at 16:17-21. Chaps. 17-19, or even through chap. 22, may be included with the bowls vision (cf. 17:1; 21:9) as an extended depiction of the final events of judgment. Rev 15:1ff makes plain that the seven bowl plagues are eschatological judgments; 17:1 suggests that what follows is another aspect of that same judgment; chap. 18 is a descriptive account of the judgment announced in 17:1 (cf. 17:2; 18:3, 9; 17:4; 18:6, 16; 17:5; 18:2; 17:6; 18:24; 17:16; 18:8; 17:18; 18:10, 21); chap. 19 is a continuation of the topic of chaps. 17-18 (vss. 1-3 make this explicit, vss. 4-7

With these structural considerations in mind, we can proceed to approach the text of Revelation with some hope of being able to avoid the pitfall of dislodging texts from their proper context.

John's Use of Sources

One cannot approach the task of understanding John's theology without raising the issue of his use of sources. Since, however, extensive research has already been done in this area,¹ it remains to identify the

continue the hallelujahs of vss. 1-3, and vss. 7-9 tie the marriage supper of the Lamb into the hallelujahs), introducing the coming of the Lamb (cf. 19:16; 17:14) and the final judgment of the wicked, a theme which extends through the 1000 years of chap. 20 (cf. 19:19-20; 20:9-10) to the final eradication of sin (20:14-15) and the creation of a new heaven and new earth in chaps. 21-22, with the holy city, new Jerusalem, as the center of the Lamb's eternal kingdom and the home of the saved. See A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 104; cf. Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 55-56; idem, *Vision*, 33-37.

¹See, e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 154-328; M.-E. Boismard, "'L'Apocalypse', ou 'Les Apocalypses' de S. Jean," *Revue biblique* 56 (1949): 507-41; Ray F. Chester, "A Study of the Relationship of Certain Symbols of the *Apocalypse* to the Old Testament" (M.A. thesis, Eastern New Mexico University, 1952); William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21-22 and the Old Testament*, Moore Theological College Lectures, 1983 (Homebush West, Australia: Lancer Books, 1985); Ferrell Jenkins, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, paperback ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976); Susan Fournier Mathews, "A Critical Evaluation of the Allusions to the Old Testament in *Apocalypse* 1:1-8:5" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1987); Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1987), 1-315; Mazzaferri, 234-63; Milligan, 41-80; Paulien, 10-120; Ruiz, 1-180; James Tarlton Sanders, "Symbolic Terminology in John's *Apocalypse*" (Th.D. diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1948), 87-158;

various conclusions of those investigations which have been adopted in conducting this study. The dissertation by Jon Paulien¹ provides perhaps the most comprehensive approach to the problem of identifying and dealing with John's sources. Susan Mathews's dissertation² takes a simpler approach to the same problem. Some of the more significant conclusions from these and other studies follow.

1. While John claims to be recording what he has seen and heard while "in the Spirit," his choice of language to describe these visionary experiences seems to be heavily indebted to previous prophetic and apocalyptic traditions.³

Albert Vanhoye, "L'utilisation du livre d'Ézéchiél dans l'Apocalypse," *Biblica* 43 (1962): 436-72; Jeffrey Marshall Vogelgesang, "The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1987), 13-72.

¹Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*.

²Mathews, "Critical Evaluation."

³Paulien, 2, 11; cf. *ibid.*, 16-17. Paul S. Minear, *New Testament Apocalyptic, Interpreting Biblical Texts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 20, notes the way in which the language and linguistic forms used by the apocalyptic prophet "reflect the personal experience of an encounter with the heavenly world, of the overwhelming effect of divine revelation, along with the pressure exerted by divine threats and promises." This pressure, in turn, gives a strong hortatory flavor to the message. "Often this requires from the prophet an authoritative reinterpretation of Scripture, one in which the people learn how God now wants them to discern new meanings in the stories of their past." Thus, the visionary experience exerts pressure on the prophet, as a spokesperson for God, to use and reinterpret prophetic traditions to meet the current need. This seems to be what John has done in the

2. There is no question but that the OT provides the major source for the language and imagery of the book of Revelation, especially the major prophets, Zechariah, the Psalms, and the Exodus narratives.¹ Yet there is not one formal quotation from the OT in the book.² John seems to have been steeped in the language and thought forms of the OT so that he always used them, whether consciously or unconsciously, with a freedom and naturalness that makes the work distinctively his own.³ Swete observes:

Apocalypse. Michaels, 17, observes that we may assume a certain distance in time, and perhaps in space, between the visions and the writing of the book. "In narrating his visions the author has adopted certain literary strategies. He has had time to reflect upon his experiences and to put them into a form suited to his purposes." He goes on to add, "If the Book of Revelation is based on visions one might expect that its only source would be the pure revelation itself. Yet the study of prophetic or millenarian movements reveals that visions and prophecy have never taken place in a vacuum. Invariably their character shapes, and is shaped by, particular historical situations and particular literary and cultural traditions. The sources of prophecies and revelations are both vertical and horizontal: vertical in that they are presumed to come from God, or at least 'from above,' but horizontal in that they incorporate elements from prophecies and other kinds of literature written decades or centuries before. However immediate or spontaneous such revelations may be, they are inevitably part of one or more continuing traditions and cannot be understood apart from some acquaintance with the traditions to which they belong."

¹Paulien, 3, 12-16; Charles, 1:lxv; Ruiz, 177; Swete, cxi, cliii; Thompson, 50-51.

²A. Y. Collins, *Crisis*, 42; Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 135; Mathews, 1, 10; Paulien, 101; Swete, liii, cxi, cliii-cliv.

³Michaels, 120-25, argues that John used midrash to rewrite, expand, and transform OT texts for his purposes.

There is not a single instance in which the Christian prophet of the Apocalypse has contented himself with a mere compilation or combination of Old Testament ideas. His handling of these materials is always original and independent, and he does not allow his Old Testament author to carry him a step beyond the point at which the guidance ceases to lend itself to the purpose of his book.¹

At the same time, it is also true, as H. Kraft notes, that John is not an inventor, but views himself as the continuer and definitive interpreter of OT prophecy. "His predictions are justified by the fact that they are derived from Old Testament prophecy."²

3. While there is evidence that John was no doubt familiar with the language of other apocalyptic literature, there is, contra Charles,³ a lack of credible evidence for any theory of literary dependence on such literature.⁴ Vielhauer notes that while "the Old Testament served the seer as his 'source'," "there are numerous parallels to Jewish apocalyptic as well, but no direct quotations from which one could infer literary dependence; it is a case of general dependence on the same apocalyptic world of

¹Swete, cliv; cf. Paulien, 17.

²Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, vol. 16a (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1974), 16.

³Charles, 1:lxv.

⁴J. S. Considine, "The Rider on the White Horse: Apocalypse 6:1-8," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 6 (1944): 409; Paulien, 29-31, 46-47, 188-89; J. T. Sanders, 110-11; Swete, liii, clviii.

ideas."¹ Even such a general dependence, however, suggests that anyone who attempts to understand the language and symbols of the Apocalypse must have a familiarity with that apocalyptic world of ideas which was prevalent in John's day.

4. A number of scholars have pointed out that both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic are grounded in OT prophecy,² therefore it should not be surprising to find that there is a common world of ideas and language between the Apocalypse of John and the apocalypses of other Jewish and early Christian writers. If all have the OT as a common source of imagery and thought forms, though they may have varying theological and political agendas and may draw on other sources as well, it becomes difficult to determine dependency in the absence of formal quotations, especially

¹p. Vielhauer, "Apocalyptic in Early Christianity: Introduction," trans. David Hill, in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, English ed. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 622-23; cf. James Hamilton Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Prolegomena for the Study of Christian Origins*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, no. 54 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 87; Kiddle, xxviii.

²See, e.g., Allo, xxix; Beckwith, 171-72; R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English, with Introductions and Critical and Explanatory Notes to the Several Books*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2:vii-xi; J. J. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 12, 19; Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 21-29, 437-39; idem, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, *Interpreting Biblical Texts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 33-34; Koch, 24-26, 33; Rowley, 13-14, 36-39; Russell, 9, 187, 190; Schmithals, 14-16, 26.

in the light of considerable uncertainty and imprecision in the dating of many of these apocalyptic works. It would seem to be safer to draw primarily upon the OT as a source for the book of Revelation while remaining alert to apparent parallels with other apocalyptic literature which may additionally inform the reader as to the thought world in which John's Apocalypse was written.¹

5. It is unthinkable to attempt to understand the book of Revelation apart from the early Christian tradition, of which the NT is the major witness. Revelation is a distinctly Christian work from beginning to end, so to neglect to view its theology in the light of the balance of the NT witness would be irresponsible.² This would further imply that, even with regard to John's use of the OT, one ought to perceive an interpretation which is in harmony with the NT view that the OT prophecies and types find

¹Paulien, 30-31. Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1-13, cautions against assuming that parallels evidence a direct literary connection. Feuillet, 53, warns: "The practice of looking for extra-biblical parallels must be undertaken with great caution, because of the temptation to exaggerate similarities." Cf. Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, *Analecta Biblica*, vol. 27 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966), 191-92.

²Cf. Paulien, 38-43. Feuillet, 53, observes, "It is certain that most of the images and themes which John uses are of a traditional character, and are found either in earlier Christian writings, or in the New Testament. Thus it seems erroneous . . . to insist on looking for an explanation outside the Bible itself."

their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ and His church.¹

6. As both Mathews and Paulien have attempted to demonstrate,² objective criteria are needed for evaluating supposed allusions to previous literature in Revelation. Although only the results will generally be evident, Paulien's comprehensive literary-critical method for the evaluation of such allusions provides the basic model for

¹Matt 1:22-23; 2:15, 17-18, 23; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 26:54-56; 27:9-10; Mark 1:2, 14-15; 12:10; 14:49; Luke 1:67-79; 4:17-21; 22:37; 24:27, 44-47; John 2:22; 5:39; 12:38-41; 13:18; 15:25; 19:24, 28, 36-37; 20:9; Acts 2:23-35; 3:18-25; 4:11, 25-28; 8:32-35; 13:27-37; 28:23; Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 10:4; Gal 3:8; Eph 4:8; 2 Tim 3:15; Heb 1:5-13; 2:6-9, 11-13; 5:5-6; 7:17, 21; 10:5-9; 1 Pet 1:10-12; 2:6-8; Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*, Andrews University Monographs, Studies in Religion, vol. 13 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 17-20, 60-78; cf. David L. Baker, "Typology and the Christian Use of the Old Testament," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29 (1976): 141-44; Friedrich Baumgärtel, "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Old Testament," trans. Murray Newman, in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann, English ed. James Luther Mays (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963), 143-44, 153; Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Τύπος Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 412-23; Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 198-205; Gerhard von Rad, "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," trans. John Bright, in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann, English ed. James Luther Mays (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963), 20-22.

²Mathews, 1-14; Paulien, 100-18, 120, 156-69.

appraising John's sources in this study.¹ The major considerations of this method are given below.

Since John never uses citations or direct quotations, his use of sources is limited to either allusions or "echoes." The former refers to the intentional fragmentary or periphrastic use of a source to point the mind of the reader to the context of that source,² while the latter involves the use of an idea traceable to a previous source but without conscious intention, probably even without any awareness of the original source, but merely utilizing something that is "in the air" of the environment in which the author lived.³

The task of a study of John's use of sources, then, is to determine as accurately as possible whether or not a proposed allusion is actually a direct allusion or merely an echo, and if a direct allusion, what degree of certainty

¹See Paulien, 156-94.

²This does not necessarily imply that John was doing exegesis in the technical sense in which we think of it today. Rather, John utilized his sources for theological purposes, always retaining complete control over the influence which the source would have on his own work, as noted under item 2 on pp. 25-26 above. With this in mind, one needs to be careful about being overly dogmatic as to John's use of his sources until they are viewed in the light of his theology.

³Paulien, 171-73; cf. Richard D. Altick, *The Art of Literary Research*, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975), 94-102; John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 64.

can be adduced for its allusive character.¹ The criteria for making such a determination derive from both internal and external evidence.

"External evidence involves what we can know about an author's relationship to his literary roots as drawn from historical, biographical, demographic, and other sources outside a given text."² This evidence is extremely limited, comprising a general knowledge of the times in which John lived and the phenomena of his book.³ Thus, internal evidence must provide the major criteria for determining John's use of sources.

Internal evidence involves the identification of verbal, thematic, and structural parallels to the potential sources.⁴

Verbal parallels are defined as "occurring whenever at least two words of more than minor significance (articles and minor conjunctions are excluded) are parallel" between a passage in Revelation and a passage in the proposed source, which must necessarily be in Greek.⁵ The

¹It should be noted here that the distinction between an allusion—having theological intent—and an echo—having no theological intent—is not always clear. The author's intent is often difficult to determine with any certainty.

²Paulien, 178.

³Ibid., 187.

⁴Ibid., 179.

⁵Ibid., 179-80. Paulien points out that verbal

two words do not have to be coupled together in the same phrase as long as they are in clear relationship to each other both in Revelation and in the suggested parallel.¹ The value of verbal parallels as evidence of an allusion increases "as the number of parallel words increases and to the extent that the parallel words are ordered in the same or in a similar way as the potential source passage."²

Thematic parallels occur when allusions are "characterized by similarity of thought and theme as well as wording."³ While verbal parallels require comparison with a Greek source, thematic parallels do not. Further, thematic parallels may involve contrast as well as similarity of theme.⁴ Thematic parallels by themselves provide the least certainty for determining allusions.

Structural parallels are "characterized either by a similarity in the ordering of material or by an overall similarity in content."⁵ Due to the nature of structural

parallels do not work in translation unless transliteration is involved (180, n. 3).

¹Ibid., 180. Paulien reminds the interpreter of the need to be aware of the danger that parallel phraseology could at times be due to fortuitously similar circumstances without representing an intended parallel. Thus common sense must be exercised in any such evaluation (ibid., 181; cf. ibid., 186, n. 1).

²Ibid., 186.

³Ibid., 182.

⁴Ibid., 183.

⁵Ibid., 185.

parallels, which necessarily involve multiple verbal and thematic parallels, these provide the strongest evidence for direct allusions in the absence of clear quotations, as in the book of Revelation.¹

With these considerations in mind, it is possible to approach the task of considering John's sources with some confidence of evaluating them carefully and correctly.

A Hermeneutic for John's Reading of the Traditions

No one can say for certain how John read the traditions, but there are no doubt some reasonable assumptions that can be made in attempting to work out a hermeneutic.

We have noted above that John viewed himself as a Christian prophet, standing in the line and tradition of the OT prophets (Rev 22:6-10). We have also noted his extensive use of OT material as the primary undergirding for his messages. From this we can be certain that John accepted the authenticity of the OT as an inspired and reliable record of God's acts in the past. He was not a critical scholar of the OT in a contemporary sense. He was a believer. He read the OT as Scripture, considered by Jews and Christians alike to be a trustworthy account of events in salvation history, given to the prophets by the Spirit of God, describing actual persons, places, institutions, and events.

¹Ibid., 186.

Salvation history, as John would have read it, began with the creation by God of man and woman in His own image, followed by their fall into disobedience and rebellion against God. The whole subsequent history of the human race as recorded in the OT was the story of God's attempts to win people back to His side. In the process God chose a man, Abram, to father a nation that would be His own covenant people, and placed him at the crossroads of civilization, in the hope that he and his descendants would bring the blessings of a knowledge of God to the other nations and peoples of earth. Though His people broke the covenant more than they kept it, God relentlessly sought to restore His people to covenant relationship with Himself.¹

It seems to me that John picks up this salvation-historical theme in the book of Revelation and develops it through the use of various devices. He lays out the evidence for two sides in the great conflict between good and evil, and urges his readers to choose to align themselves with God, who has already won the victory over the

¹Robert M. Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 2d ed., rev. & enlarged (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 3-4, insists that, with prophets, evangelists, and interpreters, "there is a unity which is based on a fundamental presupposition: God lives and works in history; he has chosen a people to be his own; he has guided and still guides the course of this people's life and work, in spite of its rebellion against him. Without acknowledgment of this presupposition, at least as a working hypothesis, biblical interpretation is impossible."

enemy by the blood of the Lamb, and who will bring all things to glorious culmination in the very near future when the King of kings and Lord of Lords rides forth with His army on white horses to judge the nations that have persisted in their rebellion against the government of God.

It should not be surprising that John would interpret the OT in this way, for He was both a Jewish Christian and an apocalyptic prophet. As a Jew, he, like his contemporary Josephus, accepted the OT as an authentic account of the history of the Jewish people and their relations with the nations around them.¹ The Jews could even trace their ancestry through genealogies that paralleled those found in the Scriptures, if not derived therefrom. Abraham, Moses, David, etc., were not just legendary characters, but real people, part of a real history. While there were different methods of interpreting the OT in the first century A.D., Jews, generally speaking,² accepted as basically factual

¹D. Moody Smith, Jr., "The Use of the Old Testament in the New," in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays: Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring*, ed. James M. Efird (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972), 13, remarks on Josephus as a historian using the OT texts as a basis for his history.

²Even Philo of Alexandria, who allegorized many of the Pentateuchal traditions, "did not deny that Scripture has a literal and historical meaning" (Sidney G. Sowers, *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews: A Comparison of the Interpretation of the Old Testament in Philo Judaeus and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, *Basel Studies of Theology*, no. 1 [Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965], 28). "Philo generally sees the Scripture possessing two meanings side by side, literal and allegorical" (ibid.) After first expositing the literal meaning of the text, Philo often

the OT record of their history as a people and of God's actions with reference to them and the other nations.¹

John was also a Christian, who, like the other NT writers accepted the historicity of the OT persons, places, and events.² There is no firm evidence in the NT that those authors viewed the OT persons, places, and events as other than historical.³ Jesus Himself, by all accounts,

introduced the allegorical one. "The two are analogous to body and soul. . . . The bodily form of the literal text points the way to the inward soul characteristics" (ibid., 29). Of course, he gave preference to the latter. But Philo was not typical of Jewish interpretation, particularly in Palestinian Judaism (D. M. Smith, 13).

¹Here I wish to discriminate between what was believed about the authenticity of the record and the method of interpreting the text to bring out some relevant meaning for later generations. Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975), 19-20, 28-50; D. M. Smith, 13-20.

²C. H. Dodd, *The Old Testament in the New*, Facet Books, Biblical Series, no. 3 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 6-8, notes that the allegorical method "is not characteristic of the New Testament," but the NT writers "show themselves aware of the historical perspective" (6). He cites a number of examples from the NT of a "real process in history" (7) or a "strictly historical sequence of events" (7-8) to show "the characteristic attitude of the New Testament writers to the Old Testament" (8), then concludes, "In the main, these early Christian writers are aware of the Old Testament as history, that is to say as reflecting the process of God's dealings with his people over many centuries" (8).

³Frederik Torm, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments* [Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930], 220, holds that by and large the NT writers retain the literal interpretation of the OT. Even though many scholars see typology as the predominant method of NT use of the OT (e.g., Baker, 141; Goppelt, 198; Grant with Tracy, 36; von Rad, "Typological Interpretation," 20), it is generally acknowledged that typology is grounded in historical persons, places,

treated the OT accounts as historical,¹ and there is no good reason to believe that the Christian prophet John would have read it otherwise.²

In exploring the traditions which John appears to have drawn upon from the OT, therefore, I do not find it necessary at every turn to remind the reader that this hermeneutic requires assuming a reading of the text at face value, as part of the story of redemptive history.³ This

institutions, and events (Baker, 138-40; Davidson, 392-96, 416; E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity: New Testament Essays*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, no. 18 [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1978], 169; Charles T. Fritsch, "Biblical Typology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 104 [1947]: 214; Goppelt, 16-18; G. W. H. Lampe, "Typological Exegesis," *Theology* 56 [1953]: 202; Torm, 223-24). Though others would grant historical correspondence without admitting actual historicity, Davidson's in-depth dissertation on typological structures in the OT and NT makes a strong case that the OT types are consistently assumed by the NT authors to be historical realities which existed or occurred as recorded in Scripture (416).

¹R. M. Grant (Grant with Tracy, 9) says, "To Jesus, as to other first-century Jews, the scriptures were authoritative and inspired. . . . He was not a literary or historical critic; indeed it would be incredible if the tradition had reported any interest on his part in literary questions. He regards the events of the Old Testament times as real events. . . . And yet they are more than historical events. They have direct relevance to the times in which Jesus stands."

²C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1952), 110, postulates that Jesus was the creative mind behind the NT interpretation of the OT, and the NT writers and theologians followed His hermeneutical lead.

³Michaels, 15, takes a somewhat similar position with regard to taking the text at face value in the book of Revelation itself: "Nothing is gained except wordiness by saying 'John claimed to have seen an angel' instead of

does not require the modern reader to read it in the same way, but it does allow us to read it the way John and his readers would most likely have read the tradition.

Review of the Relevant Literature

There is no literature whatsoever that has made any attempt to study the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif in the theology of the book of Revelation. While there are quite a number of commentators who take note of the fact that the Great City spiritually called Sodom and Egypt in 11:8 must be the same Great City elsewhere called Babylon and that John contrasts it with the Holy City, new Jerusalem, just as he contrasts the Harlot with the Bride,¹ there is no

'John saw an angel' or 'John thought he was caught up to heaven' instead of 'John was caught up to heaven.' . . . Modern readers must be willing to put themselves, so far as is possible, in the place of John, the visionary in this book, and in the place of his earliest readers."

¹See, e.g., David Edward Aune, "St. John's Portrait of the Church in the Apocalypse," *Evangelical Quarterly* 38 (1966): 146-48; Siegbert W. Becker, *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Pub. House, 1985), 261-62; G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1966; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 138, 223, 269; Ted Grimsrud, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Self-Study Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), 88, 160-61; W. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker's Book Store, 1940), 158, 242; Herman Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, ed. and rev. Homer C. Hoeksema (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Pub. Assn., 1969), 555, 562-63, 694-96, 704; Richard L. Jeske, *Revelation for Today: Images of Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 107, 117; Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation, Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1983), 112, 144, 153, 162, 203-4; Kiddle, 199, 360, 376, 416-18; Loenertz,

one who places Sodom and Egypt together in a motif with Babylon and explores what John does with the motif in the book of Revelation, taking into consideration the OT backgrounds to such a motif that would shed additional light on John's theology.

There are, however, a number of studies which deal with topics associated with one or more major aspects of this study, focusing either on Babylon in prophecy, on the Exodus theme in Revelation, on the Sodom tradition, or on one or more of the aspects of John's theology treated in this study. Some of the more significant of these are reviewed below in terms of their contribution to the present study.

Martin O. Massinger has undertaken a study of Babylon in biblical prophecy,¹ which reviews the historical and biblical backgrounds of Babylon, including the prophecies concerning Babylon in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, Zechariah, and Rev 17-18. His purpose, however, is not to enlighten the reader regarding the

83, 100, 112; Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse* (Washington, DC: Corpus Books, 1968), 102; Mulholland, 53, 206, 276-77, 291-97, 318-21; Albertus Pieters, *Studies in the Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1943), 246-61; Edwin A. Schick, *Revelation: The Last Book of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 62-64; Swete, 138; cf. J. Edgar Bruns, "The Contrasted Women of Apocalypse 12 and 17," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26 (1964): 459-63; Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 66 (n. 153), 171.

¹Martin Otto Massinger, "Babylon in Biblical Prophecy" (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1967).

theology of Revelation but to direct the reader to what he believes will be a late-twentieth-century fulfillment of these prophecies in two areas: Rev 17 points to "the realization of the ecumenical church,"¹ while Rev 18 points to "a literal city yet to be built on the Euphrates."² While Massinger's study ultimately has little in common with the present study, it does include some very helpful resources on the historical and biblical backgrounds to Babylon as a symbol in the book of Revelation.

A similar study by Jack W. Jacobs begins with the hermeneutics of prophecy, traces the history of literal Babylon, followed by a study of Babylon in OT prophecy and in Rev 17-18, and ends with prospects for the rebuilding of Babylon in modern Iraq.³ His concern is whether or not the OT prophecies concerning Babylon have been fulfilled and how they might yet be fulfilled in the future. He concludes that they have not been fulfilled, but that prophecy points to a yet future fulfillment and that all the essentials are present in modern Iraq for the rebuilding of Babylon on its ancient site as a future capital of the world.⁴ Again, the purpose and approach of his study are

¹Ibid., abstract.

²Ibid., 250.

³Jack Wayne Jacobs, "The Eschatological Significance of Babylon" (Th.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1971).

⁴Ibid., 304.

quite different from that of this study, but his review of the historical and prophetic backgrounds to Babylon are helpful in attempting to understand what mystical¹ Babylon represents in the book of Revelation.

Another study which deals with Babylon in Rev 17-18 is the recent dissertation by Jean-Pierre Ruiz, which explores John's reappropriation of prophetic material utilizing an exegetical study of John's use of Ezekiel in Rev 16:17-19:10 as a test case.² While some of Ruiz's conclusions regarding the Great City are different from those of this study, he has gathered some excellent material on the OT backgrounds to these passages, and his exegesis of Rev 16:17-19:10 provides some stimulating insights into the complexities of the text. Ruiz has rightly seen the contrast between the Harlot/City of Rev 17-18 and the Bride/City of Rev 19:6-22:17,³ but he misses John's point when he identifies historical Jerusalem as the Great City in Rev 11:8, 13; 16:19 and historical Rome as the Great City elsewhere, ignoring altogether the significance of the Great City's characterization as Sodom and Egypt (11:8).⁴ In Ruiz's favor it may be noted that 11:8 was outside of

¹Used in this study in the sense of "mysterious," "enigmatic," "cryptic." See Rev 17:5 and pp. 67-68.

²Ruiz. *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*.

³Ibid., 519, 527-28, 537.

⁴Ibid., 281-89. See my chapter 2 for a discussion of John's use of the Great City motif in Revelation.

his selected passage of study; yet, since his excursus on the Great City included this passage, his work ought to have been more thorough.

A recent book on the Great City Babylon by Joseph Balyeat¹ requires review because it claims to be authoritative on the topic. While it is written in popular rather than scholarly style, it claims to prove from Scripture that the Great City Babylon in Revelation was Jerusalem and that it came to judgment in the "Great Tribulation" of A.D. 70.²

Balyeat begins from the premise that dispensational futurism has led not only to a pessimistic view of the future but also to a lack of concern for the present. His solution is a preterist interpretation of Revelation that has all prophecies fulfilled in the past, leaving the future open to an optimistic long-term perspective and the present open to solving the problems at hand.³

By interpreting the Great City in Rev 11:8 as Jerusalem, and by postulating A.D. 65 as the date of writing the book of Revelation, Balyeat is able to interpret all the prophecies concerning Babylon as applying to historical

¹Joseph R. Balyeat, *Babylon, the Great City of Revelation* (Sevierville, TN: Onward Press, 1991).

²Ibid., 17-18.

³Ibid., 21-26.

Jerusalem.¹ Of course, if he is mistaken in these two areas, his arguments are seriously weakened. This dissertation attempts to show that he has misread John in 11:8, as well as John's view of the Great City in general.

A number of articles have also been written on various aspects of Babylon in the book of Revelation. Most do not relate directly to the major task of this study, though their insights on the exegesis of the text are useful along with that of the commentaries. Some which do bear more directly on the major thesis of this study include those by Hans K. LaRondelle² and Siegbert Uhlig.³

¹Ibid., 35-38, 51-56.

²Hans K. LaRondelle, "Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2: Exegetical and General Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 151-76; idem, "The Fall of Babylon in Type and Antitype," *Ministry*, September 1989, 7-9; idem, "The Sensus Plenior of Israel's Restoration Promises: The New Testament Typology of Israel's Exodi from Egypt and Babylon," paper presented at a meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Toronto, Canada, 28 December 1981 (TMs, Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI); idem, "The Theological Significance of Jerusalem and Babylon," paper presented at a meeting of the European Bible Conference, n.p., July-August 1988, rev. October 1988 (TMs, Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI). These articles interact with this study at a number of points.

³Siegbert Uhlig, "Die typologische Bedeutung des Begriffs Babylon," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 12 (1974): 112-25. Uhlig sees in the term "Babylon" a use of typology by which a polemic against Rome could be maintained without risk of reprisal, through use of a codename. Babylon, he holds, must be seen not just as a city but as an evil and oppressive empire which God will overthrow.

The others are not mentioned here, since they are more exegetical in nature, dealing primarily with particular textual matters.

Along the lines of an Egypt motif, a dissertation by Jay S. Casey¹ traces Exodus typology not only in the book of Revelation but also in the OT and NT, focusing on its use to illustrate themes of redemption, judgment, and inheritance. This approach does not highlight the Egypt motif in Revelation, but still has value for understanding John's theology.

Stephen Hre Kio takes a different approach to Exodus symbolism in the Apocalypse.² He views John as a pastor using the Exodus motif as a symbol of liberation

John uses this typology from the OT predictions of the fall of historical Babylon to forecast the fall of spiritual Babylon (Rome), with its blasphemous demand to receive divine worship. A religious interpretation is thus made wherein the believer recognizes Babylon as a temptation, the instrument of the adversary (124). A typological understanding of Babylon's fall reveals that the meaning of "downfall" is not entirely neutralized. "Babylon falls, that is judgment, but at the same time also it is gospel" (125). Uhlig has raised a number of pertinent issues but has failed to note the universal nature of John's Great City, which is not only Babylon but also Sodom and Egypt.

¹Jay Smith Casey, "Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1982); cf. idem, "The Exodus Theme in the Book of Revelation against the Background of the New Testament," in *Exodus—A Lasting Paradigm*, ed. Bas van Iersel and Anton Weiler, English ed. Marcus Lefébure, Concilium, vol. 189 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 34-43.

²Stephen Hre Kio, "Exodus as a Symbol of Liberation in the Book of the Apocalypse" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1985).

from oppression in order to encourage his flock in a time of persecution. He finds four cardinal components to the Exodus motif: (1) judgment as the means of liberation, (2) election as the act of liberation, (3) the covenant as the seal of liberation, and (4) the tabernacle as the presence of the Liberator.¹ The major benefits of Kio's study for the present one are his identification of passages which reflect Exodus symbolism in Revelation, his list of parallels with certain OT passages, especially from Isaiah,² and his theological emphasis on liberation from oppression, i.e., from slavery to sin.³

Other studies which have contributed something to the discussion of an Egypt motif in the book of Revelation include those by George Balentine,⁴ Fred Fisher,⁵ and

¹Ibid., 188-89.

²Ibid., 216-32.

³See *ibid.*, 379.

⁴George L. Balentine, "The Concept of the New Exodus in the Gospels" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1961; Louisville, KY: Louisville Microfilms, n.d.), 166-82, includes a section dealing with the New Exodus in Revelation, in which he identifies Exodus typology throughout the book. Especially noteworthy is that he ties Rev 11:8 into the New Exodus motif (170-71).

⁵Fred L. Fisher, "The New and Greater Exodus: The Exodus Pattern in the New Testament," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 20 (1977-78): 69-79. Fisher identifies "four elements which form the essential pattern of the Exodus deliverance" (69). These can be summarized briefly: it was a deliverance (1) accomplished by God, (2) from bondage to sonship, (3) accomplished through a man, (4) which created a lasting relationship between God and His people, one of both privilege and responsibility (69-70). Fisher then

Otto Piper.¹ A more general work by Wilbur M. Smith provides an excellent overview of the role of Egypt in biblical prophecy.² Another work, by George Rawlinson,³ traces the biblical references to Egypt and Babylon in the OT and provides historical backgrounds for each one.

The best work on the Sodom tradition has been done by James A. Loader, who explores Sodom and Gomorrah in the OT, as well as in early Jewish and early Christian

looks for these elements in the OT, in interbiblical Judaism, and in the NT, concluding that the OT and interbiblical Judaism commonly used the Exodus pattern as a pattern of the coming Messianic deliverance, while the NT presents a new and greater Exodus which maintains continuity with the OT pattern and is at the same time of infinite superiority (70-71, 79).

¹Otto A. Piper, "Unchanging Promises: Exodus in the New Testament," *Interpretation* 11 (1957): 3-22. Piper begins with a review of the use of the Exodus tradition in the OT and in Jewish apocryphal writings and Philo, then moves into its use by Jesus and the NT writers. He concludes that the NT writers differ from the earlier writers in their perspective of the Exodus. For the earlier writers the Exodus was only a provisional work, while in the NT Jesus has brought about the promised salvation. At the same time, the NT writers did not hold a uniform view of the relationship between the Exodus deliverance and that performed by Jesus. "Some would emphasize the insufficiency of all that pertained to the first Exodus, while others would lay stress on its foundational character" (21-22). We would do well, he holds, to keep these differences in mind and to remember that the NT interpretation of Exodus is not confined to typology, but is also used as a source of unchanging and everlasting divine promises and commands, as well as examples (22).

²Wilbur M. Smith, *Egypt in Biblical Prophecy* (Boston: W. A. Wilde Co., 1957).

³George Rawlinson, *Egypt and Babylon from Sacred and Profane Sources* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885).

traditions.¹ His work is thorough and deserves serious attention. Unfortunately, it was not discovered until this study had already been completed, but I have tried to take note of it in the final revisions. It brings little new content to the study, but serves to corroborate the work of this study at many points. It should be noted that Loader looks at the traditions from a modern critical perspective, however, rather than from John's first-century perspective, as I have attempted to do. Thus his conclusions may vary at times from those I have adopted, particularly with reference to a reconstruction of the development of the traditions, a study I have not found necessary to attempt.

Jerry Smart's dissertation on the Sodom tradition² provided this study with another serious look at the Sodom tradition throughout Scripture. Smart's objectives, however, are far different from those of this study. Smart's interest is hermeneutics in the light of canon criticism, and he uses the readaptation of the Sodom tradition through Scripture "as a paradigm of canonical hermeneutics" to test whether "the hermeneutical guidelines employed by the early communities of faith . . . can be uncovered and used by

¹James A. Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, Early Jewish and Early Christian Traditions*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, vol. 1 (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1990).

²Jerry Wayne Smart, "The Sodom Tradition and the Hermeneutical Task" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988).

present-day believers."¹ In the process, however, he investigates the historical/sociological context which was addressed in each biblical citation of Sodom's destruction, thereby providing some referents for this study as it considers backgrounds to the Sodom motif.

An article by André Neher has also offered some food for thought on the backgrounds to the Sodom motif.² Neher reviews Ezekiel's attitude toward Sodom, with special attention to chaps. 16 and 47, and concludes that Ezekiel makes himself the redeemer of Sodom, bringing it back to physical and geographical life and reintegrating it into the biblical family and the land of Israel.³ While not all of Neher's conclusions are convincing,⁴ his work does raise some questions which this study must respond to.

At this point the work of Kenneth Strand should be mentioned for his role in pointing out what he calls the "'Exodus-from-Egypt'/'Fall-of-Babylon' motif."⁵ While

¹Smart, 2.

²André Neher, "Ezéchiél, rédempteur de Sodome," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 59 (1979): 483-90.

³Ibid., 484, 490.

⁴His reintegration of Sodom into the land of Israel based on the boundaries specified in Ezek 47 seems to be reading far too much into the text, since the only place Ezekiel refers to Sodom in his book is in chap. 16.

⁵Strand, *Interpreting Revelation*, 46, 52; idem, "Eight Basic Visions," 108, 113; idem, "The 'Victorious-Introduction' Scenes in the Visions in the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25 (1987): 279,

this motif is identified primarily in connection with his chiastic structuration of the book of Revelation, Strand does make some theological observations regarding it. He notes that the first doublet of visions in which the motif appears (8:2-11:18 and 11:19-14:20) begins with introductory scenes that already show a progression of intensity of judgment. This intensity is further enhanced in the second doublet in which the motif appears (15:1-16:17 and 16:18-18:24).¹

The theological significance here appears to be the concept that increasing woe is commensurate with a pattern of continuing and more flagrant rejection of Christ's offer of salvation. As such, it would be a sort of extended commentary on the principle that Jesus enunciated in declaring that the judgmental doom upon Bethsaida, Chorazin, Capernaum, and other rejecters of his mercy would exceed that of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf., e.g., Matt 10:14-15 and 11:20-24).²

This structural, thematic, and theological connection brought out by Strand between the plagues on Egypt during the Exodus, the fall of Babylon, and even the destruction of Sodom as alluded to in the book of Revelation was a major factor leading to this study of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif in Revelation. Since Strand has not developed the motif beyond what is indicated above, the need exists for a more thorough investigation of this linkage and its implications for the theology of the book.

281-83, 285.

¹Strand, "'Victorious-Introduction' Scenes," 285.

²Ibid.

A dissertation on the imagery of city in the book of Revelation has been written by Loyd Melton.¹ His method of study is deductive rather than inductive. He begins with a survey of what various commentators have written and seems to have certain predetermined conclusions. Still, he makes some salient observations. He notes the spiritual nature of the city imagery, though he thinks it is "likely" that John has blended the spiritual with the historical such that Rome may be understood as the historical manifestation of the anti-God power represented by the Harlot City.² He further observes that it is "unquestionable" that the OT provides John with most of his city imagery.³ He also concludes that the methodological principle must be followed that one must begin with the historical situation and view the city imagery in terms of what it communicated to the original readers.⁴ By putting these three dicta together, one can avoid a purely historical application of the city imagery, recognizing that the original readers would take note of John's use of imagery from the OT and would see its broader spiritual application.

¹Loyd Dale Melton, "A Critical Understanding of the Imagery of City in the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1979).

²Ibid., 68.

³Ibid., 134.

⁴Ibid., 184.

Although Melton follows the pattern (1) earthly Jerusalem, (2) harlot (Rome), (3) heavenly Jerusalem throughout the study, when he gets to the end he concludes that there are only two cities in Revelation: "Rome and Jerusalem are Vanity Fair. The antithesis to Vanity Fair is the New Jerusalem."¹

A final note should be made on a general work that relates to this study. John F. Walvoord has combined three separate volumes into a single volume which deals with the nations, Israel, and the church in prophecy.² While I would not endorse Walvoord's eschatology, his background material on Egypt and Babylon in OT prophecy provides some preliminary work in this area.

There are a number of other studies that have been helpful either in connection with the introductory issues presented in this chapter, with exegetical concerns arising from the texts under study, or with questions concerning the theology of Revelation, but these are too numerous to cite. The same is true for the commentaries. The reader is referred to the footnotes for notice of these studies.

¹Ibid., 274.

²John F. Walvoord, *The Nations, Israel, and the Church in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, Academie Books, 1988).

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUNDS TO THE SODOM/EGYPT/BABYLON

MOTIF IN REVELATION

This study begins from the observation that there is a "great city" in Revelation (11:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18-19, 21) which is opposed to God and is contrasted with His "holy city, new Jerusalem" (21:2, 10; cf. 3:12).¹ In 11:8 this Great City is spiritually ($\pi\nu\epsilon\nu\mu\alpha\tau\iota\kappa\omega\varsigma$) called

¹This is a fact observed by numerous commentators. See Aune, "Portrait of the Church," 146-48; Bauckham, *Theology*, 126-28; Beasley-Murray, 315; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 80; idem, *Crisis*, 142; John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1979), 157-59; Dumbrell, 31-32; Vernard Eller, *The Most Revealing Book of the Bible: Making Sense out of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974), 114-15; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 104, 111; Desmond Ford, *Crisis! A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 3 vols. (Newcastle, CA: Desmond Ford Publications, 1982), 2:656-57; Jenkins, 112; Jeske, 117-18; Johnson, 144, 162; Kiddle, 184-87, 199, 376; Mulholland, 26-53, 276-77, 284-85, 318-21; Pieters, 246-61; Ruiz, 519, 527-28, 537; Schick, 62-64. These and others have also noted the parallel contrast between the Great Harlot, which is the Great City (17:18), and the Bride, which is the Holy City (21:9-10). See also Barr, 44-45; Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 181; Grimsrud, 160; Guthrie, 107-8; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation: A Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990), 222; Minear, *I Saw*, 144-45; Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England, and Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 159, 161; cf. Bruns, 459-60; Thompson, 39.

"Sodom and Egypt," while elsewhere it is called "Babylon the great" (18:2; cf. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5, 18; 18:10, 21), "a name of mystery" (17:5). These are the only names explicitly used to characterize the Great City in the book of Revelation.

The first task of this study is to review the evidence for a Great City motif in the book of Revelation, and to observe how John characterized this city as Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon, in contrast to the "holy city," the new Jerusalem. Then it becomes important to review the OT, NT, and other backgrounds on Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon to learn as much as possible about why John selected these—and only these—three cities/nations to symbolize the Great City in Revelation.¹ Once we have observed from this study of their backgrounds why John chose these three cities/nations to represent the Great City, one is better able to understand what John was trying to convey to his readers about the Great City and its role in his theology.

The Great City Motif in Revelation

The second half of the book of Revelation is dominated by two cities and two women. As noted above, this

¹The question of the significance of the phrase, "where their Lord was crucified," in 11:8 is taken up in chapter 3, but it is not an explicit use of the name of a city to characterize the Great City, as is clearly the case with Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon.

fact is well documented by numerous commentators.¹ The evidence is reviewed below.

The Great City

There is a "great city" mentioned eight times in Revelation.² In addition, 11:13 mentions a city which in the context seems to be a clear reference to the "great city" mentioned in 11:8. In each of these nine cases this city is identified as an evil city by either the activities in which it is engaged or the judgment from God which is brought upon it.

In 11:8 this Great City is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt. In 16:19 the juxtaposition of the description of the judgment upon the "great city" with the explanation, "and God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of the fury of his wrath," might suggest that the "great city" is "great Babylon."³ This is made more

¹See note on p. 43. Beasley-Murray, 315, states, "The Revelation as a whole may be characterized as *A Tale of Two Cities*, with the sub-title, *The Harlot and the Bride*."

²Rev 11:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21.

³While the majority of commentators accept this assumption, some hold that the two are different cities, with the "great city" referring to Jerusalem. See Ruiz, 265-71, 281-89, for a discussion of this debate. Ruiz sees the Great City in 11:8 and 16:19 as Jerusalem, which falls "at the hands of the 'Great City' Rome" (535), so that Jerusalem ceases to be the Great City, and Rome takes its place as "the new Great City" (288). Ruiz has failed to understand the role of Jerusalem in John's theology, as this study shows in chapter 3 below.

probable by the subsequent references to the Great City. In 17:18 the Great Harlot of 17:1-6, who has the mystical name "Babylon the great," is declared to be "the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth." In 18:2 "Babylon the great" is specifically called a "dwelling place," clearly using the metaphor of a city, in the wake of 17:18, rather than of a harlot. This becomes explicit in 18:10, 21, which further include the references in 18:16, 18, 19 in their context.

The Great Harlot

That this Great City is also the Great Harlot is made explicit in 17:18, as noted above, but she appears first in 14:8 as "Babylon the great," "who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion," clearly a portrayal of the same impure woman described in 17:2 and 18:2-3. In the latter passage, as noted above, she has the characteristics not only of the Great Harlot of 17:1-2 but also of a "dwelling place" (κατοικητήριον) or "haunt" (φυλακή), reminiscent of the city imagery of Jer 50:39. Throughout chap. 18, the use of harlot imagery and city imagery is so intertwined as to be inseparable, leaving no room for the assertions of some that the Babylon of chap. 17 is different from the Babylon of chap. 18.¹ The final mention of

¹Those arguing for a religious, ecclesiastical Babylon in chap. 17 and a political, commercial Babylon in chap. 18 include Kenneth W. Allen, "The Rebuilding and Destruction of Babylon," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (1976):

Babylon is in 19:2-3. In vs. 2 she is depicted as the Great Harlot, while in vs. 3 she is described in language reminiscent of the Great Harlot/City of 18:9-10, 18.

**The Bride/Holy City Versus
the Great Harlot/City**

Beginning in 19:6 there is a transition from rejoicing over the judgment of the Great Harlot/City, which has been completely destroyed, to rejoicing over the impending marriage of the Lamb to his Bride (vs. 7), who is later described as "the holy city Jerusalem" (21:9-10; cf. vs. 2). The contrast with the Great Harlot/City is plain in 19:8, for the Bride is clothed in "fine linen, bright and pure,"¹ which "is the righteous deeds of the saints," whereas the Great Harlot/City is "arrayed in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls"²

25-26; Massinger, 219-220; William R. Newell, *The Book of the Revelation* (Chicago: Grace Publications, 1941), 263-64, 285-86; and John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, NT ed. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 970-73. See Adela Yarbro Collins, "Revelation 18: Taunt-Song or Dirge?" in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed. Jan Lambrecht, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*, vol. 53 (Gembloux, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1980), 198; Charles H. Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (1987): 311-316; Thomas R. Edgar, "Babylon: Ecclesiastical, Political, or What?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (1982): 333-335; and pp. 244-46 below, for a defense of a single Babylon in both chapters. Cf. especially Rev 17:2 with 18:3; 17:4 with 18:16; and 17:6 with 18:24.

¹Cf. 19:14, which describes the armies of heaven as "arrayed in fine linen, white and pure."

²Scarlet is the color of the beast she sits on

(17:4). Comparison with 18:16-17 shows that the Harlot's attire represents the wealth (18:17) which she has gained through trafficking with the merchants of earth.¹ The holiness, purity, and righteousness of the Bride, new Jerusalem, are contrasted with the abominations, impurity, and fornication of the Great Harlot/City, Babylon (17:4). While the Bride is arrayed with the righteous deeds of the saints, the Harlot has become drunk with the blood of the saints (17:6; 18:24).

The balance of the book of Revelation has no further mention of the Great Harlot/City, but only of the Bride, the Holy City, new Jerusalem. The "beloved city" of 20:9, which Satan and his hosts surround and attempt to take by force, can be none other than the Holy City, new Jerusalem, since it is in literary parallelism with "the camp of the saints," and there is no other city in view

(17:3). Jer 4:30 reveals that dressing in scarlet and decking oneself with ornaments of gold is an attempt on the part of a woman to beautify herself to gain lovers. That there are a plurality of lovers and that they despise the woman reveal that she is a harlot. Ezek 16:10-13, 16-18 shows how what were once bridal attire and ornaments can be converted into the trappings of harlotry.

¹Gold, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple, and scarlet are listed among the cargo which she purchases from the merchants of earth (18:11-13) in a mutually beneficial relationship (cf. vss. 14-17; Isa 23:17-18). Cf. A. Y. Collins, *Crisis*, 133, 153-4, 159; *idem*, *Apocalypse*, 118, 126-127.

after 19:3 but the Holy City, in which God dwells with His people (21:2-3).¹

The parallel introductions to John's visions of the Great Harlot/City and the Bride/Holy City should be noted. Both are introduced by one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, saying, "Come, I will show you . . ." (17:1; 21:9). In both John is carried away "in the Spirit" (17:3; 21:10).²

These parallels, however, are accompanied by strong contrasts.³ The Harlot is viewed in a wilderness, while the Bride is viewed from the top of a great, high mountain. The first vision is of an impure woman with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication. The second vision is of a pure woman, "the wife of the Lamb" (21:9). The woman in the first vision is declared to be "Babylon the great," "the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth" (17:5, 18). The woman in the second vision is declared to be "the holy city Jerusalem," which comes down

¹Cf. Beasley-Murray, 297-98; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible, vol. 38 (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 356; Hughes, 217; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1989), 337; Morris, 233; Swete, 269.

²While the contrasts are more important than the parallels for this study, A. Y. Collins notes that this parallelism links the cycle of the seven bowls to the last (unnumbered) cycle of the book. From this and other links with her first unnumbered cycle (12:1-15:4), she argues for chaps. 12-22 as a literary unit (*Apocalypse*, 80).

³A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 80; Tenney, 82, 91.

from God out of heaven (21:2, 10). The first woman is outfitted like a harlot, "arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked in gold and jewels and pearls" (17:4); the second is "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," "having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel" (21:2, 11).

While Babylon is described as "a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird" (18:2), the new Jerusalem is "the dwelling place of God" (21:3), and "nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (21:27). Babylon will be "thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more" (18:21), "and the light of a lamp shall shine in thee no more" (18:23), but in the new Jerusalem, "night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever" (22:5; cf. 21:23).

The Woman of Rev 12 Compared with the Bride

There is another vision of a woman in the latter half of Revelation, in chap. 12. The evidence suggests that it is not a third woman but another phase of the Bride of chaps. 19-22.¹ In 12:1 a sign (*σημεῖον*) appears in

¹Cf. Beasley-Murray, 197-98; Eller, 126; J. M. Ford, 188, 195-98; Hughes, 137; Kiddle, 225; John Sweet, *Revelation*, TPI New Testament Commentaries (London: SCM

heaven, "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." Thus she is portrayed arrayed in the splendor of the celestial jewels, the glorious lights in the heavens created by God "for signs" (Gen 1:14), and so used in Revelation.¹ This description is somewhat parallel to Rev 21:10-11, where the Bride, the Holy City Jerusalem, is described as coming down from heaven, "having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel."

There are other connections between the Woman of chap. 12 and the Bride of chap. 21. The sun, the "greater light" of heaven (Gen 1:16), represents the glory of God and of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (Pss 84:11; 104:1-2; Isa 60:1; Mal 4:2; Rev 1:16).² In Rev 21:23 the Holy City "has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (cf. 22:5; Isa 60:19-20). Thus, the Woman of Rev 12, like the Bride of chap. 21, is resplendent with the glory of God and the Lamb, Jesus Christ.³

Press, 1979; repr., 1990; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979; repr., Trinity Press International, 1990), 195.

¹Besides the present passage, see also 6:12-13 and 8:12 (cf. Isa 13:9-10; Ezek 32:7-8; Joel 2:10-11, 30-31; Matt 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-26; Luke 21:25-27; Acts 2:19-20).

²Cf. Cant 6:10; Isa 9:2; Wis 7:29; T Naph 5:4-5; John 1:4-5, 9, 14; 8:12; 9:5; Rev 10:1. See Mulholland, 216.

³Exod 33:18-19 seems to suggest that God's glory is a manifestation of His righteous character. Cf. Rev 19:8,

The moon, the "lesser light" of heaven (Gen 1:16), may possibly be taken to represent God's word, upon which the Woman takes her stand.¹ The moon is not elsewhere clearly used as a symbol, but this concept may be defensible in light of Ps 119:105: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."² Rev 21:23 and 22:5 use the same terminology ("lamp" and "light") to declare that the light of the sun and moon will be made obsolete by the glory of God and the Lamb in the Holy City.

The tiara (στέφανος) of twelve stars which the

where the Bride is clothed with fine linen, bright and pure, which "is the righteous deeds of the saints," a gift of grace from Jesus Christ (2:4-5; 7:14). Morris, 220-21, points out that δικαίωμα never elsewhere means "righteous acts," but has the sense of a "sentence of justification." It is a gift given to them, not a meritorious work provided by them. Cf. also 19:14; 21:2, 11; Cant 6:10).

¹Thomas F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1959), 77; Morris, 152. Commentators seem uncertain as to the significance of the moon here. There is a diversity of opinion. Some view it as the woman's footstool, showing her authority (e.g., Hendriksen, 164; Hughes, 135; Mounce, 236; Swete, 147). Although the expression ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν in the NT usually implies putting under subjection, this is most frequently found in a quotation or paraphrase of Ps 110:1. Such is not the case here, and to view the moon in this context apart from the other celestial lights is to miss the point. The sun, moon, and stars are lights which adorn the Woman, enveloping her around, above, and below, and giving her her glorious character. Cf. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972), 168. The fact that both the sun and moon are lights in chap. 21 (and elsewhere in Revelation) would seem to confirm this.

²Cf. 2 Pet 1:19. Heb 5:13 calls God's word "the word of righteousness." It could be perceived as reflecting the light of "the sun of righteousness" (Mal 4:2).

Woman of 12:1 wears on her head informs the reader in several ways. First, it is distinguished from the diadems (διαδήματα) on the heads of the Dragon (vs. 3). Στέφανος generally denotes a wreath or crown of victory, reward, honor, glory, or adornment,¹ while διαδήμα signifies a crown of royal authority.² This suggests that the tiara of twelve stars worn by the Woman probably denotes a crown of honor and glory, the stars functioning as the jewels.³ Second, that all of these stars are in a single crown shows their unity. Third, their identity may be signaled by the number twelve, which appears again in connection with the Holy City in chap. 21. There vs. 12 speaks of twelve gates, "and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed."⁴ Vs. 14 further describes twelve foundations

¹Cf. 1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 4:8; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10; 4:4; 6:2; 14:14.

²Cf. Esth 6:8 (LXX); 1 Esdr 4:30; 1 Macc 11:13, 54; Rev 19:12. Isa 62:3 (LXX) provides a clear distinction between the two.

³Cf. Isa 61:10.

⁴Several commentators note the parallels between Rev 12:1 and Gen 37:9 (e.g., Philip Carrington, *The Meaning of the Revelation* [London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931], 207; Grimsrud, 89; Johnson, 119; Kiddle, 225; Krodell, 237; Morris, 152; Mulholland, 216; Sweet, 195; Swete, 147). In both there are a sun, a moon, and stars. The stars may well represent the twelve sons of Israel; however, the identification of Israel as the sun and Rachel as the moon in Rev 12, would be highly problematic. Johnson, 118, notes also that the Woman and Child which are central to John's account are totally absent in Joseph's dream. Cf. J. M. Ford, 197.

of the city wall, "and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." The twelve tribes are also named in 7:4-8 as the constituency from which the servants of God are sealed to become the inhabitants of Christ's eternal kingdom, the occupants of the Holy City on Mount Zion (cf. 14:1-5).

There is one other significant connection between the Woman of Rev 12 and the Bride of chaps. 19-22. In 12:5 the Woman delivers a male Child who is to shepherd the nations with an iron rod, and this Child is caught up to God and to His throne. At this stage the Woman is the mother of the Child. In chap. 19, the Lamb prepares to claim His Bride in marriage (vss. 7-9). The next scene portrays heaven opening and one called "Faithful and True" riding forth on a white horse to judge and make war in righteousness (vs. 11). His identity is clear from the allusive descriptions.¹ Two of these are especially helpful in determining the connection between chaps. 12 and 19-22. Vs. 15 declares that He will shepherd the nations with

¹"Faithful and True" (cf. 1:5; 3:7, 14); "in righteousness he judges and makes war" (cf. 2:16; 16:5-7; 19:2; Isa 11:4); "His eyes are like a flame of fire" (cf. Rev 1:14; 2:18); "he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself" (cf. 3:12; 2:17); "He is clad in a robe dipped in blood" (cf. 5:9; 7:14; or possibly Isa 63:1-3); "The Word of God" (cf. Wis 18:15-16; John 1:1-3, 14); "From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations" (cf. Rev 1:16; 2:12, 16); "he will rule them with a rod of iron" (cf. 2:27; 12:5); "he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God" (cf. 14:20; Isa 63:2-6); "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (cf. Rev 17:14).

an iron rod. This identifies Him clearly with the male Child of 12:5. And His name in 19:16, King of kings and Lord of lords, plainly identifies Him as the Lamb of 17:14 and thus also the Lamb/Bridegroom of 19:7. That the Woman/Mother of chap. 12 is later the Bride/Wife of Christ has been observed by some commentators.¹

In light of the many parallels between the Woman of Rev 12 and the Bride of chaps. 19-22, it seems natural to understand the two as different aspects or phases of the same entity.² The Woman of chap. 12 constitutes the historical or earthly phase of the ideal community of God's people,³ first represented by the twelve patriarchs of Israel and their tribes,⁴ then by the Christian church

¹E.g., Carrington, 207, and Eller, 126.

²J. M. Ford, 188, says, "This woman and the new Jerusalem are the antithesis of the harlot." Cf. Caird, 148; Carrington, 206-9; Eller, 126; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 80; Hughes, 138-39; Kiddle, 225; Krodel, 234; Ladd, *Commentary*, 166; Morris, 151; Mounce, 236; Sweet, 195; Wall, 159.

³In response to such Mariological interpretations as that represented by Bernard J. LeFrois, "The Woman Clothed with the Sun," *Theology Digest* 7 (1959): 21-26, see Beasley-Murray, 198; Krodel, 238; and Pierre Prigent, *Apocalypse 12: Histoire de l'exégèse*, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese*, no. 2 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1959), 144. Cf. André Feuillet, "Le Messie et sa Mère d'après le chapitre xii de l'Apocalypse," *Revue biblique* 66 (1959): 55-86. Although Feuillet defends a secondary application of the symbols to Mary, he argues that this is not the primary intention of the author; rather, the symbols used point to the people of God, both OT Israel and the Christian church (78-86).

⁴Other symbolism in chap. 12 which parallels the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness are adduced in chapter 3.

under the foundational leadership of the twelve apostles.¹

The Bride of chaps. 19-22 is the eschatological or heavenly phase of this ideal community.²

¹Cf. Eph 2:20. As Mounce, 236, observes, "The people of God are one throughout all redemptive history." Many other commentators support this dual role for the imagery of the woman with the diadem of twelve stars. Cf. Allo, 177; Beasley-Murray, 198; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 152; Carrington, 207-8; Eller, 126; Grimsrud, 90; Hendriksen, 164; Hoeksema, 418-19; Johnson, 119; Kiddle, 223; Krodel, 244; Morris, 152-53; Swete, 148-49; Wall, 159; Wilcock, 119. Ladd, *Commentary*, 167, holds that, in a broader sense, she is the ideal church in heaven, while the actual historical people of God on earth, both in the OT and the NT, are her children. It is not necessary, however to idealize the figure to this extent. It was not uncommon in the OT to portray historical Israel as the bride of Yahweh (Isa 54:5-6; Jer 2:2; 3:20; Ezek 16:8-14; Hos 2:16-20), the mother of the people of God (Isa 54:1; cf. 2 Esdr 10:7), or a woman in labor (Isa 26:17; 66:7; Mal 4:10); and the church as the bride of Christ is one of the figures of NT theology (Eph 5:23-27, 32; 2 Cor 11:2). Cf. Court, 106-7; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 80-81; Mounce, 236-37; Tenney, 87-88. In view of the fact that the Dragon in Rev 12:9 is specifically called "that ancient serpent," John no doubt had in mind the promise made to Adam and Eve in the curse on the serpent, in which the Seed of the woman would have His heel bruised in the process of crushing the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). Cf. Beasley-Murray, 201; Boring, *Revelation*, 152; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 87; Hughes, 138, 143; Krodel, 242; Morris, 156; Prigent, *Apocalypse* 12, 143; Swete, 154. This suggestion receives support from the fact that Rev 12 and Gen 3:15-16 also share the concepts of the woman giving birth with pain and the woman's offspring being in conflict with the serpent. Thus, the Woman and her Child in Rev 12 would clearly be historically concretized, as depicted in Mic 5:2-3. The Woman represents the messianic community which brings forth both the Messiah and "the rest of her offspring," "who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (Rev 12:17). Cf. Beasley-Murray, 198; Beckwith, 621-22, 630; Grimsrud, 89; Johnson, 119; Kiddle, 223, 240; Swete, 148-49.

²Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," in *Symposium on Revelation-Book 1: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical

Thus, there is in Revelation both a historical and an eschatological aspect to the radiant Woman/Bride/Holy City in Revelation. The conflict which John describes as beginning in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels (12:7-9) is portrayed as moving to this earth when Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven (12:9-12) and as continuing to be acted out through their earthly representatives, the Woman and her offspring and the agents of the Dragon (12:3-6, 13-17).¹ Though the Dragon has been forensically conquered by the blood of the Lamb (12:10-11), he has a short time remaining to him (vs. 12), in which he persecutes the Woman and the rest of her offspring (vss. 13-17). According to John's theology, the conflict will not be fully completed until the Dragon and his agents are finally destroyed (19:1-3, 20; 20:10, 15; 21:8) and God creates a new heaven and a new earth where He

Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 103, argues from sanctuary typology that the heavenly realities in the book of Revelation are literal rather than spiritual. This would be true of the Bride, the Holy City, New Jerusalem, as well as of the sanctuary.

¹Since the Dragon is Satan himself (12:9; 20:2), it is evident that the Dragon acts on earth through his agents, represented by his heads and horns, which symbolize kings (17:9-10, 12), or by other beasts. Cf. 13:1-4, where the Dragon empowers a beast which replicates and emulates it to act in its stead "to make war on the saints" and to receive worship as its representative. Ladd, *Commentary*, 166, says, "Behind the beast is the dragon." Kiddle, 227, calls the beast the "vicegerent" of the dragon. Cf. also 17:3, 7-14, where a similar beast is depicted as dominated by the Great Harlot and as behaving in a similar manner to act through its heads and horns, or kings, to "make war on the Lamb" (vs. 14) by persecuting the saints (vs. 6).

will dwell with His people (21:1-3). Then "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (21:4).

Spiritual Symbols

With this understanding of the important role of the two cities/women in the great conflict between God and Satan as portrayed in the book of Revelation, one must ask why John characterized the Great Harlot/City as the spiritual equivalent of Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon. Clearly, these names would represent something to the hearer or reader of the book. The task here is to discover what John sought to communicate to his readers and hearers by means of these symbols so that we may better understand his theology.

First, one needs to consider the use of the descriptive terms *πνευματικῶς* and *μυστήριον*, which John used to introduce the symbols of Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon. The word *πνευματικῶς* in 11:8 literally means "spiritually." Its only other use in the NT is found in 1 Cor 2:14, where Paul speaks of things being spiritually discerned, suggesting a special kind of understanding (cf. Col 1:9), enlightened by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:13). Its adjectival form, *πνευματικός*, however, is used twenty-six times. Paul frequently contrasts it with *σαρκικός* or *σαρκινός*, meaning carnal, physical, or material (Rom 7:14; 15:27; 1 Cor 3:1; 9:11; 15:44,

46). Eph 6:12 contrasts "the spiritual hosts of wickedness" with "flesh and blood," placing them outside the realm of the physical. 1 Pet 2:5 speaks in metaphor of the believers being "built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices," clearly implying a domain other than the literal.

Perhaps the use closest to that of Rev 11:8 is found in 1 Cor 10:3-4, where Paul speaks of food, drink, and a Rock as πνευματικός, and goes on to interpret the rock as Christ. In other words, what is spiritual is not to be taken at face value as merely literal, but lies in a domain requiring interpretation with spiritual or prophetic insight, pointing beyond itself to a deeper figurative meaning.¹

The use of the term μυστήριον appears to have a similar sense. It is used twenty-seven times in the NT. A comparison of these passages reveals a consistency with its use in Revelation, namely, to refer to something that has been revealed but is not readily evident to every hearer or reader; it requires an explanation, interpretation, or

¹Davidson, *Typology*, 247. Cf. Hermann Kleinknecht et al., "Πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (1964-76), 6:436-37, 449; Jacob Kremer, "Πνευματικός, πνευματικῶς," *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (1978-83), 3:291-93. Sweet, 187, declares that πνευματικῶς in Rev 11:8 implies that John is speaking "in the symbolic language in which divine secrets must be handled." Fiorenza, *Vision*, 78, points out that it means according to prophetic, not allegorical, insight. Cf. Swete, 137.

special insight to be understood.¹ This understanding of *μυστήριον* may be illustrated by comparing its two other uses in Revelation.

In 1:20 the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands are called *μυστήριον*; then their meaning is explained. They were shown to John, but he did not understand their significance until the symbols were interpreted for him. In 10:7 "the mystery of God" is spoken of as being fulfilled in the days of the seventh trumpet call, but it is no mystery in the modern sense of the word, for the verse states explicitly that God had announced (*εὐηγγέλισεν*) it to His servants the prophets, meaning that it had been revealed since the times of the OT prophets. This mystery has, in fact, already been repeatedly elaborated in the NT,² though many still fail to understand it.

Μυστήριον in Rev 17:5, then, signifies something which has been or is being revealed, but will require interpretation or special insight to understand.³ For that reason, the angel goes on in vss. 7-18 to give a partial explanation of the symbols John has been shown.

¹Günther Bornkamm, "*Μυστήριον*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (1964-76), 4:820-24, indicates that it represents something with a hidden meaning which is disclosed through special revelation.

²Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 2:7-9; Eph 1:7-14; 3:3-11; Col 1:25-27; 1 Tim 3:16.

³A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 119, says, "The implication is that the name 'Babylon' should not be taken at face value."

The "name of mystery," "Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations," however, is not explained, for it can be understood by studying the known history of Babylon and what it came to represent in the literature that was authoritative for the readers and hearers of Revelation for purposes of understanding divine mysteries.

If we wish to understand the spiritual symbolism of Sodom and Egypt in Rev 11:8 and the significance of Babylon as a name of mystery in 17:5 and elsewhere, we must consider the same sources from which the hearers and readers of Revelation would have obtained their insights. We turn, therefore, to a consideration of the backgrounds to Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon, especially to those provided by the OT, but also considering NT and other sources that may shed light on the symbolic significance which these cities/nations acquired.

In the background studies which follow, I have attempted to take the traditions at face value, just as they were preserved and would presumably have been understood by John's readers in the light of the way he used them,¹ without trying to assess their validity at every

¹Of course, this applies mostly to the OT traditions, since it is certain that he was familiar with these traditions, while it is not known what other traditions he may have been familiar with. The NT traditions serve primarily to reflect the Christian use of the OT traditions in the first century A.D., which may shed light on John's use without implying that he had seen any NT writings. The

turn. At the same time, I have endeavored to account for variations in the traditions where they are significant, and to be faithful to sound exegetical principles.

While this study is based primarily upon the traditions as recorded in early primary sources, the secondary literature has been consulted in order to be aware of critical discussions on the relevant texts. In a study covering such a breadth of materials, it is not feasible to debate every issue that arises in connection with these traditions, but where there is any significant discussion directly relating to these purposes, whether pro or con, the reader is referred to the pertinent secondary literature.¹

This background study begins with the Sodom tradition, followed by that of Egypt, then of Babylon.

The Sodom Tradition

Sodom in the OT

In the OT, Sodom is first mentioned in Gen 10:19 as one of the cities in the territory of the Canaanites, whose

extrabiblical traditions reflect historical and mythical traditions as well as other versions, elaborations, and interpretations of OT traditions which at minimum would have been "in the air" in John's time, whether or not John actually was familiar with them on a literary level.

¹This is particularly true with regard to the OT and NT traditions, regarding which so much has been written. A large spectrum of recent commentaries was consulted on each passage under study in order to give a fair hearing to various representative perspectives, but no claim is made for exhaustive coverage of every view.

families are listed in vss. 15-18. Since the pedigree of nations in Gen 10 plays such a significant role in ethnographic distinctions in the OT tradition,¹ distinctions which are given theological implications, several points ought to be noted.

1. Gen 9:18-29 belongs with chap. 10, as shown by 9:18-19, ending, "from these the whole earth was populated."² The Table of Nations, therefore, may well have been interpreted in light of that pericope, since it introduced the theme of the depravity of the Canaanites³ and

¹Cf. 1 Chr 1:5-23; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (NEB) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 100; C[arl] F[riedrich] Keil and F[rantz] Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., trans. James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., [1949]), 1:161-62; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 105; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 214-15.

²John C. L. Gibson, *Genesis*, 2 vols., Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 1:198-99; Kidner, 102; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 65, 67.

³Sarna, 64, sees this as "a major function" of the narrative, setting the stage for all that follows. "The ensuing narrative gives a preparatory intimation of the direction in which the book of Genesis is moving. . . . The present episode illustrates the virtue and piety of the original ancestor, Shem, values that are to serve as the paradigm for his descendants, the Israelites. By the same token, the typically degenerate state of the Canaanites provides the reason and moral justification for their displacement" (ibid.).

explained the distinctions between the nations that recur later in the tradition.¹

2. The list of the Canaanite families in 10:15-18 bears a strong parallel to the various lists of the Canaanite nations whose territory was promised to Abraham and the children of Israel upon their displacement.²

3. The name of Sodom is listed together with the names of Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, the other cities again associated with Sodom in Gen 14:2-3, 8,³ and later destroyed with Sodom (Gen 19:24-25; Deut 29:23; Hos 11:8). Thus a natural association is formed with other parts of the tradition.

4. Vs. 20 declares concerning the Canaanite tribes, "These are the sons of Ham, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations." The association of Sodom with the Canaanites, and thus with the sons of Ham and of Canaan, ties the tradition to 9:18-27,

¹Gibson, 1:199-201; Wenham, 197.

²See Gen 15:19-21; Exod 3:8, 17; 23:23, 28; 33:2; 34:11; Deut 7:1; Josh 24:11. Cf. Michael Maher, *Genesis, Old Testament Message*, vol. 2 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1982), 80; Wenham, 225-27.

³Smart, 28-30, points out how 10:19 defines the territory of the Canaanites with reference to Sodom and the other cities of the plain, apparently locating these cities in the southeastern section of the Dead Sea region. This would accord with 13:10, which places Sodom in the Jordan River valley, and with 14:3, which seems to locate it somewhere in the vicinity of the Salt Sea.

the story of the indiscreet act of Ham and the curse upon Canaan and his descendants.¹

The second mention of Sodom is in Gen 13, where Lot "dwelt among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom" (vs. 12). Again, several points are significant in reading the tradition from John's perspective.

1. Sodom was located in the Jordan valley, which "was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar" (vs. 10).

¹Jub 22:21 says, "Because through the sin of Ham, Canaan sinned, and all of his seed will be blotted out from the earth, and all his remnant, and there is none of his who will be saved." The very next verse refers to Sodom: "Just as all the sons of Sodom were taken from the earth, so (too) all of those who worship idols will be taken away." Josephus attributed the later calamities that came upon the Canaanites, including the destruction of their cities by the children of Israel, to the sin of Ham and the subsequent curse upon Canaan. He noted that Noah "cursed—not Ham himself, because of his nearness of kin, but his posterity. The other descendants of Ham escaped the curse, but divine vengeance pursued the children of Chananaeus" (*Jewish Antiquities* 1.6.2-3 [trans. Thackeray, LCL, 4:69]). Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990), 322-23, has pointed out that it is difficult to be certain of the exact nature of Ham's sin, but Sarna, 66, submits that "the verbs of verse 24 and the severity of Noah's reaction suggest that the Torah has suppressed the details of some repugnant act. Rabbinic sources are divided on whether Ham castrated his father or committed sodomy." Wenham, 201, says, "Ham's indiscretion towards his father may easily be seen as a type of the later behavior of the Egyptians and Canaanites. Noah's curse on Canaan thus represents God's sentence on the sins of the Canaanites, which their forefather Ham had exemplified." Cf. Richard M. Davidson, "Flame of Yahweh: A Theology of Sexuality in the Old Testament," unpublished TMs (book forthcoming from Baker Book House), courtesy of the author (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1992), 65, n. 2; Keil and Delitzsch, 1:157-58; Maher, 76.

This is the first place Sodom and Egypt are compared, and it is in connection with an abundance of water, with an implication of beauty, fertility, and prosperity.¹

2. Vs. 10 continues, "This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah."² Even while noting its beauty and fertility, the reader was reminded of Sodom's eventual destruction by Yahweh. The mention of Zoar in this context may also have been significant in light of its later role in Lot's flight from Sodom (19:20-23, 30).

3. Vss. 11-12 indicate that Lot, a member of Abram's household, chose Sodom as his place of residence.³

¹Cf. Wenham, 297.

²Gibson, 2:40, remarks that this tradition seems to imply that the Dead Sea did not yet exist at this period and that the Jordan valley extended as far south as Zoar. The same thought is expressed by Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (NEB) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 28. This view seems to be supported by 14:3, which identifies the Valley of Siddim, where the battle of the four and five kings was held, as the place where the Salt Sea was later located. According to 14:10, at the time of the battle, there were bitumen pits there into which some of the fleeing soldiers fell. It may be that the Dead Sea was formed after the destruction of the cities of the valley recorded in Gen 19:25, 29 (Keil and Delitzsch, 1:202, 236). Certainly it was a geographic feature by the time of the Exodus (see Num 34:3, 12; Deut 3:17; Josh 3:16; 12:3; 15:2, 5; 18:19). Cf. Josephus *Antiquities* 1.9; 5.1.22.

³Though 13:12 seems to place Lot outside the city of Sodom, 14:12 asserts that Lot "dwelt in Sodom." According to 19:3-4, 29, Lot and his family had homes within the city. That Lot was considered an outsider was made clear by the men of Sodom (19:9). That he was considered righteous is not only suggested by a comparison of 18:23-24 with 19:29 but also affirmed by later tradition (Wis 10:5; 19:17; 2 Pet 2:7-8).

4. The observation in vs. 13 could be viewed as a key to the whole subsequent Sodom tradition. It reads, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD." The specific nature of their wickedness was not delineated at this point, but the intensity of it was stressed,¹ and it was declared to be "against the LORD."

5. Immediately following Lot's separation from Abram, Yahweh promised to give the whole land of Canaan to Abram and to his descendants forever (vss. 14-17).² The territory of Sodom, in the Jordan River valley, seems to have been along the eastern border of this promised land (cf. 10:19; Num 34:10-12).³ The note in vs. 7 is apropos in the light of subsequent events: "At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites dwelt in the land."

Sodom comes into play again in chap. 14 when the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Bela (Zoar) rebelled against the oppressive dominance of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam. Once more, several observations can be made.

¹Wenham, 298, notes that the term translated "great sinners" is used only here. "The rare phraseology implies the extreme seriousness of Sodom's sin. Thus, obliquely, the future fate of the city is indicated, and the folly of Lot's choice is underlined." Cf. Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 29.

²Wenham, 298, observes, "This great reaffirmation of the promise of land, and descendants, is introduced by a deliberate evocation of the immediately preceding incident."

³*Ibid.*, 227. In Gen 15:18-21 the promise to Abram was repeated, but with more specificity.

1. Like the other cities of the valley, Sodom had a king, named Bera (vs. 2), so it could be considered to be a small kingdom or nation. Along with four other small kingdoms—Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Bela (Zoar)—Sodom rebelled against Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, who had kept them in servitude for twelve years (vs. 4).

2. Chedorlaomer's confederacy of four kings routed the armies of the five kings and spoiled Sodom and Gomorrah, taking with them Lot and his goods (vss. 10-12). Lot is specifically said to have "dwelt in Sodom" at that time (vs. 12).

3. Abram made a successful foray against the four kings in order to rescue Lot and his family (vs. 16). He rescued not only Lot, but also the people and goods of Sodom (vss. 16, 21). In the presence of the king of Sodom, Melchizedek attributed praise for this victory to El-Elyon: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" (vss. 19-20). Abram also honored God Most High in the presence of the king of Sodom by paying tithes of all the spoil to Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, and by refusing to accept from the king of Sodom so much as a thread or a sandal-thong, lest the king of Sodom take credit for making Abram rich (vss. 20-23).¹

¹Wenham, 322, says that the narrative implies that,

The next and final narrative about Sodom is found in chaps. 18-19. This is the most significant story in the whole Sodom tradition. A number of points emerge.

1. Yahweh announced that there was a great outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah, "and their sin is very grave" (18:20). He would go down and see if the report was true (vs. 21).¹

2. Two angels were sent into the city of Sodom to investigate the matter personally (18:22; 19:1-11) and to warn Lot and his family to leave Sodom before judgment was brought upon it (19:12-15). They claimed to have authority to bring destruction or to withhold it (19:13, 21-22).

3. Abraham was taken into Yahweh's confidence (18:17-19), and was allowed to intercede for Sodom, arguing for mercy on the ground that there was a contingent of righteous persons who inhabited Sodom (vss. 23-32).² His

were it not for his antipathy to Abram, the king of Sodom "could have found blessing too. But his rejection of Abram's ministry puts him on the path to doom."

¹Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 69, and T. J. Mafico, "The Crucial Question Concerning the Justice of God," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 42 (1983): 13, point out that Yahweh here proposed to begin a judicial investigation of the charges against Sodom.

²Gibson, 2:79. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1985), 291, argues, based on the fixed structure of intercession, especially in the prophetic texts, that 18:23-32 is neither prayer nor intercession. It is rather a way of sharpening the answer to Abraham's original question concerning the justice of Yahweh (292), since "Abraham, for all his questioning, is aware from the start that God will go through with his decision to punish Sodom"

concern was that Yahweh would be unjust should He destroy the righteous with the wicked (vss. 23, 25).

4. Though Sodom was to be destroyed, in His mercy (19:16) Yahweh called Lot and his family out of Sodom lest they be destroyed along with the wicked (19:12-17). Abraham's assessment of Yahweh was proved correct: the Judge of all the earth would do what is right; He would not destroy the righteous with the wicked (18:25).¹ Lot, however, was unable to convince anyone other than his wife and two daughters to flee with him from Sodom (19:14-15). In fact, they themselves finally had to be physically dragged out of the city by the angel messengers in order to effect their deliverance from the coming judgment (19:16-17).

5. The nature of Sodom's sin in this narrative has been debated, but seems to have had at least three

(291). But many scholars interpret Abraham's dialogue as intercession (see, e.g., Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982], 176; Gibson, 2:80, 82; Keil and Delitzsch, 1:231; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis, Anchor Bible*, vol. 1, 3d ed. [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1987], 132; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961], 207, 209).

¹Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 70, notes that it would be well here to stress the legal background to the Hebrew words and translate "righteous" and "wicked" as "innocent" and "guilty." Cf. Brueggemann, 170; Speiser, 134; von Rad, *Genesis*, 207. John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, with the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, Regency Reference Library, 1990), 2:156-57, points out that Gen 19:29 implies that Lot's rescue was in answer to Abraham's intercession, and that Lot was thus considered a righteous man living among the unrighteous.

elements: inhospitality, sexual immorality,¹ and violence.² Their gross immorality, depicted in vss. 5-9, seems to be a dominant feature of the narrative and has been understood by many to be a key element of the Sodom tradition.

6. Sodom was destroyed, along with the other cities of the valley (except Zoar),³ by "brimstone"⁴ and

¹While Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955; repr., Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1975), 2-6, denies that עָרִי is a euphemism here for sexual relations (cf. the use of עָרִי in vs. 8, also 4:1, 17, 25; 24:16; 38:26; Num 31:17-18, 35; Judg 11:39; 19:22-25; 21:11-12; 1 Sam 1:19; 1 Kgs 1:4), most scholars agree that Lot's response (vss. 6-8) makes the intent of the Sodomites very clear (G. Charles Aalders, *Genesis*, 2 vols., trans. William Heynen, Bible Student's Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981; St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada: Paideia, 1981], 2:15; D. Stuart Briscoe, *Genesis*, Communicator's Commentary, OT, vol. 1 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987], 171; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 72; Gibson, 2:82-83; Keil and Delitzsch, 1:233; Kidner, 134, 136-37; Maher, 118; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2d ed., International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930], 307; Speiser, 139, 142; Ronald M. Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures: Some Historical and Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 56-57; von Rad, *Genesis*, 212-13; Westermann, 301; John T. Willis, *Genesis*, Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2 [Austin, TX: Sweet Pub. Co., 1979], 262-63). Cf. Jub 16:5-6; 20:5-6.

²Loader, 37-38, sees all three elements, but argues that "the over-arching element of their vice is violence."

³While Zoar was spared at this time, according to Gen 19, later tradition, represented in Wis 10:6-7 and Hel Syn Pr 12:61, seems to include Zoar as well, perhaps by a separate judgment. Cf. Willem C. van Hatten, "Once Again: Sodom and Gomorrah," *Biblical Archeologist* 44 (1981): 90-91. Gen 19:30 says only that Lot was afraid to dwell in Zoar, so he went out of Zoar and dwelt in a cave in the

fire from the LORD out of heaven" (vs. 24). This was a complete destruction, including "those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground" (vs. 25). "And lo, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace" (vs. 28).

The rest of the OT references to Sodom¹ all build on the foregoing narrative tradition to emphasize Sodom as an example either of great sinfulness or of the severity of Yahweh's judgment against evil. Those passages which emphasize Sodom primarily as an example of divine judgment are dealt with first.

Deut 29:23 emphasizes the utter desolation of the cities of the valley, "which the LORD overthrew in his anger and wrath." It is part of a warning to Israel of the results of forsaking Yahweh's covenant (vs. 25). The "overthrow" of Israel, "like that of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim," would result in the whole land becoming a burnt-out waste, covered with brimstone and salt, where nothing could grow.

hills.

⁴The Hebrew word **קָדָשׁ** and the Greek (LXX) word **καίον** are both variously translated as "brimstone" or "sulfur." This is true of **καίον** in Revelation also.

¹While Sodom and Gomorrah tend to be paired together, in harmony with the tendency to parallelism in Semitic literature, Sodom is always named first, and only Sodom, never Gomorrah, is mentioned alone. No doubt Sodom became the predominant symbol because of Lot's association with it in the biblical tradition.

In Isa 1:9 Sodom and Gomorrah epitomized the evil nation which Yahweh of hosts totally exterminates. Judah and Jerusalem (vs. 1) had been behaving like Sodom and Gomorrah. Were it not for Yahweh's mercy in preserving "a few survivors," they would have been brought to extinction like those cities.¹

Isa 13:19 and Jer 50:40 are notable for comparing the promised judgment on Babylon to that on Sodom and Gomorrah. The total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbor cities had become the example or prototype of the judgment on other nations which would act accordingly. Jer 49:18 made a similar prediction against Edom, and the judgments upon both Sodom and Egypt in Amos 4:11 served as representatives of severe judgments upon other evil nations.

In Lam 4:6 the author compared the punishment of Judah with that of Sodom and considered it to be more severe—as if anything could be more severe. It was surely a case of hyperbole, as demonstrated also by vs. 7,² but

¹A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (NEB) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 26; Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary*, trans. John Bowden, 2d ed., completely rewritten, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 23; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), 92.

²R[oland] K[enneth] Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 233-34.

the premise seemed obvious: the judgment on Sodom represented the epitome of severe punishment.

Zeph 2:9 is a prediction of judgment in which Moab would become like Sodom and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, "a land possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a waste for ever." Because of "their pride, because they scoffed and boasted against the people of the LORD of hosts" (vs. 10; cf. vs. 8), in the tradition of Sodom, the only remnant of the three survivors from Sodom (cf. Gen 19:36-38) would not themselves escape.

The rest of the OT passages which make reference to Sodom emphasize primarily its evil nature. Deut 32:32 is a general statement of comparison between Yahweh's rebellious people and the morally corrupt inhabitants of Sodom. Isa 1:10 identified the rulers and people of Judah and Jerusalem with those of Sodom and Gomorrah in respect to their behavior and attitudes. The specifics may be gleaned from the surrounding context: rebellion, corrupt dealings, despising Yahweh, bloody hands, oppression, and neglect of the defenseless (vss. 2-4, 15-17).¹

In Isa 3:9 Judah and Jerusalem were compared with Sodom in the way in which they flaunted their sinful

¹Kaiser, 29, notes significantly regarding vss. 10-13, "As there is not only an accusation, but positive instruction at the end, this prelude gives the whole discourse the character of an emphatic call to repentance; it becomes a lesson in how the people doomed to destruction can still escape divine judgment."

practices. In fact, their actions were described in vs. 8: "their speech and their deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence." Again, Sodom served as the example of sinful behavior and haughtiness against Yahweh, with certain judgment following (vss. 13-14).

Jer 23:14 compared the prophets and inhabitants of Jerusalem to Sodom and Gomorrah with specific respect to adulterous behavior, lying, and encouragement of evil deeds on the part of others.

In Ezek 16:49-50 several of Sodom's sins were enumerated. In addition to harlotry and infidelity (vs. 45), "she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did abominable things before me." Vss. 56-57 indicate that Sodom had become "a byword" and "an object of reproach." When Adonai Yahweh saw the abominable behavior of Sodom and her daughters,¹ He "removed them" (vs. 50). Jerusalem would face a harsher condemnation because her guilt was greater (vss. 51-52, 58-59). Sodom, in this tradition, remained the epitome of profligacy, against which other peoples, including Yahweh's own people, were compared in assessing the justice of bringing judgment upon them.

¹Cf. Rev 17:5: "mother of harlots and of earth's abominations."

In connection with this passage, vss. 53-55 at first reading seem to add a new dimension to the Sodom tradition. In order to understand the meaning of these verses, the reader would need to consider the context.

Vss. 51-52 describe the extreme sinfulness of Jerusalem, in which she acted more abominably than her sisters. "They are more in the right than you," declared Yahweh. "You have made your sisters appear righteous." In light of this, vs. 53 continues the pronouncement of Yahweh, "I will restore their fortunes, both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters, and the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters, and I will restore your own fortunes in the midst of them." The purpose of this is "that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, becoming a consolation to them" (vs. 54). Vs. 55 goes so far as to declare that all of them would return to their former estate.

In what way could Sodom and her daughters be said to return to their former estate, since Sodom and the other cities of the Jordan valley were completely destroyed with their entire populations? André Neher holds that Ezekiel bet on the resurrection of Sodom and that chap. 16 describes its physical resurrection by reintegration into the biblical family, while chap. 47 predicts its geographical resurrection by reintegration into the land of Israel.¹

¹Neher, 484; cf. Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, trans. Ronald E. Clements, ed. Frank Moore Cross and

Neher seems to be reading too much into the text, especially in chap. 47, where Sodom is not alluded to at all. Sodom, in Ezek 16, was not the traditional city itself, which no longer existed except in the semantic consciousness. It was already a symbol of the evil city/nation which Yahweh would judge for its obduracy.¹

Samaria's claim to fame as a sinful city, consisted of its former role as the capital of the nation of Israel, which had become so incorrigible that it was given over to permanent captivity to Assyria, which then scattered the people so that they would never again be a nation (2 Kgs 17:6-18).

Thus, Jerusalem was compared to a notoriously evil infidel city destroyed for its perversity and to another

Klaus Baltzer with the assistance of Leonard Jay Green-
 spoon, *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 353.

¹William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 28 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 245-47, views Sodom and her daughters as representing the "unassimilated Canaanite communities in Israel." [D. F. Neufeld], "The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald Pub. Assn., 1978), 4:632, suggests that Sodom is symbolically used here to represent the surrounding peoples, such as the Moabites and Ammonites, who, as descendants of Lot, were survivors of Sodom. C[arl] F[riedrich] Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Ezekiel*, 2 vols., trans. James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., [1952]), 1:228, rejects the latter interpretation. He believes that literal Sodom is alluded to, but that "Sodom and Samaria represent the heathen nations generally, as standing outside the Old Testament dispensation: Sodom representing those that were sunk in the deepest moral degradation, and Samaria those that had fallen from the state of grace" (231).

rebellious people of Yahweh sent into permanent exile,¹ and she was found to be worse than either.² Yahweh could not legitimately restore the fortunes of Jerusalem without either restoring also the fortunes of Sodom and Samaria or having to apologize to them for the severity of His judgment upon them (cf. Matt 11:20-24).³

The purpose in all this was that Jerusalem might "be ashamed" when she considered how Yahweh had dealt kindly with her in comparison with the way He had dealt with her sisters (Ezek 16:54, 61).⁴ Ezekiel portrayed

¹Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel*, Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 118, says that both "had developed international reputations for their evil."

²Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 79, considers this to be hyperbole; but in light of the principle of *noblesse oblige* (cf. Luke 12:47-48), Jerusalem was indeed more guilty (Aelred Cody, *Ezekiel, with an Excursus on the Old Testament Priesthood*, Old Testament Message, vol. 11 [Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984], 79). She did not profit from the example of either Sodom or Samaria, but outdid them in corruption (Ezek 16:33-34, 47-48, 51).

³John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969), 141. The parallels between vs. 53 and vs. 55 suggest that to "restore their fortunes" means to "return to their former estate," which Keil, 1:226-27, defines as a *restitutio in statum integritatis*, a return to the condition in which they stood before Yahweh prior to their fall into ungodly ways. In the context of the breaking and restoration of the covenant, it should not be taken to imply a political or geographical restoration.

⁴Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 22 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1983), 306.

Yahweh as offering the opportunity for all Jerusalem's sisters and their daughters,¹ no matter how sinful their background, to become by grace the daughters of Jerusalem (vs. 61) and so to share in the blessings of the covenant which He promised to establish with her (vss. 60, 62).²

There are two major elements to the Sodom tradition in the OT which stand out above the rest in symbolic significance, as evidenced especially by the writings of the prophets. One is its reputation for irrepressible and

¹It should be noted that when Yahweh promised, in 16:61, to give the elder and younger sisters of Jerusalem to her as daughters, this cannot be a reference only to Sodom and Samaria, since the adjectives "elder" and "younger" are in the plural in Hebrew, signifying elder sisters and younger sisters. Keil, 1:231, referring to vs. 61, states, "The restoration which is promised in vers. 53 and 55 to Sodom and Samaria alone, is expanded here into a prophecy of the reception of all the greater and smaller nations into fellowship in the glory of the people of God." Cf. Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel, Communicator's Commentary, OT*, vol. 18 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 143. It was on account of Yahweh's mercy, "not on account of the covenant" with Jerusalem, that Yahweh would restore the fortunes of Jerusalem and all her sisters (Ezek 16:61; cf. 36:21-32).

²Brownlee, 255; Craigie, 121-23. The latter points out that this passage points the reader to "one of the key aspects of Old Testament theology, the relationship between love and law" (122). While "the essence of covenant was law," and "the conduct of the covenant relationship was governed by law, the very existence of the covenant presupposed God's love" (*ibid.*, emphasis his). Although Israel's failure legally demanded the termination of the covenant, "Just as by an act of love, God first established a covenant with Israel, so by a further act of love, he promises to re-establish another covenant" (123). Cf. Keil, 1:231-32, on the relation of the other nations to Israel under the everlasting covenant of grace.

incorrigible evil.¹ The other is its utter and permanent destruction by Yahweh for its vileness.

Other key elements include its introduction in Gen 10 as a city of the Canaanites, the descendants of Ham; its prosperity as a result of its location along the Jordan River; its geographical relationship adjacent to the territory of Abraham; its interaction with Abraham and Lot; the opportunities provided for Sodom to come to a knowledge of Yahweh; its immorality, inhospitality, and violence as key features of its sins; the call of Lot and his family out of Sodom, including the results of Lot's wife's choice to turn back toward Sodom; and the role of fire and brimstone in its judgment.

Sodom in the NT

Outside of Rev 11:8, Sodom is mentioned eight times in the NT. Five of these references come from the Synoptic Tradition. In Matt 10:15 Jesus is recorded as declaring that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment² than for any city which would not welcome His disciples. The parallel account in Luke 10:12 mentions only Sodom.

¹Von Rad, *Genesis*, 212-23, states: "Sodom was always the example of greatest depravity that one could think of in Israel." While "depravity" may suggest merely a socio-cultural problem, however, the OT tradition points out clearly that Sodom's problem was moral and spiritual.

²Cf. John 5:28-29 and Rev 20:11-13.

Matt 11:23-24 contains a similar saying, in which Jesus asserted that if the miracles had been done in Sodom which had been done in Capernaum, it would not have been destroyed.¹ But because Capernaum did not respond appropriately to the mighty works wrought in her (vs. 20; cf. vs. 5), it would be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment than for her.

Luke 17:28-30 compares the activities of people on "the day when the Son of man is revealed" with those of "the days of Lot." "They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom fire and brimstone rained from heaven and destroyed them all." A further note in vs. 32 prompted, "Remember Lot's wife." Several points are worthy of attention in this passage.

1. A comparison of these verses with the preceding parallel verses on "the days of Noah" (26-27), required by the connecting words *ὁμοίως μὴ ἐπιστρέψάτω*, reveals that the

¹Matt 11:20-21 suggests that this is because Sodom would have repented. The significance lies not in whether or not Sodom would have repented and been spared. It lies rather in the fact that Sodom continued to represent the city so notorious for its wickedness and failure to repent that it brought upon itself the condemnation of heaven in fiery judgment. Capernaum, having had greater opportunity, since Jesus made his home there (4:13; 9:1), would be judged with greater severity than wicked Sodom. Cf. Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1960; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 140-41; John P. Meier, *Matthew, New Testament Message*, vol. 3 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980), 125.

emphasis in vss. 28-30 was not on specific sins of the Sodomites but on their focus on the temporal rather than on the eternal and on their inattention to the warnings given of coming judgment, resulting in their destruction.¹

2. Sodom was not destroyed until "the day that Lot went out from Sodom" (vs. 29), just as the flood did not come "until the day when Noah entered the ark" (vs. 27). In both cases, judgment was deferred until all who would had responded to Yahweh's call to separate themselves from the unrepentant.

3. The tradition of Sodom being destroyed by fire and brimstone raining down from heaven remained unchanged. This was an essential element of the tradition.

4. The reminder of what happened to Lot's wife is in the context of vs. 31, which counsels the reader against considering material possessions when the call should come to flee and warns against turning back after one has already forsaken home.²

5. The example of what happened to Lot, his wife, and the people of Sodom, is illustrative of the situation that will exist at the eschatological judgment: "so it will

¹I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1978), 664.

²Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1951), 441, says this is a warning against worldly-mindedness.

be on the day when the Son of man shall be revealed" (vs. 30).¹

The Pauline epistles make only one use of the Sodom tradition. Rom 9:27-28 quotes from Isa 10:22-23 to the effect that only a remnant of Israel would be saved, "for the Lord will execute his sentence upon the earth with rigor and dispatch." Then in vs. 29 Paul quotes Isa 1:9 (LXX) as further support for this thesis. Sodom and Gomorrah represent the example of utter annihilation from which there are no survivors.² With this the children of Israel are contrasted in that the Lord left them a few survivors. The remnant idea is central to Paul's use of the Sodom tradition here.³

The only other places outside Revelation that we find reference to the Sodom tradition in the NT are in the parallel accounts found in 2 Pet 2:6-8 and Jude 7. Both authors cite the Sodom tradition as a part of their warning against false teachers, "ungodly persons who pervert the

¹William Manson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930), 199, finds in this an eschatological imperative.

²Clearly, Lot was not accounted as one of the people of Sodom. Even the Sodomites considered him to be an alien (Gen 19:9).

³James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38B (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 576; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, 2 vols. in one, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1968), 2:41.

grace of God into licentiousness" (Jude 4; cf. 2 Pet 2:1-2). Both authors warn of the judgment which is certain to befall these false teachers, citing examples from the past as precedent.

Second Peter cites the angels who sinned and were cast into Tartarus to await the final judgment, the antediluvians who rejected the preaching of Noah, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude cites the people who came out of Egypt but were destroyed for their unbelief; the angels who left their proper position for "eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day" (vs. 6); and Sodom, Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities, "which likewise acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust" (vs. 7). Several points should be noted in these two passages.

1. Both authors specifically cite the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as "an example." Second Peter states that "by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he [God] condemned them to extinction and made them an example to those who were to be ungodly" (vs. 6). Jude says that they "serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire" (vs. 7). Once again the element of complete destruction by fire is revealed as a major element of the tradition.

2. Both authors also speak plainly of the sins for which Sodom and Gomorrah were judged. Second Peter speaks

of "the licentiousness of the wicked" which greatly distressed righteous Lot (vs. 7), and adds that Lot "was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds" (vs. 8). Jude is more explicit when he says that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah "acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust" (vs. 7). It would appear that, at this late point in the tradition, two aspects of their sinfulness stand out: sexual immorality and an attitude of rebellion against moral and legal restraints.¹

3. Second Peter adds a defense of Lot, whom the text three times calls "righteous." Lot was "rescued" because, "by what that righteous man saw and heard as he lived among them, he was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds" (vss. 7-8). The presence of "righteous" Lot in Sodom and his ultimate rescue therefrom represent important aspects of the NT tradition, as observed also in Luke 17:28-32 above.

The Sodom tradition in the NT highlights various aspects of the OT Sodom tradition. Sodom serves as the preeminent example of the people/city judged by God for evil attitudes and practices and for failure to make good use of the opportunities offered it to know God and turn

¹This seems to be reinforced by the author of 2 Peter, when he draws his lesson from the example of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah: If God rescued righteous Lot, then He "knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority" (vss. 9-10, emphasis supplied).

from sin. Sodom was especially notable for its immorality and its rebellion against moral and legal restraints. The presence and subsequent escape of righteous Lot plays a significant role in the tradition. There are moral and eschatological imperatives derived from the examples of Sodom, Lot, and his wife. Moreover, fire and brimstone from heaven continue to form a significant part of the Sodom tradition.

Sodom in the Extrabiblical Literature

There is no significant difference between the extrabiblical Sodom tradition and that of the OT or the NT. The key elements are as follows:¹

1. Sodom was a city of great wealth and luxury, situated in a plain at the southern end of the Jordan

¹Since the OT and NT are each organized into a single-volume compilation of documents, the documentary approach has been largely followed in compiling those traditions. With the extrabiblical sources, however, the documents are scattered, making it more convenient to adopt a thematic approach in order to bring some organization to the presentation of those traditions. It should also be noted that, while the Jewish apocalyptic traditions are generally considered to be the most relevant extrabiblical materials for the study of the Apocalypse, they are often rather cryptic in their expression. The writings of Philo and Josephus, on the other hand, while not apocalyptic in nature, tend to be more thorough in their elaboration of the traditions. Therefore, these works have been quoted more extensively than have the apocalyptic materials because they generally enunciate the traditions more clearly, not because they are considered to be more valuable, though they do reflect OT traditions as viewed in a Hellenistic atmosphere in the first century A.D. These observations are valid also for the study of the extrabiblical Egypt and Babylon traditions later in this chapter.

River, in the Dead Sea area.¹ Philo described the "never-failing lavishness of their sources of wealth, for, deep-soiled and well-watered as it was, the land had every year a prolific harvest of all manner of fruits."² He added that "it was exceedingly prosperous," a land "which though not large was rich in corn and well wooded and teeming with fruits, for the position which size gave to other countries, was given to Sodom by its goodliness."³

2. Sodom became notorious for its evil ways, especially for sexual perversion.⁴ Philo provided an extended catalog of the sins of the Sodomites, which he attributed in large measure to their wealth. After citing the lavishness of their sources of wealth, he observed that "the chief beginning of evils, as one has aptly said, is goods in excess."⁵ He went on to explain:

Incapable of bearing such satiety, plunging like cattle, they threw off from their necks the law of nature and applied themselves to deep drinking of strong liquor and dainty feeding and forbidden forms of

¹Cf. Josephus *Jewish War* 4.8.2, 4 (trans. Thackeray, LCL, 3:133, 143); idem, *Antiquities* 1.8.3-1.9 (4:85, 87). "Now that the city of Sodom has disappeared the valley has become a lake, the so-called Asphaltitis," wrote Josephus (ibid., 1.9 [4:87]). Later he called this same lake "the lake of Sodom" (ibid., 5.1.22 [5:39]). 4 Ezra 5:7 also refers to it as the Sea of Sodom.

²Philo *On Abraham* 26 (trans. Colson, LCL, 6:69).

³Ibid., 39 (6:111).

⁴Jub 13:17; 16:5-6; 20:5-6; Ps-Philo 8:2; T Naph 3:4; 4:1; T Benj 9:1; T Isaac 5:27.

⁵Philo *On Abraham* 26 (6:71).

intercourse. Not only in their mad lust for women did they violate the marriages of their neighbors, but also men mounted males without respect for the sex nature which the active partner shares with the passive; and so when they tried to beget children they were discovered to be incapable of any but a sterile seed. Yet the discovery availed them not, so much stronger was the force of the lust which mastered them. Then, as little by little they accustomed those who were by nature men to submit to play the part of women, they saddled them with the formidable curse of a female disease. For not only did they emasculate their bodies by luxury and voluptuousness but they worked a further degeneration in their souls and, as far as in them lay, were corrupting the whole of mankind.¹

Josephus likewise attributed the insolence and impiety of the Sodomites to the abundance of their resources.

Now about this time the Sodomites, overweeningly proud of their numbers and the extent of their wealth, showed themselves insolent to men and impious to the Divinity, insomuch that they no more remembered the benefits that they had received from Him, hated foreigners and declined all intercourse with others.²

Josephus attributes the destruction of Sodom finally to the "violence and outrage"³ attempted against the two heavenly messengers by the men of Sodom.

God, therefore, indignant at their atrocities, blinded the criminals so that they could not find the entrance to the house, and condemned the whole people of the Sodomites to destruction.⁴

¹Ibid. His summary statement declares, "The land of the Sodomites . . . was brimful of innumerable iniquities, particularly such as arise from gluttony and lewdness, and multiplied and enlarged every other possible pleasure with so formidable a menace that it had at last been condemned by the Judge of All" (ibid. [6:69]).

²Josephus *Antiquities* 1.11.1 (4:95-96).

³Ibid., 1.11.3-4 (4:99).

⁴Ibid.

3. The presence of the good man Lot¹ and his family in the city of Sodom, their initial rescue at the hand of Abram and his servants, their return to Sodom, the warning of Sodom's destruction given by two heavenly messengers, the flight of Lot's family at the angels' behest, and the fate of Lot's wife when she disobeyed the angel's command, all comprise a part of the extrabiblical Sodom tradition.²

4. Judgment from God upon Sodom by fire and brimstone is one of the most important parts of the Sodom tradition, along with its notorious licentiousness. In fact, there is no Sodom tradition which does not include, at least implicitly, one or both of these two primary elements.³ Brief references to Sodom generally draw their significance from these two elements of the Sodom tradition.⁴ For example, T Benj 9:1 reads, "I tell you that

¹Wis 10:6 and 19:17 call Lot a "good man." Hel Syn Pr 12:61 calls him "pious Lot." Josephus *Antiquities* 1.11.3 (4:98-99) says of Lot that "he was very kindly to strangers and had learnt the lesson of Abraham's liberality [*χρηστότης*]."

²Jub 13:17-29; 16:5-9; 1QapGen 21-22; Josephus *Antiquities* 1.9-11.

³In addition to the references cited above, see 3 Macc 2:5; Wis 10:6-7. Writings dated later than Revelation also contain the same tradition (Gk Ap Ezra 2:18-21; 7:12; Sib Or 6.20; Hel Syn Pr 12:61). The edition of the Sibylline Oracles used in this study is J. J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols., ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1983, 1985), 1:327-472.

⁴Exceptions involve a lesson drawn from the fate of

you will be sexually promiscuous like the promiscuity of the Sodomites and will perish, with few exceptions";¹ and 3 Macc 2:5 recalls, "When the inhabitants of Sodom acted insolently and became notorious for their crimes you burned them up with fire and brimstone and made them an example to later generations."²

Philo contributed an extended description of the devastation wrought by the flames, which "streamed down massed in one constant and perpetual rush."³ He concluded this description by stating that

when the flame had utterly consumed all that was visible above ground it penetrated right down into the earth itself, destroyed its inherent life-power and

Lot's wife in Philo *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis II., III.* 3.75 (trans. Colson and Whitaker, LCL, 1:447) and a reference in Ps-Philo 45:2 to the blinding of the Sodomites when they tried to attack Lot and his two guests. The former, however, is related as a judgment "owing to her being enamored of Sodom and reverting to the characters that had been overthrown by God," while the latter represents a partial judgment against the Sodomites for their wickedness and perversion. In addition, Ab 5.10 gives as "the type of Sodom" the man who says, "What is mine is mine and what is thine is thine." No explanation is given, but it may be that this is an allusion to the tradition that the Sodomites were proud, independent, and inhospitable, and consequently did not interact freely with other people (cf. Josephus *Antiquities* 1.11.1).

¹The story of the immoral conduct of the Benjamites in Gibeah, and the consequences of their actions (Judg 19-21) may serve as another example of this concept.

²See also T Naph 3:4; 4:1; Josephus *Wars* 5.13.6; Jub 13:17; Ps-Philo 8:2; and Sanh 10.3.

³Philo *Abraham* 27 (6:73).

reduced it to complete sterility to prevent it from ever bearing fruit and herbage at all.¹

He even cited contemporary evidence for his assertions:

And the clearest proof is what is still visible, for a monument of the disastrous event remains in the smoke which rises ceaselessly and the brimstone which the miners obtain; while the ancient prosperity of the country is most plainly attested by the survival of one of the cities of the neighbourhood and the land round it; for the city is thickly populated and the land rich in corn and pasturage and fertile in general, thus providing a standing evidence to the sentence decreed by the divine judgment.²

As may be seen from the above, Sodom generally functions as an example or prototype of the profligate city. Philo occasionally allegorized the Sodom tradition, but even then only after treating it first literally. For Philo, Sodom allegorically represents "a soul barren of good and blind of reason,"³ since its name means "barrenness" or "blindness."⁴ He cited Deut 32:32-33 to connect Sodom with folly, "since folly is blind and unproductive of excellence, and through its persuasions some have thought

¹Ibid.

²Ibid. Cf. Wis 10:7.

³Philo *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies* 19 (trans. Colson and Whitaker, LCL, 4:513).

⁴Philo *On Drunkenness* 53 (trans. Colson and Whitaker, LCL, 3:433); idem, *On Dreams, That They Are God-sent* 2.29 (trans. Colson and Whitaker, LCL, 5:531). For other examples of Philo's allegorization in connection with Sodom, see idem, *On the Birth of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by Him and by His Brother Cain* 37; idem, *On the Confusion of Tongues* 8; idem, *On Flight and Finding* 26; idem, *Dreams* 1.15; idem, *Abraham* 28-31.

good to measure and weigh and count everything by the standard of themselves."¹

Aside from Philo's allegorization, the Sodom tradition is essentially uniform in treating Sodom as a city which was proverbial for its immorality and was destroyed by fire from God as a lesson to succeeding generations.² This summarization is well illustrated by a brief passage from Jub 16:5-6:

And in that month the Lord executed the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah and Zeboim and all of the district of the Jordan. And he burned them with fire and sulphur and he annihilated them till this day just as (he said), "Behold, I have made known to you all of their deeds that (they were) cruel and great sinners and they were polluting themselves and they were fornicating in their flesh and they were causing pollution upon the earth." And thus the Lord will execute judgment like the judgment of Sodom on places where they act according to the pollution of Sodom.³

That the deliverance of Lot from this sinful city was a strong part of that tradition is illustrated by the next verse (vs. 7): "And we saved Lot because the Lord remembered Abraham and he brought him out from the midst of the overthrow."

¹Philo *Dreams* 2.29 (5:531). For a similar use of this text, in which Philo equated Sodom with the barren soul of the wicked and spoke of God as passing "well-deserved sentence upon the impious" as the heavens rained upon them "the unquenchable flames of the thunderbolt," see also Philo *Drunkenness* 53 (3:433-35).

²Cf. David M. Howard, Jr., "Sodom and Gomorrah Revisited," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984): 385.

³Cf. Jub 20:5-6.

The Sodom tradition in the relevant extrabiblical literature is fully in line with the tradition as found in the OT and NT.¹ The key features are the same.

Summary

The Sodom tradition is fairly uniform, whether in the OT, the NT, or the extrabiblical material. The major elements seem to be:

¹A thorough perusal of the literature has revealed that the Sodom tradition is essentially limited to Jewish and early Christian literature. Smart, 38, states, "No extra-biblical Palestinian literature has yet been found that mentions the episode recounted in Genesis 19." This statement seems incomprehensible unless Jewish literature is excluded from Palestinian literature. Since he mentions none of the Jewish extrabiblical literature other than Josephus, it is difficult to know quite what he means. He goes on to observe that "the only known extra-biblical sources which even mention Sodom's demise are the writings of Greek and Latin historians, with the one possible exception being the Ebla tablets" (ibid.). Strabo *The Geography of Strabo* 16.2.44 (trans. Jones, LCL, 7:297), in discussing the Dead Sea, does mention the Sodom tradition as "the oft-repeated assertions of the local inhabitants." He imagines the fire coming from underground, however, rather than from heaven. Tacitus *The Histories* 5.7 (trans. Moore, LCL, 2:187), likewise refers to the Sodom tradition in connection with a discussion of the Dead Sea, though he does not mention Sodom by name. Unlike Strabo, he is willing to "grant that famous cities were once destroyed by fire from heaven" (ibid.). While the Ebla tablets at one time were purported to list the five cities of the plain, this report has remained unsubstantiated and has, in fact, been denied by Ebla scholars (Howard, 397-98; van Hatten, 89). Another record outside of Jewish and Christian literature may be an Akkadian poem which describes a rain of fire on unnamed cities which is similar in character and effect to the fire which destroyed Sodom. It also mentions a man who appears to have escaped destruction. See A. H. Sayce, trans., "The Overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (Accadian Account)," *Records of the Past: Being English Translations of the Assyrian and Egyptian Monuments*, ed. S. Birch (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, [1874]), 11:115-18.

1. The canonical Sodom tradition begins in Gen 10, where Sodom appears to be identified with the Canaanites, the descendants of Ham, in the Table of Nations.

2. It had great prosperity due to its location in the fertile Jordan River valley, and it consequently had a luxurious lifestyle.

3. It was noted for its exceptional wickedness, with special emphasis on its immorality and on its pride and arrogance, manifested in inhospitality and violence toward others.

4. It had geographical proximity to the territory promised to Abraham, and consequently had interaction with Abraham and Lot.

5. It had opportunities to know and acknowledge God Most High, the Maker of heaven and earth, but it failed to take advantage of those opportunities.

6. A call was made to leave Sodom before its destruction, but only a few heeded the call, and one of those turned back and was destroyed with the city.

7. Sodom was judged by fire and brimstone, resulting in its complete and permanent destruction.

While these constitute the major elements of the Sodom tradition, especially elaborated in the OT, there are two elements that stand out above the others. These are its great wickedness, especially its immorality, and its

total and permanent destruction by fire as a judgment from God.

The Egypt Tradition

The Egypt tradition is less stereotyped than the Sodom tradition and is much broader, due in large part, no doubt, to the fact that its traditional history is far more extensive in both the biblical and extrabiblical record. One must be somewhat selective, therefore, rather than exhaustive, in this review of the Egypt traditions. I begin where I believe John began, with the OT tradition, and use that as a guide for determining what elements of the extrabiblical tradition¹ may have most directly contributed to John's understanding of the Egypt motif in the book of Revelation.

Egypt in the OT

The first mention of Egypt in the OT, just as with Sodom, is found in Gen 10. In vs. 6 Egypt is listed, along with Canaan, as one of the sons of Ham. In vss. 13-14, Egypt is said to be the father of several sons and the progenitor of the Philistines (cf. 1 Chr 1:8, 11-12). The names of these men were associated with the lands that they settled.² The fact that in Pss 105:23, 27 and 106:22 (cf.

¹The NT Egypt tradition, aside from Exodus typology, which is not the main focus of this study, is so limited that there is no problem in summarizing it.

²Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11*, 95, says, "It was

78:51) Egypt is termed "the land of Ham" lends further support to the traditional identification of Egypt with the line of Ham.¹

The second mention of Egypt in the OT is in Gen 12. There was a famine in the land of Canaan, "so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there" (vs. 10). Abram forewarned Sarai that when the Egyptians would see her beauty they would kill him if they believed she was his wife (vss. 11-12). He laid a plan to spare himself by having Sarai say that she was his sister (vs. 13). When they arrived in Egypt, his fears were realized: Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's harem² (vss. 14-15). Abram was rewarded (vs. 16). Yahweh, however, "afflicted Pharaoh with great plagues because of Sarai" (vss. 17-19), and Abram and his family and possessions were expelled from Egypt (vs. 20).³

common practice in the ancient world for communities and tribal groups to trace their ancestry back to what is called an eponymous ancestor, an ancestor who gave his name to the group." Josephus *Antiquities* 1.6.1 (4:59), commenting on the descendants of Noah listed in Gen 10, wrote that they advanced from the mountains of Taurus and Amanus, "occupying the territory upon which they lit, and, as no inhabitant had preceded them, giving their own names to the nations." With respect to Egypt in particular he observed, "The Mersaeans also have kept their memory alive in their name, for we in these parts all call Egypt Merse and the Egyptians Mersaeans" (*ibid.*, 1.6.2 [4:65]). See also Richard S. Hess, "Egypt," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), 2:321; Sarna, 68.

¹Sarna, 64.

²Gibson, 2:34.

³This story of Abram's sojourn in Egypt may be a proleptic account of Israel's later sojourn in Egypt

Egypt is mentioned again in Gen 13:10. There the Jordan valley is compared to the land of Egypt in that it "was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD." The text adds, "This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah." The similarity between the physical situation of Sodom and that of Egypt in this passage is explicit, and it is attributed to the abundance of water. The fact that people in Canaan went to Egypt for food in times of famine (12:10; 26:1-2; 41:54-43:3) suggests that whatever the Jordan valley had to offer was available in Egypt on an even larger scale.¹

In Gen 15:13-16 there is an apparent allusion to Israel's later bondage and oppression in Egypt, accompanied by Yahweh's promise to "bring judgment on the nation which they serve" and to bring the descendants of Abram back to the promised land "with great possessions" in the fourth generation.

Egypt comes into view once again in 15:18, where Yahweh defined for Abram the extent of the land which He was giving him for an inheritance. "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."² This tradition would signal the

(ibid., 2:37).

¹Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 24.

²The "river of Egypt" is generally understood to be not the Nile but the "Brook of Egypt," often taken to mean the Wadi el-Arish, a boundary wadi which runs south from

reader that Egypt was considered to be a neighbor to the southwest of Abraham's descendants.¹

Egypt came to prominence when Joseph was sent into Egypt by the providence of Elohim (Gen 45:5-8) in order "to preserve for you a remnant on earth" (vs. 7). Joseph quickly established a reputation as a faithful servant of Yahweh, for Potiphar "saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his

the Mediterranean Sea into the Sinai peninsula. Cf. Num 34:5; Josh 15:4; 1 Kgs 8:65; 2 Kgs 24:7; Isa 27:12; Ezek 47:19; Gibson, 2:54; Speiser, 114; cf. Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 47; Keil and Delitzsch, 1:217. However, Philo considered it to be the Nile (*Flight* 32), and M. Görg argues in favor of the Nahal Bezor ("Egypt, River of," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* [1992], 2:378; idem, "Egypt, Brook of," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* [1992], 2:321). He further asserts that "the author of Gen 15:18 is placing Israel in contrast to, but also on a par with, the neighboring powers" ("Egypt, River of," 378).

¹That the Mosaic tradition included significant interaction between Abraham and his neighbors can be inferred already from Gen 12:1-3, where the tradition records that Abram was called to leave his country and kindred to go begin a new nation which would be great. There Yahweh would prosper him and make his name great, "so that you will be a blessing" (vs. 2). "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (or, as the margin reads, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed") (vs. 3). Presumably they would be blessed through their contact with him and his seed. (Isa 49:6 declares of Israel, "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.") Since Gen 12:1-3 occurs at the beginning of the Abraham tradition, it colors the whole tradition in terms of Abram being located where he was, namely, at the cross-roads of civilization, "at the center ['navel'] of the earth" (Ezek 38:12). A similar promise was made to Jacob in Gen 28:13-14. It is notable that Abram had direct contact with Sodom (Gen 14), Egypt (Gen 12), and Babylon (Gen 11, 14).

hands" (39:3). Later, Pharaoh said of him, "Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" (41:38). Because of his superior qualities, he was promoted to be ruler of all Egypt next to Pharaoh (41:39-41; 45:8-9). Eventually, Jacob and all his household moved into Egypt, where they were given the best of the land (45:9-46:7). "And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly" (47:27).

Both Jacob and Joseph, however, refused to consider Egypt their home. When Jacob was preparing to die, he made his sons take an oath not to bury him in Egypt but to carry him back to the land of Canaan and bury him there with his fathers (47:29-31; 49:29-32). Later, when Joseph was dying, he made a prophecy regarding the Exodus and had his family take an oath to carry his bones out of Egypt with them (50:24-25).

After the death of Joseph, "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Exod 1:8).¹ He was threatened by the tremendous growth of the Hebrew population, and he set about to enslave the children of Israel and to reduce the political and military threat by systematically killing their male infants (vss. 9-22). Moses, however, was preserved from death and became a member of Pharaoh's own household (2:10). He was appointed to be the

¹See notes by John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 7, and by Keil and Delitzsch, 1:419-21.

instrument of Yahweh in calling His people out of Egypt (3:7-17) .

Moses, together with his brother Aaron, went into Egypt to call Yahweh's people out so that they might return to the land which He had promised to their forefathers (4:29-31). These two emissaries of Yahweh were sent into Pharaoh's court to demand the release of Yahweh's people (5:1). Pharaoh's response was, "Who is the LORD, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover I will not let Israel go" (5:2).¹

¹This denial of Yahweh and His authority seems significant. Ronald E. Clements points out: "Pharaoh did not acknowledge the LORD, the God of Israel, since he was himself, according to Egyptian religion, the son and manifestation of deity. Thus he could not admit that the word of any other man or God was superior to his own wishes" (*Exodus*, Cambridge Bible Commentary [NEB] [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972], 34). Cf. Maxie D. Dunnam, *Exodus*, Communicator's Commentary, OT, vol. 2 ([Waco, TX: Word Books], 1987), 87; George Rawlinson, *History of Ancient Egypt*, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., [1882]), 42; George Steindorff and Keith C. Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East*, 2d ed., rev. Keith C. Seele (Chicago: Phoenix Books, University of Chicago Press, 1957), 82-85; Kenneth A. Strand, *Brief Introduction to the Ancient Near East: A Panorama of the Old Testament World* (Ann Arbor, MI: Braun-Brumfield, 1969), 250; John A. Wilson, *The Burden of Egypt: An Interpretation of Ancient Egyptian Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 76, 79, 85-88. The tradition may be identifying Pharaoh as arrogating deity to himself in opposition to Yahweh. Frank Wilton Hardy, "An Historicist Perspective on Daniel 11" (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1983; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1987), 15, suggests that atheism would be an extreme form of such an attitude. While this is true, it would be difficult to accuse Pharaoh or the Egyptians of atheism, strictly speaking, since, as Herodotus 2.37 (trans. Godley, LCL, 1:319) says, "They are beyond measure religious, more than any other nation" (cf. Rawlinson, *History*, 320). Rather, Pharaoh was exhibiting a form of agnosticism, or practical atheism, withholding belief in

Instead of letting Yahweh's people go, Pharaoh increased their work load so as to cause them to regret their request for release (5:20-21; 6:9, 12). Yahweh, however, intervened on their behalf by sending devastating plagues upon the land of Egypt as evidence of His superior power (3:19-20).¹ At first, Pharaoh attempted to duplicate the signs and plagues through the use of sorcery (7:11-12, 22; 8:7, 18), but eventually his magicians had to admit defeat (8:18-19). Under pressure from his advisers, and having lost his firstborn son, Pharaoh finally relented and agreed to let Israel go (10:7; 12:29-32).

Before Israel's departure from Egypt, Yahweh appeared to Moses and Aaron and said, "This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you" (12:2). A whole new era was to begin for Israel, measured from the time when Yahweh acted to bring them out of slavery in Egypt into the promised land.²

There was a ritual to be connected with this experience of deliverance, and it was to have permanent

Yahweh until forced to admit His existence (Exod 9:27; 10:16-17) by the undeniable evidences presented in the plagues on Egypt and its gods. Meanwhile, he asserted his own divine claims and authority.

¹For a comparison between these plagues and those in the trumpets and bowls of Revelation, see appendix 4.

²Durham, 153; cf. H. L. Ellison, *Exodus*, Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 63.

significance for them. It involved the slaying of a lamb and the sprinkling of its blood on the doorposts and lintel of each home, then roasting its flesh and eating it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (12:3-8). This ritual was called "the LORD's passover" (12:11), for Yahweh would pass through the land of Egypt that night and smite all the firstborn of both man and beast in the homes which were not protected by the blood of the lamb, but He would pass over the homes of all who had applied the required blood (12:12-13, 23).¹

Every year thereafter the children of Israel were to celebrate this festival as a reminder of their deliverance from the judgment upon Egypt (12:14, 24-27). In connection with this festival they were also to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days (12:15-20; 13:5-10), eating "the bread of affliction" as a reminder of their "hurried flight" from the bondage of Egypt (Deut 16:3).²

"And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt" (12:41). As that night "was a night of

¹On the significance of this ritual as a substitutionary sacrifice redeeming the life of the firstborn, see Angel M. Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1979), 274-75.

²See Keil and Delitzsch, 2:25-26.

watching by the LORD, . . . so this same night is a night of watching kept to the LORD by all the people of Israel throughout their generations" (vs. 42). The experience of that night was never to be forgotten (13:3, 8-11).

Not only was Israel delivered from Egyptian bondage on the night of the Passover, but there was a second—and complete—deliverance from Egypt at the sea. When Yahweh brought Israel through the sea on dry ground but destroyed the host of Egypt in the very waters which had been a wall to Israel on their right hand and on their left (14:21-31), Moses and the people sang a song of victory and of praise to Yahweh (15:1-18).

As a political power, Egypt ceased to be a significant factor in Israel's experience for generations after their deliverance at the sea. Still, Egypt had left its impress on their minds. The OT records their continual murmuring against the hardships of their wilderness experience and their clamoring to return to the relative luxury of life in Egypt,¹ their return at Sinai to the worship of the gods of Egypt (Exod 32:1-8), and Yahweh's continual reminders to them that He had brought them with a strong arm "out of the house of bondage" (20:2), therefore they were to keep His commandments, statutes, and laws.²

¹Exod 14:11-12; 16:2-3; 17:3; Num 11:4-5; 14:2-4; 16:13; 20:2-5; 21:5.

²Exod 15:26; 19:4-6; 20:2-17; 23:9; Num 15:37-41; Deut 16:12; 24:18, 22.

Part of the covenant curses should Israel fail to remain loyal to Yahweh and His covenant with them involved the diseases of Egypt being brought once again upon them (Deut 28:60), and, even more significantly, a return to Egypt, described in Deut 28:68:

And the LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey which I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no man will buy you.

By the time of the reign of Solomon, however, the kingdom of Israel extended "from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt" (1 Kgs 4:21). At that time Solomon entered into a marriage alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, in which he took Pharaoh's daughter as a wife (3:1; 9:16, 24; 11:1), despite the explicit injunction of Yahweh against intermarriage with the heathen (11:2).¹ He also took other foreign women as wives and concubines (vss. 1, 3), and they "turned away his heart after other gods" (vs. 4),² so that he "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (vs. 6), worshiping Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, and Molech (vss. 5, 7), in spite of two warnings from Yahweh (vss. 9-10).

¹He also imported horses from Egypt (1 Kgs 10:28) in contravention of Yahweh's command (Deut 17:16).

²Deut 17:17 had advised concerning any prospective king of Israel: "And he shall not multiply wives for himself lest his heart turn away."

As a result, Yahweh raised up adversaries against Solomon, two of which, Hadad and Jereboam, were harbored by Pharaoh in Egypt (11:14-22, 26-40).

After the death of Solomon, Jeroboam returned from Egypt to lead a revolt against Rehoboam (12:2), resulting in the division of the nation of Israel, with Jeroboam leading the ten tribes in the north (11:31-32; 12:20). In order to turn Israel from their loyalty to the house of David, Jeroboam instituted the worship of Egyptian gods in the form of two golden calves, one in Bethel and one in Dan (12:26-30), announcing to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (12:28; cf. Exod 32:4).

Jereboam's act in thus leading Israel into sin is attributed in the tradition with initiating the downfall of the nation of Israel, resulting eventually in its permanent exile at the hand of Assyria (2 Kgs 17:21-23). Ever after, the evil character of the kings of Israel was assessed in comparison with that of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who "made Israel to sin."¹ According to the record, there was not one king of Israel who turned away from the sins of Jeroboam.²

¹1 Kgs 15:26; cf. 15:30, 34; 16:2, 7, 19, 26, 31; 21:22; 22:52; 2 Kgs 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11; 15:9, 18, 24, 28.

²Even Jehu, the best king of Israel according to

Egypt also proved troubling to the kingdom of Judah. Shishak, the king of Egypt who had harbored Jeroboam during the reign of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:40), attacked Judah in Rehoboam's fifth year, "because they had been unfaithful to the LORD" (2 Chr 12:2). "He took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house; he took away everything" (vs. 9).

During the reign of King Hezekiah, the Rabshakeh of the king of Assyria accused Judah of relying on Egypt for chariots and horsemen (2 Kgs 18:21, 24; Isa 36:6, 9). That this charge was true is shown by the warnings of the prophet against such behavior in Isa 30:1-3; 31:1-3. Egypt was not a reliable ally, Judah was told (Isa 30:3, 7; 31:3), and it was ultimately threatened with punishment for its failure to support Judah in time of need (Ezek 29:6-16).

Years later, king Josiah was killed by the king of Egypt when he went out to fight against him, disregarding warnings by Pharaoh Neco to keep away (2 Chr 35:20-24). After that, the king of Egypt deposed Josiah's son Jehoahaz and carried him to Egypt, making his brother king in his stead and putting the land of Judah under heavy tribute (36:3-4; 2 Kgs 23:33-35).

the description in 2 Kgs 9-10, though he wiped out Baal worship from Israel, "was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD the God of Israel with all his heart; he did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin" (2 Kgs 10:31; cf. vs. 29).

The ascendancy of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, put a stop to the invasion of Judah by Egypt, "for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates" (2 Kgs 24:7). At the same time, however, it spelled the beginning of Judah and Jerusalem's period of Babylonian captivity (vss. 10-17), which, in turn, led to the voluntary flight of many Jews back into Egypt, seeking to avoid serving the king of Babylon as they had been counseled to do.¹ This return to Egypt was in disobedience to the explicit command of Yahweh not to return to Egypt (Jer 42:13-20),² and it resulted in their worshiping once again the gods of the Egyptians (44:8).

As a result of the return of these Jews into Egypt and their worship of the gods of Egypt, they were warned through Jeremiah (44:12-14; cf. vss. 24-30):

I will take the remnant of Judah who have set their faces to come to the land of Egypt to live, and they

¹2 Kgs 25:24-26; Jer 27:12-15; 42:9-12; 43:7; cf. Wilbur Smith, 146-51.

²While Jer 41:17-18 and 42:11-12 indicate that the people of Judah feared reprisals from the king of Babylon for the uprising of Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, their flight to Egypt was evidence that they trusted in Egypt more than in Yahweh's plans for them. Cf. Robert Davidson, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 2 vols., Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 2:144; Hardy, 15; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980), 666-67. It also reflected their breach of the Deuteronomistic covenant (Deut 17:16; cf. Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986], 720).

shall all be consumed; in the land of Egypt they shall fall; by the sword and by famine they shall be consumed; from the least to the greatest, they shall die by the sword and by famine; and they shall become an execration, a horror, a curse, and a taunt. I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, so that none of the remnant of Judah who have come to live in the land of Egypt shall escape or survive or return to the land of Judah, to which they desire to return to dwell there; for they shall not return, except some fugitives.

This concludes the narrative part of the OT tradition. The prophetic/hortative parts of the tradition are considered next. Due to the extensive amount of material regarding Egypt in the prophetic books, I have attempted to treat this material thematically. Admittedly, this leaves out a discussion of the context of each text, which is regrettable, but the limits of space forbid a more exhaustive summary.¹

1. Egypt is accused of making vaunted claims. In Jer 46:8 Egypt is recorded as boasting, "I will rise, I will cover the earth, I will destroy cities and their inhabitants." In Ezek 29:3 the king of Egypt, "the great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams,"² claims,

¹Such an exhaustive study was done in earlier drafts of this dissertation, but had to be omitted from the final draft due to the limits imposed.

²Cf. the declaration to Pharaoh in Ezek 32:2, "You consider yourself a lion among the nations, but you are like a dragon in the seas; you burst forth in your rivers, trouble the waters with your feet, and foul their rivers"; also Isa 51:9. The Hebrew word for "dragon" in these verses is תנין, and the Greek (LXX) word is δράκων. On תנין and the significance of the metaphor, see Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 29 (Dallas:

"My Nile is my own; I made it."¹ In Ezek 31 the prophet relates an oracle from Yahweh regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt, comparing him to a great cedar in Lebanon. "Its

Word Books, 1990), 104-5; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, trans. Cosslett Quin, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 403; Keil, *Ezekiel*, 2:3-4; Taylor, 199-200; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, trans. James D. Martin, ed. Paul D. Hansen with Leonard Jay Greenspoon, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 10-11.

¹While the MT here reads עָשֵׂה לִי, its proper translation is a matter of debate. The margin of the RSV gives, "I have made myself." Taylor, 199, follows this reading, noting that Egypt's sun-god, Rē', claimed to be self-begotten. G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 326, notes the same point, but believes that the text is better corrected to read, "I have made it" or "I have made them," i.e., the Nile or its streams. This latter reading is followed by the LXX: καὶ ἐγὼ ἐποίησα αὐτούς, which in turn is adopted by Eichrodt, 401-2. Leslie Allen, 101-2, argues that any emendation is unnecessary since the suffix appears to be datival, yielding the reading, "made for me by myself." Keil, *Ezekiel*, 2:4, translates the expression, "I have made it for myself," noting, "The suffix attached to עָשֵׂה stands in the place of לִי, as ver. 9, where the suffix is wanting, clearly shows." This appeal to vs. 9 as an aid in translation certainly appears valid, no doubt explaining the reason for the RSV's identical rendering of both as "I made it." The NIV reads, "I made it for myself," again reflecting the datival force of the suffix while at the same time saying basically the same thing as vs. 9. The emphasis would appear to be on the claim to creative power, which is a prerogative of deity (Keil, *Ezekiel*, 2:4). Craigie, 213, notes that "as is so true in many of the causes of arrogance, the reverse was the truth: Egypt was the product of the Nile, not vice versa." In fact, he adds, "Egypt's greatness throughout history was the fruit of the Nile. It was that great river which made habitation in the valley possible. It provided the rich soil in which to plant crops, the water to irrigate those crops, a means of transportation, and supply for drinking. Without the river, there could have been no Egypt" (ibid.).

heart was proud of its height," is the indictment of Adonai Yahweh in vs. 10.

2. It was not only for pride, arrogance, and oppression of other nations that Egypt was indicted. It was also for the way it had dealt with Israel. According to Ezek 29:6-7, Israel had relied on Egypt for military assistance, but Egypt had proven to be an unreliable ally (cf. Isa 31:1-3). Worse, however, is the accusation in Joel 3:19: Egypt has done violence to the people of Judah and has shed innocent blood in their land.

3. Another charge against Egypt is found in Isa 19:3: the Egyptians consult idols, sorcerers, mediums, and wizards (cf. vs 1).¹

4. As a result of Egypt's wickedness (Ezek 31:11), Yahweh will take action against it. This action takes

¹William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2 vols., rev. ed., Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 1:34, notes, "Egypt was proverbially the land of sorcery, of witchcraft, and of magic. The *Talmud* says, 'Ten measures of sorcery descended into the world; Egypt received nine, the rest of the world one.'" E. A. Wallis Budge, *A Short History of the Egyptian People, with Chapters on Their Religion, Daily Life, Etc.* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1914; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1914), 182, states, "However far we go back we find MAGIC flourishing side by side with religion, and it is hard to say which is the older; in Egypt magic seems to precede religion." He connects their magical rites and ceremonies with attempts to communicate with the gods and ancestral spirits (*ibid.*). Stuart, 89-90, describes how Ezek 8:9-12 portrays Egyptian pantheism being practiced in the temple, "people appealing to the spirits of various animals, represented by their images on the walls of a room, using incense smoke to symbolize the animals' glory." Cf. Craigie, 61; Eichrodt, 124; Keil, *Ezekiel*, 1:121.

three forms in the prophecies: (a) the sword, or attack and devastation or exile by another nation (e.g., Jer 46:19, 24-26; Ezek 29:8-9, 19-20; 30:10-11, 24-26; 31:11-12); (b) the drying up of its waters, or reducing it to a complete wasteland where nothing lives (Isa 19:5-8; Ezek 29:10-12; 30:12; Zech 10:11); and (c) fire (Ezek 30:8, 16).

5. Not only was Egypt to be punished, but also "the people of the land that is in league [with Egypt], shall fall with them by the sword" (Ezek 30:5). "Those who support Egypt shall fall, they shall fall within her by the sword" (vs. 6). Even "those who dwelt under its shadow among the nations shall perish" (31:17; cf. 29:12; 30:7).

6. Some of the judgments upon Egypt were declared to be of a temporal nature: Egypt would recover after a time. Jer 46:26 declares that after Egypt has been delivered into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, at some subsequent point it "shall be inhabited as in the days of old." Ezek 29:11-16 says Egypt will be a desolation for forty years, then Adonai Yahweh will restore the fortunes of Egypt and bring them back to the land of their origin, "and there they shall be a lowly kingdom," in fact, "the most lowly of the kingdoms." "I will make them so small that they will never again rule over the nations" (vs. 15). Comparison of vss. 19-20 with Jer 46:26 suggests that the same series of events is in view in both passages.

7. Other judgments prophesied against Egypt seem to be more permanent. This is particularly true of the Day of Yahweh passages. Jer 46:10 says, "That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes."¹ Likewise, Ezek 30:2-3 declares, "Wail, 'Alas for the day!' For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations." The term "the day of the LORD" is generally considered to look forward to the day when judgment would come upon all nations, including unfaithful Israel, and the rule of Yahweh would be established.²

¹Carroll, 764, refers the reader to Isa 2:12-17 for "Yahweh's day against all hubristic attitudes and enterprises." Ernest W. Nicholson, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26-52*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (NEB) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 169, states that "the mention of the day of the Lord probably indicates that the vengeance in question is to be understood more generally [than Neco's on Josiah] as in many other statements about 'the day of the Lord' in the Old Testament." Donald J. Wiseman, "Jeremiah," *The International Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, ed. F. F. Bruce, rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Marshall Pickering/Zondervan, 1986), 792, asserts that all of the oracles against the nations in Jer 46-51 "also have a typical, spiritual application," which is evidenced by the later references to these same nations. Ernst Jenni, "Day of the Lord," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 1:785, cites Jer 46:10 and Ezek 30:3 as two of a number of OT "day of the Lord" passages where the term is "used in the eschatological sense."

²Isa 2:10-21; 13:4-13; Ezek 7:2-12; Joel 1:15; 2:1-3; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:7-18; Taylor, 202; Stuart, 287-89. Craigie, 218, states that "in this oracle, he [Ezekiel] makes it clear that God's judgment would be universal and international in character." Likewise, Eichrodt, 416, asserts, "What is at first a vague undetermined terror reveals itself as the world-wide day of reckoning which awaits all nations. The judgment upon Jerusalem was always

These elements are especially evident in the prophecy of Joel, which ends with Egypt becoming a desolation as Yahweh avenges the innocent blood of the people of Judah and Jerusalem, which Egypt has helped to shed (3:19-21). This is a "day of the LORD" prophecy (2:1, 11, 31; 3:14). It involves a judgment of all the nations by Yahweh Himself (3:2, 12). Yahweh dwells in Jerusalem/Mount Zion at that time (3:16-17, 21). He "will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke" (2:30). The heavenly lights cease to shine (2:2, 10, 31; 3:15).¹ "All who call on the name of the LORD will be

viewed by the prophets against the background of the judgment of the whole world, and the same is now true of the punishing of Egypt." Henry E. Dosker, "Day of the Lord," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 1:879, says that in the OT the "day of the Lord" represents "the future consummation of the kingdom of God and the absolute cessation of all attacks upon it." For some varying perspectives on the background and content of the "day of the LORD" motif, see, e.g., Ladislav Černý, *The Day of Yahweh and Some Relevant Problems*, *Práce z Vědeckých Ústavů*, vol. 53 (Prague: V. Praze, 1948; microfilm, *Československá akademie věd Základní knihovna*, 1963), 17-106; Jenni, 1:784-85; idem, "Eschatology of the OT," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 2:126-33; Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (New York: Abingdon Press, [1956]), 133-54; Gerhard von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4 (1959): 97-108.

¹There is a parallel in the prophecy of Ezek 32:7-8, where Adonai Yahweh says to Egypt, "When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens, and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you, and put darkness upon your land, says the Lord God." Along with 30:2-3, this suggests that Ezekiel has in mind not only a temporary, partial judgment for Egypt, but also a permanent, complete judgment at the Day of Yahweh.

delivered" and find refuge in Jerusalem/Mount Zion (2:32; cf. 3:16-17, 20). Jerusalem/Mount Zion "shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it" (3:17).

8. There is also in the prophets a message of hope for Egypt. They can escape the Day of Yahweh judgment by calling on the name of Yahweh. This is hinted at in Zech 14:16-19, another Day of Yahweh prophecy. There "everyone that survives of all the nations that have come up against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of booths." "The family of Egypt" is explicitly named as having the opportunity to go up and present themselves at the feast at Jerusalem (vss. 18-19), implying that they could be numbered among the survivors.¹ This concept becomes more explicit, however, in Isa 19, where Yahweh makes Himself known to the Egyptians by His deeds, smiting them, healing them, sending them a savior, defending and delivering them (vss. 16-17, 19-22), so that they worship Yahweh and make

Eichrodt, 433, says, "The accentuation of the event to a world catastrophe reaches its climax in vv. 7 and 8 in the darkening of the stars, and this particular feature serves to introduce the typical features of the well-known prophetic description of the day of Yahweh in the judgment upon Egypt (cf. Amos 5.18, 20; 8.9; Isa. 13.10; Joel 2.10). This again sets it in the wider framework of the world-judgment which establishes the divine sovereignty over all nations."

¹Cf. Joel 2:32: "And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls."

sacrifices and vows to Him, and He blesses them and calls them His people (vss. 21, 25).¹

We cannot be certain how John interpreted this passage, but we can observe that he does not portray these heathen nations and traditional enemies of Yahweh in a positive light. Apparently he does not have this aspect of the Egypt tradition in mind in his Great City motif.

In summary, the Egypt tradition in the OT has a number of key features which should be noted. As with the Sodom tradition, it begins in Gen 10. Egypt was one of the sons of Ham and a brother of Canaan. The kingdom of Egypt was portrayed as prosperous and powerful, due primarily to its location on the river Nile.

Egypt had a long history of contact with the people of Yahweh, providing its people with opportunities to know and serve Him. Pharaoh refused to acknowledge Yahweh, so He sent great plagues upon Egypt in order to make His power and authority known until Pharaoh finally yielded to His demand to free His people from bondage.

An integral part of Israel's deliverance from Egypt was the Passover ritual, involving the shedding of the

¹John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 24 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 261, says of Isa 19 that it "speaks of God's will. The language of the Vision is 'God's plan' or 'God's strategy.'" He points to references to this plan or strategy in vss. 12 and 17 (252). While Watts is thinking in terms of literal rather than representative Egypt, Assyria, and Israel, he is no doubt correct in seeing this chapter as Isaiah's portrayal of "God's will," His dream.

blood of a lamb and applying the blood to their homes. This ritual was to have a permanent place in Israel's cultic practice, as a reminder of their deliverance.

The parting of the waters of the sea to make a dry path for escape became the means of both Israel's deliverance and Egypt's judgment. The OT prophets later used this experience as a type of the eschatological deliverance of Yahweh's people and judgment on Egypt.

The predominant tradition of the OT represents Egypt as one of the chief oppressors of Yahweh's people and a center of refusal to honor and worship Yahweh, from which His people were called out in the great Exodus. This could be said to be its key characterization.¹ It became a symbol in the writings of the prophets for an idolatrous and spiritualistic nation that arrogates to itself divine prerogatives, refuses to acknowledge Yahweh, and oppresses His people. Yahweh's people were called to a new Exodus.

Egypt in the NT

The NT makes relatively few references to Egypt. The only mention in the four Gospels is found in Matt 2:13-21, where the story is told of the flight of the holy family into Egypt and their subsequent return to the land

¹Most commentators on Rev 11:8 see the chief identifying characteristics of Egypt to be tyranny and the oppression and enslavement of God's people (see, e.g., Caird, 138; Johnson, 112; Kiddle, 199; Krodel, 226; Ladd, *Commentary*, 157; Morris, 146; Mounce, 227; Sweet, 187; Swete, 138).

of Israel. The significance of this pericope is found in vs. 15: "This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son'" (cf. Hos 11:1). Clearly, Matthew portrayed Jesus as participating in the Exodus experience (cf. Exod 4:22-23).¹

In Acts 7, Stephen reminded the Jewish leaders of the experience of Israel in relation to Egypt. Even after being led out of Egypt, "in their hearts they turned to Egypt," asking Aaron to make them gods to go before them (vss. 39-40). As a result, "God turned and gave them over to worship the host of heaven" (vs. 42) and other false gods, and swore to them, "I will remove you beyond Babylon" (vs. 43).²

Paul alluded to Egypt and the Exodus in a few places. In Rom 9:14-18, he discussed the role of Pharaoh in God's plan to show mercy to Israel. He cited Exod 9:16 as evidence that God is sovereign in His control over the

¹J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 48-50. At the same time, however, Fenton, 50, notes several contrasts between the OT Exodus and this NT parallel. In summary, Egypt in Matthew became the place of refuge for the Child whose life was threatened by an unbelieving Judean king. Even so, Matthew's major point cannot be overlooked: God called His Son out of Egypt.

²The quotation is from the LXX of Amos 5:25-27, which says that Yahweh would take Israel into exile beyond Damascus because of their worship of false gods. Presumably because Stephen was addressing Jews in this story, "Babylon" was substituted for "Damascus" without altering the accompanying preposition.

affairs of earth, showing mercy on whomever He will and hardening whomever He will. Pharaoh received no mercy.

In 1 Cor 5:6-8 he made reference to the feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread, telling his readers to "celebrate the festival . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," purging out the old leaven of malice and evil, "for Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed."

In 1 Cor 10:1-10 he also drew upon the Exodus for types (τύποι)¹ and typical experiences (τυπικῶς συνέβαινε) which were recorded as paraenetic warnings for those in the eschatological era (πρὸς νοουθεσίαν ἡμῶν, εἰς οὓς τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων κατήντηκεν). He likened Israel's experience under the cloud and through the Sea to baptism. For Paul, Egypt represents the bondage to sin from which the believer is delivered by the sacrifice of Christ, the paschal Lamb. The Christian participates in this deliverance by passing through the waters of Christian baptism.²

¹See Richard M. Davidson, *Typology*, 250-57, 266-77, on the full significance of the terms τύποι and τυπικῶς. "The τύποι are advance-presentations of eschatological realities," he asserts (274). "The OT events in the history of Israel happened τυπικῶς 'typically' with specific reference to the people of a particular period—the eschatological age of fulfillment ushered in by Christ" (ibid.). There is a *devoir-être* relationship between these prefigurations and their specific fulfillment in eschatological Israel (275).

²Cf. E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 133-34.

The Epistle to the Hebrews twice refers directly to Israel's being led out of Egypt (3:16; 8:9). In the roster of the men and women of faith in chap. 11, Moses is cited as an example of one who chose to identify himself with the people of God in their sufferings rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin or the treasures of Egypt (vss. 25-26). "By faith he left Egypt" (vs. 27), thus serving as a model for other men and women of faith (11:39-12:2).

The Egyptians, on the other hand, are designated as faithless. Heb 11:29 points out that while the children of Israel by faith crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, "the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned."

In the same vein, Jude warned that "he who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe" (vs. 5). This verse, along with Heb 11:29, points the reader to the vital role of faith among those who would be delivered from the bondage of Egypt.

In addition to these more obvious references to the Egypt tradition, there is a "new Exodus" theme which runs through much of the NT,¹ reminding the careful reader that

¹Cf. Balentine, 114-65, 186-411; Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. Wulston Hibberd (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), 153-76; Ellis, 130-34; Jacob J. Enz, "The Book of Exodus as a Literary Type for the Gospel of John," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957): 208-15; Fisher, 69-79; Jindřich Mánek, "The New Exodus in the Books of Luke," *Novum Testamentum* 2 (1958): 8-23; Richard C. Oudersluys, "Exodus in the Letter to the Hebrews," in *Grace*

the departure from Egypt was considered to be an important part of salvation-history and has a typological role to play, being repeated in the experience of the new people of God as they put their faith in Christ, their Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7; cf. 10:16), to save them from sin and death.¹

Egypt in the NT is primarily the place of slavery from which Israel was called out. It represents bondage to sin, from which the believer is called out. Israel's Exodus was the type; Jesus' Exodus was the archetype. The Christian by faith participates in this experience by accepting the blood of Christ, the passover Lamb, as his or her redemptive sacrifice for sin, expressed by partaking of the emblems of the body and blood of Christ, and by passing through the waters of baptism, so becoming a part of the New Israel.

upon Grace: Essays in Honor of Lester J. Kuyper, ed. James I. Cook (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975), 143-52; Piper, 3-22; Harald Sahlin, "Christ Our 'Exodus': The Fulfillment of an Old Testament Theme," *Searching Together* 14, no. 2 (1985): 3-6; Robert Houston Smith, "Exodus Typology in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 329-42; Streeter Stanley Stuart, Jr., "The Exodus Tradition in Late Jewish and Early Christian Literature: A General Survey of the Literature and a Particular Analysis of the Wisdom of Solomon, II Esdras and the Epistle to the Hebrews" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1973), 99-163.

¹Cf. Ellis, 131-34.

Egypt in the Extrabiblical Literature

Most references to Egypt in the extrabiblical literature are to be understood historically rather than figuratively and are either in harmony with the biblical tradition¹ or deal with events outside the biblical tradition.²

Like Gen 10, Josephus traces Egypt back to the son of Ham.³ He also notes the prosperity of the country and its people, as well as the strange and varied rites and customs of the Egyptians, including their "frenzy for women."⁴

¹See Jub 13:11-15; 14:18; 39-40; 42-49; Jdt 4:10-14; 1 Bar 1:19-20; 1 Macc 2:53; 3 Macc 6:4; Ps-Philo 8:9-10:6; Sib Or 3.248-258; Ezek Trag 1-242; Dem 2:11-19; T Reu 4:8-9; T Sim 4:3; Josephus *Antiquities* 1.8.1; 2.4-7, 11-16; 10.5-6; Philo *Abraham* 19; idem, *On the Life of Moses* 1.2-4, 15-26.

²See, e.g., 3 Macc 2:25; 3:12, 20; 7:1. Clearly, most literature outside of Jewish and Christian literature would fall in this category, though some does confirm the biblical tradition. A wide search was made of both Jewish and non-Jewish extrabiblical literature for elements of the Egypt tradition that would be relevant to John's use of Egypt as a spiritual symbol, including Jewish apocalyptic and other apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature, historical literature of the era and secondary historical sources, ancient Egyptian texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and even the Targums, rabbinic, and *merkavah* literature which might reflect earlier traditions. Only that which is most relevant for John's theology in Revelation has been cited below. Since the Jewish literature most reflects the traditions with which John is familiar, these sources have been cited most.

³Josephus *Antiquities* 1.6.2.

⁴*Ibid.*, 1.8.1-2.

Philo, in connection with a description of the role of the Nile in the fertility and prosperity of the land, makes a notable observation regarding the impiety (ἀσέβεια) of the Egyptians.

Egypt is a land rich in plains, with deep soil, and very productive of all that human nature needs, and particularly of corn. For the river of this country, in the height of summer, when other streams, whether winter torrents or spring-fed, are said to dwindle, rises and overflows, and its flood makes a lake of the fields which need no rain but every year bear a plentiful crop of good produce of every kind, if not prevented by some visitation of the wrath of God to punish the prevailing impiety of the inhabitants.¹

Throughout Jewish extrabiblical literature, Egypt is primarily the nation that enslaved Israel until God delivered His people with a strong outstretched arm through His servant Moses.² Wis 19:13-17 compares Egypt with Sodom in its treatment of guests and strangers and in the judgment which follows such inhospitality.

Other sources, especially in the Pseudepigrapha, present apocalyptic denunciations of Egypt, with prophecies of woes against it for its profligacy. Sib Or 3.314-19, 348, 596-600, 614-15 provides an example of this type of reference. There Egypt is called "the destructive race,"

¹Philo *Life of Moses* 1.2 (trans. Colson, LCL, 6:279).

²See Jub 46:12-16; Ps-Philo 9:1, 11; 23:9; 3 Macc 2:6-7; Hel Syn Pr 12:66-67; Pes 10:5; Josephus *Antiquities* 2.9.1-2; 2.14.1-6. For Philo, however, there is less focus on Egypt's oppression than on its sinful passion and godlessness, which must be left behind (e.g., *Confusion* 70; idem, *Preliminary Studies* 83-87; idem, *Who Is the Heir of Divine Things?* 203, 254-55).

which itself "is near destruction" (3.348). One accusation against it is that it was guilty of "transgressing the holy law of immortal God" (3.599-600), specifically, of engaging in "impious intercourse with male children" (3.596). While other nations are accused of similar impiety and face similar fates, Egypt is frequently singled out for special mention.

1QM 13-14 speaks of God appointing a day of battle to come to the aid of truth, to destroy iniquity, to bring Darkness low and magnify Light, to stand forever, and to destroy all the sons of Darkness, "like the fire of His wrath against the idols of Egypt."

There are other later writings of similar sentiment,¹ all of which reveal much the same characterization of Egypt as found in the biblical tradition. Egypt is described as a proud and arrogant nation, idolatrous, iniquitous, and an oppressor of God's people. Egypt would not escape ultimate punishment for its arrogance and evil conduct.

Some literature merely expresses the sentiments of the Jewish people toward Egypt as a result of their long history of contact with their southern neighbor. Let Aris 138 ranks the Egyptians as "very foolish people . . . who have put their confidence in beasts and most of the

¹See Sib Or 5.52-93, 179-96; Ap El 2:29-34, 44-45; cf. 2 Bar 58.

serpents and monsters, worship them, and sacrifice to them both while alive and dead."

A tradition which was later enshrined in Midrash Rabbah is found in two forms. Gen R 16.4 says, "All the kingdoms designated by the name Mizrayim (Egypt) are so called because they persecute (*meziroth*) Israel." Lev R 13.5 changes the sense slightly: "All governments may be called by the name '*Mizrayim*' (Egypt) since they oppressed (*mezerin*) Israel." These two pronouncements reflect a long and consistent Jewish tradition regarding Egypt as a symbol of the oppressor of Israel.

The Exodus from Egypt was also viewed as a landmark event in Jewish history. As Yahweh ordained in Exod 12:2, the Jews marked their history as a nation from that event, though they traced their ancestry back to Abraham and the patriarchs. Josephus, following the example of 1 Kgs 6:1 (though using different figures), recorded the dates for important events by counting the number of years from the Exodus, from Abram's entrance into Canaan, from the Deluge, and from Creation.¹ The Mishnah, citing Deut 16:13 as precedent, records the tradition that the faithful Jew will rehearse the story of the Exodus, not only every day, but every night as well (Ber 1.5). Further, citing Exod 13:8, it enjoins: "In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt" (Pes

¹Josephus *Antiquities* 8.3.1; 10.8.5.

10.5). Thus, it seems clear that the coming of Israel out of Egypt could never have become for the Jew a lost or meaningless tradition, for it was constantly kept alive in the daily recitation, as well as in the annual celebration of the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Booths.¹ It served as a reminder of a most joyful experience: "He brought us out from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a Festival-day, and from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption" (Pes 10.5).

Finally, there is another category of reference to Egypt. That is the figurative or allegorical use of Egypt, best illustrated by Philo of Alexandria.

Philo repeatedly uses Egypt as a symbol of the body controlled by pleasure and passion, resulting in death, "not the death which severs soul from body, but the death which ruins the soul by vice."² He does not fully distinguish at times, however, between the literal and the allegorical, often using the former as a pretext for the latter. Thus it is the historical tradition concerning Egypt that provides Philo with his pretext for characterizing Egypt as he does allegorically.

¹Cf. Ellis, 132.

²Philo *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.19 (1:273); cf. *ibid.*, 2.15, 21, 25; 3.4, 12, 25, 30, 61, 86; *idem*, *Confusion* 9, 16, 17; *idem*, *Who Is the Heir?* 62; *idem*, *Preliminary Studies* 5, 15-16; *idem*, *Flight* 3; *idem*, *Abraham* 21.

A case in point is Philo's use of the story from Lev 24:10-23, in which a young man, half Israelite, half Egyptian, cursed Yahweh. This youth

had set at naught the ancestral customs of his mother and turned aside, as we are told, to the impiety of Egypt and embraced the atheism¹ of that people. For the Egyptians almost alone among the nations have set up earth as a power to challenge heaven. Earth they held to be worthy of the honours due to a god, and refused to render to heaven any special tribute of reverence, acting as though it were right to shew respect to the outermost regions rather than to the royal palace. For in the universe heaven is a palace of the highest sanctity, and earth is the outer region, estimable indeed in itself, but when it comes into comparison with either, as far inferior to it as darkness is to light and night to day and corruption to incorruption and mortal man to God. The Egyptians thought otherwise; for, since the land is not watered like other countries by the downpour of rain but regularly every year becomes a standing water through the flooding of the river, they speak of the Nile as though it were the counterpart of heaven and therefore to be

¹It should be noted that, while Philo accused Egypt of atheism, his ensuing discussion reveals that it was not absolute atheism which he was speaking of, but rather a refusal to honor the God of heaven, deifying earthly elements such as the land, the Nile, and "the things that live on the ground" (*Flight* 32 [5:109]) in place of God. Egypt honored the creation above the Creator (cf. Rom 1:18-25). Perhaps a better term for this would be "practical atheism." It is a religion with its own gods, but their gods are really not gods at all (Acts 19:26). Rom 1:21-32 says that the exchange of the worship of the Creator for that of the creature leads to every form of evil and immorality, and Rom 2:2 concludes, "We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things." Steindorff and Seele, 132-144, discuss the multitude of gods worshiped by the Egyptians, from the "gods of the city" to "a very considerable number of lesser gods, spirits, and demons, who were considered able to be of benefit or injury to men and whose favor it was necessary to court" (135). There were also fairies, local divinities, sacred animals, and nature gods seemingly without number (135-42).

deified, and talk about the land in terms of high reverence.¹

Philo elsewhere drew upon this same story to credit Moses with

branding the Egyptian character as atheistical in its preference for earth above heaven, for the things that live on the ground above those that dwell on high, and the body above the soul.²

These two passages highlight the practical atheism, impiety, and idolatry of Egypt. Many examples of Egypt's worship of the sun, the Nile, various bull-gods, etc., most of whom were honored as givers of life, may be found in the ancient Egyptian inscriptions.³

Philo further described the Egyptians as inhospitable and licentious,⁴ characteristics for which Sodom was judged. And he described Egypt as "rebellious," "when it

¹Philo Moses 2.36 (6:545-547).

²Idem, *Flight* 32 (5:109). The significance of this identification of Egypt for John's heaven/earth dichotomy in the book of Revelation might be noted here.

³See John A. Wilson, trans., "Egyptian Hymns and Prayers," *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3d ed. with supp. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 365-81. A hymn to Osiris, found on the Stele of Amen-em-ha from the eighteenth dynasty, has been translated by M. François Chabas ("Hymn to Osiris," *Records of the Past: Being English Translations of the Assyrian and Egyptian Monuments* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, [1874], 4:97-104. See also John A. Wilson, trans., "Egyptian Myths, Tales, and Mortuary Texts," *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3d ed. with supp. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 3-36, for various Egyptian myths concerning the gods and creation.

⁴Philo Abraham 22.

glorified the mind which usurps the place of God, and bestowed on it the emblems of sovereignty, the throne, the sceptre, the diadem."¹ He even called every mind that sets itself up against God, "King of Egypt."² Thus Philo emphasized in a special way the arrogant claims of Pharaoh to divine prerogatives.

The extrabiblical Egypt tradition which has relevance for John is very similar to the OT tradition. It includes most of the same key features. Egypt's origin is traced to one of the sons of Ham, following the account found in Gen 10. It is noted for its prosperity, due primarily to the waters of the Nile. Instead of ascribing glory to God, however, it worships the creation as a god.

¹Philo *Preliminary Studies* 21 (4:519). This is reminiscent of the boast of Pharaoh in Exod 5:2 and Ezek 29:3, 9, when he implicitly asserted his own claims to deity against the claims of God. It is also reminiscent of the accusation made against the king of Babylon in Isa 14:13-14, as well as of the attitude of the "little horn" of Dan 8:9-12, the "king of the north" of Dan 11:36, and of the beast of Rev 13:1-8. It is the spirit of the Dragon who first made war in heaven (Rev 12:7-9) and of the Great Harlot/City that reigns over the kings of the earth (Rev 17:1-6, 18; 18:7). Steindorff and Seele, 82, describe the apotheosis of Pharaoh: "From time immemorial the Egyptian king had been considered the lord of the world. He was held to be the embodiment of the falcon-god Horus, the youthful sun-god who destroyed his enemies; or he was the son of the sun-god Re, who had placed himself on the throne of Geb, the father of the gods; in this latter form he was likewise the son of the principal god of the imperial age, Amun of Thebes, who had become identified with Re. This father-and-son relationship was not conceived by the priesthood as a mere figure of speech but was interpreted as a definite reality."

²Philo *Confusion* 88.

It is regarded as an arrogant, atheistic,¹ idolatrous, and licentious nation, which would incur the visitation of the wrath of God for its impiety.

Egypt remains a prime example of oppression of others, especially of God's people, with whom it shared a long history. It shares with Sodom the condemnation of its inhospitality toward others.

The Exodus experience and the celebration of the Passover were to continue as a significant part of the historical and spiritual frame of reference of the people of God forever.

Summary

Several points stand out in the combined Egypt traditions in the OT, the NT, and extrabiblical literature.

1. The Egypt tradition, like that of Sodom, goes back to Gen 10 in Jewish literature. There Egypt is shown to belong to a family of nations which were in rebellion against God and at odds with the descendants of Shem.

2. Egypt was a nation of great prosperity, due largely to the waters of the Nile. Without this water supply, Egypt's life and prosperity would have quickly

¹Egypt's "atheism" only becomes explicit in Philo, and even there it is qualified as what I have termed a practical atheism, whereby there is a substitution of earthly gods for the God of heaven. This is generally considered to be not atheism, but some form of paganism, pantheism, polytheism, animism, or idolatry.

evaporated. The drying up of Egypt's waters was one of the judgments threatened against it.

3. Egypt was a neighbor to the southwest of Israel and had a long history of association with Israel in the tradition, with many opportunities to learn of Israel's God. God's people even lived in Egypt for a period. Not all of them were faithful to God, but some were—most notably Joseph, Moses, and Aaron. Egypt did not profit either from the presence of these representatives of God or from God's revelation of Himself.

4. Egypt represented refusal to acknowledge God, or practical atheism; boastful claims of divine prerogatives; persistence in worship of false gods, especially created things; consultation of sorcerers, mediums, and wizards; reliance on its own rich resources; licentiousness; inhospitality; and oppression of God's people.

5. God sent plagues and partial judgments on Egypt to warn it and to encourage it to acknowledge Him and repent of its rebellion. He promised it blessings if it would respond, but final judgment at "the day of the LORD" if it should persist in its evil ways.

6. As with Lot in Sodom, God called His people out of Egypt preparatory to sending judgments upon it for its impiety and recalcitrance. Israel's Exodus from Egypt came to represent, especially in the NT, a type of the freedom

that comes from bondage to sin through faith in the blood of Christ, the Passover Lamb.

7. Not only a drying up of its waters, but a judgment by fire upon Egypt, is spoken of in the context of the "day of the Lord," signifying final judgment.

In short, oppression, defiance of God, and a call to exodus in face of the antagonism of Egypt could be viewed as three key elements of the Egypt tradition.

The Babylon Tradition

Babylon in the OT

As with Sodom and Egypt, the OT Babylon tradition is first located canonically in Gen 10.¹ Babel/Babylon, in the land of Shinar,² is listed as one of the first of the cities of the kingdom of Nimrod, the son of Cush, the

¹Although there is a reference in Gen 2:14 to the Euphrates as one of four rivers flowing out of Eden, there is no mention of Babylon. The lack of any comment or of any clear connection with Babylon makes any possible theological significance rather obscure for the purposes of this study. Traditional Jewish interpretation is no help. Gen R 16.4 identifies the Euphrates with Edom here.

²W. Gunther Plaut says that Shinar is the "biblical name for the area of Babylonia, and especially for Sumer" (W. Gunther Plaut, Bernard J. Bamberger, and William W. Hallo, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* [New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981], 75). Gen R 37.4 says concerning the land of Shinar, "This is Babylonia." See Gen 11:2, 9 and also Dan 1:1-2 for subsequent reaffirmation of Babylon's location in the land of Shinar within the tradition. See also W. S. LaSor, "Shinar," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 4:481; and André Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament*, trans. B. E. Hooke, *Studies in Biblical Archaeology*, no. 8 (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 68.

son of Ham (vs. 10).¹ "He was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD" (vss. 8-9), to the point of becoming proverbial (vs. 9). Keil and Delitzsch point out that the founding of Nimrod's kingdom is grammatically connected with his hunting prowess, suggesting that the hunting involved not only the hunting of animals but the hunting of men in his attempt to establish his kingdom by tyranny and power. If this is the

¹Nimrod is also generally credited with building Nineveh in the land of Assyria (vss. 11-12). Wenham, 223-24, and Hamilton, 340, consider this debatable, but Mic 5:6 calls Assyria "the land of Nimrod." It is interesting that here in Gen 10 is the first use of the phrase "the great city." On the question of associating "the great city" with Nineveh in 10:12, see Keil and Delitzsch, 1:167. While it is difficult to be certain here, Jonah 1:2 and 3:2-3 certainly call Nineveh a "great city." In Gen 10:10-11 there is a clear distinction between Babylon and Asshur/Assyria, though both seem to be connected in their origin (Speiser, 72). There is some overlapping later, however, between Babylon and Assyria, especially in the prophecies of Isaiah, making it difficult to entirely separate Assyria from the Babylon tradition during that period (cf. José F. Bertoluci, "The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil" [Th.D. diss., Andrews University, 1985], 184-91). From the perspective of Israel and Judah, both Assyria and Babylon were from the land north of the Euphrates (on Assyria, see 1 Kgs 14:15; 2 Kgs 23:29; Isa 7:20; 8:7; Jer 2:18; on Babylon, see Jer 46:2, 6, 10) and held a similar political position with respect to Yahweh's people (Isa 8:7-8; Jer 25:9-11; cf. 50:17-18). Herbert, 126, states that Assyria in Isaiah represents any Mesopotamian empire. This is probably overstating the case, but Assyria does sometimes seem to represent the ruler of Babylon, and where it does, it should be included in the Babylon tradition. (William Henry Cobb, "The Ode in Isaiah xiv," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 15 [1896]: 31, states that "Sennacherib, as well as Sargon and Tiglath-Pileser, repeatedly calls himself *šarri Babilii*." Note the way Assyria functions not only in relation to Samaria but also in relation to Jerusalem in Isa 10:5-13, 24-25, and compare it with the way Chaldean Babylon functions in 47:6-11; 48:14; and Jer 25:8-14.

significance of the proverb, then "before the LORD" can only mean "in defiance of Yahweh," as found in the Septuagintal and Targumic traditions.¹ Nimrod's name in Hebrew signifies rebellion, indicating what was surely a notable characteristic of Nimrod in the tradition.²

Gen 11 continues the Babylon tradition with the story of the building of the city and the tower of Babel/Babylon.³ 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 the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves" (11:4). Yahweh saw what they were attempting and thwarted their purpose, confusing their language, and causing them to be scattered "over the face of all the earth," so that "they left off building the city" (vss. 5-8). The city was named Babel/Babylon "because there the

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 1:167; *Targum du Pentateuque: Traduction des deux recensions palestiniennes complètes avec introduction, parallèles, notes et index*, vol. 1: *Genèse*, trans. and ed. Roger Le Déaut, with the collaboration of Jacques Robert, Sources Chrétiennes, no. 245 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978), 1:137. Cf. Josephus *Antiquities* 1.4.2.

²Keil and Delitzsch, 1:165; W. H. Gispen, "Who Was Nimrod?" trans. T. E. N. Ozinga, in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton (N.p.: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1974), 207, 210; L. Hicks, "Nimrod," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 3:551. Philo *Giants* 66 (2:478-79) says that Nimrod's name means "desertion" (αὐτομόλησις).

³Josephus *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.

LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" (vs. 9).¹

Babel/Babylon, very early in the OT record, then, signified rebellion and an affront to Yahweh, an attempt on the part of the people of Shinar, apparently under the leadership of Nimrod, not only to build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens,² and so to make a name for

¹It should be noted that this is the biblical tradition on the derivation of the name. Hamilton, 357, notes that there is no way to explain etymologically the derivation of בָּבֶל from בָּלָל. "Hence this must be a popular nonliteral etymology." He adds, "The oldest attested extrabiblical name for Babylon is *ká-dingir-ki* (usually written *ká-dingir-ra*), 'gate of god.' This name is reflected in later Babylonian *bab-ili(m)*, 'gate of god(s),' a name that may itself be a popular etymology for the name of the city." Cf. Albert T. Clay, *Light on the Old Testament from Babel*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times Co., 1907), 95-96; James G. Macqueen, *Babylon* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 36; Parrot, 69; D. F. Payne and T. G. Pinches, "Babel, Tower of," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 1:382; Donald J. Wiseman, "Babylon," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 1:385.

²Josephus gave Nimrod a motive for building the tower: "He [Nimrod] threatened to have his revenge on God if he wished to inundate the earth again; for he would build a tower higher than the water could reach and avenge the destruction of their forefathers" (*Antiquities* 1.4.2 [4:55]). Robert B. Laurin, "The Tower of Babel Revisited," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in Honor of William Sanford LaSor*, ed. Gary A. Tuttle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978), 142-45, takes issue with this idea. He holds that, rather than human pride and self-sufficiency, worship of the gods was the motivation of the Babel builders. The theological lesson of the story, he says, is that idolatry cannot provide the necessary foundation for a continuing culture. Man must accept the limitation of being a creature in a world where God is sovereign. In idolatry, man functions as sovereign, but

themselves, but also to prevent themselves from being scattered abroad in the earth (11:4), in contravention of Elohim's command to fill the earth (9:1).¹ Yahweh had to intervene in order to prevent them from totally corrupting themselves (11:6-7).

Later in Gen 11, the Babylon tradition recurs in a different form. The family of Abram is declared to be from Ur of the Chaldeans (vss. 27-28).² Since the land of the Chaldeans is always the land of Babylon—Babylonia—in the OT,³ Abram may have been considered to be originally from

left to himself, man inevitably destroys. "Man's independence from the true God is the cause of disunity and division among peoples" (145). Laurin, however, is inconsistent. He cites "the corporate boast of technological power in the Tower of Babel story" as an example of man's transgression of the limits of his creaturehood (143). In reality, both aspects of the story have validity.

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 1:173.

²Wenham, 272, along with other scholars, points out that the epithet "of the Chaldeans" is probably anachronistic in Abram's day, since the Chaldeans (MT: כְּדָרִי; LXX: Καλδαῖοι) are believed to have arrived in Babylonia about 1000 B.C. It should be remembered, however, that we are considering the tradition as it was preserved. Still, it is widely accepted today that Ur was indeed a city in ancient Babylonia (southern Mesopotamia), as Wenham himself admits (ibid.). Cf. Francis R. Steele and William Sanford LaSor, "Ur," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 4:950-51, 954-55. Massinger, 32, calls Ur "the representative of the spirit of Babylon in the Abrahamic era."

³See 2 Chr 36:6, 17; Ezra 5:12; Isa 43:14; 47:1; 48:14, 20; Jer 21:9-10; 22:25; 25:12; 32:3-5, 28; 38:23; 40:9; 51:1, 24, 35; Ezek 12:13; 23:15; Dan 5:30; 7:1; 9:1. Donald J. Wiseman, "Chaldea, Chaldeans, Chaldees," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 1:630-32, repeatedly asserts that "Chaldea" was synonymous with "Babylonia," and "Chaldean"

the land of Babylon.¹ This placement is supported by Josh 24:2-3, which states that Terah, Abraham, and Nahor "lived of old beyond the Euphrates"² and there served other gods until Yahweh took Abraham "from beyond the River" and brought him into the land of Canaan.³

In Gen 11:31 Abram and his family left Ur and moved to Haran, a sister city to Ur,⁴ before being called by Yahweh to continue on to the land of Canaan (12:1-5). What is not made explicit in 11:31 is clearly stated in 15:7: Yahweh claimed responsibility for having brought Abram out

with "Babylonian." A tradition preserved in Gen R 38.13 places Nimrod in Ur with Terah, Abram, and Haran.

¹Cf. Donald J. Wiseman, "Babylonia," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 1:391-93; idem, "Chaldea," 1:630; Steele and LaSor, 4:950-51, 954-55.

²Literally, "beyond the River." As is observed below, the great Euphrates River becomes a significant image in the Babylon tradition. "Beyond the River" is an expression used here to indicate the land of Mesopotamia, the whole southern portion from which Abram came being Babylonia. Cf. C[arl] F[riedrich] Keil and F[rantz] Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, trans. James Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., n.d.; repr., 1960), 228; A. Leo Oppenheim, "Assyria and Babylonia," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 1:263; Wiseman, "Babylonia," 1:391-92.

³Note vss. 14-15, which refer to three places where other gods are served: (1) "in the region beyond the River," (2) "in Egypt," and (3) in the land of the Amorites "in whose land you dwell." Thus the gods of Mesopotamia (Babylonia), Egypt, and Canaan are singled out as foreign gods specifically to be avoided. The fact that these were the three lands in which they or their fathers had lived is explicit in the text and pertinent here.

⁴Maher, 87. Cf. Gen 24:10, 15, 29; 25:20; 27:43; 28:2, 5, 10; 29:4-6; Josephus *Antiquities* 1.6.5.

of Ur of the Chaldeans.¹ Josh 24:2-3, 14-15 implies that Abraham was removed from "the region beyond the River" in order to separate him from the worship of the "other gods" which his family was serving there.

Abram had further contact with Babylon in Gen 14, when he went to rescue Lot from the four kings of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam, and Goiim. Abram and his 318 servants were victorious against the four kings, and El-Elyon—"God Most High"—received the praise (vss. 19-20).

Again, in Gen 15:18, in the covenant Yahweh made with Abram, an allusion to Babylon may be discerned, just as a reference to Egypt was noted there above. To Abram's descendants was promised all the land of Canaan, "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."² Thus, the land promised to Abram and his descendants was portrayed as bounded by the territory of Babylon on its northeastern frontier and by the land of Egypt to the southwest.

¹This is further clarified in Acts 7:2-4; cf. also Neh 9:7. Thus Gen 11:31, in conjunction with 15:7, may represent the first call out of Babylon in the tradition. Swete, 229, mentions this as a type of Rev 18:4.

²Although Sodom is not mentioned in this passage, the list of the Canaanite tribes in vss. 19-21 is strongly reminiscent of the list in 10:15-18. "The territory of the Canaanites" in 10:19, which extended "in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha," would seem to locate Sodom near or along the eastern border of the promised land (cf. Josh 15:5).

This promise apparently became a reality during the reigns of David and Solomon (2 Sam 8:3; 1 Kgs 4:21; 1 Chr 18:3; 2 Chr 9:26).¹ Later, due to the unfaithfulness of Israel and Judah to Yahweh, this land was occupied at different times by Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon (2 Kgs 17:5-7, 23-24; 23:29, 33-35; 24:7).

The OT Babylon tradition picks up again with the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah.² First, the Assyrians, who ruled Babylon during Hezekiah's reign, took Israel into captivity, carrying the Israelites away into various cities of Assyria and filling the cities of Samaria with people from Babylon and other heathen cities (2 Kgs 17:6, 24-25, 30-31; 18:10-12; cf. 1 Kgs 14:15).

¹Briscoe, 146; Brueggemann, 150; Robert Davidson, *Genesis* 12-50, 47; Gibson, 2:56; Kidner, 125; Wenham, 333.

²Secular history reveals that after the death of Hammurabi, Babylon began to go into decline. Hammurabi's dynasty ended when Babylon was sacked by the Hittites in 1595 B.C. (Macqueen, 96-99; Joan Oates, *Babylon, Ancient Peoples and Places*, vol. 94 [London: Thames & Hudson, 1979], 84). The decline of Babylon continued after the Hittite invasion, and later monarchs failed to restore it to its former prosperity (Macqueen, 102; Oates, 84). Under a succession of dynasties ruled by various ethnic groups, Babylon remained in relative eclipse until the time of Hezekiah, when a series of Assyrian kings ruled Babylon (Macqueen, 102-25; Oates, 86-116). Under Sennacherib, Babylon was completely destroyed, but it was rebuilt by his son Esarhaddon (Macqueen, 129-30; Oates, 120). The Neo-Babylonian supremacy began with the accession of the Chaldean Nabopolassar to the throne of Babylon in 626 B.C. (Macqueen, 134; Oates, 126-27) and reached its zenith of power and glory under his son Nebuchadnezzar II. Cf. Oppenheim, 1:268-70.

Later, when the sun reportedly moved backward in response to Hezekiah's prayer for a sign of his promised healing, Merodach-baladan, "king of Babylon"¹ (2 Kgs 20:12; Isa 39:1), sent envoys to Hezekiah "to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land" (2 Chr 32:31), "for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered" (Isa 39:1). "But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud" (2 Chr 32:25). Instead, he showed them his house and all his riches (2 Kgs 20:15; Isa 39:2-4). For this failure (cf. 2 Chr 32:31), Yahweh promised severe judgment upon Hezekiah's house and sons (2 Kgs 20:17-18; Isa 39:6-7):

Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried into Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the LORD. And some of your own sons, who are born to you, shall be taken away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

The Babylon tradition continues with a record of the fulfillment of this prophecy (2 Kgs 24:10-16).²

¹Assyrian records reveal that Merodach-baladan, a Chaldean prince, seized the throne of Babylon in 721 B.C. before Sargon, the Assyrian king, was able to secure it for himself after the death of Tiglath-pileser III. He held the throne until Sargon defeated him in 710 B.C. Again, during the reign of Sennacherib, he ruled Babylon briefly about 703 B.C. It is considered likely that the events of Isa 39 took place around 712/711 B.C., during Merodach-baladan's first period of rule. Cf. George Stephen Goodspeed, *A History of the Babylonians and Assyrians*, Historical Series for Bible Students, vol. 6 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 245-58, 267; Oswalt, 693; Strand, *Brief Introduction*, 200.

²A partial fulfillment is recorded in 2 Chr 33:11—Hezekiah's son Manasseh was taken in chains to

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was chosen as Yahweh's servant to punish Judah for its sins by destroying it and taking its people into captivity (Jer 25:8-9). He made his first campaign against Judah during the reign of Jehoiakim, carrying away the king, some of the royal family and nobility, and some of the temple vessels to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:1; 2 Chr 36:5-7; Dan 1:1-4). Subsequently, during the reign of Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin/Jeconiah, who continued the evil practices of his fathers (2 Kgs 24:9), Nebuchadnezzar again besieged Jerusalem and took the king, his family, and most of the Jewish people to Babylon, along with the treasures of the temple and the palace (2 Kgs 24:10-17; 2 Chr 36:9-10; Jer 24:1). A third and final attack on Jerusalem was made by Nebuchadnezzar after Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon (2 Kgs 24:20; 25:2; 2 Chr 36:13-17; Jer 21:1-10; 27:1-22; 34:1-7; 39:1-2). At that time, the city, the palace, and the temple were completely destroyed and burned with fire, the king's eyes were put out after his sons were slain before him, and he was taken in chains to Babylon, along with most of the remaining people (2 Kgs 25:4-21; 2 Chr 36:17-20; Jer 39:3-10).

When Johanan and the people of Judah rebelled against Yahweh's command for His people to remain in Judah

Babylon—but the prophecy was not fully fulfilled until the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Cf. John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 25 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 66.

and serve the king of Babylon (Jer 42:7-22), and they fled into Egypt (43:5-7), Yahweh promised that He would send His servant Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, against Egypt (43:10-13; 46:13-26) and against the Jews who had moved to Egypt (44:1-30).

Thus, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, became a "sword" in the hand of Yahweh to punish both His rebellious people (Jer 21:7) and that nation (Egypt) which was encouraging them in their rebellion (Ezek 30:25; cf. Jer 37:5-7, 11). However, Babylon, in turn, would receive the same punishment if and when it should become arrogant, perverse, and rebellious against Yahweh, and should deal with His people without mercy (Jer 25:12-14, 26; 27:6-7; 50:3, 9-15, 29; 51:24-26; Isa 13:17-22; 47:1-11).

Daniel and his three friends functioned as faithful representatives of Elohim in Babylon, according to Dan 1-3. Nebuchadnezzar was personally provided with numerous opportunities to observe the faithfulness of these four Hebrew members of his court (1:19-20; 2:25-30, 46-49; 3:12-30; 4:18, 24-27). Yet, though he repeatedly had to admit the superiority of their God (2:47; 3:28-29; 4:18), he lapsed into pride in his own greatness and accomplishments (4:30).¹ Consequently, he was deprived of his kingdom

¹There is a distinction between the boasting of the king of Babylon and that of the king of Egypt. As noted above, the king of Egypt was considered to be a god, and claimed to have the creative powers of a god. The king of Babylon, however, boasted of his greatness, but did not

until he acknowledged "that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever he will" (4:32) and he lifted his eyes to heaven and "blessed the Most High and praised and honored him who lives for ever" (4:34).

Despite this experience, the tradition records no change in Babylon's characteristics. The final act in Babylon's OT historical tradition involved the king of Babylon throwing a lavish feast at which the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem were used to drink wine, and the revelers "praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone" (Dan 5:1-4). That very night the king was slain and the kingdom was taken from the Babylonians and given to the Medes and Persians (vss. 26-28, 30-31).

We know from secular history that Babylon was not physically destroyed at that time.¹ Rather, the Jews

claim to be a god. In Dan 3 he demanded worship not of himself but of the great image which he had set up as a representation that his kingdom would last forever. H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon: A Sketch of the Ancient Civilization of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley* (New York and Toronto: New American Library, Mentor Books, 1968), 343, concludes that "it is wrong to speak of the king in Mesopotamia as divine." "The king was, from the religious point of view, primarily the link between the gods and the people whom they had created to do them service. He represented the people before the gods, and in turn was the pipe-line through which the gods regulated the affairs of the state for the people" (ibid., 345). See also Wiseman, "Babylonia," 401.

¹Joseph Jensen, *Isaiah 1-39, Old Testament Message*, vol. 8 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 143; Gerald A. Larue, *Babylon and the Bible*, Baker Studies in Biblical Archaeology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 74;

continued to live in Babylon, and Daniel continued to serve in the court of Darius the Mede, then of Cyrus the Persian (Dan 6:28). In the first year of Cyrus, a decree was issued permitting the Jews to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem, where they were authorized to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). At that time, approximately 50,000 people returned to Jerusalem (2:64-65; Neh 7:66-67).¹ Later,

Macqueen, 152-3; Oates, 135-37. Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 7.5.7-36 and Herodotus 1.191 both describe how Cyrus avoided a battle with the heavily defended city of Babylon by diverting the river Euphrates in order to dry up its bed so that the army might enter under the river gates while the city was involved in feasting and drinking. The Cyrus inscriptions confirm the fact that Cyrus was able to enter Babylon without any battle or fighting (A. Leo Oppenheim, trans., "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3d ed. with supp. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969], 315-16; A. H. Sayce, trans., "The Inscriptions Relating to the Rise of Cyrus and His Conquest of Babylonia," *Records of the Past: Being English Translations of the Ancient Monuments of Egypt and Western Asia*, n.s., ed. A. H. Sayce [London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, (1889)], 5:162-63, 166). Rather, Cyrus "forbade looting and appointed a Persian governor, leaving undisturbed the religious institutions and civil administration" (Oates, 135). "Trade and commerce continued unimpaired" (*ibid.*, 138; cf. Larue, 74), but "from 539 B.C. onwards, there was a steady decline to final desolation" (Macqueen, 155). By the time of the writing of the book of Revelation near the end of the first century A.D., Babylon was in ruins and was finally abandoned (Larue, 80; Macqueen, 232-33; Oates, 142-43). Strabo notes in *Geography* 16.1.5 (7:201) that, by the time of his writing early in the first century A.D., the royal residence had long since been moved from Babylon to Seleucia, and Babylon "was neglected and thrown into ruins." In fact, he states that "the greater part of Babylon is so deserted that one would not hesitate to say what one of the comic poets said in reference to the Megapolitans in Arcadia: 'The Great City is a great desert'" (*ibid.*).

¹H. L. Ellison, *From Babylon to Bethlehem: The People of God from the Exile to the Messiah* (Atlanta: John

during the reign of Artaxerxes I,¹ perhaps as many as 5000² more Jews returned to Jerusalem with Ezra at the king's urging (Ezra 7:12-13; 8:1-14, 18-20). Still, many Jews elected to remain in Babylon.

While the traditional OT history of Babylon reveals a political fall to the armies of Cyrus in 539 B.C. by his diverting of the waters of the Euphrates,³ the prophecies against Babylon provide a broader perspective on its judgment. Once again, as with Egypt, I have elected, due to

Knox Press, 1979), 12. Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries ([Downer's Grove, IL]: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 65, calls this "a very mixed response, dividing individual clans down the middle."

¹Whether this was Artaxerxes I or II has been debated, but most scholars lean toward Artaxerxes I. Cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 65-66, 162; R. J. Coggins, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (NEB) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 6-8, 43-45; F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 5-9, 14; Siegfried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood, *The Chronology of Ezra 7: A Report of the Historical Research Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald Pub. Assn., 1953), 105-6; H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 16 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), xxxix-xliv. It makes little difference for this study.

²Williamson, 110, suggests that, although only about 1500 men are named, the caravan as a whole, including women and children, may have numbered some 5000 (cf. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 160; Ellison, *Babylon to Bethlehem*, 12). In the twelve families listed, he also sees a representation of ideal Israel undertaking a second Exodus, with its desert journey from the land of captivity back to the land of promise (Williamson, 111). This would highlight another parallel between Egypt and Babylon.

³See p. 151, n. 1.

the volume of material, to take a thematic approach to the prophetic/hortative elements of the tradition. Only the major points are summarized.

1. Babylon is portrayed as "the glory of kingdoms, the splendor 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" (vs. 7).

2. Isa 13-14; 47:6-15; and Jer 50-51¹ provide a fairly thorough catalog of the accusations made against Babylon: (a) she² 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; cf. Hab 1:6, 9); (b) "You said, 'I shall be mistress for ever'"; "You felt secure in your wickedness, you said, 'No one sees me'" (Isa 47:7-8, 10); (c) she was a lover of pleasures, "wanton as a heifer at grass" (Isa 47:8; Jer 50:11); (d) she said, "I will make myself like the Most High"; "I am, and there is no one besides me"; she sinned against Yahweh, strove against Yahweh, and proudly defied Yahweh (Isa 14:13-14; 47:8, 10; Jer 50:14, 24, 29, 32; 51:5, 9, 24; cf. Hab 1:11); (e) she relied on sorceries, enchantments, divination, astrology, and her own wisdom and knowledge for

¹See appendices 1 and 2 for parallels between the latter two passages and Rev 17-19:3.

²As John does in Revelation, most of these prophecies speak of Babylon in the feminine gender.

guidance, and she trafficked with others who did likewise (Isa 47:9-10, 12-13, 15; Jer 50:36; cf. Ezek 21:21); (f) she was a land of images, and her people were mad over idols (50:38; cf. 50:2; 51:47, 52); (g) she desecrated Yahweh's temple (50:28; 51:11, 51). Ezek 23:17 adds to this list the declaration that the Babylonians came to Jerusalem "into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their lust," so that Jerusalem "was polluted by them."

3. In response to these charges, Yahweh declares over and over that He will punish Babylon (Jer 25:12; 50:18, 27, 31; 51:6, 18, 44, 47; cf. Isa 13:11). He will requite her according to her deeds (25:14; 50:15, 29; 51:6, 24, 35, 49, 56). As with Egypt, this judgment 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); (b) a drying up of her waters, making her a heap of ruins, without inhabitant forever, "as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbor cities" (50:38-40; 51:36-37; cf. 50:12-13; Isa 13:19-20; 44:27); and (c) burning her with fire so that she would be a perpetual waste (50:32; 51:25-26, 30, 32, 58).

4. In the context of Babylon's judgment, 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. As with Egypt, so also with Babylon there seem to be two types of judgment alluded to. A temporal

judgment from which Babylon might recover is suggested by the early portions of Jer 50. In vss. 2-3 "Babylon is taken" by a nation from the north; her gods are dismayed and put to shame; her land "is a desolation, and none shall dwell in it; both man and beast shall flee away." Again, in vss. 9-16, "Chaldea shall be plundered" by "a company of great nations, from the north country"; "from there she shall be taken"; her "mother shall be utterly shamed" and disgraced; "she shall be the last of the nations, a wilderness dry and desert"; "she shall not be inhabited"; "every one who passes by Babylon shall be appalled, and hiss because of all her wounds"; "her bulwarks have fallen, her walls are thrown down." Similar descriptions may be found elsewhere as well (e.g., vss. 41-43, 45; 51:1-4, 11-14, 27-33), apparently depicting a military conquest of Babylon which does not necessarily result in Babylon's permanent demise.

6. Besides a temporal, partial judgment against Babylon, there is evidence also for a final, permanent judgment upon Babylon. The best evidence is in Isa 13, which is a Day of Yahweh prophecy (vss. 6, 9).¹ There we

¹Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols., trans. James Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1960), 1:298-302; George Buchanan Gray and Arthur S. Peake, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah*, 2 vols., *International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 1:237-38; Jensen, 141-42; Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 14-18; Oswalt, 305-6; John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah*, 2 vols., *Daily Study Bible*

find typical signs of universal judgment: Yahweh is marshaling His heavenly hosts for battle (vss. 3-5), the whole earth is to be destroyed as a punishment for its evil (vss. 5, 9, 11), the heavenly luminaries are shaken and cease to give light (vss. 10, 13), and there is no recovery from the judgment (vss. 19-20). It is in this context that Babylon is judged in Isa 13.¹ Jer 25 also pictures a judgment which is "against all the inhabitants of the earth" (vss. 29-30). First Yahweh makes "all the kingdoms of the world" drink the cup of the wine of His wrath (vss. 15, 26). "And after them the king of Babylon² shall drink" (vs. 26). Other evidence for the universal nature of this judgment is found in vss. 30-31, 33. Jer 50:25-26 seems to have a similar cosmic perspective in view, although the action is detailed against Babylon only. Certainly the comparison of Babylon with Sodom and Gomorrah in her judgment (50:40; cf. Isa 13:19-20) would suggest a final and permanent judgment, as does also 51:26: "You shall be a perpetual waste" (cf. vs. 57; 25:27).

(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984, 1986), 1:137-38; Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 195-200.

¹See George Eldon Ladd, "Eschatology," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 2:132.

²The athbash Sheshach (~~ששח~~) is used in the MT here, as in 25:26, as a cipher for Babylon, as the LXX rendering (28:41) suggests. See Wiseman, "Babylon," 385.

A number of characteristics distinguish the OT Babylon tradition. As with Sodom and Egypt, it begins in Gen 10. Nimrod, the founder of Babylon, was the grandson of Ham. Babylon, in Gen 11, represented man's independence from Yahweh, its citizens building not only the city but a tower whose top reached into the heavens so that they might make a reputation for themselves. Babylon was closely identified with the river Euphrates, which flowed through the city. Babylon was also a city of great pomp and power.

Abram was called to leave his family in the land of Babylon and to go to a place which Yahweh would show him, in order to found a new nation that would keep covenant with Yahweh and be a blessing to all nations. His descendants did not keep the covenant and kept returning to the worship of the gods of Egypt, Canaan, and Babylon, so Yahweh finally permitted Babylon to conquer them and take them into captivity. There they had opportunity to ponder the reasons for their captivity and to return to faithfulness to Yahweh. Like Joseph and Moses in Egypt, Daniel and his three Hebrew friends were faithful representatives of Yahweh in the king's court. Babylon, however, failed to profit from the many evidences given it of the supremacy of Yahweh. The final epitaph on Babylon is that the vessels of Yahweh's house were desecrated and used to praise the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Babylon was not fully destroyed in 539 B.C. There was merely a change of administration. Yahweh's people were permitted to return to restore and rebuild the city and the temple at Jerusalem. Calls were issued for the Jews to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem, but the response was mixed. Many elected to remain in Babylon.

The OT prophets saw in Babylon a symbol of the evil and arrogant nation that becomes an oppressor of others, especially of Yahweh's people.¹ Babylon worshiped idols and images, used sorcery and divination, and profaned the temple of Yahweh. The prophets also detailed Yahweh's judgments against Babylon. It would be requited according to its deeds. Its "waters" would be dried up, and Yahweh would bring upon Babylon the sword and fire. It would be made desolate forever, and no one would inhabit it any more.

Before final judgment would be meted out on Babylon, however, Yahweh's people would be called out of it, and many would respond to that call.

Babylon in the NT

Outside of the book of Revelation, the NT has little to say about the Babylon tradition, but what it does reveal is significant.

¹See Bertoluci, 294.

The genealogy in Matt 1 makes clear that the Babylonian captivity was a very important point in the history of the Jews, in much the same way as the earlier Exodus from Egypt and the Davidic monarchy (vss. 11-12, 17).¹

In Acts 7:2-36 we discover not only the Egypt tradition, as noted above, but also aspects of the Babylon tradition. Vss. 2-5 describe Abraham's call out of "the land of the Chaldeans"² to a place which God would show him, which he would later receive for an inheritance.

In vss. 42-43 a prophecy of Amos (5:25-27 LXX) to Israel concerning its impending captivity by Assyria because of Israel's worship of Assyrian deities is cited, but it has apparently been modified for a Jewish audience by changing "beyond Damascus" to "beyond Babylon."³

¹Several scholars note that, while the reign of King David marked the high point in Jewish history, the deportation to Babylon marked the low point (W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible, vol. 26 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1971], 5; Fenton, 39; Meier, 4).

²Vs. 2 specifies that this was "when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran." Vs. 4 describes his departure "from the land of the Chaldeans" to Haran before "God removed him from there" also.

³The LXX also alters the translation from the MT so that the Assyrian deity Kaiwan becomes the Babylonian deity Rephan, though both are the same god, Saturn. See F. W. Beare, "Rephan," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 4:36; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1988), 143-46; R. P. C. Hanson, *The Acts*, New Clarendon Bible (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967), 100; J. W. Packer, *Acts of the Apostles*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (NEB) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 58-59; Gary V. Smith, "Sakkuth,"

The only other NT passage outside of Revelation which mentions Babylon is 1 Pet 5:13, in which Peter sent greetings from "she who is at Babylon." This passage has received considerable attention. Most scholars believe that Peter here used "Babylon" as a code name for Rome.¹ If this is so, as it probably is, then we have in the NT, outside of Revelation, an example of the symbolic use of Babylon,² demonstrating that Babylon had already become a code word that was recognized and used by Christians in the first century A.D.

The Babylon tradition in the NT, outside Revelation, is not strongly developed, but enough is said to indicate that Babylon had created for itself a permanent

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 4:283; and Howard F. Vos, "Kaiwan," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 3:2.

¹Claus-Hunno Hunzinger, "Babylon als Deckname für Rom und die Datierung des 1. Petrusbriefes," in *Gottes Wort und Gottes Land*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 66-77; Karl Georg Kuhn, "Βαβυλών," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (1964-70), 1:516-17; Swete, 183; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 310-11; 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, vol. 20 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980), 94; C. P. Thiede, "Babylon, der andere Ort: Anmerkungen zu 1 Petr 5,13 und Apg 12,17," *Biblica* 67 (1986): 532-33, 537; Uhlig, 121.

²Michaels, *1 Peter*, 311, contends that Peter probably did not intend any "sinister associations" by it, though this is the sense in which Jewish apocalyptic literature used it (cf. Sib Or 5.143, 159; 2 Bar 67:7-8).

niche in Jewish history as the place of their former captivity and a symbol for what was considered to be an oppressive nation.

Babylon in the Extrabiblical Literature

Except for the mythical backgrounds to Babylonian prehistory, the Babylon tradition in extrabiblical literature is generally in keeping with the biblical tradition.¹ With few exceptions,² other than the mythical prehistory, the extrabiblical traditions generally support or expand upon the biblical tradition. The strand of tradition which John would accept as valid for explaining the origin of Babylon would be that which follows the OT tradition rather than the Babylonian mythological accounts of its prehistory.³ There is an extrabiblical

¹The same holds true here as for the Egypt tradition (see p. 130, n. 2).

²The Prayer of Nabonidus (4QprNab), for example, seems to suggest that perhaps it was Nabonidus rather than Nebuchadnezzar who should have been featured in Dan 4 (cf. Raymond Hammer, *The Book of Daniel*, Cambridge Bible Commentary [NEB] [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976], 48-49).

³Cf. Morris, 151. For example, as Albert Champdor relates, "In the Akkadian story of the Creation, Babylon was built 'in the beginning of time' by the lesser celestial deities, as a dwelling-place for the great gods. When the work was completed there was great rejoicing, and Marduk, Creator and Lord of Heaven and Earth, addressed the assembled gods: 'This is Babylon, the place that is your home; Make merry in its precincts, occupy its broad (places)'" (*Babylon*, trans. and adapt. Elsa Coult, *Ancient Cities and Temples* [London: Elek Books, 1958; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958], 125; cf. E. A. Speiser, trans., "Akkadian Myths and Epics," *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*

Babylon tradition which begins with Nimrod and the Tower of Babel, as in the OT 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."¹

It was Nimrod who began this desertion. For the law-giver says "he began to be a giant on the earth" (Gen. x. 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 deserter change and alteration of purpose are the first steps.²

Josephus, likewise, credited Nimrod with instigating a rebellion against God at Babylon after the Deluge. He recounted how God repeatedly admonished the dwellers in Shinar to send out colonies for the thorough peopling of the earth:

Relating to the Old Testament, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3d ed. with supp. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 60-61, 68-69). John would have found such an account in conflict with his theology, in which there is only one Lord, one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water (Rev 14:7), and it is not Marduk. The legend of the building of Babylon by Semiramis, as detailed by Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 2.7.2-2.10.6, is not considered to be historical (note the mythology connected with the birth and early years of Semiramis [ibid., 2.4]). It is unlikely that John would have used this legend in place of the OT tradition.

¹Philo *On the Giants* 15 (trans. Colson and Whitaker, LCL, 2:477-79).

²Ibid.

But they, never thinking that they owed their blessings to His benevolence and regarding their own might as the cause of their felicity, refused to obey. Nay, to this disobedience to God's will they even added the suspicion that God was plotting against them in urging them to emigrate, in order that, being divided, they might be more open to attack.

They were incited to this insolent contempt of God by Nebrodes [Nimrod], grandson of Ham the son of Noah, an audacious man of doughty vigor. He persuaded them to attribute their prosperity not to God but to their own valor, and little by little transformed the state of affairs into a tyranny, holding that the only way to detach men from the fear of God was by making them continuously dependent upon his own power. He threatened to have his revenge on God if He wished to inundate the earth again; for he would build a tower higher than the water could reach and avenge the destruction of their forefathers.

The people were eager to follow this advice of Nebrodes, deeming it slavery to submit to God, so they set out to build the tower with indefatigable ardour and no slackening of the task. . . .

. . . The place where they built the tower is now called Babylon from the confusion of that primitive speech once intelligible to all, for the Hebrews call confusion "Babel."¹

As further evidence for the Babylon tradition, Josephus 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 mortals among themselves. Therefore humans gave the city the name Babylon.²

It is significant that this passage from Sib Or 3 goes on to extend the Babylon tradition beyond Babel. First, it recounts Abraham's departure from Ur of the

¹Josephus *Antiquities* 1.4.1-3 (4:55-57).

²Ibid.

Chaldeans (3.218-19), noting that he and the "race of most righteous men" (3.219) which he engendered "are always concerned with good counsel and noble works" (3.220) and do not occupy themselves with portents, augurers, seers, sorcerers, soothsayers, or ventriloquists (3.221-26). "Neither do they practice the astrological predictions of the Chaldeans nor astronomy. For all these things are erroneous" (3.227-28). Rather, when God led "the people of twelve tribes" (3.248) out of Egypt, He gave them His Law from heaven and enjoined them to perform it (3.255-58). "And if anyone should disobey he would pay the penalty by law, whether at human hands or escaping men; he would be utterly destroyed in all justice" (3.258-60).

Yet upon this very people evil would come because of their failure to obey the law of God and because they "worshipped unseemly idols" (3.265, 275-79). "You will be led to the Assyrians¹ and you will see innocent children and wives in slavery to hostile men" (3.268-70). "For seven decades of times all your fruitful earth and the wonders of the Temple will be desolate" (3.280-81). "But a good end and very great glory await you as immortal God decreed for you" (3.282-83). The temple would be built again and would be as it was before (3.290-94).

¹J. J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," 1:368, n. e2, notes that the Assyrians and Babylonians are regarded as equivalent in Sib Or 3. Cf. Sib Or 3.99, 104, 160, 303, 810.

On the other hand, Sib Or 3 continues, God has devised many grievous woes for Babylon, "because it destroyed his great Temple" (3.301-2). The Sibyl warns (3.303-13):

Woe to you, Babylon, and race of Assyrian men. At some time a rushing destruction will come upon the whole land of sinners and a tumult will destroy the entire land of mortals and an affliction of the great God, leader of hymns. For a heavenly eternal destruction will come upon you, Babylon, one day from above, and on the children of wrath. . . . Then you will be as you were before, as if you had not been. Then you will be filled with blood, as you yourself formerly poured out the blood of good men and righteous men, whose blood even now cries out to high heaven.

Interestingly, this passage continues with a similar woe against Egypt and her neighbors, including the "land of Gog and Magog, situated in the midst of Ethiopian rivers" (3.319-20), because they "have utterly destroyed the great house of the Immortal and have chewed it terribly with iron teeth" (3.328-29). This, in turn, is followed by an oracle against Rome: "O luxurious golden offspring of Latium, Rome, virgin, often drunken with your weddings with many suitors, as a slave you will be wed, without decorum" (3.356-58). The imagery frequently bears a remarkable similarity to that found in the book of Revelation (cf. 3.663-93).

Other accounts of the Tower of Babel experience may be found in Jub 10:18-26 and Ps-Philo 6:1-2; 7:1-5, and even on an ancient Chaldean cuneiform tablet.¹ In the

¹W. 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.

former, "all of the land of Shinar is called Babel because there the Lord mixed up all the languages of the sons of men" (vs. 25), though the Tower itself was located "between Asshur and Babylon in the land of Shinar" (vs. 26).

In Pseudo-Philo, Nimrod plays a significant role. The sons of Ham made Nimrod their leader (5:1), and he began to be arrogant before the Lord (4:7). When the people who had settled in a plain in the land of Babylon decided to make bricks and build a tower whose top would reach to heaven, twelve men, including Abram, Nahor, and Lot, refused to help make bricks, even on pain of death. Eventually Abram was thrown into the brick kiln, but came out unscathed. The tower builders, however, were not deterred from their purposes, and set about again to construct the tower, until God put a stop to their plans by confusing their languages and dispersing them over the earth. "And therefore the name of that place was called 'Confusion'"¹ (7:5).

Thus may be seen the persistence of the important role of Gen 10-11 in the Babylon tradition.²

Birch (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, [1874]), 7:129-32.

¹This is a translation of the Latin *Confusio*, thought to be a rendition of an original Greek *Σύγχυσις*, as in the LXX, based on the biblical etymology given in Gen 11:9.

²Even various Babylonian and Greek historians, such as Berossus, Alexander Polyhistor, and Eupolemus repeat the Tower of Babel story. See E. Richmond Hodges, *Cory's Ancient Fragments of the Phoenician, Carthaginian,*

A variation of the Gen 11 account of Abram's departure from Chaldea is related in Jdt 5:6-9 by Achior, the leader of the Ammonites, as he attempted to describe the history of the Jews to Holophernes, Nebuchadnezzar's commander-in-chief:

They are descended from the Chaldaeans; and at one time they settled in Mesopotamia [Haran], because they refused to worship the gods their fathers had worshipped in Chaldaeaa. They abandoned the ways of their ancestors and worshipped the God of Heaven, the god whom they now acknowledged. When the Chaldaeans drove them out from the presence of their gods, they fled to Mesopotamia, where they lived for a long time. Then their god told them to leave their new home and go on to Canaan. They settled there and acquired great wealth in gold, silver, and livestock.

Achior went on to recite the sojourn of the children of Israel in Egypt, their Exodus, and how their prosperity or lack of it was in direct proportion to their faithfulness to God's law (vss. 17-18). He counseled Holophernes that, unless there was evidence that the Jews had sinned against God, it would be unwise to attack them. The response of Holophernes in 6:2-4 may be significant for the Babylon tradition:

What god is there but Nebuchadnezzar? He will exert his power and wipe them off the face of the earth; and their god will not rescue them. . . . They will be completely wiped out. This is the decree of King Nebuchadnezzar, lord of the whole earth. He has spoken; and what he has said will be made good.

Babylonian, Egyptian and Other Authors, new and enl. ed. (London: Reeves & Turner, 1876), 55, 75, 77.

Babylon's arrogance before God is portrayed by the tradition as one of its major faults.¹ Thus, for example, in Sib Or 5.143, 159, where Babylon appears to be used as a code name 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" (5.165-67, 171, 177). It has persecuted the people of God (5.160-61). But above all, it boasts, "I alone am, and no one will ravage me" (5.173). Therefore, God will destroy it so that it "will remain utterly desolate forever" (5.163-64, 174-75). "As a widow you will sit by the banks, and the river Tiber will weep for you, its consort" (5.170).

It seems noteworthy in this passage that the river Tiber plays a significant role in relation to Rome like the Euphrates does in relation to Babylon. The Euphrates was widely recognized as having a primary responsibility for the great power and prosperity of Babylon, a veritable source of life for Babylon.² As for the place of Babylon

¹Cf. Nebuchadnezzar's lengthy panegyric to himself and to the gods of Babylon in J. M. Rodwell, trans., "Inscription of Nebuchadnezzar," *Babylonian and Assyrian Literature: Comprising the Epic of Idzubar, Hymns, Tablets, and Cuneiform Inscriptions*, rev. ed., The World's Great Classics (New York: Colonial Press, 1901), 251-66.

²See *Herodotus* 1:193. Goodspeed, 6, points out that the ancient inhabitants of Babylon called the Euphrates "the life of the land." Cf. W. St. Chad Boscawen, *The First of Empires: "Babylon of the Bible" in the Light of Latest Research* (London: Harper & Bros., 1903), 47-48; E. A. Wallis Budge, *Babylonian Life and History* (New York:

in the world of its day, Herodotus states that the city of Babylon was the strongest and most famous of all the great cities of Assyria.¹ Thus it could function as a symbol for Rome in Sib Or 5, not only in its spiritual and moral characteristics, but also in its physical characteristics.

It appears that there is considerable uniformity in the essentials of the relevant Babylon tradition, whether in the OT, the NT, or the extrabiblical literature. The significant features in the extrabiblical literature include: the building of Babylon and the Tower of Babel by Nimrod as a monument to his greatness and as an attempt to convince the people to join him in his rebellion against God; the prominent role of the river Euphrates in the prosperity and political might of Babylon; the migration of Abraham from Babylon because of its idolatry; Babylon's arrogance, perversity, sorcery, and astrology; its shedding of blood, and its destruction of the temple of God; its

Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.), 3; Oates, 11.

¹Herodotus 1.178. Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel and Bible: Two Lectures on the Significance of Assyriological Research for Religion, Embodying the Most Important Criticisms and the Author's Replies*, trans. Thomas J. McCormack and W. H. Carruth (Chicago: Open Court Pub. Co., 1903), 33, summarizes the importance of Babylon in the world of its day: "Commerce and industry, stock-raising and agriculture flourished here in an eminent degree, while science, geometry, mathematics, and notably astronomy, attained a height of development that has repeatedly evoked the admiration of modern scientists. Certainly not Paris, and at most Rome, can bear comparison with Babylon in the extent of influence which it exercised upon the world for 2000 years."

impending judgment for its sins; and its use as a symbol to represent other nations which behave in similar ways.

Summary

Several key elements of the Babylon tradition in the OT, the NT, and the relevant extrabiblical tradition can be observed.

1. The canonical Babylon tradition goes back to Gen 10-11, with Nimrod, the grandson of Ham, leading the people in a rebellion against Yahweh, including building a city and a tower which stood as symbols of their independence from Yahweh and their resolution to do things on their own terms and so to make a name for themselves. That they were successful in making a name for themselves is evident from the persistence of the Babel/Babylon tradition.

2. Abraham's early life in the land of the Chaldeans, or Babylon, where his family served other gods, and his subsequent call out by Yahweh have also become important elements of the early Babylon tradition.

3. Babylon was a neighbor to the northeast of Israel, and had frequent opportunities for contact with God's people. From the time of Babylon's second era of great ascendancy, beginning during the Assyrian supremacy, until its decline and demise, Babylon had repeated opportunities to learn of the God of heaven from His chosen people and His dealings with them. During this time, God's people

were even located in Babylon for about seventy years. Daniel and his three friends were faithful witnesses for God in the court of the king of Babylon. The prophets called Babylon to account for what it should have learned but did not.¹

4. Babylon was depicted as being a prosperous and powerful kingdom which owed its prosperity in large part to the river Euphrates. Because of its advantages, Babylon became proud and arrogant, perverse, and defiant of God. One of the judgments pronounced against Babylon for its arrogance and sinfulness was the drying up of its waters.

5. Another important part of the Babylon tradition is the way in which the power of Babylon was misused to become an oppressor of God's people and of people everywhere. It also used its power to defile the temple of God and employ its sacred vessels for revelry, self-exaltation, and drunkenness. Babylon's religion was frequently mentioned in the tradition as a factor in its judgment. It was faulted for its idolatry, for its astrology and worship of astral deities, and especially for its use of sorcery and divination. It also used coercion to impose its own religious system on others. Whereas Babylon had received

¹The biblical principle that "on the evidence of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained" (Deut 19:15) is valid here, as elsewhere (cf. Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; Matt 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19; Heb 10:28).

plenty of testimony regarding the God of heaven,¹ it chose to continue to worship gods of its own devising and to practice sorcery.

6. Because of its misuse of the privileges given it by God, the prophets called Babylon to account and promised that God would bring judgment upon it. Babylon fell politically to Cyrus in 539 B.C. after Cyrus diverted the water in the Euphrates so that he could enter the city, but God promised to judge eschatological Babylon not only by drying up its waters and bringing a sword against it, but also by burning it with fire.

7. Some of God's people continued to remain in Babylon, but it was not His will for them to remain there. The moral fall of Babylon was announced by the prophets, and God's people were called upon to leave before final judgment would be brought upon it for its perversity. They were to return to Jerusalem and restore the worship of God.

The most notable elements of the Babylon tradition appear to be its pride, arrogance, and defiance of God due to its wealth, power, pomp, and glory; its desecration of the temple and taking the people of God into captivity; and its attempt to impose its own religious system on others.

Such was the Babylon tradition, and it is evident that it shares a great deal in common with the Sodom and

¹Ps 87:4 leaves both Egypt and Babylon without excuse: "Among those who know me I mention Rahab [Egypt] and Babylon."

Egypt traditions. We turn now to discover what those common elements are that must have had significance for John in Revelation as he portrayed the Great City symbolized by Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon.

Conclusion: A Unified Motif

Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon have quite a number of significant elements in common in their traditions. Among these, at least the following seem to have special importance for the Great City motif in Revelation.

1. All three traditions trace their origin in the OT to Gen 10, where they are identified with the children or grandchildren of Ham. The significance of Ham and his descendants in Gen 10 is seen in the context of 9:18-27, where the sin of Ham and the curse on Canaan are found, along with the strained relationship that would develop between the descendants of Ham and Canaan and those of Shem and Japheth. It is amplified by the activities of Nimrod in connection with the building of Babylon and other cities, as described in 10:8-12, and of the city and tower of Babel/Babylon, as narrated in 11:1-9. This suggests that Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon all began with a spirit of rebellion against God, or at least a spirit of independence from God. The subsequent history of these three cities/nations makes this point abundantly evident.

2. All three of these cities/nations are described as being unusually rich and prosperous, and their

prosperity is expressly attributed in large part to the fact that a major river flowed through each of their territories,¹ providing them with an abundant supply of water.² God would dry up their waters as part of His judgment against them.³

3. Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon were all closely associated with the history of God's chosen people in some special way, not only geographically but historically as well. Most significantly, God had faithful representatives—His witnesses—not merely living as neighbors to these great cities/nations, but even living within their borders for periods of time. They thus had many opportunities to learn of the God of heaven and to honor Him as God, but they refused to do so.

4. Each of the three great cities/nations worshipped false gods, practiced degrading forms of religion, and engaged in activities that were considered an abomination in the sight of God. They also established themselves

¹Clyde E. Harrington and William Sanford LaSor, "Euphrates," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 2:203, point out that the Jordan, Nile, and Euphrates rivers are the three most mentioned rivers in Scripture.

²These rivers were a source of irrigation, transportation, communication, commerce, and defense—essential to the continued prosperity of the city/nation.

³Although there is no prophecy about a drying up of Sodom's waters, as there is for Egypt and Babylon, it is clear in the tradition that Sodom's waters were dried up when God burned the cities of the Jordan valley with fire (Gen 13:10; Deut 29:23; Zeph 2:9; Philo Abraham 27 [6:73]).

as oppressors, the strong taking advantage of the weak, the rich lording it over the poor, etc. They were inhospitable and showed no mercy to those over whom they had control. They were unresponsive to God's efforts to correct them, and they mistreated His representatives. For such practices God promised to bring them to judgment. He did not, however, bring immediate judgment on them, but first provided them with evidences of His mercy and superiority and with opportunities to change their ways.

5. Before judging Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon, God made a call in each case for people to come out of them, to separate themselves from the evil practices of those cities/nations and so be delivered from the judgment He was about to bring upon them.

6. Before final judgment was to be meted out, there were partial judgments administered, which involved a collapse of the political power through agencies such as military conquest, natural catastrophes, or plagues. These partial judgments seem to have functioned as warnings against further arrogance and independence from God. Full and final judgment would come only if these warnings were not heeded.

7. Final judgment would involve complete and permanent destruction. Several processes may be involved, including "sword," "drying up" of the "waters," and, especially, fire from God, which totally consumes and leaves no

prospect for recovery. In the case of Sodom, God provided an example of final and eternal destruction by fire and brimstone. In the case of Egypt and Babylon, final destruction was reserved for "the day of the LORD." The example of Sodom, however, was given as a reminder to all that the judgment upon Egypt and Babylon would be no less severe simply because in mercy it was long delayed.

It is not assumed here that John necessarily recognized this unified motif in all the details catalogued here, but that these three powers were unified by significant threads in the tradition would be evident enough for John to utilize them as ideal prototypes of his Great City. While many other nations such as Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Edom, or Assyria may demonstrate some of the same patterns and receive similar warnings and judgments from God, none share all of the same significant characteristics that Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon do.¹ Apparently it is for this reason that John in the book of Revelation has chosen these three—and only these three—to represent the Great City. By noting the characteristics they have in common, we can return to the book of Revelation with an enriched understanding of why John identifies the Great City in terms of Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon and what implications this has for his theology.

¹See "Limits of the Motif in Revelation" (pp. 257-80).

At the same time, to avoid a reductionistic view of the motif, we ought to take brief note of the key differences that exist between the three traditions. Each of the three seem to have three key features that deserve special attention.

Sodom was best known for its immorality, the finality of its judgment by fire, and its value as an example and warning to those who should come after.

Egypt was best remembered for its oppression of others, its practical atheism and defiance of God, and its role as antagonist in the Exodus.

Babylon was most noted for its pride of wealth, pomp, power, and glory, leading to defiance of God; its destruction and defilement of God's temple and taking of God's people into captivity; and its attempts to impose its own religious system on others.

With these backgrounds in mind, we turn back now to the book of Revelation to see how John utilized these traditions in the development of the Great City motif.

CHAPTER 3

THE SODOM/EGYPT/BABYLON MOTIF IN REVELATION

In chapter 2 the existence of a Great City motif in the book of Revelation was established. It was also noted that John identified the Great City by three—and only three—explicit symbolic names which gave spiritual or figurative significance to the Great City motif because of the semantic history which those three cities/nations came to share. The main task of chapter 2 was to identify the key elements of the Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon traditions that provide the necessary background for understanding why John selected these three cities/nations in particular to represent the Great City in his theology.

The task of this chapter is to return to the book of Revelation and observe how John wove the various elements of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif into his overall work and how an awareness of the backgrounds delineated in chapter 2 provides for a richer understanding of his theology. I take note also of many of the allusions to the OT that relate to the motif and demonstrate John's heavy dependence on OT traditions to inform the reader as to his theology. This dependence provides important guidance in

determining both the limits and the implications of the motif. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the latter two topics. In assessing the limits of the motif, special attention is given to the role of Jerusalem in relation to the Great City in John's Apocalypse.

Elements of the Motif in Revelation

At the end of chapter 2, seven key elements shared by the Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon traditions were listed as being significant for the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif in the book of Revelation. Before entering upon a more thorough study of the way John wove the motif into his overall work, it would be well to note first how each of these seven elements is readily apparent in connection with John's Great City motif in Revelation.

Two Fundamentally Opposed Groups

One of the key elements of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif is the concept of two groups that are fundamentally at odds with one another. This is the setting established early, in Gen 9-11, and it pervades each of the traditions. The people of God were distinguished from those who chose to rebel against God, His laws, and His people. God called for His people to separate themselves from the wicked and to form a community that would represent Him before the world and so be a blessing to all nations.

In the book of Revelation, the visions of John took the reader behind the scenes, where could be observed the struggle of good and evil powers for the control of this earth and the loyalty of its people. God and His hosts were engaged in mortal combat with the hosts of Satan, the destroyer of souls, "the deceiver of the whole world" (12:9).

John set this element of the motif in clear perspective in Rev 12:7-12, undoubtedly one of the most significant passages in the whole book:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

Clearly, for John, then, this war between God and Satan, between good and evil, began in heaven, but was moved to this earth after Satan was thrown out of heaven. That the earth was the place where this conflict continued to be carried out was plainly stated in the next verse (vs. 13): "And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down

to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child."

John's description in these verses was plainly an allusion to the conflict between the serpent and the woman and her seed announced at the entrance of sin into the world (Gen 3:15).¹ John's reference to Satan as "that ancient serpent, . . . the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev 12:9) suggests this. His description of the conflict between the Dragon/Serpent and the Woman and her offspring (vss. 4, 13-17) would seem to confirm it. The Woman's anguish in delivery (vs. 2) is but further evidence of the allusion to Gen 3:15-16.²

As noted in chapter 2, this Woman represented the corporate people of God on earth. Based on John's obvious allusion to Gen 3, she may be understood to represent God's people since the entrance of sin, though her crown of twelve stars suggests that she especially represented Israel as God's corporate people in OT times, and the church founded by the apostles in the Christian era.

¹Cf. Beasley-Murray, 201; Boring, *Revelation*, 152; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 87; Hughes, 138, 143; Jeske, 88; Krodel, 242; Morris, 156; Prigent, *Apocalypse* 12, 143; Swete, 154.

²Sweet, 203, declares that Gen 3:15-20 dominates chap. 12. Paul S. Minear, "Far as the Curse is Found: The Point of Revelation 12:15-16," *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991): 74, concludes that there is weighty evidence to support Sweet's thesis. Cf. Michèle Morgen, "Apocalypse 12, un targum de l'Ancien Testament," *Foi et Vie* 80, no. 6 (1981): 63-74.

Therefore, John seems to have had in view an ongoing earthly conflict between the agents of the Dragon and the people of God. While this conflict pervades the book of Revelation, it is especially illustrated in Rev 11-22 by the motif of the two women and the two cities, as described above at the beginning of chapter 2.¹

Waters Bring Prosperity

Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon were all described as particularly prosperous, due in large part to their location on major rivers which provided an abundant supply of water. Of the three prominent rivers in the OT world—the Jordan, the Nile, and the Euphrates—the Euphrates was considered the greatest. It was often referred to as "the great river," or simply "the River." There was none like it for strategic importance in the crossroads of civilization, and Babylon was the major city which benefited from its waters in terms of developing economic and military prosperity. John, in the Apocalypse, utilized this fact several times in his Great City motif.

The "great river Euphrates" played a role in both the sixth trumpet plague (9:14) and the sixth bowl plague (16:12). In the latter, "its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east." This was

¹See p. 52, n. 1, for a partial list of references to discussions of the opposition of these two women/cities in the book of Revelation.

certainly a reflection of the prophetic tradition regarding Babylon in the OT.¹ John further developed this aspect of the motif in 17:1, where he was shown the Great Harlot, which represented Babylon, "seated upon many waters." It is a virtual certainty that this was an allusion to Jer 51:13, which, as was shown in chapter 2, most likely referred to the Euphrates.²

The waters of the Euphrates, however, like Babylon itself, became a symbol in Revelation, and the symbolism was explained to John by the angel in vs. 15: "The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues."³

Thus, the waters on which Babylon was seated would symbolize the many people and nations of earth which become drunk with the wine of her fornication (vs. 3), providing Babylon with its political and commercial support, much

¹While this may be an allusion to the prophecy of Jer 50:38; 51:36, it may also be an allusion to Isa 44:27, which is in the context of Cyrus' conquering of Babylon and giving the Jewish exiles permission to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (43:14-16; 44:26-45:2). See *Herodotus* 1.191; Sweet, 248. The parallel passages in which the waters of Egypt are dried up (Isa 19:5-7; Zech 10:11) provide a link to the Egypt motif.

²Beasley-Murray, 251; Beckwith, 292; Caird, 213; Charles, 2:262; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 119; Eller, 154; Hughes, 181; Kiddle, 341, 355; Krodel, 292; Morris, 198; Mounce, 308; Sweet, 252; Swete, 213; Wall, 205.

³William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 2 vols., rev. ed., Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 2:136, points out that this symbolism was derived from the OT prophecies.

like the heads of the Beast on which Babylon was seated represented kings (vss. 9-10) who commit fornication with her (17:3; 18:3) and over which she exercises dominion (17:18). The drying up of those waters might symbolize the evaporation of that support, which would spell desolation for Babylon. Thus the sixth bowl plague would introduce the beginning of Babylon's final judgment. Babylon's judgment was to be completed under the seventh bowl plague when she would drain the cup of the fury of God's wrath (16:19).

That Babylon's prosperity was attributed, at least in part, to her location on "many waters" could be seen in John's portrayal of Babylon as a great commercial success in a waterfront location, after the model of Tyre.¹ Her wealth is mentioned explicitly in 18:17, 19. In these verses the merchants, shipmasters, seafaring men, sailors, and all whose trade is on the sea would weep and wail because they would no longer be able to become enriched by trade with her. Her wealth would have been laid waste.

A final allusion to Babylon in relation to waters occurs in 18:21-22, where the symbolic action of the mighty angel casting a millstone, representing Babylon, into the sea reminded the reader of Jer 51:63-64, in which the prophet was instructed to tie a stone on the scroll on which the

¹Appendix 3 notes the parallels between the judgment on Babylon in Rev 18 and the prophecies of judgment on Tyre in Ezek 26-28.

prophecy against Babylon had been written and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, saying, "Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more."

It is no doubt significant also that the contrasted Holy City, the new Jerusalem, is portrayed by John in Rev 22:1-2 as having a river of the water of life "flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city." This is an allusion to Ezek 47:1-12, in which a river of water flowed from the threshold of the temple, bringing life and prosperity wherever it flowed.¹

God's Witnesses in the Great City

The Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon traditions revealed that there was a close historical and geographical relationship between these cities/nations and the people of God. In fact, before God brought judgment upon these nations for their wickedness, He permitted His people to live in them for a time. This provided an opportunity for God's people to function as witnesses for God to these heathen neighbors, and for these nations, in turn, to demonstrate their true character toward these representatives of God. John highlighted this aspect of the motif.

In Rev 11 the reader was first introduced to the contrasting symbolism of the Holy City, which would be

¹Cf. Ps 46:4: "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High." See also Gen 2:10-14.

trampled by the nations (vs. 2), and the Great City (vs. 8), where the Beast that would ascend from the abyss (cf. 17:8) would make war on God's Two Witnesses and kill them (11:7-10). The fact that the Two Witnesses would prophesy clothed in sackcloth during the same time period (vs. 3) that the nations trample the Holy City (vs. 2) seems significant.¹ That their testimony would be borne in the street of the Great City becomes evident when, at the end of that period, the Beast would make war on the Two Witnesses and kill them, and their corpse² would lie exposed in the street of the Great City (vss. 7-8). The people and nations, which in vs. 2 trample the Holy City, now rejoice and throw a party at their death (vs. 10). After three and a half days the Two Witnesses are revived and ascend to heaven in a cloud. Presumably as a result of its treatment of the Two Witnesses, the Great City receives a partial

¹Most scholars agree that the two time periods are the same. See, e.g., Beasley-Murray, 182-83; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 71; Hughes, 123; Kiddle, 189; Krodel, 222.

²Like their mouth (vs. 5) and their testimony (vs. 7), their corpse is spoken of in the singular—twice (vss. 7-8), though it does appear once in the plural (vs. 9). The suggestion seems to be that the Two Witnesses are not to be individually distinguished. They both share the same characteristics, go through the same experiences, have one work, and bear one testimony. There is nothing that differentiates one from the other. John probably has two witnesses because scriptural precedent requires that for testimony to be valid, there must be at least two witnesses who agree (Deut 19:15; 1 Tim 5:19). Cf. Minear, *I Saw*, 101-3; Kenneth A. Strand, "The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3-12," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 (1981): 130-33.

judgment, signified by the fall of a tenth of the city and the death of 7000 people (vs. 13). This judgment would apparently take place under the sixth trumpet plague, which is called the second woe (vs. 14).¹

Witnesses, their testimony, and martyrdom play a major role in the book of Revelation.² Jesus is called the faithful and true witness (1:5; 3:14; 22:16, 20). John himself, who was on Patmos on account of the testimony of Jesus (1:9), was a witness (1:1-2). Antipas, a faithful witness in the city where Satan's throne was, was faithful to death (2:13). The martyrs were slain because of the witness they bore (6:9; 20:4), for which the Great Harlot/City was held accountable (17:6; 18:24), but in so doing

¹Although Rev 10:1-11:13 is a double excursus, or as some have labeled it, an interlude or intermission between the sixth and seventh trumpets, 11:1-13 covers a period of time during which God's people are persecuted and at the end of which the Two Witnesses are killed, resurrected, and received up into heaven, and the Great City is judged. By locating these activities just prior to the announcement of the end of the second woe and the beginning of the third and final woe, John effectively discloses that the judgment of the Great City at the end of the forty-two months/1260 days takes place just prior to the final events pertaining to the close of human history, which he locates under the seventh trumpet. Cf. Dan 7:21-22; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 74; Hughes, 120; Krodell, 209-212; Morris, 133; Mounce, 205; Sweet, 175, 181; Wall, 148-49.

²Cf. Boring, *Revelation*, 144-47; Mitchell Glenn Reddish, "The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1987), 123-235; William H. Shea, "The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21 (1983): 73; Strand, "Two Witnesses," 131-34.

they conquered the Dragon (12:11).¹ The offspring of the Woman would bear testimony to Jesus and so incur the wrath of the Dragon (12:17). John's brethren, the prophets, bore testimony to Jesus and were slain by the Great Harlot/City (19:10; 22:9; 18:24). In each case it may be noted that the witnesses were either persecuted or killed for the testimony they bore.²

Wickedness of the Great City

The semantic history of Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon for John's hearers and readers was replete with a record of pride, arrogance, rebellion, immorality, worship of false gods, sorcery, inhospitality, and oppression of others, with special attention to their treatment of God's chosen people. All of this semantic history was brought to the Great City motif in Revelation, as reflected in John's portrayal of the Great City and its behavior.

¹Strand, "Two Witnesses," 131-33, demonstrates that "the word of their testimony" represents the dual witness of "the word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus Christ." Boring, 146-47, notes that 11:5 (cf. Jer 5:14; Sir 48:1) depicts the word of their witness as fire proceeding from their mouths. "Just as their Lord's 'terrible swift sword' of justice is the sword that proceeds from his mouth, his judging and purifying word (1:16; 2:12; 19:15), so the 'fire' with which his servants 'torment' (11:10) their oppressors is their unbearable word" (147). It is by the word of God and the testimony of Jesus revealed in their words and in their lives that God's witnesses/martyrs conquer the Dragon.

²Boring, *Revelation*, 144, points out that the Greek word for "witnesses" (μάρτυρες) is the same word used for "martyrs." Thus, he argues, the two concepts are inseparable.

In Rev 11 the Great City called Sodom and Egypt was the place where God's Two Witnesses would be not only slain but treated with great indignity. In 14:8; 17:2, 4-5; 18:3; and 19:2, the Great City Babylon was depicted as a harlot who corrupted the kings and people of earth with her fornication and the wine of her impure passion, so that she was called the "mother of harlots and of earth's abominations" (17:5). In 17:6 and 18:24 she was found drunk with the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who had been slain upon the earth.

In Rev 18:2 Babylon was pictured as a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit. In 18:13 she was accused of engaging in the slave trade.¹ In 18:23 she was responsible for deceiving all nations by her sorcery. A fitting summary statement in 18:5 declared that "her sins are heaped high as heaven."

God's People Called Out

As Lot was called out of Sodom, as Israel was called out of Egypt, and as first Abraham and later the Jews were called out of Babylon, so in Rev 18:4 God would call His people out of the Great City Babylon before it is finally judged.² Although it is not explicit, that would

¹Literally, *σωμάτων καὶ ψυχῶν ἀνθρώπων*. See Beasley-Murray, 267; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 128.

²Fiorenza, *Vision*, 100, points out that this call not only applies to an exodus from Babylon, but also invokes the exodus from Egypt motif as well as the exodus

appear to be the clear implication also of the message of the second angel in 14:8. This seems evident not only from the parallel in 18:2-3, but also from the message of the third angel in 14:9-11 and the call for endurance and faithfulness in 14:12.

Warning Judgments on the Great City

The pattern of judgment detected in the Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon traditions revealed that judgment was generally presented as taking place in two stages. There were preliminary warning judgments, which usually took the form of political overthrow, plagues, or natural disasters. These were intended to call attention to the God of heaven and to encourage repentance and reformation. If these did not produce the desired result, full and final judgment would eventually follow.

In the book of Revelation, the trumpet plagues seem to have had the function of warning judgments.¹ In the sixth trumpet plague, the river Euphrates and the Great City would be explicitly involved. The angels who had previously been bound, or prevented from acting, at the Euphrates, representing the political base for the Great

from Sodom. See also Wilcock, 169. It is even possible to see in 11:12-13 a call out of the Great City Sodom and Egypt before it is judged by a great earthquake. Cf. 2:13: "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is."

¹Beasley-Murray, 156; Caird, 112; Hendriksen, 140; Kiddle, 151; Ladd, *Commentary*, 124; Morris, 119; Paulien, 224-25, 228-29; Sweet, 159; Wilcock, 88, 99.

City,¹ were released to kill a third of mankind (9:14-15). Those who would survive, however, would not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshiping demons or idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, or wood (vs. 20),² nor would they repent of their murders, sorceries, immorality, or thefts (vs. 21). As a result of its role in the death and contemptuous treatment of the Two Witnesses, the Great City would be judged with a great earthquake, "and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" (11:13).

Final Judgment on the Great City

Eventually, God must bring final judgment upon the unrepentant Great City. This He would do in a way that would call forth glory to His name (Rev 19:1-3). Fire, frequently accompanied by sulphur/brimstone, was the traditional means designated for executing final judgment, though sword and/or a "drying up" of "waters" may also be involved. The fate of Sodom functioned as the preeminent example of final judgment by fire.

¹Cf. Hans K. LaRondelle, "Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book II: Exegetical and General Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 147.

²Except for iron, which is omitted here, this is the same list of gods given in Dan 5:4, 23 which the Babylonians were praising the night Babylon fell.

In the sixth bowl plague, the water of the great river Euphrates would be dried up in preparation for the coming of the kings from the east (16:12).¹ In the seventh bowl plague there would be a theophanic revelation during which the Great City would be split into three parts,² the cities of the nations would fall, and great

¹There is only one clear example in Scripture of kings coming from the east, and it is instructive. Cyrus and his armies were to come against Babylon from the east (Isa 46:11). The allusion to Isa 44:27-45:1, where the drying up of the waters and rivers is associated with the advance of the armies of Cyrus against Babylon, seems apparent. See LaRondelle, "Sensus Plenior," 19. Cf. J. Massyngberde Ford, "The Structure and Meaning of Revelation 16," *Expository Times* 98 (1986-87): 328; Sweet, 248; Swete, 205. Cyrus was God's "anointed" (45:1), concerning whom He declared, "He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose" (44:28). This included the overthrow of Babylon and the restoration of God's people to Jerusalem. In other words, Rev 16:12 seems to denote a preparation for the fall of Babylon, in which the historical fall to the armies of Cyrus functions as the prototype of Babylon's eschatological fall. While Sib Or 3.652 refers to a king whom God sends from the east to give every land relief from war, J. J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," 354, 356, holds that this referred to a Ptolemaic king. It is highly unlikely that John is referring to this tradition, not only because of the uncertainty that John had this tradition available to him, but especially since his kings are preparing for a major battle with the kings of the whole world (vs. 14) rather than bringing relief from war (Beasley-Murray, 243). Beasley-Murray, 244, indicates that the real object of the kings from the east appears to be the destruction of Babylon. Cf. Sweet, 248; Swete, 205.

²While some may be inclined to speculate on what the three parts represent, most commentators avoid such speculation. A number of commentators, on the other hand, see in this statement a symbolic representation of the completeness of the city's destruction (Ladd, *Commentary*, 218; Morris, 195; Mounce, 304). Herschel Hobbs, *The Cosmic Drama: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971), 155, believes that the number three signifies divine judgment.

Babylon would drain the cup of the fury of God's wrath, a sure indication that that would be the climax and final installment of the outpouring of the wrath of God on the Great City (16:17-21; cf. 15:1).

There are two chapters (17-18) especially dedicated to the judgment on Babylon, detailing the reasons for her judgment and some of the attendant circumstances. This would be Babylon's final judgment. She would be repaid in equivalent proportion to all of her deeds (18:6).¹ She would first suffer plagues (vss. 4, 8; cf. 16:2-21), then she would be burned with fire (18:8-9, 18; cf. 17:16). As a result, she would be laid waste and "shall be found no more" (18:17, 19, 21-23). While the kings, merchants, and sea traders who were made wealthy from their illicit trade with her would weep and mourn over her "in fear of her torment" (vss. 9-10, 15, 19), the great multitude in heaven

¹The apparent tautology between the first clause ("Render to her as she herself has rendered") and the two subsequent clauses ("repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed") of 18:6 has engendered a variety of attempts to explain the seeming violation of the talion principle in the latter phrases. Becker, 273-74, argues that the principle of *noblesse oblige*, as enunciated by Jesus in Luke 12:47, must come into play here, demanding greater punishment based on greater knowledge (cf. Kenneth A. Strand, "Some Modalities of Symbolic Usage in Revelation 18," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 24 [1986]: 40-41). Mounce, 325, follows Beckwith, 715, in arguing that double recompense is merely a conventional expression for full requital. However, Meredith Kline, "Double Trouble," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (1989): 171-79, makes a convincing case for reading "equivalent" in place of "double" in this verse, thus avoiding any tautology and any conflict with the talion principle of justice.

would rejoice at the just judgment of God against the Great Harlot/City (19:1-2), crying, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever" (19:3).

With this quick overview of John's use of the key elements of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif in the book of Revelation, it seems evident that the Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon traditions were intermingled by John in order to give dimension and color to his Great City motif. The key elements shared by the three traditions certainly helped to enrich the motif and to clarify its major characteristics. A deeper and more comprehensive study of the book of Revelation, particularly the second half of the book, reveals the extent to which the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif was infused into John's theology.

The Extent of the Motif in Revelation

We observed above that one of the most significant elements of the motif was the portrayal of two groups in continual conflict, namely, the people of God and their enemies, the heathen nations around them. Though the movement pervades the book of Revelation, John made it explicit in Rev 12 that this conflict did not begin on earth but had a prehistory in heaven, that cosmic forces of good and evil are behind the earthly events in which God's people suffer persecution at the hand of evil powers.¹ He

¹In dealing with the language of prophecy, one is hard put to be fair to the descriptive task in trying to

also made clear that God is in ultimate control; therefore, final victory for those who remain loyal to God is assured. The forces of the Dragon, meanwhile, are permitted to fully demonstrate their true character, so that when God finally brings them to judgment, there will be no contention as to the justice of their sentence (cf. 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 19:1-2).

Once John's readers understood that there are only two sides in the great conflict between God and Satan, between good and evil, and were enabled by John's characterization of the Great City to locate their own situation in that conflict, they would have been better able to understand the experiences they were going through. Rev 12 indicates that John was far more comprehensive in his approach than has often been admitted.¹ The reader who

choose the best tense of the verb to describe what was intended by the original writer. In electing to consider the text from a first-century perspective, it becomes somewhat hazardous to attempt to decide with prophetic material what tense should be used in each case. Therefore, in order to avoid making decisions which may misrepresent the author's intent, the balance of this chapter uses the present tense whenever there is some doubt as to the best tense to use. This should not be interpreted as an attempt to speak directly to the reader of this study, but rather to avoid making unnecessary judgments on the text by attempting to read it as the first readers would have—just as it presents itself to the reader.

¹The results of this study pose a challenge to the preterist or *zeitgeschichtliche* approach to John's theology, for the conflict portrayed by John is not merely between Rome and the first-century Christian church in Asia Minor but between the powers of good and evil (cf. Eph 6:12). He traces the conflict from its inception in heaven through its introduction on earth as recorded in Gen 3; its institutionalization as recorded in Gen 10-11; its development and spread as recorded in the subsequent OT history of

would discover evidences of this great conflict motif throughout the book, seeing through John's prophetic eye the play and counterplay of the ongoing struggle for the souls of men and women, would be amply rewarded with insights into what was behind the daily struggles he or she was facing.

We move now to a study of traces of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif throughout the book of Revelation. The book has been broken into manageable units, with no intent to suggest a structure for the book. The motif becomes most prominent beginning in Rev 11.

Rev 1-3

There is little explicit Sodom/Egypt/Babylon material in Rev 1-3, but the reader can discern traces of the motif within the larger great conflict motif that is represented there by Christ's appeals for faithfulness in the face of persecution, apostasy, idolatry, and immorality, and for repentance in the face of self-sufficiency, carelessness, and indifference, which would lead ultimately to eternal loss. References to evil men, persecution, faithful witnesses, idolatry, immorality, repentance, and the city of God, the new Jerusalem, belong either to the

cities and nations like Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon; the *de facto* victory for God's side won by the blood of the Lamb; the subsequent anger of the Dragon, and his war against the remnant of the seed of the Woman, continuing until its eschatological conclusion at the final judgment.

Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif or to the Jerusalem motif to which it is opposed.

M. D. Goulder has also pointed to Paschal themes in Rev 1-3, suggesting further elements of the Egypt motif.¹

Rev 4-5

In chaps. 4-5 the reader was granted a glimpse into the throne room of the universe, where was seen and heard a rehearsal of the role of the Lamb in the salvation process. There are clear elements of the Egypt motif in the slain Lamb by whose blood people in bondage to sin are ransomed for God, and in making people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation a kingdom and priests to God (5:9; cf. Exod 19:6). The whole focus of the vision was God's initiative in making provision for the salvation of people everywhere by redeeming them from the hand of the enemy through the sacrifice of Christ, the slain Lamb. Based on His death which brought about redemption, the Lamb was declared worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll which was in the hand of the One seated upon the throne (5:9).

Rev 6-7

In the vision of the seven seals, with its excursus in chap. 7, John provided an extension of the vision of Rev

¹M. D. Goulder, "The Apocalypse As an Annual Cycle of Prophecies," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 352-56. Cf. Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," 121-22.

4-5.¹ The Lamb was shown opening one by one the seals on the scroll² which He took from the hand of the One seated on the throne (5:7). The four living creatures which surround the throne command the action under the first four seals.

¹Cf. Fiorenza, *Vision*, 62; Mounce, 151; Jon Paulien, "The Seven Seals," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 200-201, 203, 212; Wall, 109.

²Contra Vanhoye, 462, and Vogelgesang, 25, this scroll is not the scroll of Ezek 2:8-3:3, for Ezekiel's scroll was not sealed but was open and spread out, and while Ezekiel was commanded to eat his scroll, this scroll is not eaten but is unsealed one seal at a time until it can be opened and its contents read and implemented. In John's day, a scroll sealed with seven seals would have been a legal document, either a will or some kind of deed or contract. (See the excellent discussion in Beasley-Murray, 120-23. Cf. Krodel, 160-62; Ladd, *Commentary*, 79-82.) Either way, it is generally conceded to be a book of destiny, a record of God's redemptive purpose for man, including the revelation and implementation of the final drama of earth's history and the title-deed to the inheritance lost by man but repurchased by the blood of the Lamb (Beasley-Murray, 123; Caird, 72-73; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 39-40; Grimsrud, 49; Johnson, 74-75; Krodel, 161-62; Ladd, *Commentary*, 81-82; Mounce, 142; Mulholland, 159-60; Strand, *Interpreting Revelation*, 55). As such, it functions as a symbol of hope for God's people and a portent of doom for the Great City. As each seal is broken, it signals another significant step in the steady progress of history toward the time when the final seal will be broken, the scroll will be opened, and the eschatological deliverance of the righteous and the judgment of the wicked will be effected. (This scenario is based on the view that the scroll is rolled up and sealed on the outside with seven seals, all of which must be broken before the scroll can be unrolled, read, and its contents put into effect. See Fiorenza, *Vision*, 62; Ladd, *Commentary*, 80; contra Morris, 92.)

The four riders on the colored horses in the first four seals would remind the reader of the visions of Zech 1:8-11 and 6:1-8.¹ There, horses with riders or chariots were sent out by God to patrol the earth (1:10-11; 6:7). The report of the riders in the first vision was that "all the earth remains at rest" (1:11). God's response was, "I am very angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little they furthered the disaster" (vs. 15). This was the accusation against Babylon in Isa 47:6. Babylon was the agent of God to punish Judah and Jerusalem, but it overstepped its commission and showed no mercy. God declared His intent to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and His house (Zech 1:16; 2:1-5). This was accompanied by a call to flee from Babylon to Zion (2:6-7), and an announcement that God would once again dwell in the midst of His people in Jerusalem/Zion (2:10-11).

In Zech 5 is found a vision in which God removed iniquity and wickedness from the land of His people to the land of Shinar, or Babylon.²

¹A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 44. Mathews, 249-55, admits a "correspondence" between Rev 6 and Zech 1:8; 6:1-6, but concludes that, except for a probable allusion to Zech 1:8 in Rev 6:4, the borrowing is more conceptual than allusive.

²The use of the term "the land of Shinar" alludes to Babylon's traditional early history as recorded in Gen 10-11 (Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary [Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972], 129;

In Zech 6 the horses pulled chariots, suggesting a military campaign.¹ The idea of a military campaign is reinforced by the explanation of the angel that these horses and chariots represent the four winds of heaven (vs. 5).² David L. Petersen points out that the chariot served in OT prophecy as a symbol of God's martial presence, and that it was specifically associated with the wind in some of these passages.³ It is significant, then, that after

Rex Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, Cambridge Bible Commentary [NEB] [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977], 60; David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984], 261).

¹Peter C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, 2 vols., Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984, 1985), 2:185-86; Petersen, 266.

²Though the RSV does not translate the verse in this way, this is generally acknowledged to be the literal rendition of the Hebrew (Baldwin, 131; Petersen, 269-70; Mason, 60).

³Petersen, 265. Isa 66:15-16 declares: "For behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the stormwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the Lord execute judgment, and by his sword, upon all flesh; and those slain by the Lord shall be many." Jer 4:11-13 also speaks of a hot wind of judgment coming against Jerusalem. Vs. 13 reads, "Behold, he comes up like clouds, his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles—woe to us, for we are ruined!" In 2 Kgs 2:11-12 a chariot and horses of fire, with a whirlwind, function as God's agents of deliverance for Elijah. In 2 Kgs 6:17 horses and chariots of fire represent agents of deliverance to God's people and of judgment and destruction to the enemies of God's people. Cf. also Deut 33:26; Ps 68:17; 104:3-4; Isa 19:1; Hab 3:8. See further Rev 7:1 and Beasley-Murray, 142, on the four winds as agents of judgment. Petersen, 266, concludes his observations on the chariots of Zech 6: "Here the march of Yahweh and his hosts into battle is unmistakable. 'Chariots' can hardly refer to Israel's army at any

the horses and chariots had patrolled the earth, the angel who spoke for God cried out, "Behold, those who go toward the north country¹ have set my Spirit at rest in the north country" (6:8). There is no question but that "the north country" was equated with Babylon, or at least "the daughter of Babylon" (2:6-7).² Thus, the mission of God's war chariot to the north country³ was a mission of divine judgment on Babylon and/or her "daughter."⁴ It should not have been surprising, then, that the result of this action put God's Spirit at rest. Finally Babylon was judged for its wickedness and for its mistreatment of God's people.

Thus, Rev 6:1-8, by its allusion to Zech 1 and 6, may have been understood in the prophetic context of God's promise of judgment against Babylon and the other oppressors of His people, and of the ultimate restoration of Jerusalem as the city of God and His people.⁵ It was a

early stage in its history; it is obviously the divine army here which marches forth to fight for Israel."

¹It was the chariot with the black horses that went to the north country. Mason, 60, sees this as representing "dark judgement for the Babylonians."

²Cf. Jer 1:14; 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 25:9; 46:6, 10, 20, 24; 47:2; 50:3, 9, 41; 51:48; Ezek 23:24; 26:7.

³Baldwin, 140, maintains that "so far as the prophet's message is concerned the only group of importance is that which goes to the north."

⁴Rev 17:5 depicts Babylon as "the mother of harlots." Cf. Ezek 16:44: "Like mother, like daughter."

⁵Paulien, "Seven Seals," 222-23, observes that Rev 6 recalls the covenant curses of Lev 26 and Deut 32 and

message of hope for the people of God. God would remove iniquity from His people and their land, and would call His people out of Babylon. Jerusalem/Zion would be restored, and God would dwell once again in the midst of His people. At that time He would judge Babylon for its iniquity and oppression.

While there is great diversity of opinion on the precise meaning of the four horsemen of Rev 6, we can know from the allusions to Zechariah that John saw God as in control and as bringing good out of evil. What God would permit¹ would not always be pleasant, but, as the message of the fifth seal pointed out, God called for patience as He delayed bringing judgment in order that the conflict might fully play itself out (6:11).

The final events of this earth's history would be played out following the opening of the sixth seal, which would end with "the great day" of the wrath of God and of

their execution in the context of the Babylonian exile. The judgments of these covenant curses were first exercised upon God's people in order to lead them to repentance. "With the Exile, however, God's attention is directed increasingly toward the nations who are afflicting His people. The judgments that had been directed toward them are now turned against their enemies. The great turning point in that process is dramatized in Zechariah (1:8-17; 6:1-8)" (223).

¹The repeated use of the passive expression ἐδόθη "communicates John's theological conviction that these calamities do not happen without the knowledge and authorization of God" (Fiorenza, *Vision*, 63).

the Lamb (6:17).¹ There are several parallels between this passage and the oracle concerning Babylon in Isa 13.² The reference to the failure of the heavenly bodies to shine, while closest in language to Joel 2:10, 31, is paralleled also in Isa 13:10. And "the great day of their wrath has come" was likely drawn from Isa 13:9: "Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy sinners from it." The very next verse speaks of the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars. Vs. 13 ties the two together: "Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of His fierce anger."

Not only this, but there is a clear link in vs. 11 with Rev 6:15-16, which speaks of the great, rich, and powerful men of earth hiding in the caves and rocks of the mountains, calling for these to hide them from the face of the One seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. The link is made through Isa 2:9-12, 17, 19, 21.

¹Fiorenza (ibid., 64-65) says that the sixth seal describes the "Day of the Lord" and rhetorically portrays the judgment and punishment of the rich and powerful. While she argues that the language and imagery are "hyperbolic rather than descriptive or predictive of actual events," she nevertheless admits that "the portents in the heavens are so terrible that they can only be understood in apocalyptic terms to mean the final dissolution of the whole world."

²There are also parallels with Isa 2:10, 19, 21; 34:4; Ezek 32:7-8; Hos 10:8; Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 10, 30-31; Nah 1:6; and Mal 3:2.

Isa 13:11 says, "I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless."

Isa 2:9-12 shows how clearly the two ideas are integrated:

So man is humbled, and men are brought low—forgive them not! Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty. The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high.

These same ideas are repeated in vss. 17, 19, 21.

Vs. 19 reads: "And men shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth." Surely this was in view in Isa 13 as well. Thus Isaiah could declare in 13:6-8:

Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every man's heart will melt, and they will be dismayed. Pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in travail. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame.

It is not difficult to see from these parallels with Isaiah's oracle against Babylon that the Babylon motif played an important role in the sixth seal. The Egypt motif can also be found there, since Ezekiel's lamentation against the king of Egypt also finds similar parallels with Rev 6.¹ Apparently then, John had both the Babylon and Egypt motifs in view in the vision of the seals.

¹See Ezek 32:7-8, 12; cf. 30:2-4.

Rev 7 forms an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals.¹ It focuses on the sealing of the servants of God. An angel bearing the seal of God calls to the four angels who have been given power to harm the earth and sea, commanding them not to begin their work of destruction until the servants of God have been sealed upon their foreheads (vss. 2-3). The imagery comes from Ezek 9:1-6.²

The background to Ezek 9:1-6 is found in chaps. 5-8. God was very angry with His people because they had sinned and rebelled against Him (5:13, 15; 7:3 8). The most offensive of their sins was defiling His sanctuary with various abominations (5:11; 8:5-17). In short, they were worshiping Canaanite, Egyptian, and Babylonian deities³ in the temple of God.

¹A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 51.

²Ibid.; Beasley-Murray, 142-43; Kiddle, 133-35; Mounce, 167. Fiorenza, *Vision*, 66, and Krodel, 182, see also a possible reference to the application of the blood of the Passover lamb at the Exodus from Egypt.

³William Foxwell Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel: The Ayer Lectures of the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, 1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1942), 165, says, "Chapter 8 of Ezekiel is a valuable description of Syro-Mesopotamian syncretism in the priestly and noble circles of Jerusalem." He goes on to describe the various forms of worship represented in Ezek 8 as, respectively, Syro-Assyrian (vss. 3-6), Egyptian (vss. 7-12), and Sumero-Akkadian (vss. 13-14) (165-67). He does not identify the origin of the worship of the sun (vss. 15-16), noting only that "we may have a simple extension of the tendency toward exaggerated cosmic symbolism which we already find in the temple" (167). For other analyses of the origins of the various forms of worship as Canaanite, Egyptian, and Babylonian, see Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (NEB)

God's response to this worship of foreign gods in His house was wrath (8:18; cf. 5:11-17; 6:12-14; 7:3-15). He called for the executioners of the city to draw near, each with his destroying weapon in his hand (9:1). Six men approached the bronze altar with weapons for slaughter in their hands, and a man dressed in linen and having a scribal inkhorn was with them (9:2). God called to the man with the inkhorn and said, "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it" (9:4). To the men with the weapons for slaughter, He commanded (9:5-6),

"Pass through the city after him, and smite; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity; slay old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one upon whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary."

This is the OT parallel to the sealing in Rev 7:3. Those who were marked were those who not only refused to participate in false worship but even grieved over the fact that others were participating in such abominations. So in Rev 7, those who are sealed with God's seal in their foreheads are those who refused to worship the beast and its image or to receive its mark (20:4). Rather, they have come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14); they

(London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 53, 55-56; Craigie, *Ezekiel*, 57, 61-64; Eichrodt, 122-27; Greenberg, 168, 171.

have not defiled themselves with harlots, but are chaste (14:4); they are without guile and blameless (14:5); therefore, they have written in their foreheads the name of God the Father and the name of the Lamb (14:1), which is the seal of their character. In short, it might be said that they endured the persecution of the Great City, avoided the immorality of the Great Harlot, and escaped the corruption of Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon. God has tested them and found them faithful. They have a character like His, represented by their white robes (7:9, 13-14; cf. 19:8) and by the name of God and the Lamb in their foreheads (14:1; cf. 7:3; 9:4). Therefore the promise to them was that God would shelter them with His presence; they would hunger and thirst no more; they would not be smitten with sun or scorching heat; but they would follow the Lamb as He would shepherd them, and He would guide them to springs of living water (7:15-17; cf. 14:4).¹

¹These verses are an obvious allusion not only to the Exodus but to Isa 49:10: "They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them." This is the promise to those who come out of Babylon. Isa 47-48 is a prophecy of doom upon Babylon. Isa 48:20 bids, "Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea . . . ; say, 'The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob.'" The very next verse reminds the reader of the Exodus and forms the setting for 49:10: "They thirsted not when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he cleft the rock and water gushed out." Thus it is clear that the promise in Rev 7:16-17 is to those who have come out of Egypt/Babylon.

Rev 8-9

The seven trumpets, as noted above, represent warning judgments on the earth and on those who do not have the seal of God upon their foreheads (9:4), designed to humble them in repentance so that they would turn from their wickedness and worship the God of heaven. They include woes (8:13; 9:12; 11:14), or plagues (9:18, 20), which show many similarities to the plagues upon Egypt¹ but appear to be broader in scope.² These woes are said to be against "those who dwell on the earth" (8:13).

A study of the various passages in Revelation in which the earth-dwellers are mentioned reveals that, with the possible exception of those in 3:10 and 14:6,³ the

¹Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 58, sees the content of the trumpet plagues as "a free adaptation of the ten plagues against the Egyptians." Cf. Beasley-Murray, 154-55; Eller, 108; Krodel, 192; Sweet, 157. See appendix 4 for a chart of parallels between the plagues upon Egypt and the trumpet and bowl plagues of Revelation.

²A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 58, says, "The plagues in the exodus story were directed against the land crops, animals, and people of Egypt. Here, the entire world is affected in each of its traditional four aspects. . . . The exodus story concerns the experiences of Israel as a people. The Apocalypse focuses on the trials of the faithful, but it has a more universal scope. The sufferings of the followers of Jesus are seen as one symptom of the corruption and alienation of the entire cosmos. The partial destruction of the world in these four trumpets foreshadows the account of total destruction in the last cycle of visions in the Apocalypse."

³Becker, 172, allows only one possible exception—14:6. Cf. Caird, 87-88; Wilcock, 72.

earth-dwellers represent only the impenitent wicked.¹ The implicit conclusion of 9:4 is that the earth-dwellers in 8:13, upon whom the coming woes are about to fall, are those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.² Further, 9:20 implies that they worship demons and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood, and that they practice murder, sorcery, immorality, and theft. These descriptions identify the earth-dwellers on whom these woes would be inflicted as citizens of the Great City which is called Sodom/Egypt/Babylon.

The Babylon motif appears quite clearly in 9:13,³ with the command to release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates. The work of these angels is described in vs. 14. They have been held in readiness for the command to kill a third of mankind. Since the waters upon which the Great Harlot is seated (17:1) represent peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues (17:15), the

¹In 6:10 they are those who have shed the blood of the martyrs. In 11:10 they are tormented by the messages of the Two Witnesses and consequently throw a party when the Two Witnesses are slain by the Beast. In 13:8 they worship the Beast from the sea and do not have their names written in the Lamb's book of life. In 13:14 they are deceived by the Beast from the earth into making an image to the Beast from the sea. In 17:2 they have become drunk with the wine of the Harlot's immorality. In 17:8 they marvel at the scarlet Beast which carries the Harlot, and their names are not written in the book of life.

²Kiddle, 153.

³The Sodom/Egypt motif becomes explicit in 11:8, still within the literary context of the sixth trumpet.

river Euphrates, upon which Babylon was located (Jer 51:13), must represent people from "the four corners of the earth."¹ These earth-dwellers, like the river Euphrates, form the support system for Babylon and its ambitions for world dominance.²

Rev 10-11

Rev 10:1-11:13 is a double excursus between the sixth and seventh trumpets, or the first and second woes. Except as an introduction to chap. 11, Rev 10 has little to do with the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif, but in Rev 11 the Great City comes to the forefront.

Rev 11 begins with a command to John to rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. Vs. 2 counters with instruction not to measure the court, "for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months." Here we have a reference to the Holy City, in contrast to the Great

¹Although several scholars deny that the four angels here are the same as those who stand at the four corners of the earth in 7:1, based largely on the supposed distinction in their location and in their mission (cf. Fiorenza, *Vision*, 72; Krodell, 205; Swete, 121), Kiddle, 161-63, argues strongly for their identity. See also Hughes, 112.

²J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 146, notes that the mention of the river Euphrates may prepare us for the oracle on Babylon in chap. 16, based on the connection made in Jer 51:59-64 between the Euphrates and the fall of Babylon (cf. Rev 18:21).

City in vs. 8. We need to know what is meant by the Holy City in this verse. Two important points emerge.

First, the symbolic nature of the Holy City becomes evident,¹ since the future time element would make little sense if the reference was to literal Jerusalem, and the trampling by the nations would make no sense if it referred to the new Jerusalem.² That the Holy City is a reference to Jerusalem in this passage is clear from the references to the temple, altar, worshipers, and court, but it is neither historical Jerusalem nor the new Jerusalem.³ It is figurative, prototypical Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the assembly of the people of God, the place where God's name is, the locus of the true worship of God (Ezek 48:8-35). It is trampled into the dust for a time by the impious nations, the citizens of the Great City (cf. vss. 9-10), but that time has an end. The next time John pictures the Holy City is in 21:2,⁴ where it is "the new Jerusalem,

¹Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," 110-11, holds that "not a literal 'court' is in view in the earthly setting of Revelation 11:2, but a 'trampling' or persecution of the earthly/spiritual 'holy city,' the saints, by the 'Gentiles,' the spiritual enemies of God, for 42 prophetic months."

²Besides, the new Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb, does not become a feature until after the parousia, when the marriage of the Lamb takes place.

³Fiorenza, *Vision*, 77.

⁴Not counting 20:9, which describes "the camp of the saints and the beloved city" as surrounded by the nations of earth at the end of the thousand years.

coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Jerusalem has been renewed, restored, redeemed, and glorified. Once again it has become the dwelling place of God with men (21:3).

The situation described in Rev 11:2 was similar to that portrayed in Isa 64:10: "Thy holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation." The prophet's response was to ask Yahweh, "Wilt thou restrain thyself at these things, O LORD? Wilt thou keep silent, and afflict us sorely?" (vs. 12). Yahweh's response to the destruction of His Holy City is given in Isa 52:1-2:

Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake yourself from the dust, arise, O captive Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

It is helpful to note several points in this passage:

1. Jerusalem was portrayed as a young woman with beautiful garments (cf. Rev 12:1; 19:8; 21:2).
2. Jerusalem was called "Zion," "the holy city."
3. The passage stated that into Jerusalem would no more come the uncircumcised and the unclean. This was not true of literal Jerusalem, but would be true of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:8, 27; 22:3, 15), of which, in the

theology of the OT prophets, historical Jerusalem became idealized into the prototype, often referred to as Zion.¹

4. Jerusalem had been in captivity and was called to rise and shake off the dust. This may have been the dust of affliction and disgrace (cf. Ps 44:24-25; Isa 47:1), the dust of mourning her captive condition (cf. Lam 2:10; Ezek 27:30), or the dust into which she had been cast and trampled (Ps 7:5; Isa 25:12; 26:5-6). The reference to "you waste places of Jerusalem" a few verses later (vs. 9) suggests that the latter may have been intended (cf. 51:3).

Since John made use of all of these concepts at some point, and at least two, if not three, of them in 11:2, it seems reasonable to conclude that John may have had this passage in mind as he wrote. As Isa 52 was part of God's promise to restore Judah and Jerusalem following her captivity in Babylon, John probably had the Babylon tradition in mind as he composed Rev 11:1-2.

The second point that emerges from 11:2 is that there was to be a time interval during which the nations would trample the Holy City, while the sanctuary would remain untrampled. This period of forty-two months is widely recognized as being the same period of time during

¹LaRondelle, "Jerusalem and Babylon," 8. Cf. Beckwith, 647; Dumbrell, 2, 19-20; Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series, no. 41 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1987), 19, 23, 146-49.

which the people of God are persecuted in Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:6, 14; and 13:5.¹ The "nations" who trample the Holy City in 11:2 are apparently the "peoples and tribes and tongues and nations" of vs. 9, namely, "those who dwell on the earth" (vs. 10), the earthly antagonists to the Two Witnesses, the citizens of the Great City.² Since the Two Witnesses prophesy clothed in sackcloth for the same time period (vs. 3), there must be a direct correlation between the trampling of the Holy City and the fact that the Two Witnesses are clothed in sackcloth.³

¹Charles Homer Giblin, "Revelation 11.1-13: Its Form, Function, and Contextual Integration," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 438. Cf. Beasley-Murray, 182-83; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 70-71; Joseph S. Considine, "The Two Witnesses: Apoc. 11:3-13," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 8 (1946): 386; André Feuillet, "Essai d'interpretation du chapitre xii de l'Apocalypse," *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957-58): 188; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 77, 84; Donatus Haugg, *Die Zwei Zeugen: Eine exegetische Studie über Apok 11, 1-13*, *Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen*, vol. 17 (Munich: Verlag der aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936), 12-13; Hughes, 122; Krodell, 220-21; William H. Shea, "Time Prophecies of Daniel 12 and Revelation 12-13," in *Symposium on Revelation-Book 1: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 329-30; Swete, 133-34.

²In 17:5 we note that the Great Harlot exercises control over these peoples, nations, multitudes, and tongues. They have become drunk with the wine of her impure passion (17:2 18:3), and they do her bidding.

³Sackcloth was worn as a symbol of self-denial and affliction in order to represent humility or disgrace (1 Kgs 20:31-33; Ps 69:10-11; Isa 58:5); repentance (Jonah 3:5-10; Luke 10:13); or deep distress, grief, and mourning (Isa 37:1-3; Lam 2:10-11). It was a public statement as to the seriousness of a situation (cf. 2 Kgs 6:30-31).

Since 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; and 13:5 all portray a persecution of God's people during a period of 1260 days/ forty-two months/three and a half times (years), it is only reasonable to see them as describing the same period of time and the same activity, as most commentators agree.¹ This suggests that there is a common denominator behind all of the persecuting activity. Rev 12 suggests that the Dragon, "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan," is the common denominator, a perpetual enemy of God and His people. Rev 13:2, 4 confirms that the Dragon is behind the persecuting activity of the Beast from the sea. If the Beast from the abyss in 11:7 and 17:8 can be equated with the Dragon, as suggested by a comparison of 17:8, 11-14 with 9:1-2, 11; 12:3-4, 9; and 20:1-3, 7-10,² then

¹See, e.g., A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 70-71; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 84; Hughes, 122, 141; Ladd, *Commentary*, 153, 174; L. L. Thompson, 42.

²There are quite a number of parallels between the essential features of the Dragon and those of the Beast of Rev 11:7 and 17:3, 7-8, 11-14. (1) They both are reddish in color (12:3; 17:3). (2) They both have seven heads and ten horns (12:3; 17:3, 7). (3) Both come out of the abyss and go into perdition/destruction, which is the lake of fire (17:8, 11; 20:2-3, 7, 10; cf. 2 Pet 3:7; Jude 6). (4) Both wage war against God and His people (11:7; 12:7, 13, 17; 17:14; 20:7-9). Of these, the most significant is the fact that they are both found in the abyss. Rev 9 proves quite significant in this regard (A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 72). In 9:1-4, a star fallen from heaven to earth is given the key to the abyss, and he opens it to release smoke from which go forth agents of destruction whose king is the angel of the abyss, named Abaddon or Apollyon ("destroyer"). Given the interpretive clue in 1:20 that stars represent angels, the star fallen from heaven in 9:1 would be a fallen angel. It would also suggest that the third of the stars of heaven which the Dragon swept with his tail

the Dragon is also clearly behind the persecuting activity of the "nations" or earth-dwellers in 11:2-3, 7-10.¹

Also, the persecuting Harlot/City of 17:6 and 18:24 is

and cast to earth in 12:4 represents the angels who were cast to earth with the Dragon in 12:9. It further sheds light on John's interpretation of the taunt against the king of Babylon in Isa 14:12-15: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! . . . You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit [Abyss]." Cf. also Ezek 28:14-17. The "angel of the bottomless pit" must be the "star fallen from heaven to earth," who is given the key to the abyss in 9:1. He must be the Dragon of 12:9, who was cast from heaven to earth along with his companions in rebellion. It is worth noting in this regard that the Beast who ascends from the abyss and goes into perdition in 17:8 is also a king, for in 17:11 he functions as an eighth king for a short period at the end of history when the ten horns/kings submit their power and authority to him in order to make a unified attack on the Lamb, who conquers them. Furthermore, the Beast from the abyss is "full of blasphemous names." We noted in Isa 14:12 that he takes the name "Day Star, son of Dawn." But in Rev 22:16, Jesus claims to be the "bright morning star." At the end of 17:8 the Beast from the abyss causes the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life to marvel because they observe that it "was and is not and is to come." In 1:4 God is described as the one "who is and who was and who is to come." Apparently the one who aspired to make himself "like the Most High" (Isa 14:14) is presented in Revelation as the counterfeit of God and the Lamb. All this suggests that there is only one entity in Revelation which qualifies as the scarlet Beast in Rev 17 which comes from the abyss and goes into perdition, and that is the "star fallen from heaven to earth" (9:1), the "angel of the bottomless pit" (9:11), the great red Dragon who, with his angels, was cast from heaven to earth (12:3-4, 7-9), the Dragon who will be shut up in the abyss for a thousand years before being released to lead the nations in a final assault against God and his people, only to be cast at last into the lake of fire and brimstone (20:2-3, 7-10).

¹Martin Hopkins, "History in the Apocalypse," *Bible Today*, no. 20 (1965): 1343, says that the Beast of 11:7 is Satan.

portrayed as being carried by the Beast from the abyss (17:3, 7-8).

While the Dragon, however, is a cosmic figure who is ultimately responsible for instigating the persecution of God's people, John also designated earthly entities as being directly responsible for that persecution. Those entities are the Beasts from the sea and earth (13:7, 15), and the Great Harlot/City (17:6; 18:24). By virtue of the fact that she exercises an evil control over kings (17:2, 9-10, 18; 18:3, 9-10), the rich and the powerful (18:3, 11-19, 23), and the people of the nations (17:1-2, 15; 18:3), the Great Harlot/City is held responsible for all "the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth" (18:24).

The Great City, then, represented the earthly counterpart of the Dragon, controlling kings, nations, institutions, the rich and powerful, and even common people who have not fully committed themselves to a firm loyalty to God. The latter groups become, in turn, the earthly agents of the Dragon who oppose God and persecute His people.¹ Thus the nations in 11:2 may properly be viewed as

¹This explains the close relationship that exists between the Beast from the abyss and the Great Harlot in chap. 17, the Dragon and the Beast from the sea in chap. 13, and the Beast from the abyss, the Great City, and the nations in chap. 11. It also helps to explain the role of the heads and horns of the Beast from the abyss, which are kings (17:9-10, 12), as well as those of the Dragon of chap. 12 and of the Beast from the sea of chap. 13.

operating under the influence of the Dragon/Beast from the abyss, as well as that of the Great City, of which they are citizens.

Rev 11:3 introduces "my two witnesses." Since the speaker was apparently the same as the one whose voice from heaven spoke to John in 10:4, 8, it would appear that it was a divine Person.¹ The Two Witnesses were God's witnesses, or, in the terminology of the book, prophets (11:3, 10), those who bear the testimony of Jesus (19:10; cf. 22:9). The fact that they were identified as "the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth" (vs. 4) requires that they be considered in the light of Zech 4, in which Zechariah saw a seven-branched lampstand flanked by two olive trees, and was told, "These are the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (vs. 14). Though there are slight differences in detail in the two accounts, it is generally acknowledged that John was making allusion to Zechariah's vision.² Thus the reader would have profited from seeing Rev 11 in that light.

¹Krodel, 222, maintains that the speaker in these verses is Christ. This certainly fits John's pattern, since witnesses and testimony normally are associated with Jesus in the book of Revelation.

²There is a scholarly consensus on this. See, e.g., A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 71; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 78; Hughes, 123; Swete, 135; Wall, 144.

The background to the vision in Zech 4 is significant. Zechariah was writing at a time when the Jews had been freed from Babylonian captivity and had been given authority, even assistance, to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, as well as the city itself. Thus Yahweh said, according to 1:16, "I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; my house shall be built in it, says the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem." In 2:7 those who still remained in Babylon were called out. Yahweh promised to plunder Babylon, restore Jerusalem, and dwell in Zion in the midst of His people (2:9-12).

In chap. 3 Satan stood up to oppose the high priest, Joshua, but Yahweh rebuked Satan and confirmed Joshua's status by having him clothed with clean, new high-priestly garments. In chap. 4 God showed His solidarity with Zerubbabel, the appointed civil leader of Judah and Jerusalem. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you" (vs. 9).

This context for John's allusive background may be significant in placing the vision of the Two Witnesses within the Babylon motif, suggesting an association between

coming out of Babylon and the restoration of true worship centered in the temple of God.¹

Other symbolism connected with the Two Witnesses was drawn from a broad prophetic background. Besides the allusions to Zech 4, there was a clear allusion also to Jer 5:14. Many scholars have identified the fire proceeding from the mouth² of the Two Witnesses as an allusion to Elijah calling down fire on his enemies in 2 Kgs 1:10, 12, but the imagery more likely came from Jer 5:14: "I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them."³ This suggests that the

¹In Rev 11, this would be the temple of God in heaven, which is shown open in 11:19. See Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," 113-14, 117-18, 124.

²The word for mouth is singular in Greek, an evidence of the unity of the symbol. Cf. p. 187, n. 2.

³Boring, *Revelation*, 146; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1943), 337; Strand, "Two Witnesses," 130. Friedrich D sterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, trans. and ed. Henry E. Jacobs, Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 11 (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), 315-16, admits that Jer 5:14 (and Sir 48:1) equates the words of God in the prophet's mouth with a devouring fire, but he denies that it has such a meaning in Rev 11:5, insisting that the fire in Rev 11 refers to plagues. However, he fails to note that in Revelation John uses the imagery of a sword issuing from the mouth of Jesus to symbolize the sword of judgment (1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21), and in the context of such judgment Jesus is called The Word of God (19:13; cf. Heb 4:12). Clearly, whether represented by sword or fire, the word of God represents, for John, the testimony of Jesus which judges the world. (The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, according to 19:10.) Cf. Boring, *Revelation*, 146-47; Caird, 135-36; Kiddle, 195-96; Krodel, 222; Lenski, 339-340; Wall, 147; Wilcock, 104-5.

prophecy or testimony that the Two Witnesses bear is the word of God.¹

At the same time, there are apparent allusions to other prophets, like Elijah ("They have power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying" [vs. 6a; cf. 1 Kgs 17:1; Jas 5:17]), or like Moses and Aaron, whose experience not only in the first plague ("and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood" [vs. 6b; cf. Exod 7:19-21]) but in all the plagues on Egypt ("and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire" [vs. 6c]) seems to be alluded to. The allusion could also have been to the two heavenly messengers to Sodom, who brought fire and brimstone on the cities of the valley after the people of Sodom mistreated them and rejected their appeals (Gen 19:13, 24).

In this light the reference to Sodom and Egypt in Rev 11:8 would fit in with the literary context which immediately precedes it, and the Sodom/Egypt motif becomes more broadly evident. At least, one should admit that the

¹John always equates or associates the word of God with the testimony of Jesus (1:2, 9; 20:4). Strand, "Two Witnesses," 131-35, points out that "the word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus" are a part of John's two-witness theology throughout the book (1:2, 9; 20:4; cf. 6:9; 12:17; 14:12). He suggests that "this 'two-witness' theology is prominent and receives thorough-going emphasis in the Gospel of John, a work with which the Revelation shows other close thematic affinities" (132). He concludes "that the primary point of reference or application of the two-witnesses symbolism in Rev 11:3-12 is indeed this twofold testimony called 'the word of God' and 'the testimony of Jesus'" (134-35).

backgrounds for the Two Witnesses permit a broader application than merely two particular historical persons.¹

The focus should remain on the function and activities of the Two Witnesses, not on a historical identification. In this regard, Strand's observation that the Two Witnesses represent primarily "the word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus"² within the context of the theology of Revelation should be borne in mind.

In 11:7, when the Two Witnesses have finished their testimony, the Beast that ascends from the abyss makes war on them, conquers them, and kills them.³ This was a clear reference to the Beast of 17:8, on whose seven heads, or mountains, the Great Harlot sits (17:9).⁴ These seven

¹Ibid., 131; idem, "The Two Olive Trees of Zechariah 4 and Revelation 11," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 20 (1982): 259; Beasley-Murray, 185; Farrer, *Revelation*, 132-34; Hoeksema, 381-83; Minear, *I Saw*, 103. Fiorenza, *Vision*, 77-78, states: "By imaging the two witnesses as olive trees and lamp stands, as well as by interpreting the great city 'spiritually,' John communicates that he is intentionally using symbolic-theological language. Attempting to identify the two witnesses as historical personages, or to interpret every feature of the vision in a historical-allegorical way, misses John's hermeneutical intention and brings unsatisfactory results."

²Strand, "Two Witnesses," 131-35.

³Note that the activity of the Beast from the abyss against the Two Witnesses in 11:7, namely, *ποιήσει μετ' αὐτῶν πόλεμον καὶ νικήσει αὐτούς*, is also the work of the Beast from the sea in 13:7: *ποιήσει πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ νικήσει αὐτούς*. Furthermore, the Beast from the abyss and his Ten Horns attempt the same against the Lamb in 17:14 (*οὗτοι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολεμήσουσιν*), but the Lamb will not be conquered (*καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον νικήσει αὐτούς*).

⁴The Greek is quite clear: *αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλῶν ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσίν*.

heads were declared to be seven kings (17:10) over which the Great Harlot/City exercises dominion or royal authority (17:18). Thus there is a close connection between the Great Harlot, the Beast that ascends from the abyss, and the kings or kingdoms¹ represented by its heads. This connection is seen in 11:8, for when the Beast kills the Two Witnesses, their dead bodies lie in the street of the Great City. This Great City, which was elsewhere called Babylon, was here spiritually called Sodom and Egypt.² It

ὄρου ἢ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ' αὐτῶν. The woman is seated upon seven heads/mountains. To argue that she is seated on mountains but not on heads is a perversion of the angel's explanation. The seven heads **are** seven mountains. "They are also seven kings" (vs. 10). Heads = mountains = kings/kingdoms. On the latter, cf. Kenneth A. Strand, "The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?" in *Symposium on Revelation - Book 2: Exegetical and General Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 186-87.

¹See *ibid.*

²As noted in chapter 2 above, it is not the purpose of this study to identify where the Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon traditions diverge or differ, but to observe the features they shared, which gave John a reason to characterize the Great City by these three names. Neither is it my purpose to attempt to identify any historical applications John may have had in mind, as could be inferred by the change in terminology from Sodom and Egypt in 11:8 to Babylon elsewhere. This study has conscientiously avoided attempting to make any historical interpretations of John's prophecies, as that would detract from the purpose of this study. However, at the end of chapter 2, certain key characteristics of the three traditions were listed. Those who would like to note any possible differences in application between the Great City called Sodom and Egypt and the Great City called Babylon would want to explore those key characteristics. The "spiritual" characteristics most unique to Sodom and Egypt might be, respectively, immorality and practical atheism. Those of Babylon might be defilement of

was involved in not only the martyrdom of the Two Witnesses but also that of their Lord (11:8) and of the prophets, saints, and all who had been slain on the earth (17:6; 18:24). For its role in this bloodshed, the Great City and its citizens would be subsequently judged (11:13; 16:19; 19:2).

Rev 12

Much of Rev 12 has already been discussed above. However, there are a few further points that deserve attention. First, we should consider the symbolism of the Dragon.

Although the dragon (δράκων) was a symbol widely used in ancient mythology, John's imagery must be understood from its use in Revelation.¹ John was very clear on

the temple of God and religious coercion. However, I wish to insist on one Great City in Revelation, though it may have various applications in different eras. A contextual clue to why Sodom and Egypt might be used in this passage may be found in the representation of the Two Witnesses as standing before the Lord of the earth, with power over the heaven, the waters, the earth, and fire, "to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire" (vss. 5-6). This could be an analogy to the two angels who went to bear witness in Sodom and to Moses and Aaron who bore witness in the court of Pharaoh. There is no such analogy in the Babylon tradition. However, this does not explain the use of πνευματικῶς to describe the reason for calling the Great City Sodom and Egypt.

¹Gerhard F. Hasel, "Dragon," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 1:990-91; Morris, 151; Wall, 160. Fiorenza, *Vision*, 31, notes, "Literary and historical analyses can deepen the book's persuasive mythological pathos but cannot replace it. An analysis of Revelation's sources and traditions helps to elucidate the possible meanings of

what the Dragon represented. It was "that ancient serpent [ὄφις], who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (12:9; 20:2-3). As has been pointed out above, this is widely acknowledged to represent an allusion to Gen 3. John used the symbol of the Dragon in line with OT tradition.¹

Δράκων had a range of significance in the LXX, where it almost always translated תנינ and always translated תנינל. It could signify a serpent (Exod 7:9-10, 12; Deut 32:33; Ps 90 [91]:13), a desert creature like a jackal (Jer 9:11 [10]; Lam 4:3; Mic 1:8), a marine animal (Ps 148:7; Job 7:12; cf. Gen 1:21 Sym, Aq, Th), or a crocodile (Ezek 29:3; 32:2; Job 40:25-41:26 [41:1-34]). In Isa 27:1 Leviathan (LXX: δράκων) was twice called a serpent (LXX: ὄφις), setting a clear precedent for John in Rev 12.² Isaiah

Revelation's images, but such an analysis does not explain them. Their meaning cannot be derived from the tradition but only from their present position within the overall symbolic and rhetorical narrative of the book."

¹Mulholland, 218; Prigent, *Apocalypse 12*, 144. It seems significant that John uses OT rather than mythological categories and names for the Dragon. ὄφις is the term used for the serpent in Gen 3 (LXX). Διάβολος is the name used throughout the LXX to translate תנינ (Satan), the attacker, accuser, and adversary of God's people (cf. vss. 10, 13, 17). Σατανάς is an actual transliteration (with the definite affix) of the OT תנינ. "The deceiver of the whole world" is clearly a category derived from the OT, not from mythology. Cf. Krodel, 242; Morris, 156-57.

²Farrer, *Revelation*, 143, points out that, in addition to equating the dragon with the serpent, Isa 27:1 "makes the Lord's smiting of Leviathan a sequel to his people's painful travail in bringing forth a resurrection (xxvi. 16-19) and to going into hiding for a moment until

declared that "in that day" God would punish Leviathan and would slay the dragon that is in the sea. "Leviathan" and "the dragon" were used as metaphors for the oppressors of God's people, which, according to the context of 27:1, Isaiah identified as Egypt and Assyria (vss. 12-13). In Isa 51:9 Rahab (Egypt)¹ was the dragon.

In Ezek 32:2 Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was compared to a dragon in the sea. In 29:3 Pharaoh was called "the great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams." In Jer 51:34 the king of Babylon had swallowed Zion like a dragon. Ps 74:13-14, in the context of "working salvation in the midst of the earth" (vs. 12), declared that God divided the seas by His might, broke the heads of the dragons on the waters, and crushed the heads of Leviathan, giving him as food for the people² of the wilderness. This seems to have been an obvious reference to Egypt as a many-headed dragon whose heads God crushed at the defeat of the Egyptian army at the Sea. This passage not only provided John with an OT precedent for the figure of a

the indignation be past (xxvi. 20)." This observation makes John's use of this figure even more meaningful and increases the probability that John may have had Isa 26:16-27:1 in mind as he wrote.

¹Cf. Isa 30:7; F. A. Spina, "Rahab," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 4:34; Hasel, 1:990.

²While the RSV and NIV render the word as "creatures," the word is literally "people" (MT: **עַם**; LXX: λαός), a reference to the people of Israel who escaped from Egypt through the Sea into the wilderness.

many-headed Dragon, but also linked the figure thematically to Gen 3:15, where the Seed of the Woman would crush the head of the Serpent.

Thus, through the symbolism of the Dragon/Serpent, John not only identified Satan, the Dragon, with the Serpent of Gen 3 (cf. Rev 12:9) and his eventual doom at the hand of the promised Seed of the Woman, but also pointed to Egypt and Babylon as representatives of the Dragon by virtue of their traditional role in persecuting the Woman and her offspring (cf. Rev 12:13, 17).

Before leaving the symbol of the Dragon, we must take note of the fact that it was portrayed as having seven heads and ten horns, with seven diadems upon its heads (12:3). This had great significance, for the Beast from the sea would also have seven heads and ten horns, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads (13:1). Further, the Beast which ascends from the abyss, and which carries the Great Harlot, also has seven heads and ten horns and is full of blasphemous names (17:3, 7). The fact that all three were portrayed having seven heads and ten horns suggests that they are similar in a very important way.¹

¹L. L. Thompson, 80, holds that these various beasts are merely variations of one another, since John blends their identities together so that the boundaries separating them are blurred. This is only partially true. The former premise does not necessarily derive from the latter. There are distinctions as well as similarities between them in some cases (see, e.g., Rev 13:2, 4).

Rev 17 tells what the heads and horns represent.

The seven heads represent seven kings, five of whom, John was informed, had already fallen, one was reigning at the time, and one had not yet arrived on the stage of history (vss. 9-10). The ten horns represent ten kings who had not yet, in John's day, received royal power, but would receive authority for a brief period together with the Beast (who would function as an eighth king),¹ at which time they

¹The fact that he is described as ἐκ τῶν ἐπτά seems to suggest that he is an eighth king in relation to the line of the seven kings as opposed to that of the ten kings. This expression is variously understood. Those who follow the preterist interpretation, viewing the seven kings as seven Roman emperors, frequently take it to mean "one of the seven" who would return as an eighth (Beasley-Murray, 256; Caird, 218-19; Swete, 221). Some follow a variation of this in which it may represent not only a Roman emperor but also an eschatological antichrist. Krodel, 296, says, "As a historical emperor he was one of the seven, but as Antichrist he will appear as an eighth" (cf. Morris, 204). Hughes, 186, differs entirely, arguing that the eighth king, "though of them, is not one of them or an additional king in series with them. It is an eighth, rather, in the sense that the seven kings are of it, just as the seven heads by which the seven kings are signified are the seven heads of the beast." Saying that the seven kings are of it is not the same, however, as saying that it is of the seven kings. A few commentators take "eighth" as a symbolic number. Sweet, 259, sees it as expressing a claim to transcendence, while "of the seven" shows that "in fact it is one of the old firm." Johnson, 160, views it as signaling an attempt to imitate Christ's resurrection, while it, in fact, "belongs to the seven, i.e., qualitatively but not numerically (as if he were a former king revived)." Mulholland, 281, sees six as the number of incompleteness, seven as the number of completion, and eight as signifying something that is past completion and therefore goes away to destruction. The Beast, he says "stands outside of the seven as an eighth but still partakes of the seven." The view of Mounce, 316, is that the eighth king "is an eighth in the sense that he is distinct from the other seven. He is Antichrist, not simply another Roman emperor. He is not a human ruler through whom the power of evil finds

would make war on the Lamb, though the Lamb would conquer them (vss. 12-14), meaning that this would be the end of the Beast and the ten kings. Thus John indicated that this scene reflects the same perspective as 20:7-10, in which the Dragon would come out of the abyss, gather the nations of earth for a final war against God and His saints, but would be destroyed, or go into perdition, which is the lake of fire.

This description reveals that the fiery red¹ Dragon, like the scarlet Beast of Rev 17, has an earthly dimension, namely, kings or powers which have authority to act on earth.² The diadems these kings wear (12:3; 13:1) represent regnal authority. The seven kings apparently rule consecutively (17:10), while the ten kings rule contemporaneously (vs. 12), and that apparently near the final stage of history, as envisioned by John (vss. 14,

expression—he is that evil power itself. He belongs to the cosmic struggle between God and Satan which lies behind the scenes of human history. Yet he will appear on the stage of history as a man. He is of the seven—not one of the seven—in that he plays the same sort of role as his earthly predecessors. He himself, however, belongs to another sphere of reality." C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2: *The Message of Revelation* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1985), 475, argues that the beast is not an eighth head. It is a beast. The heads belong to it. It belongs to the seven only as the sum of seven numbers is an eighth number.

¹The Greek word is *πυρρός*. Cf. Lenski, 364.

²The Dragon, for example, "stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth" (12:4), through the agency of an earthly power, represented by one of its heads.

16-17).¹ If this scarlet Beast from the abyss is equivalent to the great red Dragon, as suggested above, then the Great Harlot which is carried by the Beast and exercises control over its heads/kings can be seen to play a role in the persecuting activity of the Dragon and its heads in chap. 12, as suggested by 17:6 and 18:20, 24.

There are other figures and language besides that of the Dragon that point to an Egypt motif in chap. 12. The flight of the Woman into the wilderness with the Dragon in hot pursuit strongly recalls the Exodus from Egypt. This is reinforced by other figures. The attempt on the part of the Dragon to sweep the Woman away with a flood, and the swallowing up of the flood by the earth, recalls the experience of Israel at the Sea (Exod 15:12).² The giving of two wings of a great eagle to the Woman so that she might fly into the wilderness is widely acknowledged to

¹If the beasts, heads, and horns of Daniel be accepted as precedent for John's use of the symbolism, as many scholars suggest (e.g., Beasley-Murray, 208-9; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 90; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 83; J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 219-20, 222-23; Mounce, 249-51, 254; Strand, "Seven Heads," 184; Swete, 161-62), they represent not so much individual kings as kingdoms (Dan 7:23, 27; 8:20-22; cf. Strand, "Seven Heads," 186-87), major powers in world affairs that played a significant role in relation to the covenant people of God. One of these powers was pointed out in Dan 2:37-38, and two more were identified by name in Dan 8:20-21. John knew these prophecies and built upon them. Those who wish to identify the heads of John's beast powers need to begin where John apparently began. That is not the purpose of this study.

²Beasley-Murray, 205-6; Farrer, *Revelation*, 148; Hughes, 142; Johnson, 124; Kiddle, 236-37.

reflect Exod 19:4 and Deut 32:11-12, which refer to God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt.¹ The nourishment provided to the Woman in the wilderness would remind the reader of the daily manna provided to Israel during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness.²

The Egypt motif is also evident in 12:11, where the people of God are said to have overcome the Dragon by the blood of the Lamb. It was the application of the blood of the Passover lamb which determined the distinction between the unbelieving people of Egypt and the people of faith. Unbelief and failure to apply the blood spelled death for those who elected to remain in Egypt and preserve their loyalty to Pharaoh, while those who manifested faith in the applied blood of the lamb were spared and went on to victory over Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt at the Sea. In fact, it was the difference made by the blood of the lamb that finally brought Pharaoh to admit defeat and set God's people free (Exod 11:1, 4-8; 12:13, 29-33).

¹Beasley-Murray, 205; Carrington, 225; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 87; Hughes, 141; Johnson, 124; Kiddle, 237; Mounce, 245; Sweet, 203-4.

²Sweet, 198, 203, sees the 1260 days in which the Woman is nourished as alluding to forty-two years during which Israel was provided with manna in the wilderness. But the period was clearly forty years (Exod 16:35; Num 14:33-34; 32:13; Deut 2:7; 8:2, 4; 29:5; Josh 5:6). Others prefer to see it as alluding to the forty-two stages of Israel's journey, as derived from Num 33 (Kiddle, 230; Wilcock, 118), but there is no parallel between the forty-one campsites named in Num 33 and the 1260-day/three-and-a-half-time period of persecution mentioned in Rev 12:6, 14, and the number forty-two does not appear in either passage.

Rev 13

There is nothing in Rev 13 which speaks directly of the Great City Sodom/Egypt/Babylon, but there are numerous parallels between the characteristics and activities of the Great City and those of the Beasts from the sea and from the earth. It is readily observable, as vss. 2, 4, and 11 make note, that these Beasts are agents of the Dragon, doing the work of the Dragon.

The seven heads and ten horns of the Beast from the sea (vs. 1) associate it very clearly with the Dragon of 12:3 and the Beast from the abyss of 17:3, 7, though it is not the same entity (vss. 2, 4). The blasphemous name on its heads (13:1) and the blasphemies it utters (vss. 5-6) parallel the Beast of 17:3, "which was full of blasphemous names." The forty-two months during which it would be permitted to exercise its authority is parallel to the period during which the nations of earth were to trample the Holy City (11:2) and the Two Witnesses would prophesy clothed in sackcloth (11:3), at the end of which the Two Witnesses would be killed by the Beast from the abyss and their corpses would lie in the street of the Great City Sodom/Egypt (11:7-8). It is also parallel to the period during which the Dragon would persecute the Woman (12:6, 14).¹ The Beast from the sea would make war on the saints

¹There is a consensus among scholars on this matter. See p. 216, n. 1, for some scholars who concur.

(13:7), while the Beast from the earth would cause all who would not worship the image to the Beast from the sea to be slain (13:15). This is the same kind of activity for which the Great Harlot/City would be judged in 17:6 and 18:24.¹ Thus they would receive a similar reward (19:20).

The Beast from the earth, known also as the False Prophet (cf. 13:14; 19:20), would be involved, with the Beast from the sea and the Dragon, in deceiving those who dwell on the earth through demonic powers or sorcery (13:13-14; 16:13-14; 19:20), which is the work of the Dragon (12:9; 20:3) and the Great City (18:23).

Thus, though the Great City itself may not have come clearly into view in Rev 13, it would appear to have been always in the mind of the author.

Rev 14

Chap. 14 begins with the Lamb on Mount Zion, along with the 144,000 who, in chap. 7, were sealed with the name of the Lamb and of His Father in their foreheads. The Lamb, from the Egypt motif, stands in direct opposition to the Dragon/Beast. Mount Zion, which is the Holy City, new Jerusalem,² functioned in direct contrast to "Babylon the great," mentioned later in vs. 8. And the 144,000 who are

¹As Krodel, 255, points out, it also seems to be an activity modeled after that with which the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar threatened the loyal people of God in Dan 3.

²Cf. 2 Kgs 19:31; Ps 48:2; Isa 4:3-5; 10:12; 18:7; 24:23; 37:32; Joel 2:32; Heb 12:22.

sealed "out of every tribe of the sons of Israel" (7:4), having the name of the Lamb and of His Father written on their foreheads (14:1), were contrasted with those who worship the Beast and its image and receive its mark on their foreheads or on their hands (14:9). Unlike the latter, who drink the wine of the adulterous passion¹ of the Great Harlot Babylon (vs. 8), the 144,000 "have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste" (vs. 4). Unlike the Dragon, the Beast, the False Prophet, and the Great Harlot/City, who, as noted above, practice to deceive, there is no falsehood found in the mouths of the 144,000, for they are spotless (vs. 5). They follow the Lamb wherever He goes (vs. 4).

The first mention of Babylon by name in the book of Revelation occurs in 14:8. There an angel flying in mid-heaven announces, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion." This appears to have been a certain allusion to Isa 21:9 and Jer 51:7-8, and a possible allusion to Dan 4:30.² The

¹See Becker, 272, on translating this expression.

²Cf. Beasley-Murray, 225; Caird, 184; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 102; J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 237; Krodell, 268; Sweet, 226; Swete, 183; Wall, 184-85. The likelihood of the allusion to Jer 51:7-8 is increased by the parallel announcement found in Rev 18:2-3. There are a significant number of parallels between Rev 18:2-6 and Jer 51:6-9: (1) the announcement that Babylon has fallen, (2) the statement that all nations have drunk of her wine, (3) the call to flee from Babylon in order to escape her punishment, (4) the notice that Babylon's sins have reached up to heaven, and (5) the declaration that Babylon will be requited

OT Babylon tradition is thus brought to the forefront in this passage.

The message of the first angel (14:7) includes an announcement that the hour of God's judgment has come. The announcement of the fall of Babylon constitutes the message of the second angel. Comparison with Rev 18 reveals that the announcement of Babylon's fall is an announcement of imminent impending judgment upon Babylon.¹

The third angel announces impending judgment upon those who worship the Beast and its image and receive its mark. There seems to have been an attempt to identify these worshipers of the Beast with all those nations in vs. 8 who drink the wine of Babylon's impure passion, for vs. 10 turns the tables so that they drink the wine of God's wrath, which is poured unmixed into the cup of His anger.² This imagery appears to have been drawn from Isa 51:17,

according to what she has rendered to others. In addition, Jer 51:8 includes the admonition to wail for Babylon because of her fall. This is a primary activity in Rev 18 (vss. 9, 11, 15, 18-19). See also appendix 2.

¹Becker, 225, notes that in 14:8 the meaning of Babylon "cannot be restricted to Rome since the context ties it in with the final judgment on the last day. Therefore 'Babylon' signifies all the enemies of the church for all time."

²The Greek makes the wordplay more evident. In vs. 8 Babylon causes all nations to drink ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. In vs. 10 the Beast worshiper himself (αὐτός) will drink ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. Cf. 16:19; 19:15; Beasley-Murray, 225; Caird, 185-86; Sweet, 227.

21-23 and Jer 51:7,¹ suggesting that Babylon, who made other nations drink "the cup of staggering, the bowl of my wrath" (Isa 51:22), would be made by God to drink that same cup herself. This would be in harmony with the verdict against Babylon in Rev 18:6: "Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double² for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed." A comparison of 14:11 with 19:3 confirms that the Babylon motif was implicit also in the message of the third angel.

The Sodom motif appeared in the third angel's message as well. Many commentators note that the fire and brimstone (vs. 10) represent what Beasley-Murray calls "a standing symbol of divine judgment,"³ which is derived from the Sodom tradition.⁴ Although the clause "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever" seems to reflect Isa 34:10 very closely, it may have been derived initially from the Sodom tradition, which states that "the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace" (Gen

¹Cf. Jer 25:15-28; Barclay, *Revelation*, 2:111; Beasley-Murray, 225; Caird, 184; J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 248; Hughes, 162; Krodel, 268; Mounce, 275; Sweet, 226; Swete, 183-84.

²On "double" as "equivalent," see p. 194, n. 1.

³Beasley-Murray, 226. Cf. Ps 11:6; Isa 34:9-10; Ezek 38:22; Luke 17:29-30; Rev 19:20; 20:9-10; 21:8.

⁴Gen 19:24; Jude 7; Beasley-Murray, 226; J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 249; Hughes, 163; Krodel, 269; Mounce, 275; Sweet, 227; Swete, 185.

19:28).¹ That all this is accomplished in the presence of the Lamb reminds the reader that the Egypt motif was never far from the author's mind, either.²

The imagery of the vintage harvest and the winepress in 14:19-20 appears to have been drawn from Joel 3:13³ and Isa 63:2-6.⁴ Rev 19:15 uses similar imagery. Like Isa 34, the passage in Isa 63 is found in the context of judgment against Edom. Joel 3 refers to judgment against a variety of the traditional enemies of God's people,⁵ but is found in a "day of the Lord" context. The latter three are all located in the context of the vindication, avenging, and exaltation of Jerusalem/Zion.

Like these, Rev 19:15 is found in the context of God's judgment on the Great City as a vindication of His people (18:20), an avenging of the crimes against them (19:2), and His preparation for the glorification of His Bride, the Holy City, new Jerusalem (19:7-8; cf. 21:2,

¹Barclay, 1:112; Swete, 185-86.

²Cf. the trumpet plagues of chaps. 8-9, the explicit reference in 11:8, and the many allusions to Egypt in chap. 12 (see pp. 231-32).

³Mounce, 281-82; Sweet, 229; Swete, 190.

⁴Fiorenza, *Vision*, 91; Johnson, 143.

⁵Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia are named in vs. 4 and Egypt and Edom are identified in vs. 19.

9-11). Rev 14:14-20 should be seen as a parallel to 19:11-21.¹

The city in 14:20 was not the Great City, but the Holy City, as shown by the setting of John's source in Joel 3.² Thus, the judgment of the Great City was portrayed as taking place outside the Holy City in somewhat the same way as the judgment on the Devil and the nations he had deceived was described as taking place outside the "beloved city" in 20:9-10.

Rev 15-16

Rev 15-16 has to do with the seven last plagues in which the wrath of God is brought to full and final completion (ἐτελέσθη) (15:1). The Exodus from Egypt motif dominates the two chapters.³ First of all, the contents of the plagues are so remarkably like the plagues on Egypt that most commentators hold that they are based on the

¹See A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 105; Ronald H. Preston and Anthony T. Hanson, *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine*, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1949), 105.

²Cf. Allo, 246; Barclay, *Revelation*, 2:116; Beckwith, 664-65; Carrington, 254; Charles, 2:25; Düsterdieck, 402; Hughes, 167; Johnson, 144; Krodell, 276; Lenski, 450; Mounce, 282; Swete, 192; Wall, 189-90.

³Beasley-Murray, 232-33; J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 256-57; Johnson, 146-47. A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 110-11, sees John using the story of the Exodus in Rev 15-16 as "a model for understanding the present situation" facing his readers. Beasley-Murray, 233, notes that the Exodus is portrayed as both redemption and judgment.

Egyptian plagues.¹ Second, it is widely observed that the description of those who have conquered the Beast as standing beside the sea with the harps of God and singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (vss. 2-3) is strongly reminiscent of the experience of Israel in gaining the victory over the armies of Egypt at the Sea and singing with Moses and Miriam the Song of the Sea recorded in Exod 15:1-21.²

The seven last plagues begin with judgments upon those who bear the mark of the beast and worship its image (16:2), progress to judgment upon the throne and kingdom of the Beast (16:10), then to judgment on the river Euphrates (16:12), Babylon's political support system,³ and finally, to judgment on the Great City Babylon itself (16:19).⁴

¹See comparisons by Barclay, *Revelation*, 2:125-26, and Beckwith, 671-73, as well as appendix 4 of this study. Cf. also Beasley-Murray, 232; Caird, 201; Wall, 191. Even the response of those being plagued (16:9, 11, 21) echoes the response of Pharaoh and his servants to the plagues on Egypt (Exod 8:14, 19, 32; 9:7, 34-35).

²Beasley-Murray, 235; J. M. Ford, "Structure," 327.

³LaRondelle, "Contextual Approach," 146-47, draws a distinction between the city (Babylon) and the waters on which it sits (the Euphrates). He argues that the former represents religious leaders, while the latter represents political powers. The angelic interpreter told John, "The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues" (Rev 17:15).

⁴Ruiz, 282, argues that, "contrary to the opinion of the majority of commentators," the "great city" in 16:19 is Jerusalem, not Babylon. He distinguishes between ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη and Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη, placing them in juxtaposition (284-85) rather than in reiterative parallel. Thus he ends up with two Great Cities in a historical progression in

Once again we note a merging or blending of the Egypt and Babylon motifs.¹

Rev 17-18

It hardly seems necessary to demonstrate the presence of the Babylon motif in chaps. 17 and 18, since the fall of Babylon is the central message of these chapters

which Babylon (Rome) destroyed and supplanted Jerusalem as the Great City (288). Ruiz, unfortunately, has made the fatal mistake described by Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*, trans. George W. Schreiner (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 188: "The problem at bottom is that of symbol. . . . When we have 'deciphered' that Babylon is Rome we have not explained the symbol in the least; we have simply situated the text historically, given its historical reference, which is a wholly different thing." Ruiz has focused on the historical identification of the symbol of the Great City, and the symbol has lost the universal value which John everywhere intends, as this study demonstrates. By so doing, he has created an anomaly wherein Jerusalem ceased to be the Great City in A.D. 70, yet coexists with Babylon (Rome) in the eschatological era when it is split into three parts under the seventh bowl judgment (288). Alan James Beagley argues for Jerusalem not only here but wherever the Great City or Babylon is mentioned in Revelation (*The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church's Enemies*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche, vol. 50 [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987], 67-69, 81-112). He views the judgment on Babylon in Rev 16-18 as referring to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. At least he is consistent in pursuing his interpretation of 11:8 to its logical conclusion, but his arguments have not received much acceptance. He makes the same error as Ruiz, as do all those who interpret Babylon merely as Rome. Cf. Hughes 127, 161, 183; Minear, *I Saw*, 246.

¹LaRondelle, "Contextual Approach," 143-44; Kenneth A. Strand, "Chiastic Structure and Some Motifs in the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 16 (1978): 401-8; idem, "Eight Visions," 114; idem, "Foundational Principles," 25-26.

(17:1; 18:8, 10, 20; 19:2).¹ Rather, some elements of the Sodom and Egypt motifs, some OT allusions, and some inter-relationships between the two chapters are noted. The special way in which Babylon was characterized as having religious, political, and economic influence over the people and nations of earth is also noted.

The Sodom motif may be evident in two forms. One is the emphasis on the immorality of the Harlot and of the kings and people who form the support system for Babylon. This is repeated in 17:2, 4-5 and 18:2-3, 7, 9. The other is the destruction of the Harlot/City by means of fire (17:16; 18:8-9, 18).² Some commentators have also noted that the call to come out of the Great City (18:4) recalls the summons to Lot to flee from Sodom.³ Additionally, the wealth and prosperity of the Great Harlot/City and its

¹Dyer, 313-15; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 94-96, 98; Herbert Mackenzie, "The Destruction of Babylon," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 92 (1935): 226; Massinger, 164-65; Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988; repr., HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 144. Although Wall understands Babylon's destruction as a kind of self-destruction, "a self-defeating civil war" (204), following 17:16, he agrees that this section deals with the punishment of the great prostitute, Babylon, and functions as part of an extended footnote on 16:19b, describing the contents of the cup filled with the wine of God's wrath (203-5).

²Sweet, 271. Burning with fire was the traditional punishment for harlotry (Gen 38:24; Lev 21:9; Jub 20:4; cf. J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 298; Sweet, 269).

³Fiorenza, *Vision*, 100; Krodell, 302; Sweet, 266. There is no observable linguistic basis for this, but it could be observed on a thematic basis.

location on "many waters" is reminiscent not only of the Babylon tradition but of the Sodom and Egypt traditions as well, as we have seen in chapter 2 above.

The Egypt motif may be evidenced by references to the Lamb who conquers the Beast and his Ten Horns in 17:14, and to plagues upon the Great City (18:4, 8). There could also be a hint of the Egypt motif in 18:23, which states that all nations were deceived by the sorcery of the Great City (cf. Exod 7:11-12, 22; 8:7, 18).

The primary OT allusions in Rev 17-18 are to Isa 47-48, Jer 50-51, and Ezek 26-28.¹ The first two are

¹Commentators cite a variety of OT passages to which John appears to allude. Beasley-Murray, 264, says, "The chief quarries to which John has gone for his structure are the prophecies against Babylon in Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51, and that against Tyre in Ezekiel 26-7, together with significant snatches from the prophecies against Edom in Isaiah 34 and Nineveh in Nahum 3." Boring, 185, lists Isa 13:21; 23:1-16; 34:11-14; 47:7-9; Jer 50:39; 51:37; and Zeph 2:14-15 as the sources from which John has drawn his materials. Hughes, 189, says that the language used in Rev 18 "is reminiscent of the doom prophecies for Babylon in Isaiah 13:19-22 and in Jeremiah 50:39f. and 51:37, and also of the judgment proclaimed against Edom in Isaiah 34:8-15 and against Nineveh in Zeph 2:14f." A. Y. Collins, "Revelation 18," 198-202, and Kiddle, 359-71, both cite the oracles against foreign cities and nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel as the sources drawn upon most, with special reference being made to Isa 21, 23, 34, 47; Jer 50-51; and Ezek 26-27. Johnson, 163, says that John has drawn especially from OT "accounts of the destruction of the ancient harlot cities of Babylon (Isa. 13:21; 47:7-9; Jer. 50-51) and Tyre (Ezek. 26-27)." Massinger, 194, gives Isa 13:1-14:23; Jer 50:1-51:64; and Zech 5:5-11 as the three prophetic passages most closely related to Rev 18. Wall, 212, states that the destruction of Babylon in Rev 18 "is consistent with prophecies leveled against other evil city-states—such as the biblical Tyre (Ezek. 26-28; Isa. 23:1-18), Babylon (Isa. 13:19-22; 47:7-9; Jer. 50-51), and Nineveh (Zeph. 2:14-15; Nah. 3)." The most frequently

prophecies concerning Babylon, while the latter is a prophecy concerning Tyre. Rather than identifying each allusion here, the reader is referred to appendixes 1-3 for apparent allusions or echoes discerned in the course of this study. While the allusions to the prophecies concerning Babylon predominate, as may be observed, the allusions having to do with the commercial aspects of Babylon tend to have been drawn from the prophecies concerning Tyre (Ezek 26-28), which was renowned as a commercial seaport. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, even while John drew on the prophecies concerning Tyre, the Great City he had in view was still called Babylon (18:2, 10, 21). John once again reveals his freedom in using sources for his own purposes.

While a few commentators have attempted to distinguish between the Great Harlot Babylon in chap. 17 and the Great City Babylon in chap. 18, several points militate against such an interpretation. First and foremost is 17:18, which identifies the Great Harlot indisputably with the Great City. Second, the imagery shifts back and forth continually throughout chap. 18 between harlot imagery and city imagery.¹ Third, clear verbal and thematic parallels

mentioned allusions are to Jer 50-51, Ezek 26-27, and Isa 13, 47, respectively. Of these, the most extensive parallels appear to be found in Isa 47, Jer 50-51, and Ezek 26-27. These have been collected in appendixes 1-3.

¹Cf., e.g., vss. 2-3, 9-10, 16.

between the two chapters reveal that the Babylon of chap. 18 is the same Babylon found in chap. 17.

Rev 17

1—I will show you the judgment of the great harlot

2a—with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication

2b—with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk

4a—arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls

4b—holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations

5—Babylon the great

6—drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus

16b—burn her up with fire

18—the great city

Rev 18

10b—In one hour has thy judgment come (cf. vss. 8, 20)

3b—the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her (cf. vs. 9)

3a—all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion

16—clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold, with jewels, and with pearls

6b—mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed

2—Babylon the great

24—in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth

8—she shall be burned with fire

10, 16, 18-19, 21—the great city

These parallels provide persuasive evidence that both chapters were dealing with the same Babylon, as John attempted to make plain in 17:18. Also, 19:2-3 further identifies the Great City which has just been judged as the Great Harlot (cf. 18:18; 19:3).

Thus it may be concluded that there is only one Babylon in the book of Revelation, and it is the Great Harlot/City. Its judgment is announced at the beginning of chap. 17, then its characteristics and those of its partners in evil are identified. The chapter closes with a description of the final battle of the Beast and its Ten Horns against the Lamb (vs. 14), followed by one version of the judgment of the Great Harlot (vs. 16). Chap. 18 begins again with an indictment of the Great Harlot (vss. 2-7), followed by another perspective on her judgment (vss. 8-24).

If Babylon was going to be judged and God was calling His people to come out of Babylon, then it would seem to have been important for the reader to be able to identify some of the essential characteristics of Babylon as John presented them in Rev 17-18. The characteristics of Babylon seem to fall into three categories: religious, political, and economic. Let us observe how John depicted these three aspects of Babylon.

Religious characteristics

The primary representation of the religious aspect of Babylon is her depiction as a harlot with whom the kings of earth have committed fornication and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk (17:2). Harlotry was widely used in the OT as a symbol of

spiritual infidelity and religious apostasy.¹ By choosing to contrast two women in Revelation, one a pure bride and the other a harlot, John effectively established the two sides as representing, respectively, fidelity and infidelity to God in spiritual terms. Fornication (πορνεία) thus represented a spiritual, not a sexual, impropriety.²

The harlot's attire (17:4; 18:16) represented the external evidences of spiritual apostasy.³ The golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication (17:4) represents the intoxicating nature of the corrupt form of religion which she shares with the people and nations of earth, causing them to join in her apostasy

¹Wall, 205, writes, "It would be a mistake in our view to take **adulteries** literally as 'sexual impurity' (contra Morris, *Revelation*, p. 198). Rather, John uses a prophetic typology to cast religious apostasy as sexual infidelity (cf. Hos. 2:5; Nah. 3:4; Isa. 23:16-17; Jer. 2:20-31; 13:27; Ezek. 16:15-19; Caird, *Revelation*, pp. 212-13)." Cf. also Exod 34:15-16; Lev 20:5-6; Deut 31:16; Judg 2:17; 8:27, 33; 1 Chr 5:25; Jer 3:1-3, 6-9; Ezek 23:30, 35.

²Caird, 212; Peterson, 146; Roloff, 196; Wall, 205.

³Cf. Wall, 206. Comparison with Ezek 16:10-18 suggests that the ornaments may be the tokens of betrothal, but have been used to "play the harlot." Scarlet attire and golden ornaments are not merely signs of wealth (cf. Hughes, 182); Jer 4:30 associates them with harlotry. J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 287-88, besides identifying the harlot's attire with "worldly luxury," harlotry, "splendor and distinction," and "ungodly conduct," points out the irony of a similarity to the vestments of the high priest, suggesting "a parody of the high priest on the Day of Atonement wearing the vestments specially reserved for that occasion and holding the libation offering."

(17:2; 18:3).¹ In fact, 18:23 indicates that she uses sorcery to deceive all the nations.²

The name of mystery on her forehead, "Mother of harlots and of earth's abominations" (17:5), identifies her as a leader in apostasy, with "daughters" following in her footsteps (cf. Ezek 16:44-48).³ The fact that the Harlot is portrayed as drunk with the blood of the saints, prophets, and witnesses/martyrs of Jesus (17:6; 18:24) reveals again that John saw a spiritual conflict involved, in which the Harlot, because of her spiritual apostasy, has become such a "dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit" (18:2),⁴ that she finds pleasure in putting to

¹Ladd, *Commentary*, 224, points out that in the OT the word for abomination became particularly associated with idolatry. The suggestion is that the woman is portrayed as enticing men away from the worship of God.

²Sorcery is a religious exercise, utilizing power gained from the assistance or control of evil spirits. See 18:3: "a haunt of every foul [unclean] spirit." Cf. Matt 10:1; Mark 1:26-27; 7:25; 9:25; Luke 4:36; 8:29; Acts 8:7. A. Y. Collins, "Revelation 18," 200-1, states that in Jewish ethics, harlotry, idolatry, and sorcery were often linked.

³The fact that Babylon has daughters which are like their mother (Ps 137:8; Isa 47:1-5; Jer 50:42; 51:33; Zech 2:7) should alert the reader to beware of them as well. Several commentators note that Roman prostitutes wore a headband with their name on it, identifying them (Hobbs, 158; Krodel, 293; Mounce, 310; cf. Sweet, 254).

⁴While this expression has similarities to a number of OT prophecies of the desolation of Babylon (Isa 13:21-22; 34:11, 13-15; Jer 50:39; 51:37), it is different from all of them in its mention of demons and unclean spirits. Thus it appears to relate to a spiritual fall (characterized in part by spiritualism?) which precedes the judgment that results in the desolation pointed to in those

death those who choose to remain loyal to God. It is not surprising, then, to find that she is carried by a Beast which is full of blasphemous names (17:3), and which, as shown above, has the characteristics of the Dragon himself, who is the leader in the revolt against God.

Political characteristics

The political characteristics of Babylon are represented primarily by her depiction as a great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth (17:8). This suggests that Babylon has influence in the affairs of nations, even that she is able to assert her authority over the legislative agendas of rulers and governments in order to accomplish her malignant purposes. A city is basically a civic or political entity. While Babylon's depiction as a harlot emphasized primarily her spiritual or religious aspects, her depiction as a city emphasized primarily her political aspects. Together, they form a portrayal of a religio-political union.

"A queen I sit, I am no widow," she declares in 18:7, an allusion to Isa 47:7-9, in which the former "virgin daughter of Babylon" (47:1), "the mistress of kingdoms" (vs. 5), bragged, "I shall be mistress for ever, . . . I shall not sit as a widow." But though she denies having to

prophecies. This appears to be confirmed by the call to come out of Babylon (vs. 4), which follows this announcement. Her judgment does not take place until vs. 8.

face judgment for her crimes, God would hold her fully accountable according to the biblical principle of *lex talionis* (Rev 18:6).¹

Economic characteristics

The primary means of characterizing Babylon as having a significant role in the economic affairs of earth was by devoting considerable attention to her wealth and the prosperity others had gained by their association with her. It was pointed out above, however, that the nature of this association was not purely commercial. Babylon "has played the wanton" (18:7), while the kings of the earth "committed fornication and were wanton with her" (vs. 9) "and the merchants of earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness" (vs. 3).² Even "merchants" was a symbol, the reader was told: "Thy merchants were the great men of the earth" (vs. 23).

The commerce described, like most everything else in the passage, was apparently also symbolic, representing the hire or wages of harlotry.³ It appears to have been a

¹Cf. Exod 21:23-25; Lev 24:19-20; Deut 19:21; Isa 59:18; Jer 17:10; 50:15, 29; Matt 16:27; Rom 2:6; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 22:12.

²Though making a different point, A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 126, makes the valid observation, "Becoming drunk with her and fornicating with her is synonymous with growing rich with the wealth of her wantonness."

³Fiorenza, *Vision*, 96, notes: "The image of the city as 'the great harlot' probably derives from Isa 23:17, "which, especially in its Greek form, understands the

barter arrangement in which both parties benefited. The Harlot became enriched with material luxuries (vss. 14, 16), while the kings, merchants, and sea traders became "rich with the wealth of her wantonness" (vs. 3). It seems significant that after Babylon was destroyed no one would "buy" the merchants' cargo any more (vs. 11), implying that she had apparently been their sole customer.

Still, historical Babylon was noted for its great commerce and prosperity, as was Tyre in the prophecy from which John drew much of this imagery (Ezek 27:12-36). So it would probably be improper to insist that Babylon's economic role was purely symbolic in this passage. Certainly both mystical Babylon and those with whom she maintains the relationships described in chaps. 17-18 gain mutual power and prosperity from those relationships. Such economic prosperity would increase the influence Babylon is able to exert over the kings and nations of earth.¹

Rev 19-22

Rev 19 continues the theme of judgment on Babylon with heaven's response to the judgment on the Great Harlot/City (vss. 1-5), in which God is praised for the

international commerce and wealth of Tyre as the 'hire' paid to a harlot." Cf. A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 118.

¹Note the economic power which the Beast from the earth is able to wield in 13:16-17. Without control over such factors, no power is able to enforce its decrees. Babylon has dominion over the kings of the earth (17:18).

justice of His judgment in favor of the saints, apostles, and prophets and against the Great City (18:20). This is followed by an announcement that the marriage of the Lamb has come and the Bride is ready for the ceremony (19:6-8), and a benediction upon those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (vs. 9). From this point on, the Great City is history, with only an occasional allusion to some aspect of it. Instead of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif, the balance of the book is preoccupied with the Holy City/new Jerusalem motif, revealing the contrast between the two symbolic cities in John's theology.¹

Although the Great City itself no longer plays a significant role in the book of Revelation, there are lingering traces of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif in chaps. 19-22. We have already observed the continuing soteriological significance of the Lamb, which was first introduced in 5:6-10 as the sacrifice through whose blood men were ransomed for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation to become a kingdom and priests to God. In chap. 19, the Lamb is finally able to marry the Bride whom He has been courting for so long. He continues to be featured in chaps. 21-22 as the husband of the Bride, the new Jerusalem

¹See Roberto Badenas, "New Jerusalem—The Holy City," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2: Exegetical and General Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 244, 255-57.

(21:9-14), and as the co-equal with the Almighty God (21:22-23; 22:1, 3). Thus, the Lamb which was slain in order to ransom those marked for death and to inaugurate the Exodus from spiritual Egypt is finally able to celebrate the arrival of His people in the promised land, where God and the Lamb are enthroned at Jerusalem (22:3) and dwell among Their people (21:3).

Traces of the Sodom motif appear in those passages which speak of a final judgment upon the wicked by means of fire and brimstone (19:20; 20:9-10, 14-15; 21:8). As in 14:11, the Sodom motif may also be reflected in 19:3: "The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."

The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif was likely present also in the two lists of the murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, and idolaters, etc., who would be excluded from the Holy City (21:8; 22:15), since these are the crimes of which Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon are traditionally accused.¹

Based on the relationships which have already been noted above between the Great Harlot/City and the Dragon, the various Beasts, and the kings and great men of the earth, the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif was not likely far from the mind of John in passages such as 19:18-20 and 20:2-3, 7-10, which mention these powerful players in the

¹Badenas, 263-64. (The page number for his summary chart should be p. 264, not p. 256 as printed.)

great conflict between good and evil. This is especially so in light of certain features which link these passages to one another and to the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif.

The imagery in 19:17-21 is taken from Ezek 39:4, 17-20, which was part of a prophecy against Gog and Magog.¹ Gog, in Ezek 38-39, was the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal in the land of Magog. No historical identity is known for Gog and Magog, but they seem to have represented the nations from "the four corners of the earth" (Rev 20:8)² who would rise up against the people of God "who dwell at the center of the earth" (Ezek 38:12).³

¹Barclay, *Revelation*, 2:184; Beasley-Murray, 282; Caird, 247; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 136; Krodel, 324; Sweet, 285.

²Ezek 38-39 uses the expression "from the uttermost parts of the north" (38:6, 15; 39:2), but the nations mentioned include some from the south as well. In reality, all of the tribes or nations mentioned, except Persia, are found in Gen 10, and are identified as descendants of either Japheth or Ham. Those descended from Japheth include Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, Togarmah, and Tarshish. Those descended from Ham include Cush, Put, Sheba, and Dedan. Their significance arises less from any known geographical or historical relationship to God's people than from their traditional identification with nations to the north or south of Israel which were descended from Ham or Japheth. They represent those who do not belong to the line of God's elect and who are ultimately hostile to them.

³See C. G. Howie, "Gog and Magog," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 2:437. However, A. Josef Greig, "Gog and Magog: Hebrew Ciphers Help Solve a Problem—and Knock Some Cherished Speculations," *Ministry*, February 1978, 15, follows J. N. Schofield (*Law, Prophets, and Writings: The Religion of the Books of the Old Testament* [London: SPCK, 1969], 209) in arguing that "Magog, like Sheshach, is a cipher or code name for Babylon." His evidence, borrowed from Schofield, is ingenious, but may be unnecessarily creative in view of the fact that Magog and

This was the traditional activity of the Great City which John called Sodom/Egypt/Babylon. Since this is also what John depicted as taking place in Rev 20:8-9, even using the symbolism of Gog and Magog to identify "the nations which are at the four corners of the earth," we can be fairly certain of a thematic connection between Rev 19:17-21 and 20:7-10, and that the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif was in view in both, though the Great City itself was no longer extant.

There is other evidence as well. In both passages there was a military motif. In 19:19 "the Beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army." This is the same imagery in view in 17:12-14 and again in 20:7-9.¹ The attempted attack against the One sitting on the white horse, whose name is King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16), who is also the Lamb (17:14), would fail, for "the Lamb will conquer them" (17:14), and the Beast and the False Prophet would be captured and thrown into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone (19:20).

the other nations listed in Ezek 38-39, except Persia, are all found to be descendants of Japheth and Ham in Gen 10. Should Greig be correct, it would add significantly to the Babylon motif in Rev 19-20, but this would be problematic, for Babylon is supposed to rise no more after her judgment in chap. 18 (vs. 21; cf. 19:3).

¹It is also very similar to 16:13-14, though the structure of the book suggests that this is a different setting, preceding the fall of Babylon.

In 20:9-10 Gog and Magog surround "the camp of the saints and the beloved city," but fire comes down from heaven and consumes them. "And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (20:10; cf. 14:11; 19:3; 21:8).

There are some key points these passages have in common with each other that relate also to the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif.

1. They all have an evil leader or leaders. In 19:19-20 the leaders are the Beast (from the sea) and the False Prophet (the Beast from the earth [13:14; 19:20]). In 20:2-3, 7-10 the leader is Satan, the Dragon/Serpent/Devil.

2. They all have followers who have been deceived by their leaders. In 19:20 the followers are "those who had received the mark of the Beast and those who worshiped its image." In 20:3, 8 they are the nations.

3. In 19:20 and 20:9-10 both leaders and followers wage war against the Lamb and His people, but are destroyed in the lake of fire.

The parallels with the traditional activities of the Great City Sodom/Egypt/Babylon seem apparent. That 20:9 makes "the camp of the saints and the beloved city"¹

¹The "and" here probably represents an epexegetic

the focus of the attack by the armies of the nations further evokes reminders of the opposing roles of the two cities in the book of Revelation.

The final two chapters of Revelation are dominated by a description of the glory of the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, as it becomes the heritage and home of those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

Limits of the Motif in Revelation

The question was raised above whether the Great City motif ought to include more than just Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon as its representatives. This is a very legitimate question which deserves serious consideration. Are there not other cities or nations, such as Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Assyria, or even Jerusalem, which may also symbolically exemplify the Great City which opposes and exalts itself against God? Assuredly there are. However, John does not explicitly identify these as part of his Great City motif in the book of Revelation, presumably because they do not share all the special characteristics which he would like to apply to the Great City, characteristics which are shared by Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon.

καὶ. See Hendriksen, 235; Ladd, *Revelation*, 270; Morris, 233; Mounce, 363; and Wilcock, 193; cf. Swete, 269. Most commentators understand the "beloved city" to be the Holy City (e.g., Beasley-Murray, 298; Krodel, 337; Morris, 233; Wilcock, 193), though some want to make it an earlier phase than in chap. 21 (e.g., Beckwith, 746; Caird, 257; J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 356; Johnson, 192).

Edom, Moab, and Ammon as Candidates

Edom, Moab, and Ammon were descendants of the household of Abraham, which included Lot. They rebelled against God, but were not enemies by national origin as were the Hamitic families outlined in the Table of Nations in Gen 10, like Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon. There is no major tradition which places the people of God in their midst, though certainly they had regular contact with Israel. None of them were noted for having a major metropolis located on a major river, deriving prosperity and power therefrom. In short, they lacked many of the major features of John's Great City motif.

Tyre as a Candidate

Tyre was indeed a great city, located on many waters, though this was the Great Sea (Ezek 26:17; 27:3, 32) rather than a great river. Its tradition does not, however, go back to Gen 10. It is first mentioned in Josh 19:29 as a fortified city on the border of the territory assigned to the tribe of Asher. God's people never dwelt in Tyre, though they did have a trading relationship with it. Tyre played a rather minor role as an enemy of Israel in the tradition. In fact, Tyre was early a friend and ally of David and Solomon (2 Sam 5:11; 1 Kgs 5:1; 7:13; 9:11). Only in Ezek 26:2; Joel 3:4-6; and Amos 1:9 were charges of oppression made against Tyre. It was accused of

arrogance, of unrighteous trafficking to get wealth, of violence, of removing the treasures from God's temple, and of selling the people of Judah to the Greeks. For these things it will be judged. John utilized language from the prophecy against Tyre in Ezek 26-28 in his "song" about the judgment of the Great City in Rev 18, but he applied it to Babylon rather than to Tyre. The Tyre tradition apparently fell somewhat short of all that John wanted to utilize to characterize the Great City.

Assyria as a Candidate

The Assyria tradition admittedly goes back to Gen 10, which describes Nineveh as a city¹ built by Nimrod in the land of Asshur/Assyria. Assyria was also, prior to Neo-Babylonia, the oppressor nation to the north of God's people (Isa 52:4; Zeph 2:13), and was responsible for taking Israel into captivity in 722/721 B.C.² We noted in chapter 2 that Isaiah frequently wove together prophecies concerning Assyria and Babylon. And Zeph 2:3-15 speaks of Nineveh and Assyria much like the other prophets speak of Babylon.³

¹It is a matter of debate as to which city is referred to in vs. 12 as the "great city." See p. 141, n. 1.

²2 Kgs 17:6; Herbert, 3-7; Jensen, 22-29; Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 235; Oswalt, 5-13.

³Of course, the same could be said concerning Edom, Moab, and Tyre, so this would not be much of an argument by itself.

Nineveh was a very prosperous city located on a major river, the Tigris.¹ Nineveh's location on the Tigris, however, is not mentioned in Scripture; therefore, it should probably not be considered a significant element of the tradition that John follows. In fact, Jeremiah associated the Euphrates rather than the Tigris with Assyria (2:18), no doubt because the former, rather than the latter, constituted the relevant boundary river.

Aside from the books of Jonah and Nahum, Nineveh played no significant role in the Assyria tradition. Among the major prophets, Nineveh was mentioned only once (Isa 37:37), and that was an incidental historical reference. When Assyria was mentioned by Isaiah, it was associated with Babylon rather than with Nineveh.² Thus, Nineveh was not a major factor in the Assyria tradition, while the Babylon motif essentially covered both Assyria and Neo-Babylonia as the oppressors beyond the Euphrates in relation to God's people.³

¹Gen 2:14 states that the Tigris flowed east of Asshur, the first capital of Assyria, from which it took its name. See D. J. Wiseman, "Assyria," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (1979-88), 1:332.

²Whereas Babylon has a key role in all the major prophets, Assyria has a significant role only in Isaiah. It is mentioned five times also in the book of Hosea. On the increasing prominence of Babylon during the latter period of the Assyrian empire, see Goodspeed, 301-10; Oppenheim, "Assyria and Babylonia," 1:274; and Wiseman, "Assyria," 1:338.

³See Bertoluci, 191. The return of God's people

The fact that John did not choose to explicitly identify Assyria, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, or any other such reprobate nation as a representative of the Great City does not mean that they were not representative of the Great City in many ways, for they were. As we have observed above, in some cases John even borrowed imagery from OT prophecies concerning them in order to develop his motif. But he used these prophecies for his own purposes, such that the prophecy concerning Tyre, for example, was used to illustrate some of the characteristics of the Great City he called Babylon. Apparently John selected Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon as special representatives of the Great City, in part at least, because of the unique features which their traditions had in common that would highlight the characteristics of the Great City which he wished to bring out.

from Egypt and Assyria (Isa 11:11, 15-16; 27:12; Zech 10:10-11) clearly involves drying up the Nile and Euphrates rivers so that they may cross dryshod. This suggests that Babylon could be interchangeable with Assyria in these prophecies. The fact that there was never any historic return of Israel from their final captivity in Assyria, and the fact that the OT records no clear call out of Assyria, as it does in the case of Babylon, suggests that Babylon proved to be a more suitable representative for John's Great City motif than did Assyria.

Historical Jerusalem as a Candidate

The most widely promoted candidate for inclusion in the Great City motif is Jerusalem.¹ This is due primarily to the modifying clause in 11:8, "where their Lord was crucified." Admittedly there would be a powerful argument for inclusion if, in fact, this phrase were intended by John to delineate Jerusalem as another representative, with Sodom and Egypt, of the Great City. Because of the impact on the theology of the book that results from either

¹Among the many writers who consider Jerusalem, in one way or another, to be included in the Great City motif are Allo, 152-53; Balyeat, 52-56, 71-76; Beagley, 66-70, 81-112; Becker, 170-71; Beckwith, 601-2; Joseph Bonsirven, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, Verbum Salutis, vol. 16 (Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils, 1951), 198-99; Carrington, 189-92; Charles, 1:287-88; Düsterdieck, 317; Farrer, *Revelation*, 135; D. Ford, 656-62; J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 180, 283-93; T. F. Glasson, *The Revelation of John*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (NEB) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 67; Kraft, 158-59; J. E. Leonard, *Come Out of Her, My People: A Study of the Revelation to John* (Chicago: Laudemont Press, 1991), 97-100; Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers; San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1983), 201-2; Ruiz, 282-89; William Henry Simcox, *The Revelation of S. John the Divine*, rev. G. A. Simcox, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), 120-21; J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, ed. J. Otis Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961), 172; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 181; Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Theologische Verlagsgemeinschaft (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung Dr. Werner Scholl, 1926; repr., Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1986), 420-21. LaRondelle, "Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire," 162, says that the Apocalypse projects "Babylon" as "Jerusalem," but "not the old-covenant harlot city is in view, but the new covenant harlot city!"

inclusion or exclusion of Jerusalem from the Great City motif, a careful study of the role of Jerusalem in the book of Revelation is required, including John's attitude toward the Jews and toward the covenant promises made to Israel in the OT.

One must begin a study of Jerusalem in Revelation by explicit references to it. The first thing one discovers is that every explicit reference to Jerusalem in Revelation is to the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, the Bride of the Lamb.¹ In 3:12, Jerusalem is new, "the city of my God," which comes down from God out of heaven. In 21:2, Jerusalem is again new, along with everything else, "the holy city," "coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." A similar description is found in 21:9-10, where Jerusalem is also called "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." God's throne is in it, and it is the home of the righteous forever (22:3-5).

The new Jerusalem, along with all that Rev 21-22 depicts as taking place there, represents the fulfillment of all the covenant promises of Scripture.² The gates are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel, while the twelve foundations are inscribed with

¹Fiorenza, *Vision*, 71; Wilcock, 170.

²Badenas, 271; Dumbrell, 78-79; LaRondelle, *Israel of God*, 145; idem, "Jerusalem and Babylon," 23.

the names of the twelve apostles (21:12, 14). The sealed servants of God, who stand at last on Mount Zion, are portrayed as constituted of the twelve tribes of Israel (7:3-8). Their Redeemer, the Lamb, is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (5:5; cf. 22:16). The temple in heaven is the place of God's throne and the center of His activity on behalf of man, the place where God's servants worship and serve Him (3:12; 7:15; 8:3-5; 11:19; 15:5-8; 16:1, 17).

Apart from the problematic clause in 11:8, every aspect of Jerusalem, Judah, the temple, and Israel as a nation was presented in a positive light in the book of Revelation.¹ John viewed Israel and Jerusalem in the light of the OT covenant promises to be fulfilled in the new Jerusalem.² The significant addition that merits

¹Although a number of scholars take the position, based to a large degree upon Rev 2:9; 3:9; and 11:2, 8, that John is engaged in a polemic against the Jews and Jerusalem (e.g., Allo, 152-53; Beagley, 27-112, 179-80; J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 180-81, 283-307; LaRondelle, "Jerusalem and Babylon," 22), I show below that there is no substantial evidence for such a reading of the book, as other scholars agree (A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 17; Feuillet, *Apocalypse*, 102; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 55, 135-36).

²Although LaRondelle, "Jerusalem and Babylon," 22, argues, citing Rev 3:9, 12, that "the message of the heavenly Jerusalem always occurs in the context of an anti-Judaistic polemic" in Revelation, he states in the next paragraph that the New Jerusalem is a community "made up of saints from both Testaments (from the twelve tribes of Israel and the church of the twelve apostles). Thus the New Jerusalem symbolizes the basic continuity of the old-covenant and the new-covenant people of God" (23). There would appear to be a tension between these two statements, due perhaps to a misunderstanding of the meaning of 3:9.

attention is the inclusion of "the nations" and "the kings of the earth" in the covenant blessings (21:24-26). Those from the nations who accept by faith the terms of the covenant become recipients of the promised blessings, fellow-heirs with the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in harmony with the testimony of Jesus in Matt 8:10-11 and Luke 13:28-29 and of Paul in Rom 4:11-17; 9:8, 24-26; 11:11-32; and Gal 3:7-14, 26-29. The Jews are not excluded from the covenant blessings in Revelation any more than they are in Paul's epistles (Rom 11:1-5, 11, 14, 23-24, 26-31). The language of John, as is shown below, makes this evident.

Even where John spoke of Jews directly, he was critical only of those who did not properly represent the high ideals for which the Jews were supposed to stand. They were not true Jews, but impostors. They represented instead a "synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9). John viewed the true Jew¹ as having his citizenship in Mount Zion, "the

According to John's interpretation of Isa 60:14, from which 3:9 was drawn, "those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews but are not" are "the sons of those who oppressed you." "They shall call you the City of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel." Zion-Jerusalem-was not the oppressor but the oppressed. John had no polemic against either Jews or Jerusalem, as pointed out above.

¹Cf. Rom 2:28-29; 9:6. A. Y. Collins, *Crisis*, 125, holds that the title "Jew" in Rev 2:9 and 3:9 is claimed for the followers of Jesus. Charles, 1:57, avers, "The true Jews are those who have believed in Christ, and thereby won a legitimate claim to the name and spiritual privileges belonging to the Jews. The fact that our author attaches a spiritual significance of the highest character

city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb 12:22; cf. Rev 3:12), the gates of which are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel (Rev 21:12). It would be, after all, a symbolic group of 144,000 "out of every tribe of the sons of Israel" (7:4) who would be sealed with the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father upon their foreheads (14:1; cf. 3:12), and who would stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, having been redeemed from the earth (7:1, 3).

In 2:14 the "sons of Israel" are the innocent who are led astray, rather than the aggressor who leads others into sin. Balaam, not Israel, is the villain, just as with Jezebel in vs. 20. Those whom Jezebel beguiles into practicing immorality and compromising with idolatry are called "my servants," in parallel with the "sons of Israel."¹

to the name *Ἰουδαῖος* shows that he is himself a Jewish Christian." See also Allo, 35; Becker, 52; Beckwith, 453; Beasley-Murray, 82; Charles R. Erdman, *The Revelation of John: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1936), 51-52; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 55; Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series, no. 11 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 67; Hughes, 40; Johnson, 45-46; Mulholland, 101-2; Wall, 73.

¹LaRondelle, "Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire," 159-62, attempts to paint Jerusalem as Babylon through the use of Jezebel/Athaliah typology. But this appears to miss John's point. Babylon may be equated with the harlot queen Jezebel, but not so with Jerusalem. Jezebel was a foreigner who brought Baal worship to Israel (1 Kgs 16:31). Thus, as John says, she was involved in "teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols" (Rev 2:20). But to John, "my servants" were not the enemy. They were the new Israel, the covenant

Thus it may be seen that there is no evidence of a negative attitude toward either Jerusalem or the Jews, as such, in the book of Revelation.¹ Rather, there is considerable evidence for a strong Jewish Christian flavor on the part of the author, in which the language and concepts of the OT played a dominant role in the theology of Revelation,² building upon the covenant promises made to

people of God (cf. 1:1; 6:11; 7:3; 10:7; 11:18; 15:3; 19:2, 5, 10; 22:3, 6, 9), in continuity with the old Israel. It is important to remember that John portrays both the old and the new Israel by the same figure in Rev 12—the pure Woman, not the Harlot. This is a key to understanding John's view of Jerusalem in the book of Revelation.

¹Eller, 126, asserts, "There is no anti-Semitism in John." Jerusalem, for John, is always the symbolic home of the church, whether on earth or in heaven (*ibid.*, 114). Both Fiorenza, *Vision*, 55, and Wall, 73, point out that John's comments about the "synagogue of Satan" should not be taken as anti-semitic rhetoric. John is merely indicating that the fundamental line of continuity with the community of God's people is maintained by faith in the One "who died and came to life" (2:8), rather than through claims of human ancestry.

²For some of the imagery relating to the Jews and their history, note, e.g., "the teaching of Balaam" (2:14); "the hidden manna" (2:17); "the woman Jezebel" (2:19); "the key of David" (3:7); "the city of my God, the new Jerusalem" (3:12; 21:2, 10); "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (5:5); "the Lamb who was slain" (5:12, 6); 144,000 sealed "out of every tribe of the sons of Israel," 12,000 from each tribe (7:4-8); the golden censer with incense offered upon the golden altar (8:3); "his name in Hebrew is Abaddon" (9:11); the temple of God, the altar, those who worship there, the court outside the temple, and "the holy city" (11:1-2); the ark of God's covenant within the temple (11:19); "Mount Zion" (14:1); "the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (15:3); "the temple of the tent of witness," those coming out of it "robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles" (15:5-6); "the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon" (16:16); "Hallelujah!" (19:1, 3, 4, 6); names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel inscribed

the seed of Abraham to show how the covenant blessings and promises would be fulfilled to all who by faith should become heirs of those promises, whether Jew or Gentile (14:12; 21:1-7; 22:17).

Neither is there in Rev 11:1-2 evidence of an anti-Judaistic polemic. The temple is "the temple of God," the place where God is worshiped at the altar, and the city is "the holy city" (vss. 1-2). The Holy City is trampled, not by the Jews, but by the unbelieving nations. The significance of this positive portrayal should not be overlooked by those who find a polemic against historical Jerusalem in vs. 8.

If "the holy city" in vs. 2 represents prototypical Jerusalem, the community of God's people, the locus of the worship of God, where He has placed His name, as I argue above,¹ can it be that John intends vs. 8 to designate Jerusalem as a representative, with Sodom and Egypt, of the Great City, though it is nowhere else so designated in the book? While this is not impossible, it does seem rather out of character.

What else could John have meant in vs. 8 when he stated that the dead bodies of the Two Witnesses would lie in the street of the Great City "where their Lord was

on the gates of Jerusalem (21:12); "I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star" (22:16).

¹p. 212.

crucified"? A key word in the Greek has been omitted from the RSV translation, namely, postpositive *καί*,¹ which should here be translated as "also." This word indicates John's real intent in adding this phrase.² It was pointed out above that a number of scholars note that John, in this passage, was comparing the experience of the Two Witnesses to that of their Lord in a number of significant ways.³ John was attempting to point out that the Two Witnesses would suffer indignity and martyrdom at the hands of the same enemy as "their Lord."⁴ The use of the qualified

¹Although some manuscripts do omit *καί* here, it is present in the most important witnesses to the text of Revelation.

²Düsterdieck, 318.

³See A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 71-72; Eller, 120; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 78-79; Johnson, 112-13; H. M. Morris, 202-4; Mulholland, 208; Sweet, 183, 187-88; L. L. Thompson, 51; Wall, 146-47; Wilcock, 106.

⁴Caird, 137-38; Eller, 120; Hughes, 128; Johnson, 112-13; Minear, *I Saw*, 224; Roloff, 133. Wall, 146, says, "He is not moving from symbolism to literalism to speak of the city of Jerusalem. He is rather saying something about the theological significance of the death of the 'two witnesses' (and those they represent): like Jesus they suffered an apparent defeat at the hands of his enemies, and, like His, their execution will lead to their eventual resurrection and vindication. John's main point therefore is this: faithfulness unto death is always the ultimate measure of the disciple's faithfulness to God." Düsterdieck, 318, notes that "the concluding words of ver. 8, *ὅπου κ.τ.λ.*, dare not be conceived of as a mere notice of locality," but serve rather to indicate that "the servants have suffered the same thing as their Lord." Along similar lines, observing the function of the phrase in the passage, Mounce, 226, concludes: "The inclusion of a reference to the crucifixion is not to identify a geographical location but to illustrate the response of paganism to righteousness." The Great City, he holds, is the whole earth under the wicked

expression "their Lord" serves to reinforce this concept.¹ We may conclude, therefore, that John did not name Jerusalem in 11:8 because he did not intend to point to Jerusalem as another representative of the Great City, but it was his purpose to identify the fate of the Two Witnesses with that of their Lord.

Neither the Holy City of vs. 2 nor the Great City of vs. 8 were meant to refer to literal cities.² They

and oppressive sway of Antichrist (227). Likewise, L. Morris, 150, asserts that the Great City is "every city and no city. It is civilized man in organized community." So also, Kiddle, 187, recognizing that no single city is intended by John in his image of the Great Harlot/City, writes, "And when John says of her in xi. 8, 'where their Lord also was crucified,' he has attained in his own way the universality of the Fourth Gospel: 'He came into the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.' Not merely Jerusalem, not only Rome, but the wide earth itself was a realm of corruption (Sodom), where the Church was persecuted (Egypt). Not merely Jerusalem, but the world at large had shared in the sins which had crucified their Lord (cf. i. 7)." It seems quite likely that John's image of the Great City as the place "where their Lord was crucified" reflects the same idea that Paul expressed in 1 Cor 2:8: "the rulers of this age" are held responsible for the Lord's crucifixion. The parallels to Matt 10:16-22, Mark 13:9-13, and Luke 21:12-19, in which Jesus commissioned His disciples to "bear testimony" before kings and governors (Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12-13) in spite of the fact that they would be persecuted and even put to death (Matt 10:21; Mark 13:12; Luke 21:16), are strengthened by the statement of Jesus in Matt 10:24: "'A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.'" Cf. John 15:20: "'Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.'"

¹Düsterdieck, 318. Swete, 138, notes that this expression recalls the words of Jesus recorded in John 15:20: Οὐκ ἔσιν δούλος μείζων τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ. εἰ ἐμὲ ἐδίωξαν, καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν.

²While scholarship in the past has wavered between

were symbolic or figurative, functioning in the vision as representatives of two opposing sides in the struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the Dragon. It is the characterization of the two cities that is in view, not their identification with any historical city.

Against the argument that John was alluding to OT passages referring to Jerusalem as Sodom,¹ it can be shown, as Mounce has pointed out,² that while Jerusalem is

efforts to identify the Great City as either Rome or Jerusalem (see the summary of the views of major scholars by Otto Böcher, *Die Johannesapokalypse*, Erträge der Forschung, vol. 41 [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975], 63-68, 87-96), the trend in recent scholarship is to admit that the Great City is not a literal, historical city at all, but is a symbol that has universal applicability. For John, it was represented by Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon, and it could apply to any city, nation, or institution that exhibits the same characteristics, including such historical powers as Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Assyria, Persia, Grecia, Rome, or even apostate Samaria and Jerusalem. See Bauckham, *Theology*, 85-86; Beasley-Murray, 185-86; Harry R. Boer, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979), 82; Caird, 138; Erdman, 101; Charles Homer Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy*, Good News Studies, vol. 34 (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, Liturgical Press, 1991), 114; Grimsrud, 87-88; Homer Hailey, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 257; Johnson, 112; Kiddle, 184-88, 199; Krodel, 226; Lenski, 344-45; Loenertz, 83; L. Morris, 146; Mounce, 226-27; Mulholland, 206-7; John P. Newport, *The Lion and the Lamb: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation for Today* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), 225; Roloff, 133; Sweet, 187; Wall, 146; Wilcock, 106, 168-171. Even Fiorenza, though she generally holds Babylon to represent the Roman Empire (*Vision*, 100), admits that it "must not be reduced to a simple code or steno-symbol for Rome since John uses the name 'Babylon' in order to evoke a whole range of scriptural meanings" (*ibid.*, 89).

¹The OT never identifies Jerusalem with Egypt (Beckwith, 602; Mounce, 226; Simcox, 121; Swete, 138).

²Mounce, 226.

compared with Sodom, she is never explicitly called Sodom, i.e., she is never portrayed as the model of the hopelessly unregenerate evil city which God would destroy by fire, never to recover. Certainly, the sins and backsliding of Jerusalem were repeatedly rebuked, and she was frequently compared with other cities and nations notorious for their perversity, but this is not the same as becoming the symbol of an evil nation that is doomed to final and complete destruction because of her intransigent iniquity.

Jerusalem in the OT, in spite of her waywardness, was always the center of God's affection and the focus of hope and salvation, the city where God placed His name and where all of the covenant promises and blessings would eventually be fulfilled when His people would finally repent of their backsliding and return to Him with a whole heart. She represented the people of God who may find themselves in Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon, needing to be called out lest they become like the inhabitants of those evil cities/nations. It was she who was constantly under threat from the nations about her, either by political and military aggression or by the adoption of their forms of worship and practice.

Since, as we have seen above, Revelation is heavily indebted to OT imagery, we must consider briefly the OT passages which have been repeatedly adduced in favor of

Jerusalem as Sodom, noting their full context. Isa 1:9-10 is a favorite:¹

If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah. Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

Vs. 9 clearly does not call Jerusalem Sodom. It merely states that, were it not for the grace of Yahweh in preserving a few survivors, Judah and Jerusalem (vs. 1), "the daughter of Zion" (vs. 8), would have been utterly destroyed, left without inhabitant, like Sodom and Gomorrah.² It uses a simile within a contrary-to-fact condition to draw a hypothetical comparison between their fates.

In vs. 10 Yahweh spoke to the rulers and people of Judah and Jerusalem in metaphorical terms, essentially likening them in their behavior (cf. vs. 4) to their counterparts in Sodom and Gomorrah. The very fact that the rulers and people of Judah and Jerusalem were being likened to their counterparts in Sodom and Gomorrah shows clearly which was the prototype of evil and which was the ectype.

¹See Allo, 152; Beagley, 67; Beasley-Murray, 185; Becker, 170; Beckwith, 602; Charles, 1:287; A. Y. Collins, *Apocalypse*, 73; Dusterdieck, 317; Farrer, *Revelation*, 135; J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 172; Hendriksen, 158; Johnson, 112; Krodel, 226; Ladd, *Commentary*, 158; Swete, 138.

²Cf. Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah*, Andrews University Monographs, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1972), 316-17. He concludes that the *tertium comparationis* is the totality of destruction.

Though Jerusalem was often guilty of behaving in similar patterns, she never became the prototype of the evil city.

The people of Judah and Jerusalem would continue to be Yahweh's "sons" (vss. 2, 4) and "my people" (vs. 3). Though they became a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly" (vs. 4), they were not consigned to eternal destruction like Sodom and Gomorrah.¹ Rather, the text states specifically, "If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah" (vs. 9). The call instead was, "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes" (vs. 16). The promise was, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (vs. 18). Furthermore, "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land" (vs. 19).

"The faithful city" had indeed "become a harlot, she that was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers" (vs. 21). Yet, Yahweh promised that He would "smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy" (vs. 25). He would restore her judges and her counselors as at the first, and "afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (vs.

¹Ibid., 252-54.

26). "Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness" (vs. 27).

The word of Yahweh concerning Judah and Jerusalem continued in Isa 2:2-3:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

There was a clear distinction between the fate of Sodom and this prophecy concerning the fate of Jerusalem. While Sodom did not repent and was annihilated, Jerusalem would repent and be redeemed and glorified. Clearly, a false understanding of Jerusalem has been derived from Isa 1:9-10 by not looking at the larger context.

Isa 3:8-9 has occasionally also been cited as a passage which describes Jerusalem as Sodom:¹

For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen; because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence. Their partiality witnesses against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil upon themselves.

Again, Jerusalem was **likened** to Sodom in the way her inhabitants sinned openly and unabashedly, but she was not herself made the prototype of the evil city. The very next verse offered hope: "Tell the righteous that it shall

¹Charles, 1:288; Hendriksen, 158; Krodel, 226.

be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds" (vs. 10). The passage goes on to describe how Yahweh would afflict the haughty daughters of Zion who had behaved unseemly (3:16-4:1), and what the result would be (4:2-4):

In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, when the LORD shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning.

Though Judah and Jerusalem persisted in their backsliding, Yahweh would continue to work, through judgments, for the salvation of His people until they would repent and be redeemed and glorified.

The balance of the book of Isaiah continues with the same testimony concerning Jerusalem and her future.¹ John knew that Jerusalem represented the messianic community in the book of Isaiah, often straying and disobedient, but always restored in the end to the ideal Zion, the eternal community of the redeemed. Admittedly, only a remnant of "Jacob" or "Judah and Jerusalem" would return² from "Egypt," from "Assyria," and from "Babylon" to become

¹See, e.g., Isa 10:20-21; 11:10-12; 12:6; 24:23; 26:1-2; 27:12-13; 30:18-26; 31:5; 33:20-22, 24; 35:8-10; 37:22-23, 31-32; 40:1-2, 9-11; 41:8-10; 43:1-7; 44:1-5; 49:13-16; 51:4-6, 11; 52:1-10; 59:20-21; 60:1-22; 62:1-12; 65:17-25; 66:10-13, 20-23.

²Isa 11:11, 16; cf. Hasel, *Remnant*, 336-48.

a part of eschatological Zion, but Jerusalem nevertheless continued to represent the messianic community in both the OT prophets and John's Apocalypse. Roberto Badenas says, "Jerusalem the holy city (Isa 52:1) was expected to become, after all her trials and failures, once again and definitely so, the city of the Lord (Isa 60:14)."¹

Jer 23:14 is another text cited as evidence that Jerusalem was Sodom.² In this passage the prophets of Jerusalem "have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah." Again, it is immediately obvious that Jerusalem was not Sodom, but a simile was used in which the prophets and people of Jerusalem were accused of behaving like the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. The latter remained the prototypes of wickedness, while historical Jerusalem became the ectype in this passage.

Still, often wayward historical Jerusalem must be distinguished from the ideal, prototypical Jerusalem of the prophets and of John. Jeremiah's complete perspective on Jerusalem must be gleaned from the balance of the book, which expressed much the same idea as did Isaiah.³

¹Badenas, 247. See also *ibid.*, 251, where he argues for a continuity between the old and new Jerusalems.

²Allo, 152; Beckwith, 602; Hendriksen, 158; Ladd, *Commentary*, 158.

³See Jer 3:12-18; 15:19-21; 30:3, 10-11, 17-22; 31:1-14, 23-24, 31-40; 32:36-44; 33:6-26; 46:27-28; 50:4-5, 19-20.

Ezek 16:46-58 is a fourth passage frequently cited as evidence that Jerusalem was considered to be Sodom in the OT.¹ Yet Jerusalem was not called Sodom here. Rather, her behavior was compared with that of her "sisters," Sodom and Samaria, and was found to be worse than that of either. In fact, the behavior of Jerusalem was so abominable that she made her "sisters" appear righteous by comparison (vss. 47-52). In spite of all this, however, Jerusalem herself never became a prototype of the evil city that faces eternal destruction. Rather, vss. 59-63 point to the eventual restoration of Jerusalem to a covenant relationship with God:

Yea, thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of

¹Allo, 152; Beasley-Murray, 186; Beckwith, 602; Charles, 1:288; Düsterdieck, 317; J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 172; Hendriksen, 158; Johnson, 112; Krodel, 226; Ladd, *Commentary*, 158; Swete, 138. Ruiz, 364-78, argues for Ezek 16 (and 23) as having exerted an influence on Rev 17. He finds in Rev 17:16 "a new synthesis of the metaphor of punishment for sexual misconduct as applied to a socio-political entity" (366). But in Rev 17 the Great City is Rome, not Jerusalem, according to Ruiz (*ibid.*), so this background to Rev 17 does not contribute to the argument in favor of Jerusalem as the Great City unless, like Beagley, 93-112, or J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 283-307, one argues in favor of Jerusalem as the Great Harlot/City in Rev 17-18. This position has not received any significant support.

your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel went on to describe how Yahweh deals justly with people, according to their iniquity or righteousness (chap. 18), and specifically how He worked patiently with rebellious Israel, doing all in His power to woo them to Himself, but without success (chap. 20). Still, He promised Israel that He would yet "purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me" (20:38). "And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country which I swore to give to your fathers" (vs. 42). "And you shall know that I am the LORD when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel, says the Lord GOD" (vs. 44).

Like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel constantly returned to the concept that Jerusalem, despite her backsliding, would remain the symbol of Yahweh's elect people on earth, whom He would eventually win back to Himself, forgive, redeem, and glorify.¹ There was no other community of people on earth with whom Yahweh kept covenant. If Jerusalem had been permanently rejected, Yahweh would have had no community on earth that was uniquely His own (cf. 2 Chr 6:5-6; Amos 3:2).

¹See Ezek 11:16-20; 34:11-16, 22-31; 36:8-15, 22-38; 37:11-28; 39:7-8, 25-29; 43:4-9; 48:30-35.

Jerusalem was not important, in the larger scheme of things, as a historical city on a mountain, but for what it represented as the headquarters of the worship of God on earth,¹ the only place where He had placed His name,² the locus of His people, in whom He would reveal His glory before the nations.³ Apart from His people, there would have been no divine interest in Jerusalem. Jerusalem represented the core of the community of the God's people. No other city or nation ever represented the people of God in Scripture. All the other nations worshiped other gods. It was the task of the people of God to provide before the nations a living demonstration of the glory and power of God in order that all nations would come to know and worship God.⁴ Apart from the worship of God headquartered in Jerusalem, there would have been no worship of the true God. That is why Israel's backsliding was so serious that God had to act decisively to bring them to repentance (cf. Deut 4:25-31). They wanted to be like the nations around them, but God constantly had to remind them that they were called to be different (Exod 19:5-6; Lev 20:26; Deut 7:6;

¹Isa 56:7; Jer 3:17; Ezek 43:7; Zech 14:16.

²Cf. Deut 12:5, 11; 14:23; 16:6; 26:2; 1 Kgs 9:3; 14:21; 2 Chr 6:5-6; 12:13; Isa 18:7; Ezek 48:35.

³Isa 60:21; 62:1-7; Jer 33:9; Ezek 37:21-28.

⁴Gen 12:2-3; Deut 4:5-8; Isa 42:6-7; 45:14; 49:6-7.

10:15; 14:2; 26:18-19; 28:1-14), to be His witnesses in the earth (Isa 43:10-12; 44:8; 49:3, 6; 55:4-5).

John understood this and retained Jerusalem in his theology as the community of God's people. The Woman of Rev 12 was John's Jerusalem, as was the Bride of Rev 19-22. Like all NT writers, John made the transfer of the messianic community from the people of Israel to the Christian house of faith, but it was still prototypical Jerusalem, the virgin daughter of Zion, the focus of attack on the part of the Dragon/Beast and the Great City Sodom/Egypt/Babylon. Jerusalem could never be the Great City for John, since his theology was grounded in, and a messianic or christological development of, the theology of the OT prophets.¹

Implications of the Motif in Revelation

Having established the presence, backgrounds, key elements, and extent of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif in the book of Revelation, we turn now to a study of the implications of the motif for John's theology. As noted in chapter 1, three selected areas of John's theology are focused on, namely, theodicy, soteriology, and eschatology.

¹The other OT prophets have a theology of Jerusalem similar to that of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. See, e.g., Dan 9:16-19, 24-25; 11:45-12:1; Hos 1:10-11; 2:14-23; 14:4-7; Joel 2:12-32; 3:1-2, 16-21; Amos 5:14-15; 9:11-15; Obad 17, 21; Mic 2:12-13; 4:1-13; 5:2-4, 7-9; 7:7-20; Nah 1:12-2:2; Hab 3:13; Zeph 3:11-20; Hag 2:6-9; Zech 1:12-17; 2:1-12; 3:9-10; 8:1-8, 15, 20-23; 9:9-17; 10:6-12; 12:4-13:1; 13:9; 14:1-21; Mal 3:4, 11-12, 16-18; 4:2-3.

It is not my purpose to fully elaborate John's theology in these areas, but rather to consider in a preliminary way what implications the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif might have for his theology in each area.

In this discussion it would be well to remember that John used his sources freely, not slavishly, as was shown in chapter 1. He knew the traditions, and utilized them for his own purposes. This is not to imply that he abused his sources, but that he frequently reinterpreted them in the new context of the risen and ascended Christ and of His church. John saw himself as a Christian prophet in the line of the OT prophets, but with a new christological and ecclesiological emphasis. Furthermore, the coming of the Messiah had ushered in a new era, with a new eschatological focus. Thus, John could read the traditions as a part of redemptive history and yet interpret them in a new light from his new perspective within that redemptive history.

Sodom/Egypt/Babylon and Theodicy

One of the great theological problems of all time has been the question of theodicy. Grant Osborne helps us to define our terms of reference. He states: "Theodicy in the Bible refers to the justification of God in two different directions: the seeming triumph of the wicked and

the suffering of the innocent."¹ In the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif, John addressed both aspects of the problem.

Through the use of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif John gave his readers a salvation-historical view of the issue of theodicy. For example, the reader could not think of the Great City as spiritually represented by Sodom without thinking of the Gen 18-19 Sodom tradition. There the issue of theodicy was explicitly addressed very early in the tradition of salvation history.

Abraham, informed by Yahweh that He had heard a great outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah in regard to the gravity of their sin and was going to investigate, responded with a very insightful question: "Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (18:23). Yahweh had said nothing about destroying anyone, but Abraham apparently understood something of the character of Yahweh and the appropriate response to sin. At the same time, he also revealed his understanding of another issue of theodicy, that of justice requiring a reward according to works. In 18:25, he answered his own question with an assertion of Yahweh's justice in this regard as well:

Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

¹Grant R. Osborne, "Theodicy in the Apocalypse," *Trinity Journal*, 14 n.s. (1993): 63.

Yahweh's actions in bringing Lot and his daughters "out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt" (19:29), demonstrated that Abraham's confidence in Yahweh's justice was warranted.

In the subsequent Sodom tradition, there is never a question raised as to the justice of Sodom's sentence. The responsibility for their destruction is always laid at the feet of the people of Sodom, as a result of the choices they made. God is never blamed or accused of injustice. Rather, the example of Sodom is consistently set forth as a warning to others who may be tempted to behave similarly.

John utilizes this tradition, as well as the Egypt and Babylon traditions, to make a statement about the responsibility the Great City bears in its eventual doom. God cannot be blamed. As Creator, He is Sovereign and has a responsibility to judge and to restore the created order that sin has brought into disarray. His judgment is not arbitrary, but is according to deeds (*lex talionis*), a principle John repeatedly invokes (2:23; 13:10; 16:6; 18:6-7; 20:12-13; 22:12).

He also uses the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif to make clear that God's holiness and righteousness are vindicated by His justice in taking vengeance for His persecuted and martyred people. Rev 17 and 18 depict the judgment of the Great Harlot/City not only for her immorality, wantonness, arrogance, and other sins, but also for her treatment of

saints, apostles, prophets, and other martyrs/witnesses of Jesus (μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ) (17:6; 18:20, 24). In the paean to God's justice in 19:1-3, after the final judgment of the Great Harlot/City, there can be no doubt as to the conclusion of the chronicle of God's dealings with both the innocent righteous and the wicked who have oppressed and persecuted them throughout history:

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.

There are also other indications in the book of Revelation that the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif is closely intertwined with John's theology of God's justice.

In chap. 11 the Great City is judged for its role in the treatment of God's Two Witnesses (vs. 13). In chap. 14 the fall of Babylon is proclaimed immediately following the announcement of the coming of God's judgment hour (vss. 7-8). God's justice is declared in rendering judgments in the bowl plagues, which end with Babylon being made to drink the cup of the fury of God's wrath (16:5-7, 19).

Osborne lists four general headings under which John's theology of the justice of God may be classified:¹

(1) God's judgment as a revelation of His righteous character; (2) God's judgment as a necessity in light of humanity's depravity and final rejection; (3) God's

¹Ibid., 66, 68, 70, 73.

judgment as an execution of His righteous punishment; and (4) God's judgment as a vindication of His righteous ones. All of these issues are addressed in one way or another by John's Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif. This is especially so when one is pointed by the motif to the OT traditions which underlie it, with their salvation-historical view of the working of God with both righteous and unrighteous through history, combined with John's eschatological focus on the resolution of the great conflict in the impending eschaton.

In short, the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif provided John with a model for explaining the problems of theodicy in terms which his readers could relate to and understand.

Sodom/Egypt/Babylon and Soteriology

It has been widely observed that the Lamb is a key feature in the book of Revelation, having a soteriological role throughout the book.¹ The blood of the Lamb was, of course, a significant element of the Egypt motif, representing Yahweh's provision for delivering His people from the plague of death which was to pass over Egypt.²

¹See, e.g., Becker, 93; Grimsrud, 50-52; Hughes, 79; Mulholland, 161-63; Sweet, 124-26; Wall, 102-5.

²Beasley-Murray, 125, says, "In this book, which is full of the exodus typology, it is virtually certain that the prophet has in view the Christ as the passover-lamb." Cf. Hughes, 79; Sweet, 6, 124; Wall, 103-4. I remind the reader again that this study does not intend to explore the Exodus motif, as such, in Revelation. Although the Egypt and Exodus motifs are intertwined to a considerable extent, the Exodus motif does not end with Israel's experience at the sea (Exod 14-15), but rightly includes a study of the

In Rev 5 the Lion of the tribe of Judah emerged as the conqueror who had earned the right to open the seven-sealed scroll (vs. 5) by virtue of the fact that He was also the Lamb who was slain to ransom people for God by His blood from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (vss. 8-9).

In 7:9-10 the great numberless multitude of the redeemed stood before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, crying with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" When John inquired regarding those clothed in white robes, he was told, "These are they who have come out of great tribulation;¹ they

Sinai covenant and the typology of the sanctuary and its services and festivals. I have limited the discussion of the Exodus from Egypt tradition as far as possible to the character of Egypt and its enslavement of God's people, as well as God's attempt's to set His people free by plaguing Egypt until it let Israel go. The Passover account is an integral part of that tradition. It is the soteriological key to John's broad christological use of the tradition.

¹Coming out of great tribulation appears to have been equated to some extent with coming out of Egypt and Babylon. In the verses which follow (15-17), there are a number of expressions which remind one of the Exodus from Egypt, but these are allusions to Isa 49:10, which is part of a promise concerning the people of God who came out of captivity in Babylon (48:20; cf. 49:9). At the same time, comparison with Isa 48:20-21 reveals that the promise is stated in terms of the Exodus experience: "Say, 'The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!' They thirsted not when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he cleft the rock and the water gushed out." Cf. Mulholland, 183-84.

have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14).

When we turn to that section of the book of Revelation in which the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif is most prominent—11:1-19:3—we find that there is a close connection between the blood of the Lamb and the salvation of those who have been persecuted by the Dragon, the Beasts, and the Great City. There is also an explicit loss of salvation for those who find themselves opposing the slain Lamb and siding instead with the Dragon, the Beasts, and the Great City.

In 12:10-11 those who have been accused before God day and night by "the accuser of our brethren" (Satan, the Dragon, who "has been thrown down") "have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

In 13:8 "everyone whose name is not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain" worship the Beast from the sea—and through it the Dragon (vs. 4).

In 14:1 those who have the name of the Lamb and His Father in their foreheads are seen standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion. These "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" and "have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb" (vs. 4).

In 14:9-10 those who worship the Beast and its image and receive its mark on their foreheads or hands will

"be tormented with fire and brimstone¹ in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb."

In 15:2-3 those who have conquered the Beast and its image and the number of its name are viewed "standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands." There they sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, praising God for His great and wonderful deeds. This is obviously a reminder of the great deliverance of Israel from Egypt at the sea.

In 17:14 the Ten Kings, who have given over their power and authority to the Beast (vs. 13), "make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

There are no other means of salvation in the book of Revelation than the blood of the Lamb. Those who side with the slain Lamb become part of His eternal kingdom in chaps. 19-22, as promised in 5:9-10. Those who reject the slain Lamb doom themselves to destruction and eternal loss, just as on that fateful night in Egypt. Because the blood of the Lamb was a part of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif, the reader was able to see it as part of a whole picture which revealed the provision of God for salvation from sin and the individual's personal responsibility for accepting or rejecting it.

¹The Sodom motif may be implicit in this passage.

Sodom/Egypt/Babylon and Eschatology

Eschatology is an area of John's theology in which special interest has been shown in the study of the book of Revelation.¹ It is also an area in which there has been considerable diversity of opinion. The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif informs the reader about various aspects of John's eschatology.

The major contribution of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif to John's eschatology is its focus on the final judgment as the rectification of the problem of evil. While Rev 12:10 points to a *de facto* victory over the Dragon through the blood of the Lamb, which can be claimed by John's readers, it is evident from 12:12-17, as well as chaps. 13-18, that there is still a lot of trouble ahead for God's people before the problem of evil is finally eliminated from this world.²

¹George Eldon Ladd, "The Theology of the Apocalypse," *Gordon Review* 7 (1963-64): 73, states that the primary theology of Revelation is its eschatology. "It claims to be a prophecy of the things that must soon take place (1:1-3), whose central event is the second coming of Jesus Christ (1:7)." Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, attempts to demonstrate that eschatology is "the main motive and formal structural principle of the book" (36), the "fundamental principle of interpretation" (37), and "the main concern" (46) of the Apocalypse. The final judgment and the eschatological salvation constitute "the goal and high point of the composition of the whole book" (555).

²Ladd, "Eschatology," 2:134, observes that in the NT, "the OT promise of eschatological redemption is fulfilled in two redemptive acts: in the mission of Jesus in history and in His parousia at the end of the age. What is seen in the OT as a single great Day of the Lord has become

Although John presented the time as being "near" (1:3) or "short" (12:12), and Jesus as returning "soon" (3:11; 22:6, 12, 20), he nowhere clarified the length of time before the final judgment, leaving his readers with a sense of imminence and expectancy that would require constant preparedness on their part, in accordance with Jesus' own eschatological counsel (Matt 24:36-25:46; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34-36). No one was to postpone the day of decision lest he or she be found unprepared. Before the announcement of the end of probationary time ("It is done!") under the seventh bowl plague (16:17), there would be a final reminder, "'Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed'" (vs. 15).

When Israel was being prepared to flee from Egypt, Yahweh instructed them how they were to be prepared. As

two days." He goes on to point out that this "means that the age of the Church is a period 'between the times,' in which the two ages, as it were, overlap. . . . This structure of 'realized-futuristic' eschatology is the unifying factor in the diversity of NT thought. It also renders all NT truth essentially eschatological in character" (ibid.) This kind of eschatological structure requires special vocabulary to denote the various aspects of eschatological fulfillment. Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," 107, sees three aspects: "(1) the basic fulfillment of the OT eschatological hopes centering in the earthly life and work of Jesus Christ at His *first advent*; (2) the derived spiritual fulfillment by the church, the body of Christ in the time of tension between the 'already' and 'not yet'; and (3) the *apocalyptic consummation* and final ushering in of the age to come at the second advent of Christ and beyond." These three aspects, he says, "may be termed respectively *inaugurated, appropriated, and consummated eschatology*" (ibid.).

they ate the Passover lamb, they were to be dressed for travel—their loins girded, their sandals on their feet, and their walking sticks in their hands—and they were to eat in haste (12:11).

When Lot and his family were being urged to flee from Sodom to avoid the coming destruction, "he lingered; so the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand" (19:16) and brought them out of the city and said to them, "Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley; flee to the hills, lest you be consumed" (vs. 17). John tries to convey this same sense of urgency to his readers in the voice from heaven in Rev 18:4: "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities." Only the city is there called Babylon, the allusion being to Jer 51:6, 45:

Flee from the midst of Babylon, let every man save his life! Be not cut off in her punishment, for this is the time of the LORD's vengeance, the requital he is rendering her.

Go out of the midst of her, my people! Let every man save his life from the fierce anger of the Lord.

There is a sense of urgency communicated in the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif, an urgency to escape the turf of the enemy before it is too late, to turn from the sinful habits and practices that enslave the citizens of the Great City, to partake instead of the Passover Lamb and, having

set sight on the Promised Land, to move out with haste toward the Holy City.

The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif gives a salvation-historical perspective to John's eschatology. It is a tool by which the acts of God in the history of His people and their enemies as recorded in the OT are used by John to illumine the present and the future for his readers.

Most of the time periods of the book of Revelation appear under the rubric of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif and closely related developments. It is at the end of the 1260 days of 11:3, for example, that the Two Witnesses were killed by the Beast from the abyss in the street of the Great City. This is the same period of time during which the Holy City was trampled by the nations in 11:2; during which the Woman was pursued into the wilderness by the Dragon in 12:6, 14; and during which the Beast from the sea was allowed to exercise authority in 13:5. Thus there seems to be some basic similarity to these differently described events. And this time period seems to fit into a development of events that can be discerned in these passages.

There is another time period of three and a half days during which the corpses of the Two Witnesses lie in the street of the Great City. After their resurrection, upon their ascension to heaven, there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the Great City fell. This, however,

was not the final judgment on the Great City, which is described in 16:19, for the announcement follows, "The second woe has passed; behold the third woe is soon to come" (11:14).

So also in Rev 12, after the 1260 days/three and a half "times" during which the Woman was nourished in the wilderness (12:6, 14-16), there were other events to follow: "Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus."

In Rev 13 there appears also to be a development that takes place. Not only do we find there the same period of time (vs. 5), but there is a mortal wounding of one of the heads of the Beast from the sea, from which it amazingly recovers, and "the whole earth followed the beast with wonder." And this is not the end of the story, for after this another Beast rises from the earth, which "exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed" (vs. 12).

Rev 14 suggests a development in that after the first angel announces that the hour of God's judgment has come, a second angel follows with the message that Babylon has fallen, and this in turn is followed by a third angel with a message of warning to those who persist in

worshipping the Beast and his image, etc. (vss. 6-11). Still, this cannot be the end, since this is followed by a call for endurance (vs. 12) and by an announcement that there will be a blessing on "the dead who die in the Lord henceforth," "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" (vs. 13). The harvest of the earth by "one like a son of man" follows this at some point (vss. 14-16).

The seven bowl plagues in Rev 15-16 reveal both an external and internal development. They are described as "the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended" (15:1). They also appear to occupy a period of time, for 15:8 says that "no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended." They appear also to be sequential, for the typology John apparently used from the fall of historical Babylon,¹ in which Cyrus diverted water from the Euphrates to prepare for the fall of Babylon,² is divided between the sixth and seventh bowl plagues, such that the drying up of the Euphrates is under the sixth bowl and the fall of Babylon is under the seventh bowl. Also, as noted above, there is a warning under the sixth bowl to be prepared for the coming of Christ, but the announcement "It is done!" does not come until the seventh bowl.

¹See p. 184, n. 1.

²See Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 7.5.7-36; Herodotus 1.191; Isa 44:27-45:1.

Rev 17, the chapter dedicated to the judgment of Babylon, likewise contains a development, perhaps one of the most significant in the book. The Beast which carries the Great Harlot is described as having seven heads and ten horns, like the Dragon of Rev 12 and the Beast from the sea in Rev 13. In vs. 10 the angel explained to John regarding the heads of the Beast: "they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while." But there was also the matter of the ten horns. The angel continued (vs. 12): "And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast."

These time periods and developments were not given for the purpose of projecting a date for the final judgment, which would have been impossible from the limited information John gave, or even to suggest to his readers that the final judgment was in the remote future, which would have been counter to the thrust of his eschatology. Rather, it was to give his readers a sense of movement, that things were not static, but history was progressing and developing toward a culmination, and they were a part of that history. There were still events lying ahead, and things would get worse before they got better, but the same God who had guided His people in the past would be with

them in their future, and ultimate victory was assured them if they would remain faithful to the end (1:3; 2:10; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12; 16:15; 22:7).

The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif, I believe, could have played a significant role in helping to give John's readers this larger perspective, using allusions and echoes from the past to understand their present situation and to affirm John's explanation of the future that lay yet ahead.

I suggest that the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif helps to demonstrate that John's perspective was the salvation-historical view of the OT prophets and did not begin and end with the local situation in first-century Rome. Eugene Boring, while not commenting on the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif as such, nevertheless observes John's salvation-historical orientation:

One way John helped the church of his time to understand their experience as part of the saving act of God was to set it within the context of God's mighty acts in past history. John understands, and wants the church to understand, that the present persecution is in continuity with the history of the people of God in the past, in which anti-God powers of oppression and injustice which seemed to be in control of the world were overthrown by the liberating act of God.

It is true that John does not recite the "mighty acts of God" as a chronological narrative of the past, and thus can be misunderstood as having "no retrospect on salvation history," but this impression is due to the prophetic manner in which John uses the Scriptures. Instead of bifurcating past and present by citing a text as an item from the past and then "applying" it to the present, he draws images from the past and represents them as the vehicle of the prophetic word of God to the present, "collapsing" them into the present moment. See, for example, 11:5-8, where . . . Sodom, Egypt, "the great city," and "the city where their Lord was crucified" all become the same city. Yet this does

not mean that John had no sense of time, that all history is homogenized and compacted into the present moment. John has a clear perception of the history of God's mighty acts in the past and draws from this tradition the images by which he portrays the present/eschatological act of God.¹

Not only does John use images from the past to portray "the present/eschatological act of God," but he also puts them into service to project confidence in the future acts of God until the eschatological consummation, at which time God will introduce a radically new order.²

Summary

While John made special use of the key features of the Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon traditions in order to highlight selected characteristics of the Great City, he also made a broad use of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif throughout the book of Revelation, especially the latter half. He did this to a large degree through the use of allusions to various OT passages which related to one of

¹M. Eugene Boring, "The Theology of Revelation: 'The Lord Our God the Almighty Reigns,'" *Interpretation* 40 (1986): 263. He adds on p. 267: "John sets the history of God's mighty acts of salvation within the context of universal human history, that is, he sets it within the parameters of creation and eschaton, each understood as an act of God. The creation and eschaton are not thought of 'mythologically,' but 'historically,' that is, as the first and last of God's mighty acts in history, albeit at its 'edges.'"

²Cf. *ibid.*, 263-669. Adela Yarbro Collins, "Eschatology in the Book of Revelation," *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990): 63-72, discusses the distinctions between prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic eschatology, and concludes that there is a synthesis of the two in the book of Revelation, but that the former is subordinated to the latter (67).

these traditions, or by the use of key words, phrases, and concepts which would remind the reader of the various traditions. In this way he was able to blend the three traditions into a cohesive motif which would provide the reader with important insights into his theology and his development of the great conflict motif throughout the book of Revelation.

The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif forms a significant part of John's great conflict motif, in which the two women/cities represented the two sides of the conflict on earth. Because the great conflict motif was central to John's theology, a clear understanding of what the Great City Sodom/Egypt/Babylon represents is an asset in attempting to understand his theology.

While the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif probably was not determinative for John's theology, it did have implications for John's theology and probably formed an integral part of its development. It helped the reader to have the broad salvation-historical perspective of God's acts in history, past, present, and future; to know that, though judgment is long deferred in mercy to the sinner, it would certainly come. God's justice would be vindicated. The guilty would be punished. The suffering and death endured by the righteous at the hands of evil persons and institutions would be avenged. The reader would also know the importance of the work of Christ, the Passover Lamb, in his

or her salvation. And he/she would live every day in a state of preparedness and earnest expectation, knowing that the time for the end of all things was near.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

As noted in chapter 1, this study set out to demonstrate that there is a Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif in the book of Revelation and to try to understand the key elements of the motif through a study of the Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon traditions in the OT, NT, and relevant extra-biblical literature.

Chapter 2 demonstrated first that there is a Great City motif in Revelation, and that John explicitly called the Great City Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon. It was observed that these names had symbolic significance which would have been meaningful to the first readers of the book, based on the traditional and semantic significance which these names had acquired by the time of the first century A.D. That significance was then sought from the traditions which had developed concerning these cities/nations, as found in the OT, in the NT, and in the relevant extrabiblical literature of the time. It was determined that there were a number of highly significant features which were shared by the three traditions that would shed light on John's use of the code

words "Sodom," "Egypt," and "Babylon" to characterize the Great City in Revelation. These included:

1. A traditional common ancestry in the line of Ham, as given in Gen 10, as opposed to the line of Shem, from which Abraham and his descendants came

2. Their location on a major river, which played a significant role in their prosperity

3. Their identification as geographic neighbors of Abraham and his descendants, as well as having in common that some of Abraham's family or descendants lived within their boundaries for periods of time, implying that they were not left without witnesses to the God of heaven

4. Their intransigent evil characters, notably oppression of others, particularly of the representatives of God, but also variously including such things as arrogance, idolatry, sorcery, immorality, and practical atheism

5. Partial warning judgments in the form of military overthrow, natural disaster, or plagues, in which God's power and sovereignty were made clear, giving opportunity for them to repent and turn to honor God

6. A call to God's people who were living in their midst to come out before final judgment would be meted out

7. Final, complete judgments predicted (or executed, in the case of Sodom) in one or more of the following forms: sword, a drying up of their waters, and fire.

Chapter 3 showed first how the key elements shared by the three traditions were used by John in highlighting certain features of the Great City and its impending judgment in Revelation. Then a broad study of the book of Revelation was undertaken to determine the extent of the motif in the book. It was observed that elements of the motif may be found throughout the book, but that the motif is particularly prominent in the latter half of the book, beginning with chap. 11. It was further noted that the Great City motif is an integral part of the larger great conflict motif, which is elucidated especially in chap. 12.

The limits of the motif were studied, with the conclusion that other cities and nations like Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Assyria/Ninevah, and Jerusalem were apparently not included in the Great City motif because they lacked significant features by which John wished to characterize the Great City, not because they may not have represented the Great City in many ways. In the special case of Jerusalem, it was determined that John viewed Jerusalem as the prototype not of the Great City but of the Holy City, based to a large degree on the perspective of the OT prophets, who consistently depict Jerusalem as eventually returning to Yahweh and being established as Zion, the Holy City in which Yahweh dwells with His redeemed people and to which all nations gather to worship Yahweh.

Finally, the implications of the motif for selected areas of John's theology were explored briefly. The major conclusion was that John's use of the Sodom/Egypt/Babylon motif highlights his salvation-historical perspective and colors his whole theology, giving his readers confidence, based on God's record in their past history, that they could entrust their present and future to His sovereign direction, knowing that He was a covenant-keeping God and that the blood of the Lamb was the guarantee of victorious salvation and citizenship in the new Jerusalem. "Surely I am coming soon" was the watchword for the reader of Revelation—coming to judge and coming to save. In all their trials they had reason to rejoice.

A hermeneutic was proposed in chapter 1 for working with John's sources and reading the traditions as he would likely have read them. There is no way to verify John's hermeneutic, but the results of this study seem to suggest that the proposed hermeneutic had some validity and may be useful for other similar studies. At least the common elements found in the Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon traditions were all shown in chapter 3 to be utilized by John as significant features of his Great City motif, as well as of his larger great conflict motif, seemingly confirming his reading and adoption of these elements of the traditions. We have also been able to observe some of the ways in which John's use of symbolism functioned in the expression and

development of his theology. Through the use of symbols from the past, like Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon, which conveyed a whole tradition and semantic history to the reader, John was able to put these traditions into the service of his theology, incorporating the whole tradition in the symbol and reappropriating it for the new situation.

It is hoped that this study will be a stimulus for further investigation into John's theology, an area much neglected in the field of Revelation studies.

APPENDIX 1

A Comparison of Isa 47-48 with Rev 17-19:3

Isa 47

1—Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne

1—You shall no more be called tender and delicate

2—Take the millstones and grind

3—I will take vengeance

5—Sit in silence

5—Go into darkness

Rev 17-19:3

17:1—I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who is seated upon many waters; 18:7—she says, "A queen I sit"; 18:2—fallen, fallen is Babylon the great

18:14—All thy dainties and thy splendor are lost to thee

18:21—Took up a stone like a great millstone;
18:22—sound of a millstone shall be heard in thee no more

18:20—God has given judgment for you against her; 19:3—he has avenged on her the blood of his servants

18:22—The sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters, shall be heard in thee no more; sound of the millstone shall be heard in thee no more

18:23—The light of a lamp shall shine in thee no more

5-You shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms

6-I gave my people into your hand, you showed them no mercy

7-You said, "I shall be mistress for ever"; 8-"I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children"

8-You lover of pleasures

8, 10-You said in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me"

9-These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day: the loss of children and widowhood; 11-disaster shall fall upon you; ruin shall come upon you suddenly

9-Loss shall come upon you in full measure

9-In spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments; 12-stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries

18:9-The kings of the earth who committed fornication and were wanton with her, will weep and wail over her; 18:14-all thy dainties and thy splendor are lost to thee, never to be found again

17:6-I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus; 18:24-in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on the earth

18:7-In her heart she says, "A queen I sit, I am no widow, mourning I shall never see"

18:7-She played the wanton

18:7-She glorified herself

18:8-So shall her plagues come in a single day, pestilence and mourning and famine; 18:10-in one hour has thy judgment come; 18:19-in one hour she has been laid waste; cf. 18:17

18:6-Render to her as she herself has rendered; 18:7-give her a like measure of torment and mourning

18:23-All nations were deceived by thy sorcery

10-You felt secure in your wickedness

18:5-Her sins are heaped high as heaven;
18:7-"mourning I shall never see"

Isa 48

14-He [Cyrus] shall perform his [the LORD's] purpose on Babylon

Rev 17-19:3

17:16-17-They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it in their hearts to carry out his purpose

20-Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea

18:4-Come out of her, my people

APPENDIX 2

A Comparison of Jer 50-51 with Rev 17-19:3

Jer 50

Rev 17-19:3

8—Flee from the midst of
Babylon, and go out of the
land of the Chaldeans

18:4—Come out of her, my
people

11—Plunderers of my heritage

17:6—Drunk with the blood
of the saints and of the
martyrs of Jesus; 18:24—In
her was found the blood of
prophets and of saints

11—You are wanton as a
heifer at grass

18:3—The wealth of her
wantonness; 18:7—she played
the wanton; 18:9—the kings
of the earth were wanton
with her

13—She shall not be inhab-
ited, but shall be an utter
desolation

17:16—They will make her
desolate and naked;
18:19—she has been laid
waste

14—She has sinned against
the Lord

18:5—Her sins are heaped
high as heaven

15—Her bulwarks have fallen,
her walls are thrown down

18:2—Fallen, fallen is
Babylon the great

15—This is the vengeance of
the Lord

18:20—God has given judg-
ment against her for you;
19:3—He has avenged on her
the blood of his servants

15—Take vengeance on her; do
to her as she has done;
29—requite her according to
her deeds, do to her accord-
ing to all that she has done

18:6—Render to her as she
herself has rendered; repay
her deed for deed;
18:7—give her a like
measure of torment and
mourning

26—Destroy her utterly; let nothing be left of her

29—She has proudly defied the Lord; 31—O proud one

31—Your day has come, the time when I will punish you

32—I will kindle a fire in his cities

39—Wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her

39—She shall be peopled no more for ever, nor inhabited for all generations; 40—no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her

Jer 51

6—Flee from the midst of Babylon, and let every man save his life! Be not cut off in her punishment

6—This is the time of the Lord's vengeance, the requital he is rendering her; 56—the Lord is a God of recompense; he will surely requite

7—Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, making all the earth drunken: the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad

18:21—So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more

18:7—She glorified herself

18:10—In one hour has thy judgment come

18:8—She shall be burned with fire

18:2—It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird

18:22—The sound of harpers, minstrels, etc., shall be heard in thee no more; and a craftsman shall be found in thee no more; and the sound of the millstone shall be heard in thee no more; cf. 18:23

Rev 17-19:3

18:4—Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues

18:6—Render to her as she herself has rendered;
18:20—God has given judgment for you against her;
19:3—he has avenged on her the blood of his servants

17:4—In her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; 17:2; 18:3—All nations have become drunk with the wine of her impure passion

8—Suddenly Babylon is fallen and has been broken; wail for her; cf. vs. 44

9—Forsake her, and let us go each to his own country; for her judgment has reached up to heaven, and has been lifted up even to the skies

10—The Lord has brought forth our vindication

13—O you who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures, your end is come

24—I will requite Babylon for all the evil that they have done in Zion

26—You shall be a perpetual waste; 55—the Lord is laying Babylon waste

29—The Lord's purposes against Babylon stand, to make the land of Babylon a desolation, without inhabitant

30—Her dwellings are on fire; 32—the bulwarks are burned with fire; 58—her high gates shall be burned with fire

18:2—Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

18:19—In one hour she has been laid waste; 18:9—the kings of the earth will weep and wail over her

18:4-5—Come out of her, my people; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities

18:20—God has given judgment for you against her

17:1—The judgment of the great harlot who is seated upon many waters; 18:17—In one hour all this wealth has been laid waste; 18:10—In one hour has thy judgment come

18:6—Render to her as she herself has rendered; 18:24—in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints

18:19—In one hour she has been laid waste; 18:21—and shall be found no more

17:16-17—They will make her desolate and naked, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose

17:16—They will burn her up with fire; 18:8—she shall be burned with fire

- 35—"The violence done to me and to my kinsmen be upon Babylon," let the inhabitant of Zion say
- 37—Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant;
49—Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel, as for Babylon have fallen the slain of all the earth;
44—the wall of Babylon has fallen
- 41—How Babylon has become a horror among the nations!
43—Her cities have become a horror, a land of drought and a desert, a land in which no one dwells
- 42—The sea has come up on Babylon; she is covered with its tumultuous waves
- 45—Go out of the midst of her, my people! Let every man save his life from the fierce anger of the Lord
- 62—Nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate forever
- 64—Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the evil that I am bringing upon her
- 18:20—Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!
- 18:2—Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit; cf. 18:22-23—no more inhabitants; 18:24—in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on the earth
- 18:9-19—Kings, merchants, and sea traders wept and wailed over her, "Alas, alas, for the great city; in one hour she has been laid waste"
- 18:21—A mighty angel took a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more
- 18:4—Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues
- 18:22-23—The sound of music or of a millstone will be heard in thee no more; a craftsmen shall be found in thee no more; the voice of bridegroom and bride shall be heard in thee no more
- 18:21—So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more

APPENDIX 3

A Comparison of Ezek 26-28 with Rev 18

Ezek 26

13-I will stop the music of your songs, and the sound of your lyres shall be heard no more

14-I will make you a bare rock; you shall never be rebuilt; 19-I will make you a city laid waste

20-You will not be inhabited or have a place in the land of the living

21-I will bring you to a dreadful end, and you shall be no more; you will never be found again

Ezek 27

9-All the ships of the sea with their mariners were in you, to barter for your wares

12-24-List of trading partners and goods traded

Rev 18

22-The sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters, shall be heard in thee no more

19-She has been laid waste; 21-and shall be found no more

22-23-No musician, no craftsman, no miller, no bridegroom or bride will be found in thee any more

21-So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more

Rev 18

19-All who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth

11-13-List of goods traded with the merchants of earth

29-31—The mariners and all the pilots of the sea stand on the shore and wail aloud over you and cry bitterly; they cast dust on their heads and wallow in ashes; they weep over you in bitterness of soul, with bitter mourning

32—They raise a lamentation for you and lament over you: "Who was ever destroyed like Tyre in the midst of the sea?"

36—The merchants among the peoples hiss at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more for ever

Ezek 28

2—Your heart is proud, and you have said, "I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods"; cf. vss. 6, 9

4—You have gotten wealth for yourself, and have gathered gold and silver into your treasuries

16—In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned

18—I brought forth fire from the midst of you; it consumed you; 19—you shall be no more for ever

17-19—All shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood afar off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning; they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned

19—They wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! In one hour she has been laid waste.

15—The merchants who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, "In one hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

Rev 18

7—She glorified herself; in her heart she says, "A queen I sit"

16—The great city was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold, with jewels, and with pearls

13—She trafficked in human souls; 24—in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who have been slain upon the earth; 5—her sins are heaped high as heaven

8—She shall be burned with fire; 21—and shall be found no more

APPENDIX 4

A Comparison of Plagues in Revelation and Exodus

Trumpets	Bowls	Egypt
1. <i>On earth:</i> hail, fire, blood; 1/3 of earth, grass, and trees burnt	<i>On earth:</i> sores on men with mark of the beast and who worship its image	<i>On earth:</i> hail and fire, plants and trees destroyed (#7), sores on man and beast (#6)
2. <i>On sea:</i> 1/3 of sea became blood, 1/3 of sea creatures died	<i>On sea:</i> the sea became blood, everything in the sea died	<i>On waters:</i> all waters became blood, fish died (#1)
3. <i>On rivers and springs:</i> 1/3 of waters poisoned, many men died	<i>On rivers and springs:</i> waters became blood, men could not drink	<i>On rivers, ponds, streams, etc.:</i> waters became blood, men could not drink (#1)
4. <i>On sun, moon, and stars:</i> 1/3 of each darkened	<i>On the sun:</i> power to scorch men with heat/fire	<i>On sun, moon, and stars:</i> thick darkness three days (#9)
5. <i>On sun and air:</i> darkened by thick cloud of smoke containing locusts who tormented men with pain	<i>On sun and air:</i> darkness on the kingdom of the beast, men gnawed tongues for pain and sores	<i>On sun and air:</i> land was darkened by thick cloud of locusts which came on east wind, ate everything (#8)

6. *On river Euphrates:* 1/3 of men killed by fire and brimstone from mouths of horse-like creatures, great earthquake, 1/10 of city fell, 7000 killed

7. *Voices in heaven:* world's kingdoms are become God's kingdoms

On river Euphrates: river dried up to prepare way for kings from east, frog-like spirits of devils working deceptive miracles to gather kings for day of battle of God Almighty

A voice from the temple: "It is done," Babylon and cities of nations fall, great hailstones

On river Nile: frogs come out of river, magicians conjure frog-like apparitions to deceive by imitating miracles of God in struggle between God and Pharaoh (#2)

A great cry in Egypt: all first-born die, Egypt's probation closes (#10), hail (#7)

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