

Will Babylon Be Rebuilt in Iraq?

Another way to ask the title question is, should we understand the Babylon in Revelation 18 to be the same literal Babylon of the Old Testament? The answer to this question is dependent on the prophetic context of Isaiah 13-14. If this passage has already been fulfilled, then Revelation 18 would probably not be the same literal city spoken of in Isaiah 13 and 14, for Isaiah 13:19-20 states, “Babylon... will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations....” Many evangelical scholars hold that this passage has already been fulfilled.¹

There is strong evidence from the context of Isaiah 13-14 that the passage has not been fulfilled, but await the details described in Revelation 18. First, the judgment described in Isaiah 13 is more consistent with the events described in the tribulation than with anytime in known history. Babylon has never gone through a destruction similar to Sodom and Gomorrah (Isaiah 13: 19 and Jeremiah 50:46). Neither the overthrow by the Persians nor the Medes resemble the violence described in Isaiah 13:19-20. Cyrus had the city handed over to him. The fall of Babylon has been described by past historians as one that occurred gradually. For centuries after the conquest by Cyrus Babylon was still inhabited, and even today Arabians have been know to use the building materials and pitch there tents in the cities remains.²

A second reason for understanding Isaiah 13-14 as yet future is that according to Isaiah 14:1-8 Babylon will be judged during a period when Israel is restored in the land. Isaiah 14:1-2 was not fulfilled at the time of Israel’s return from Babylonian exile. Israel did not possess the nations, nor did she make “captives of captors”. At the hands of the Persians and Medes following the takeover of Babylon the lands were not at “rest and peace” as described in Isaiah 14:7. Neither was the universal nature of Isaiah 14:9 fulfilled. Each of these prophecies are best understood in the context of the final judgment described prior to the millennium in Revelation.

The above alone does not prove that Babylon will be rebuilt in Iraq. It does however negate the accusation that it can not be rebuilt on the bases of Isaiah 13:20. With the present occupation of the U.S, along with the constant instability of the Middle East, it may seem unreasonable to assume that Babylon will be rebuilt. But then again, who believed at the turn of the twentieth century that Israel would be established as a nation 50 years later. It is conceivable that Babylon will be rebuilt in Iraq. According to Garner, in “Curses and Prophecies”³, which was written before the presence of the U.S., Iraq, was in the process of “restoring or rebuilding some of the structures ... in the ancient city.”

In conclusion, if the prophecies of Isaiah 13-14 have already been fulfilled, then Babylon on Revelation 18 should be understood as allegorical. But, the evidence indicates that Isaiah 13-14 has not been fulfilled. If we hold to a literal fulfillment of prophecy, and this author does, then it is best to understand that a literal city of Babylon will exist, and will be destroyed according the Isaiah’s prophecy. Revelation 18 is speaking of the literal city of Babylon.

¹ Scofield Reference Bible, 1917 edition. Pp. 1346-47.

² Bibliotheca Sacra, 133:529:19-27. January-March, 1976).

³ Ibid, p.6.