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The Babylon of 1 Peter 5:13

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THE BABYLON OF 1 PETER 5:13

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of New Testament
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM	1
II	THE ROMAN THEORY	4
III	THE MESOPOTAMIAN THEORY	16
IV	THE EGYPTIAN THEORY	23
V	EVALUATION	41
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	43

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

1 Pet. 5:13 reads: "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son." There are many historical problems connected with an interpretation of this verse. First, who is ἡ συνεκλεκτή? Second, where is Babylon? Third, who is Marcus whom Peter addresses as "my son"?

The problem discussed in this paper is the second one: Where is Babylon? Three theories have been advanced: "Babylon" is: (1) Rome, (2) Babylon in Mesopotamia, and (3) Babylon on the Nile River in Egypt. Each of these theories is discussed in a separate chapter. The wording of 1 Pet. 5:13 does not make it mandatory to say that Peter was in Babylon, wherever it is, at the time he wrote his first epistle. This is particularly true if the Egyptian theory is accepted. The greetings from the church at Babylon could have come through Mark. However, the natural thing is for Peter to be sending greetings as the result of personal contact with the church at Babylon. We have so little information on the life of Peter that it is theoretically possible that he visited any of the three places mentioned. In this paper, we have assumed that Peter wrote his first epistle in the "Babylon" whose church sends greetings.

The story of this thesis began last summer when I was in Cairo, Egypt. I was directed to the Coptic churches in Babylon by a friend living in Cairo at that time, Mr. Arthur Schwantes. Through Mr. Schwantes I met the Rev. Mr. Hoepner, the pastor of the German Pro-

testant Church in Cairo. In giving us final directions for our excursion to Babylon, Mr. Hoepner remarked that this was the Babylon mentioned by Peter at the end of his first epistle. The remark interested me very much, because the only theories I had ever heard on Peter's Babylon were the Roman and the Mesopotamian theories. My curiosity compelled me to spend two afternoons and a morning looking around Fort Babylon and its six churches. The first afternoon, my companion, Dean Lueking, and I visited some of the churches with the assistance of an officer of the law and his rifle. Our gracious guide balked at taking us to the Jewish synagogue; we assumed he was afraid that the combination of our pale faces and a visit to the Jewish synagogue would be too much even for his trusty weapon: the people might not wait to ask whether we were "Yankee" or "Englees". The next afternoon, the two of us decided to brave the dangers of Old Cairo, specifically Fort Babylon, without the protection of our official friend. We walked around the fort, plowing through the desert sand which comes right up to the fort. A little boy led us to the synagogue where the rabbi's assistant proceeded to give us a tongue lashing for coming around the back way. The following morning, I visited the Coptic Museum and the library of the museum. In the library I found the writings of A. J. Butler upon whom I depended a great deal when writing the chapter on the Egyptian theory. Because of this personal association, I have spent most time discussing the Egyptian theory. The main points of the Roman and Mesopotamian theories have often been treated and therefore can be summarized more briefly.

Concerning ἡ εὐρεκτικὴ, I agree with J. E. Huther and the vast

majority of commentators that this refers to the church at Babylon and not to some lady.¹ Actually, the problem has no direct bearing on the location of Babylon.

The identity of Marcus could conceivably have something to say about the location of Babylon. Babylon and Marcus seem to be closely related. This is particularly so if the Egyptian theory is accepted. Where we felt it necessary in discussing the various theories, we brought in the problem of Marcus.

This thesis is written with certain basic assumptions. We assumed that 1 Peter was written by Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ. We feel that the evidence for the Petrine authorship of the letter as presented by many earlier scholars and recently restated by Edward Gordon Selwyn² is conclusive. It was necessary to assume the Petrine authorship if the inquiry into the location of Babylon is to have any meaning at all. We have further assumed that Peter wrote this letter before 68 A.D. Whether, as Selwyn suggests, Silvanus wrote the letter for Peter or Peter wrote it himself, is unimportant for this paper.³

¹J. E. Huther, "Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude," Meyer Commentary, translated by Rev. Paton J. Gloag et al. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1887), p. 189.

²Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1947), pp. 27-33.

³Ibid., pp. 9-17.

CHAPTER II

THE ROMAN THEORY

The Roman theory of the Babylon of 1 Pet. 5:13 seems to be the most popular and the most commonly accepted theory. J. E. Huther, in the Meyer Commentary, says that the three principal reasons supporting this view are: (1) tradition, (2) the designation of Rome as Babylon in Revelation, and (3) the fact that there were no Jews in the Mesopotamian Babylon at this time.⁴ We will use most of this chapter to discuss the first two points; the third point will come under consideration when we speak of the Mesopotamian theory.

The Authorities

The Roman theory has by far the greatest list of authorities supporting it. Papias, Hieronymus, Oecumenius, Beda, Luther, Thiersch, Wiesinger, Ewald, Schott, Hoffman, Huther,⁵ Sieffert, Keil,⁶ Salmon,

⁴J. E. Huther, "Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles by James, Peter, John, and Jude," Meyer Commentary, translated by Rev. Paton J. Gloag et al. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1887), p. 340.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Carl Friedrich Keil, Commentar ueber die Briefe des Petrus und Judas (Leipzig: Doerffling and Franke, 1883), p. 25.

Ramsay,⁷ Swete,⁸ Selwyn,⁹ Kuhn,¹⁰ Stoeckhardt,¹¹ Hauck,¹² Beare,¹³ Zahn,¹⁴ Cullman,¹⁵ Grotius, Lardner, Cave, Sealer, Hitzig, and Farrar,¹⁶ hold to the Roman theory.

Edward Gordon Selwyn says that Babylon is "a sobriquet for Rome".¹⁷

Karl Georg Kuhn in Kittel's Woerterbuch says that only Rome can be thought of with regard to 1 Pet. 5:13.¹⁸

⁷G. T. Manley, "Babylon on the Nile," The Evangelical Quarterly, (April 1944), XVI, 142.

⁸Henry Barclay Swete, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1909), p. xxi.

⁹Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1947), p. 243.

¹⁰Karl Georg Kuhn, "Babylon," Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, compiled by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1933), I, 514.

¹¹G. Stoeckhardt, Kommentar ueber den Ersten Brief Petri (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1912), pp. 7-8.

¹²Friedrich Hauck, Die Briefe des Jakobus, Petrus, Judas und Johannes Kirchenbriefe (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1949), p. 34.

¹³Francis Wright Beare, The First Epistle of Peter (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), p. 31.

¹⁴Theodor Zahn, Introduction to the New Testament, translated from the third German edition by John Moore Trout et al., (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901), II, 159-160.

¹⁵Oscar Cullman, Peter, translated from the German by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 83-84.

¹⁶Frederick W. Farrar, The Early Days of Christianity (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin and Co., 1882), II, 516 n.

¹⁷Selwyn, op. cit., p. 243.

¹⁸Kuhn, op. cit., p. 514.

W. M. Ramsay's reason for saying that 1 Peter was written from Rome is that the letter is "impregnated with Roman thought."¹⁹ As we are going to see in Chapter 3, it is very likely that a letter written from Babylon in Egypt would also be tainted with Roman thought concerning "the relation to the state and its officers,"¹⁹ because Babylon, Egypt, was the location of one of the three Roman legions stationed in Egypt.²⁰

Francis Wright Beare, who accepts the Roman theory, does not ascribe the authorship of 1 Peter to Peter. He thinks that it was written by a presbyter of the area to which it is addressed. The mention of Babylon was part of the pseudonymity of the letter. Under these conditions Rome is the only possible interpretation. His view is further explained with the fact that he accepts a late date for the writing of this letter.²¹ The later the dating of the letter, the more probable the Roman theory becomes, as we shall see when we discuss the use of the metaphor. Beare says, "There is nothing to connect the memory of Peter with either Egypt or Mesopotamia."²²

The Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia New Testament uses a process of elimination to interpret Babylon as Rome.

There is no reason to believe that he (Peter) ever visited or evangelized the Mesopotamian metropolis then shorn of its former glory, nor the imperial fortress of the same name not

¹⁹W. M. Ramsay, The Church in the Roman Empire (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), pp. 286-287.

²⁰Manley, op. cit., p. 138.

²¹Beare, op. cit., p. 31.

²²Ibid., p. 183.

far from the site of the modern Cairo, whereas it is highly probable that he was in Rome at the time of the composition of the Epistle.²³

However, the Roman theory is not dependent on this negative type of arguing.

Tradition

The first mention of Babylon as Rome is made by Eusebius, the father of Church History who lived from about 260 to 341.²⁴ Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History, II, 15. 2) reports a story told by Clement of Alexandria about the origin of Mark's Gospel in Rome during the time when Peter was preaching there. This story is supported with the testimony of Papias.²⁵ From Eusebius' account, Oscar Cullman in Peter attributes to Clement the belief that 1 Peter was written in Rome and that Babylon is a cryptic word for Rome.²⁶ Theodor Zahn says that it is wrong to say that Clement was of this opinion, because elsewhere Clement identifies Babylon with the ancient city in the land of the Parthians. Moreover, Zahn says that Clement has nothing to say about the place from which 1 Peter was written in his comments on 1 Pet. 5:13.²⁷ On the basis of this same section in

²³John E. Steimmeller and Kathryn Sullivan, "Babylon," Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia New Testament (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1950), p. 58.

²⁴P. J. Bacchus, "Eusebius of Caesarea," The Catholic Encyclopedia, edited by Charles G. Herbermann et al. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), V, 617. The Catholic Encyclopedia hereafter referred to as C. E.

²⁵Zahn, op. cit., p. 163.

²⁶Cullman, op. cit., p. 117.

²⁷Zahn, op. cit., p. 163.

Eusebius, Selwyn says that Papias understood 1 Pet. 5:13 as referring to Rome.²⁸ Zahn is not so bold; he says that "probably" Papias understood Babylon in 1 Pet. 5:13 as referring to Rome.²⁹ Papias lived from about 69 to about 140. He was Bishop of Hierapolis, a disciple of John the Apostle, and a friend of Polycarp.³⁰ As Zahn points out, it was quite natural for Papias to use the Roman interpretation. Being a disciple of John, he naturally placed high value on the Apocalypse and John's use of the term Babylon for Rome. Papias also interpreted many other biblical passages allegorically. His preference for the allegorical interpretation may have led him to interpret 1 Pet. 5:13 allegorically.³¹ The evidence for Papias holding the Roman theory is not strong. Furthermore, whether Papias' background and method of interpretation diminish his testimony for the Roman theory or not is a matter which could be argued both ways. Papias is the cornerstone for the traditional argument of the Roman theory.

Zahn says that the Roman theory "was from the first the prevailing one in the Church, and continued to be so."³² Selwyn says that it "was universal both in east and west until the Reformation."³³ The reason for the change in interpretation at the time of the Reformation—although, as said before, Luther, the Great Reformer, accepted the Roman theory—

²⁸Selwyn, op. cit., p. 243.

²⁹Zahn, op. cit., p. 163.

³⁰John Chapman, "Papias," C. E., op. cit., XI, 457-459.

³¹Zahn, op. cit., p. 163.

³²Ibid.

³³Selwyn, op. cit., p. 243.

was that 1 Pet. 5:13 was being used by the Romanists to prove that Peter's Roman episcopate lasted from twenty to twenty-five years. Ultimately, it was being used to substantiate the primacy of the pope. Zahn points out that the origin of the Roman interpretation did not arise from an attempt to prove the long Roman sojourn of Peter. Such attempts did not arise until the fourth century.³⁴ However, if one were to decide that Papias was influenced by his association with John and his flair for allegorizing and not by the historical fact, as G. T. Manley points out, "the support which this would give to the tradition of Peter's episcopate at Rome is quite sufficient to account for its adoption by later writers"³⁵

There is some tradition for the Mesopotamian theory, but it is late and usually not accepted. Zahn says,

For centuries nothing was known in the tradition of the Syrian Church as to a residence of Peter in Babylon, until some scholars of the Middle Ages undertook to prove it from 1 Pet. v.13."³⁶

The Antiochian school knows no such tradition.³⁷

The Acts of Philip, which were not written before 400, mention that Philip found Peter in the land of the Parthians. However, Zahn says that the Acts of Philip are "absurd" in character.³⁸

The lack of strong tradition for any other place leaves the field

³⁴Zahn, op. cit., pp. 159-160.

³⁵Manley, op. cit., p. 142.

³⁶Zahn, op. cit., p. 159.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 163-164.

³⁸Ibid.

open to the Roman view. Zahn points out,

If there had existed such traditions as made possible the literal interpretation of the name Babylon, which was also the most natural one, the interpretation that makes 1 Pet. v.13 refer to Rome—which came more and more to be accepted, and which can be traced back to the beginning of the second century—could certainly not have been universally accepted; in fact, could scarcely have arisen at all. The entire absence of such traditions makes it impossible to believe—more so, in case the letter is spurious, than if the letter is genuine—that the writer would lead his readers to suppose that he was in Egypt or Babylonia.³⁹

If the Babylon at the southern extremity of the Nile delta, or the ancient city of that name on the Euphrates, long destroyed, be meant, it is impossible to explain how every trace of the tradition of the work of Peter on the Nile or the Euphrates could disappear from the Church as a whole, and, in particular, from the Churches of the lands in question.⁴⁰

In the sixth or seventh century, this tradition finds its way into one of the New Testament manuscripts which reads, "The end of the letter of the apostle Peter, written from Rome."⁴¹

The Syriac "Teaching of the Apostles", which Zahn describes as being "of a somewhat late date," describes 1 Peter as "what Simon wrote from Rome," thus interpreting Babylon to mean Rome.⁴²

Zahn says:

The confused views about Rome or Rhode, a daughter of Peter, of which Barhebraeus gives an account in connection with 1 Pet. v.13; Acts xii. 12, 13, are to be traced back ultimately to the interpretation of Babylon to mean Rome⁴³

Bar Hebraeus, or Barhebraeus, was a Jacobite Syrian bishop and historian

³⁹Zahn, op. cit., pp. 159-160.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 159.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 164. (Wright, Catal. p. 82)

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

who was born in 1226 and died in 1286.⁴⁴

The Metaphor

According to the Roman theory, the word Babylon is a metaphor for Rome. Luther says that this metaphor is used in the sense of thronging corruption. He says that Peter has here called Rome "a confusion, or Babel, since there was also such disorderly conduct, and a confused multitude of all kinds of shameful practices and vices; and whatever in the whole world was scandalous had flown together there."⁴⁵

Zahn says:

Just as the Jews called Rome and the Roman Empire Edom, and just as among Christians Jerusalem and Zion were typical designations of their commonwealth, which centers in heaven and has its future upon earth, so Babylon, which among Greeks and Romans was the proverbial type of a great luxurious city, under the influence of historical tradition and O. T. prophecy, came to be used by Jews and Christians as the figurative name for the capital of the world-empire which was hostile to the Church of God⁴⁶

Selwyn lists three points of comparison between Babylon and Rome which would have prompted the use of this metaphor. First, Babylon was the place of exile in Jewish history; Peter thinks of himself as an exile. Second, both Babylon and Rome combined wealth and wickedness. Third, there are comparisons between their oppressiveness and fall.⁴⁷

⁴⁴R. Butin, "Bar Hebraeus," C. E., op. cit., II, 294.

⁴⁵Martin Luther, I and II Peter, preface by E. H. Gillett (Harlem, 1859), p. 237.

⁴⁶Zahn, op. cit., p. 178.

⁴⁷Selwyn, op. cit., p. 304.

The use of metaphorical designations of persons and places in the Bible is very common. Selwyn lists Elijah and John the Baptist (Mark 9: 11-13), the Christian Church as the Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:26),

Israel for God's chosen religious community, Mount Zion for the place of His worship, Jerusalem for the place of His presence on earth, Sodom for wickedness, and Egypt for materialism and worldliness.⁴⁸

Peter himself uses metaphors in this letter, cf. 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:4. 9; 5:13; etc.⁴⁹ However, nowhere does Peter use a metaphor for the name of a place. He describes in a metaphorical way people whom he explicitly identifies.

1 Pet. 5:13 is not an isolated example of Babylon being used for Rome. Cullman collects the uses:

It occurs above all in the Apocalypse of John, where there can be no doubt that in chs. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5 ff; 18:2 ff. Rome is meant by "Babylon". . . . We further find "Babylon" as a figurative designation for Rome in the pseudepigraphic late Jewish literature. It appears, for example, in the Sibylline Oracles V, 159, where it is said: "The deep sea will burn, and so will Babylon itself and the land of Italy;" in the Apocalypse of Baruch 11:1; and in Fourth Esdras 3:1 ff. . . . In addition, the word "mystery", which in Revelation 17:5 refers to the saying concerning Babylon-Rome, appears to indicate that this covert manner of expression was already known to Christians.⁵⁰

However, it must be stated that this is not conclusive evidence that in 1 Pet. 5:13 the word Babylon means Rome. Selwyn and Cullman agree that if Babylon means Rome here, it is the first such use of the term

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 303-304.

⁴⁹Steinmueller, op. cit., p. 58.

⁵⁰Cullman, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

Babylon. Cullman says:

Both in the Apocalypse of John and in the late Jewish texts, of course, we are dealing with writings which can hardly be earlier than our First Epistle of Peter. Nevertheless, they belong to approximately the same period.⁵¹

Selwyn says:

If Babylon in v. 13 means Rome, this is presumably the earliest occurrence of this appellation or cryptogram in Jewish or Christian literature; for though it is found in Or. Sib. v. 143, 152 and Apoc. Bar. xi. 1, and in N. T. in Rev. xiv. 8, xvi. 19, xvii. and xviii., there is little doubt that these passages are later than 1 Peter.⁵²

Because this is the first time that the term is used in a metaphorical sense—if it is so used—nothing can be proved from the usage of the metaphor concerning the interpretation of 1 Pet. 5:13. The most that can be said is that because we have records which show that the term Babylon became a popular metaphor for Rome after 70, it may also have been popular in Peter's time. Those who date the letter of Peter after 70 can use the later usage of the term as evidence for the metaphorical meaning of the word in 1 Pet. 5:13.

In concluding this section on the metaphor, we want to answer the question, why might Peter be prompted to use the word Babylon for Rome?

Zahn says that this statement in 1 Pet. 5:13 was not

. . . intended as news, by which the readers are informed for the first time of Peter's place of residence. Such communication would be without parallel in all other N. T. epistles, and totally different in form from similar communications in other letters.

Zahn says that Peter used this term to describe the conditions by which the Church where he resided was surrounded.⁵³ Selwyn suggests that

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 83-84.

⁵²Selwyn, op. cit., p. 303.

⁵³Zahn, op. cit., pp. 158-159.

prudence caused Peter to use a symbolic name, "as the letter might have to pass the censorship of police officers."⁵⁴ Cullman also offers this suggestion.⁵⁵ K. Heussi, however, Was Petrus in Rom?, p. 38, is against the censorship idea. He "does not see the reason for such a hide-and-seek game."⁵⁶

Some people try to make a case against the Roman theory by saying that Peter was not in Rome very long or that Mark could not have been with Peter in Rome. These are two problems which have a bearing on the interpretation of Babylon as Rome. But they seem to me to be problems which must be taken up separately and not included in the scope of this paper. This much can be said: if it can be shown that Babylon is a metaphor for Rome, it is possible to make the known schedule of Peter's life fit such an interpretation, as Zahn does.⁵⁷ If it is proved that Babylon is Rome and that Peter was in Rome at this time, it is possible to fit the little we know about Mark's schedule into such a scheme.⁵⁸

In support of the Roman theory, some use the listings of the travels of Peter which came out about the fifth century and later. But by this time the primacy of the Roman bishop is being discussed, and this could have influenced the compilers either for or against a Roman interpretation. There are also extant at this period listings which are considered absurd, e.g., the Acts of Philip which we mentioned earlier. On

⁵⁴Selwyn, op. cit., p. 243.

⁵⁵Cullman, op. cit., p. 83.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 83 n.

⁵⁷Zahn, op. cit., pp. 160-165.

⁵⁸Ibid.

the other hand, we must not discard as unreliable all literature of this period because some of it is faulty. The problem is to weigh each source carefully.

The Roman theory does not, however, depend upon either of these last two matters. Rather, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, the Roman theory is based upon tradition and the use of the metaphor.

CHAPTER III

THE MESOPOTAMIAN THEORY

The Mesopotamian theory is the most popular of the two literal interpretations of 1 Pet. 5:13. This theory is based on the fact that it is a literal interpretation.

The Authorities

Erasmus, Calvin, Gerhard, Neander, DeWette-Brueckner, Wieseler, Weiss, Bleek, Reuss, Fronmueller, Huther,⁵⁹ Bengel, Lightfoot, and Alford⁶⁰ favor this literal interpretation.

Calvin says in favor of the Mesopotamian theory and against the Roman theory:

But as the persuasion had prevailed, that he (Peter) had moved from Antioch to Rome, and that he died at Rome, the ancients, led by this sole argument, imagined that Rome is here allegorically called Babylon. But as without any probable conjecture they rashly believed what they have said of the Roman episcopate of Peter, so also this allegorical figment ought to be regarded as nothing.⁶¹

Frederic W. Farrar does not favor the Mesopotamian theory, but he says in defense of the theory:

⁵⁹J. E. Huther, "Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude," Meyer Commentary (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1887), p. 340.

⁶⁰G. T. Manley, "Babylon on the Nile," The Evangelical Quarterly April 1944), XVI, 138-146.

⁶¹John Calvin, Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles, translated by the Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), pp. 22-23.

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and dwellers in Mesopotamia, had been among his hearers on the day of Pentecost, and there is nothing intrinsically improbable in the notion of his having gone to visit these crowded communities of the Dispersion.⁶²

Literalness

Peter sends greetings from Babylon in 1 Pet. 5:13. The obvious interpretation is that Peter is giving the name of a place. There were two places with the name Babylon at the time of Peter. The people of Asia Minor to whom Peter wrote this letter were undoubtedly well-acquainted with Babylon in Mesopotamia. Babylon played an important part in secular history and in the history of the Jews, being the capital city of the world for many years. Another Babylon was located in Egypt on the Nile River. We shall discuss the Egyptian Babylon in the next chapter.

There is little that need be said to prove that Babylon in Mesopotamia is a literal interpretation of 1 Pet. 5:13. It is obvious that this is so. The question, of course, raised by the interpretation is whether Peter meant the name to be taken literally or whether the people to whom the letter was written understood it in a literal way. Before accepting an allegorical interpretation, there should be some strong proof that a literal interpretation is out of the question. In the previous chapter we discussed some of the factors which play into an allegorical interpretation, and saw that the situation does not demand an allegorical interpretation.

Theodor Zahn favors the traditional Roman theory, but he says that

⁶²Frederic W. Farrar, The Early Days of Christianity, (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin and Co., 1882), II, 515.

the literal interpretation is the most natural interpretation.⁶³

Oscar Gullman, who also favors the Roman view, says:

It must be said, however, that it is not completely certain that the expression must here be understood in a figurative way. We cannot fully exclude the possibility that the long famous ancient Mesopotamian city of Babylon was really meant.⁶⁴

Existence of Babylon

The Mesopotamian theory must defend itself against the charge that Babylon in Mesopotamia was no longer in existence in the first century A.D. Strabo, the Roman geographer who lived about 25 B.C.,⁶⁵ applies to Babylon, Assyria, the verse, "The great city has become a wilderness." Pausanius (probably the Greek traveller and geographer of the second century A.D.)⁶⁶ says with reference to the time of the founding of Seleucia, 312 B.C.,⁶⁷ that only the walls of Babylon were left.⁶⁸ G. T. Manley says, "Ancient Babylon was then in ruins."⁶⁹

Jack Finegan, who does not seem to be involved in the 1 Peter argu-

⁶³Theodor Zahn, Introduction to the New Testament, translated by the Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), pp. 22-23.

⁶⁴Oscar Gullmann, Peter, translated from the German by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 84-85.

⁶⁵Alfred J. Butler, Ancient Coptic Churches (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), I, 174.

⁶⁶John Edwin Sandys, "Pausanius," Encyclopaedia Britannica, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1951), XVII, 400. Encyclopaedia Britannica hereafter referred to as E. B.

⁶⁷L. H. Dudley Buxton, "Seleucia," E. B., op. cit., XI, 304.

⁶⁸Zahn, op. cit., pp. 162-163.

⁶⁹Manley, op. cit., p. 143.

ment, says, "Babylon was so prominent in many later periods that its name is attached permanently to the region."⁷⁰ Therefore, it is possible that Peter was calling cities in the territory around the ancient city Babylon. Frederic W. Farrar mentions this point.

It is not proved that St. Peter may not have used the word "Babylon" to describe the country or district, as is done by Philo (Leg. ad Gaium, 36), so that he may have actually written from Seleucia or Ctesiphon . . . or even from Nehardea or Nisibis⁷¹

Jews

Since Peter, according to Gal. 2:7. 8, was the apostle to the Jews, the presence of Jews must be taken into consideration with each theory. For the story of the Jews in the Mesopotamian Babylon, we shall refer to Josephus and his Antiquities of the Jews. According to Josephus (Ant. xv. 2. 1), about the year 35 B.C., "there were Jews in great numbers" at Babylon.⁷² William Whitson, the translator of Josephus, says in the notes at this point that the city of Babylon spoken of by Josephus must be one which was built upon the Tigris long after the utter destruction of old Babylon. He says that it was not far from Seleucia.⁷³

Josephus (Ant. xviii. 9. 8) relates the disaster which came upon the Jews in Babylon about 100 years later. The name of Agrippa, 37-44 A.D.,

⁷⁰Jack Finegan, Light from the Ancient Past (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 10.

⁷¹Farrar, op. cit., p. 515.

⁷²Flavius Josephus, "Antiquities of the Jews," The Works of Flavius Josephus, translated by William Whitson (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co.), pp. 444-445.

⁷³Ibid.

is mentioned in connection with the story. Manley and Farrar say that the event occurred during the reign of Caligula, 37-41 A.D.⁷⁴ At this time,

. . . the Babylonians attacked the Jews, which made those Jews so vehemently to resent the injuries they received from the Babylonians, that being neither able to fight them, nor bearing to live with them, they went to Seleucia, the principal city of those parts The Jews . . . lived there five years, without any misfortunes. But on the sixth year, a pestilence came upon these at Babylon, which occasioned new removals of men's habitations out of that city; and because they came to Seleucia, it happened that a still heavier calamity came upon them on that account, which I am going to relate immediately.⁷⁵

Josephus continues the story (paragraph 9), saying that the Greeks and Syrians in the city of Seleucia attacked the Jews of that city

. . . and slew about fifty thousand of them; nay, the Jews were all destroyed, excepting a few who escaped, either by the compassion which their friends or neighbors afforded them, in order to let them fly away. These retired to Ctesiphon, a Grecian city, and situated near Seleucia Now the whole nation of the Jews were in fear both of the Babylonians and of the Seleucians . . . so the most of them gathered themselves together, and went to Neerda and Nisibis, and obtained security there And this was the state of the Jews at this time in Babylonia.⁷⁶

From Josephus' record we can say with definiteness that there were Jews in the Mesopotamian world at the time of the writing of the first epistle of Peter. However, it seems very doubtful that there were Jews in the city of Babylon. It seems doubtful that there were any in Seleucia. Some lived in Ctesiphon, but most in Neerda and Nisibis. Ctesiphon can still be included in the region of Babylon, but to claim that a person writing from the other two cities would say that he is writing from

⁷⁴Manley, op. cit., p. 143, and Farrar, op. cit., pp. 514-515.

⁷⁵Josephus, op. cit., p. 558.

⁷⁶Ibid.

Babylon and that the people who received the letter would understand Babylon in that sense, would be open to much dispute. It would seem to be stretching Finegan's statement to make it applicable to such a wide area. (I was able to locate Nisibis on a map, but not Neerda. I am assuming that they were close together, as Salsucia and Ctesiphon are.) Keil and Farrar say that it would not have been impossible for the Jews to return to Babylon during the twenty years before Peter wrote his letter.⁷⁷ This seems to me to be grasping at straws.

Objections to the Theory

Proponents of the Mesopotamian theory must defend their stand against powerful attacks on the theory. We have included some of the major attacks on the theory in preceding sections. Here we shall include a few more.

Farrar lists "four powerful arguments" against the Mesopotamian theory.

(1) There is not the faintest tradition in those regions of any visit from St. Peter. (2) If St. Peter was in Babylon at the time when his Epistle was written, there is great difficulty in accounting for his familiarity with the Epistle to the Ephesians, which was not written till A.D. 63. (3) It becomes difficult to imagine circumstances which could have brought him from the Far East into the very crisis of the Neronian persecution in the Babylon of the West. (4) If "Marcus" be the Evangelist, he was with St. Paul between A.D. 61-63 (Col. iv. 10; Philem. 24), and probably rejoined him just before his martyrdom in A.D. 68 (2 Tim. iv. 11). We should not, therefore, expect to find him so far away as Babylon in A.D. 67.⁷⁸

⁷⁷Carl Friedrich Keil, Commentar ueber die Briefe des Petrus und Judas (Leipzig: Doerffling and Franke, 1863), and Farrar, op. cit., pp. 514-515.

⁷⁸Farrar, op. cit., pp. 515-516.

There is considerable difference of opinion in dating the later parts of the life of Peter and Paul. In the Dictionary of the Bible, edited by James Hastings, A. J. Maclean dates the letter to the Ephesians about 60 or 61. The death of Paul is placed in 64 by Harnack, 64-65 by Turner, and 67 by Lightfoot.⁷⁹ According to R. A. Falconer, Peter came to Rome after Paul's death and died about 64. The First Epistle of Peter is dated before A.D. 64.⁸⁰ David Smith puts Peter's death at Rome in 68.⁸¹

Returning now to Farrar's four arguments, the tradition connected with the various theories was discussed in the preceding chapter; we will not repeat it here. Concerning argument number two, J. E. Huther says, "The composition of the epistle in Rome is not by any means proved by so uncertain an assertion."⁸² The uncertainty of this assertion would be Peter's familiarity with the Epistle to the Ephesians as a presupposition for this letter. Arguments three and four are very theoretical. We know very little about Peter's movements, and why he went where and when. That 1 Peter was written in 67 (64 according to Falconer) is very important for the Roman theory, because that is the time when Peter was in Rome. If a person does not accept the Roman theory, however, it could have been written earlier.

⁷⁹A. J. Maclean, "Paul the Apostle," Dictionary of the Bible, edited by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1914), p. 690.

⁸⁰R. A. Falconer, "The First Epistle of Peter," Ibid., p. 717.

⁸¹David Smith, "Simon Peter," Ibid., p. 714.

⁸²Huther, op. cit., p. 340.

CHAPTER IV

THE EGYPTIAN THEORY

The third, and least accepted, view concerning the Babylon of 1 Pet. 5:13 is the theory that Babylon was located in Egypt on the Nile River. Because the facts pertaining to this view are little known, we shall try to go into greater detail than we have with the Roman and Mesopotamia Valley theories.

The Authorities

The Egyptian theory seems to receive most of its little recognition from English scholars.

"Alford quotes Leclerc, Mill, Pearson, Calovius, Pott, Burton and Gresswell, as favoring the Egyptian Babylon, but he dismisses it, chiefly because this Babylon was small and little known."⁸³

J. E. Huther in the Meyer Commentary remarks,

"The view that by Babylon is meant the Babylon in Egypt mentioned by Strabo has nothing to commend it, the less so that this Babylon was simply a military garrison."⁸⁴

Charles Bigg in the International Critical Commentary agrees with Huther and says that it is "the last place where we should expect to find St. Peter and his friends."⁸⁵

⁸³G. T. Manley, "Babylon on the Nile," The Evangelical Quarterly, (April 1944), XVI, 142.

⁸⁴J. E. Huther, "Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude," Meyer Commentary, translated by Rev. Paton J. Gloag et al. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1887), p. 340.

⁸⁵Rev. Charles Bigg, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude," International Critical Commentary, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 75.

Edward Gordon Selwyn, contemporary English exegete, calls the Egyptian theory very unlikely. His complaint against the Egyptian theory seems to be that the name Babylon was given the fort in Egypt by the Roman legionaries, according to their custom of naming places after military stations where they had previously been on duty.⁸⁶

Oscar Cullman says that the Egyptian theory must "theoretically . . . be considered." He speaks of it as a "military camp". He says that "one can scarcely accept" it, because it is an "obscure" place.⁸⁷

Montague Fowler in his history, Christian Egypt, does not try to prove the Egyptian theory, but he makes this statement:

"The church that is at Babylon," of which St. Peter speaks, was clearly intended to refer to the Christians of Egypt, the disciples of the Apostle's friend and amanuensis, St. Mark, and not (as is commonly stated) to some obscure body of converts at Babylon in Chaldea.⁸⁸

The reason for an apparent lack of interest in the Egyptian theory may be that until the beginning of the present century little was known of Babylon in Egypt. Fowler, writing in 1901, says,

It is remarkable that, until within comparatively recent years, the existence of Babylon in Egypt appears to have been almost entirely unknown.⁸⁹

⁸⁶Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1917), p. 243.

⁸⁷Oscar Cullman, Peter, translated from the German by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 85.

⁸⁸Montague Fowler, Christian Egypt, (London: Church Newspaper Company, Ltd., 1901), pp. 192-193.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 192.

The case for the Egyptian theory is based upon its naturalness. Peter sends greetings from Babylon. In Egypt, in close proximity to Palestine and Jerusalem, is a city at Peter's time with the historical name, Babylon. For those who demand a literal interpretation wherever feasible, this theory demands consideration.

In presenting the case for the Egyptian theory, we want to bring out six main points. By presenting the history of Babylon we want to produce some of the evidence (1) that there actually was a place in Egypt called Babylon at Peter's time, (2) that it was a place of importance, (3) that it was a city. If the evidence produced proves this, we have answered most of the objections to this theory. Most objections are based on Babylon being merely a military camp, obscure, and of little importance. By discussing (4) the geographical connection of Egypt and Palestine, we want to show its nearness to and easy connection with the center of Christianity, Palestine and especially Jerusalem. Since Peter is named in Gal. 2:7, 8 as the apostle to the Jews, we want (5) to look at the evidence for the existence of Jews in Babylon. By discussing Mark's association with Egypt and the evidence that Egypt was an early stronghold of Christianity, we want (6) to point out the early beginnings of the Church in Egypt and Babylon's part in its early growth.

The History of Babylon

Origin

Several legends of the early origin of Babylon are recorded by Abu Salih, the Armenian patriarch, who lived during the last years of

the twelfth and the early years of the thirteenth centuries.⁹⁰ In the book Churches and Monasteries of Egypt, which is attributed to him, Abu Salih says:

The city of Misr, outside of which is Madinat ash-Shams, was founded by Misrain, the son of Canaan, the son of Ham, the son of Noah, the son of Iansch the Blind, and it was called after the name of the king of the Egyptians, Misrain.⁹¹

Misr is the Frankish Roman name for Babylon the Fortress.⁹²

At another place, Abu Salih says:

I found it written in the history of Mahbub ibn Kustantin Al-Manbaji, in the first part, that a king named Aftutis, in the time of Isaac son of Abraham, was the first who discovered books and sciences and astronomy and arithmetic At the same time, Sodom and Gomorrah were built; and Babylon also was built upon the river Nile.⁹³

Alfred J. Butler, in his footnotes to the book of Abu Salih, mentions that this story of the foundation of Babylon, Egypt is not generally accepted.⁹⁴ In his own books, Butler does not concern himself with this problem but disposes of it by saying, "I cannot pretend to say what is the earliest mention of Babylon in history."⁹⁵

⁹⁰Abu Salih (attributed to him), The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt, translated from the Arabic by B. T. A. Evetts, with notes by Alfred J. Butler (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1885), p. x.

⁹¹Abu Salih, *op. cit.*, p. 86. In the footnotes Butler reports that Madinat Ash-Shams is the Hebrew for Beth Shemesh of Jer. 43:13, the classical Heliopolis.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 80 n.

⁹⁵Alfred J. Butler, Babylon of Egypt (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1914), p. 6.

Diodorus Siculus, the Greek historian⁹⁶ who wrote about 50 B.C., says that a number of prisoners were brought from Asiatic Babylon by Sesostris, king of Egypt,⁹⁷ to carry out his public works in Egypt, and were driven by the hardships of their task to revolt. Thereupon they seized a strong position on the Nile, carried on war against the Egyptians, and harried the country round: but they were finally amnestied and founded a settlement on the spot which they called Babylon.⁹⁸

Diodorus says that Ctesias, Greek historian of the 5th century B.C.,⁹⁹ gives a different account. According to Ctesias, Babylon was founded by some of those who came to Egypt with Semiramis,¹⁰⁰ a famous Assyrian princess of about 800 B.C. around whom many fantastic legends sprang up.¹⁰¹

Josephus, writing perhaps about 80 A.D., when speaking of the Israelite exodus, says that the Hebrews journeyed

κατὰ Λητοῦς πόλιν ἔρημον τότε, οὐσαν Βαβυλῶν γὰρ,
 ὕστερον κτιζέσθαι ἐκεῖ, Καμβύσου καταστρεφόμενου τὴν
 Αἴγυπτον.

"Josephus (Ant. ii. 15. 1) says that Babylon was built by Cambyses when he conquered Egypt in 525 B.C."¹⁰²

⁹⁶"Diodorus Siculus," Encyclopaedia Britannica, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1951), VII, 394. Encyclopaedia Britannica hereafter referred to as E. B.

⁹⁷"Sesostris," Ibid., XX, 377

⁹⁸Butler, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

⁹⁹"Ctesias," E. B., op. cit., VI, 832.

¹⁰⁰Butler, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁰¹"Semiramis," E. B., op. cit., XI, 314.

¹⁰²Butler, op. cit., p. 8.

Eutychius (Annales 1. p. 267), the Melchite patriarch of Alexandria who was born at Babylon in 876,¹⁰³ says that the Persian king, Artaxerxes Achus, built Fort Babylon.¹⁰⁴

"Strabo (Geog. xvii. chap. i), the Roman geographer of 25-24 B.C., says some revolted Babylonians obtained a settlement there from the kings of Egypt."¹⁰⁵ The version of Diodorus Siculus agrees with this.

Butler quotes John of Nikiou, an Egyptian chronicler of the latter part of the seventh century,¹⁰⁶ to the effect that the original foundations of the fortress of Babylon were laid by Nebuchadnezzar, who named it after his capital.¹⁰⁷

John of Nisibis, who lived in the seventh century A.D., says that Babylon was built by Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem, and connects it with the Jewish exile into Egypt in the days of Jeremiah.¹⁰⁸

The differences in the various records in no way affect the point which we are trying to make, namely, that Babylon is a very old city in Egypt, dating back at least 500 years before Christ. Nebuchadnezzar and other Babylonians seem to have had great influence on the history of the

¹⁰³Adrian Fortescue, "Eutychius," The Catholic Encyclopaedia (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1919), V, 639. The Catholic Encyclopaedia hereafter referred to as C. E.

¹⁰⁴Manley, op. cit., p. 138.

¹⁰⁵H. Havernat, "John of Nikiu," C. E., op. cit., VIII, 475.

¹⁰⁶Alfred J. Butler, The Arab Conquest of Egypt (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1902), pp. 243-244.

¹⁰⁷Alfred J. Butler, The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1884), I, 172.

¹⁰⁸Butler, The Arab Conquest of Egypt, pp. 243-244.

place. This accounts for its name, Babylon. It also accounts for the fact that Strabo (Geog. xvii. 812) in 25 B.C. called the inhabitants of the place Babylonians.¹⁰⁹ The historic evidence all points to the fact that Babylon was a settlement where people lived as well as a fort.

Pauly, in the Real-Encyclopaedie, contends that Babylon was merely a fanciful name given to the city without any historical background. As Butler points out, however, it is more reasonable to suppose that such a change was made by Persians during a Persian occupation of Egypt, whether under Cambyses, as suggested by Josephus, or under Nebuchadnezzar, as alleged by John of Nikiou and several other writers.¹¹⁰

The Romans

Egypt was made a Roman province in 30 B.C. In the year 25-24 B.C., Strabo, the Roman geographer, made a trip up the Nile to the first Cataract in the company of his friend Aelius Gallus, the prefect.¹¹¹ Strabo (Geography xvii. 1. 30) writes of his trip:

Having sailed farther up the river, one comes to Babylon, a stronghold, where some Babylonians had withdrawn in revolt, and then successfully sought permission from the kings to build a settlement; but now it is an encampment of one of the three legions that guard Egypt.¹¹²

Of particular interest in this quotation is the fact that Babylon was "a stronghold". In fact, it was one of the three Roman strongholds in Egypt. This makes Babylon a place of importance. Strabo also says that

¹⁰⁹Butler, Babylon of Egypt, p. 7.

¹¹⁰Butler, Babylon of Egypt, pp. 8-9.

¹¹¹Butler, Ancient Coptic Churches, I, 174.

¹¹²Manley, op. cit., p. 138.

the Babylonians built "a settlement" which implies more than merely a fortified position. One can hardly think of an army camp then, as today, without thinking of a city nearby. There must be some place where the soldiers can find entertainment and spend their money. If Roman soldiers can at all be thought of as the G. I.'s of their day, there were plenty of merchants around to take their money from them. One can hardly imagine Jews, if there were any in Egypt, overlooking such a profitable location.

H. I. Bell in the Harvard Theological Review, although he rejects the Egyptian theory, does offer proof of Jews transacting business in Babylon in the year 59 A.D., which is very near the date of Peter's epistle.

It is true that in P. Ham. 24, dated in A.D. 59, we find three Jews acknowledging a deposit of money in a contract drawn up ἐπ' ἀγορανόμου Εἰρηναίου παρτερωβελῆς τῆς πρὸς Βαβυλῶνι τοῦ ἑλιπολείτου νομοῦ; but the deposit is made by a Roman cavalryman, and the Jews may have visited the camp merely in order to conclude this transaction, though the presence of an agoranomos does suggest a permanent civil population.¹¹³

The remains of the Roman fort still standing today are probably not the fort that Strabo saw. The fort still standing was built by Trajan in 100 A.D. The story of Trajan, who greatly increased the importance of Babylon, is not pertinent to this study, Trajan lived at the turn of the century, which puts him after the time of 1 Peter.

Jesus and Babylon

According to tradition, Babylon played a part in the life of Jesus. Babylon is on the eastern border of Egypt, one of the Egyptian cities

¹¹³H. I. Bell, "Evidences of Christianity in Egypt during the Roman Period," The Harvard Theological Review (July 1944), XXXVII, 187-188.

closest to Palestine. The road to Egypt known to the prophets crossed the Nile River at Babylon.¹¹⁴

If we think of the geographical features and political importance of Babylon, it becomes the natural place for the Holy Family to take up residence during their exile in Egypt. There would be no reason why they should either cross the river or travel further south into Upper Egypt. The presence of the Roman garrison would give them as much protection as they could find in all of Egypt.¹¹⁵ Ancient tradition asserts that Joseph stopped at Babylon with Mary and Jesus. No other place has ever made claim to this distinction. This indicates that the tradition was established at a very early date.¹¹⁶ In the Church of Abu Sargah, or St. Sergius, in Babylon, there is a crypt which according to legend was the resting place of the Holy Family during their stay in Egypt.¹¹⁷

In concluding his book Babylon of Egypt, Butler indicates that Babylon was more than "small and little known" (Alford) and more than "simply a military garrison" (Huther and Bigg). Butler says:

It seems established

(1) that on the site of Ancient Misr or Old Cairo there originally existed in Pharaonic times a city of some importance, marked by Egyptian monuments . . . :

(2) that in the sixth century before our era there was a Babylonian military settlement made and a fortress erected upon the rocky height . . . :

(3) that from this settlement the name Babylon spread over the adjacent region, and became the normal designation of a great town extending far enough northward of Ar Rasad to

¹¹⁴Manley, op. cit., pp. 138-139.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 141.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 141.

¹¹⁷Butler, Ancient Coptic Churches, I, 181.

touch with its outlying suburbs the southern environs of the mighty but decaying city of Heliopolis.¹¹⁸

The history of Babylon seems to indicate that it was a city before it became a fort.

Ptolemy, the geographer and historian of the second century, remarks "that the River of Trajan (. . . the canal connecting the Nile and the Red Sea) flows through Heroon Polis and the city of Babylon."¹¹⁹ Butler says that the evidence from Ptolemy indicates that Babylon was a city, and that it was widespread and intersected by the canal. This, he says, is proved irrefutably. Ptolemy wrote with local knowledge, being an Egyptian and spending most of his life in Alexandria.¹²⁰

There is a little difficulty, however, in applying this information to the present study. Ptolemy's last recorded observation was in 151 A.D.;¹²⁰ this puts him almost 100 years after the writing of the letter of Peter. However, in view of the history of Babylon, it seems unlikely that the city of Babylon was non-existent 100 years before Ptolemy.

As to applying the name Babylon to a large area surrounding the city, Butler proves this only from the time of Ptolemy onward.¹²¹ The fact that such references are not found before Ptolemy does not necessarily mean that the area did not have this name during the first century. However, neither does it prove the point.

¹¹⁸Butler, Babylon of Egypt, p. 62.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 9.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 11.

¹²¹Butler, Babylon of Egypt, p. 34.

Zahn, although he rejects the Egyptian theory, says that Babylon "was a city of no small importance". At this point he quotes Epiphanius (Mon. Ed. Dressel, p. 6) who calls it "the great Babylon".¹²²

G. T. Manley says that from the records it may be taken as certain that in the time of Christ a settlement called Babylon was in existence, and had already existed for several centuries.¹²³

Geographical Connection between Egypt and Palestine

G. A. Frank Knight has written a large volume on the geographical connections between Palestine and Egypt. He says that "no territory enjoyed closer relations with Palestine than Egypt."¹²⁴ He says that because they were separated from each other only by a short strip of easily traversable desert, the art and civilization, the customs and religious practices, the political ideals and domestic institutions, the literature and the politics of the one region reacted with no small force upon the other.¹²⁵

Knight also says, "It is certain that the tidings of the new Faith which was sweeping through Syria was fully communicated to the thronging millions of Jews in the Nile Valley." He calls Eusebius' statement that Mark introduced Christianity to Alexandria improbable. He says that it is much more likely that the news of Christ reached Egypt by the innumerable

¹²²Theodor Zahn, Introduction to the New Testament, translated from German by John Moore Trout et al. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901), II, 162.

¹²³Manley, op. cit., p. 136.

¹²⁴Rev. G. A. Frank Knight, Nile and Jordan (London: James Clark & Co. Ltd., 1921), p. 502.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 13.

family connections binding the Jews of the Delta to the people of Canaan, and through the annual pilgrimages of the Egyptian Jews to the great feasts at Jerusalem.¹²⁶

The connection of this information with our problem is that if, as Knight says, the Gospel message came overland from Palestine to Egypt, Babylon, being an important city and one of the first cities a person would come to in Egypt, would hardly be by-passed by the bearers of the Gospel. This would make the supposition of Christians in Babylon at this period strong.

Jews in Egypt

Since Peter did most of his evangelizing among Jews, the question of whether there were Jews in Egypt, specifically Babylon, becomes an important consideration.

We have already quoted one reference to Jews transacting business in Babylon.¹²⁷ That this was no isolated incident, but that there were many Jews in Egypt, is what we want to prove in this section.

There is much evidence to prove that many Jews lived in Egypt at the beginning of the Christian era. "Josephus testifies (Ant. xiv. 7. 2; xix. 5. 2) to the size and influence of their colonies:" in Alexandria one fifth of the population was Jewish; in Cyrene, one quarter. The Jews had their own rulers and enjoyed considerable freedom and many privileges. Edersheim computes the total number of Jews in Egypt to about one million

¹²⁶Ibid., pp. 502-503.

¹²⁷cf. p. 30.

(Philo. In Flaccum, 6, 8), or one eighth of the population. The Gospels and Acts bear testimony to the constant communication in both directions between Libya, Egypt and Palestine (Mark 15:31; Acts 2:10; 6:9; 8:27 ff.; 13:1).¹²⁸

Manley feels that "there is evidence, amounting to practical certainty, that a Jewish colony existed in Babylon from early times." From the days of Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:40), a constant stream of people coming and going connected Egypt and Palestine. The main route for this traffic went from Memphis through Babylon and Heliopolis along the Pelusiac or eastern branch of the Nile delta to Pelusium, and from there near the sea coast to Gaza. Complete evidence for the use of this route exists in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer. 2:16; 43:5 ff.; 46:14; Ezek. 30:14-18).¹²⁹ In view of these last two facts, it would be surprising if there had been no Jews in Babylon. The Roman garrison stationed there made it a place of commercial importance.¹³⁰

That there were Jews in Babylon at this time is proved by the existence of a synagogue in Old Cairo whose story, according to E. L. Butcher in The Story of the Church of Egypt, goes back to the time of Christ. Tradition carries it back to the time of Jeremiah. El Makrizi, a historian of the ninth century, states that this synagogue was built forty-five years before the second destruction of Jerusalem, and that in it was a copy of the Pentateuch written by Ezra the priest. He also states that there existed an inscription saying that the building was erected in the year 336 of the

¹²⁸Manley, op. cit., p. 140.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 139.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 140.

era of Alexander, which means about 24 A.D. About 1882 two European antiquarians saw the roll of the Law referred to above, and noted that it was of great antiquity. Their attempt to get possession of it ended in failure, and it was removed to an unknown place.¹³¹ Tradition maintains that the tomb of the prophet Jeremiah is located in this synagogue.¹³²

Mark

The greeting in 1 Pet. 5:13 comes from "the elect together with you in Babylon and Mark, my son." It is natural to surmise that Mark was closely connected with Babylon. Therefore, a study of Mark's connection with Egypt is pertinent to the Egyptian theory.

Bell claims that the tradition that St. Mark was the founder of the Alexandrian Church rests on insecure evidence. Although Eusebius (H. E. ii. 16) mentions that Mark founded the church at Alexandria, earlier Alexandrian writers like Clement and Origen make no allusion to this fact. Bell admits that this is an argument from silence and, therefore, precarious.¹³³

According to Coptic tradition, Mark's father lived in Egypt before coming to Jerusalem. This might account for his Latin name Marcus. Epiphanius (Haer. 51. 6) states that Mark was sent to Egypt by Peter and there founded the church of Alexandria. Eusebius (H. E. ii. 16) also tells of his coming to Alexandria and adds (ii. 24) that he was martyred there in

¹³¹Manley, op. cit., p. 140.

¹³²Fowler, op. cit., pp. 75-77.

¹³³Bell, op. cit., p. 187.

the eighth year of Nero.¹³⁴ Theophilus, who may be the old Antiochian bishop and apologete of about 180, seems to agree with this. According to Cramer, Nicetas, and others, Peter sent Mark as his substitute from Rome to Egypt.¹³⁵

Zahn says that the tradition according to which Mark preached the Gospel in Egypt and became the first bishop of Alexandria "is ancient and very little contradicted, so that it is to be given a certain amount of credence; though its date and circumstances cannot be determined with exactness."¹³⁶

Fowler, who accepts the Egyptian theory, says that Mark, the Evangelist, went to Alexandria. He distinguishes between John Mark and Mark, the Evangelist. He also says that Egyptian tradition maintains, without any authority, that the original of Mark's Gospel was written in the Coptic language.¹³⁷

The Acta Marci pictures Mark arriving from Rome and going to the Jewish quarter in Alexandria, where his first convert is a Jewish shoemaker.¹³⁸

Coptic tradition names Annianus, a shoemaker, as Mark's first convert. He was ordained in 44 A.D. and put in charge of the church in Alexandria when Mark visited and founded other churches in Egypt.¹³⁹

¹³⁴Manley, op. cit., pp. 143-144.

¹³⁵Zahn, op. cit., p. 148.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 131.

¹³⁷Manley, op. cit., p. 144.

¹³⁸Fowler, op. cit., pp. 1-4.

¹³⁹Manley, op. cit., p. 144.

Egypt, a Stronghold of the Early Church

Earlier, we quoted Knight to the effect that Egypt was one of the first places to receive the Gospel.¹⁴⁰ In the land of Egypt, Christianity is supposed to have appeared first in the cities of Babylon and Alexandria. "The whole Jewish community of Babylon is reported to have adopted the new faith"¹⁴¹ Butler says, "The Copts were among the first to welcome the tidings of the Gospel, to make a rule of life and worship, and to erect religious buildings."¹⁴²

Butler says that the churches of the Copts had clustered within the walls of Fort Babylon "from the very beginnings of Christianity."¹⁴³ Later Babylon became the seat of a bishopric.¹⁴⁴ The area became a strong center of Christianity. The territory northward from the fort was later dotted with churches and convents.¹⁴⁵ All of these facts point to a strong early church at Babylon.

An indication of the strength of early Christianity in Egypt is the Egyptian origin of the Apocrypha¹ Gospel of Peter and the Apocalypse of

¹⁴⁰Cf. p. 33.

¹⁴¹W. T. Whitley, "The Christianizing of Egypt, Northumbria, China," The Review and Expositor (July, 1929), XXVI, 323-328.

¹⁴²Butler, Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt, I, p. vii.

¹⁴³Butler, The Arab Conquest of Egypt, p. 238.

¹⁴⁴Butler, Babylon of Egypt, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵Butler, The Arab Conquest of Egypt, p. 243.

Peter.¹⁴⁶ This could also be an indication that Peter was in Egypt or was in close contact with the Church in Egypt, if other evidence to such a relationship is accepted.

Communication between Asia Minor and Egypt

A matter which must be considered in connection with the Egyptian theory is that of transportation between Babylon and Asia Minor. Word seems to have reached Peter from Asia Minor prompting him to write. Could word have reached Babylon from Asia Minor easily, if Babylon is placed in Egypt?

Acts 2 indicates that there was easy communication with Jerusalem; at least there were Jews from three of the five places mentioned in the address of Peter's letter present in Jerusalem during the festival of Pentecost. Verse 9 mentions Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia.

An excellent road ran from the Cilician Gates northwards through Cappadocia and Galatia to Amisus on the Euxine.¹⁴⁷ By means of this road a person could easily get to Jerusalem. We have already pointed out how easy it was for a person to get from Jerusalem to Babylon in Egypt. In fact, the parents of Jesus made the trip with Jesus when He was still very young.

An indication that there was also easy communication by sea between Asia Minor and Egypt is that Appian (Hist. Com.) calls the Pamphylans,

¹⁴⁶Cullman, op. cit., p. 85.

¹⁴⁷Edward G. Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1946), p. 46.

Lycians, and people living in Caria as far as Ionia "the people who look to the 'Egyptian Sea'."148

In presenting the case for the Babylonian theory, we've tried to bring out six main points favoring the theory: (1) that there actually was a place called Babylon in Egypt at the time Peter wrote his first epistle, (2) that Babylon, Egypt, was a place of importance, (3) that Babylon, Egypt, was not only a fort but also a city, (4) that there was constant and easy communication between Palestine and Babylon, Egypt, (5) that there were Jews living in Babylon, Egypt, when Peter wrote his first epistle, and (6) that Babylon played an important part in the beginnings and early growth of Christianity in Egypt. The Egyptian theory offers a literal interpretation of 1 Pet. 5:13, and much circumstantial evidence to back up such an interpretation.

148 Ibid.

CHAPTER V

Evaluation

The evidence which we have presented for the three interpretations of Babylon in 1 Pet. 5:13 makes it impossible for us to say with any finality that one of these places is the Babylon from which Peter sent greetings. All three theories stand on circumstantial evidence, which is never conclusive.

The two legs on which the Roman theory stands are tradition and a metaphorical interpretation. We have shown that the early tradition of the Roman theory is very weak, and that nothing can be proved about the use of the metaphor because there is no use of this metaphor antedating Peter's letter.

The only support for the Mesopotamian theory is that it is a literal interpretation. We have proved that there are two literal interpretations: the Mesopotamian Babylon and the Egyptian Babylon. The Mesopotamian theory seems to be the weakest of the three.

Although there is much circumstantial evidence for Babylon, Egypt, circumstantial evidence, as we said before, is never conclusive. It seems to us, however, that the circumstantial evidence supporting the fact that it is a literal interpretation gives this theory great strength. The other two theories are old and generally accepted theories; they are also battle-scarred. As G. T. Manley points out, the commentators when interpreting Babylon as Rome or the city in Mesopotamia base their theory "not so much on positive evidence, which they admit to be slender, as upon the difficulties in the way of the alternative solution."¹⁴⁹ The

Egyptian theory has, generally speaking, not been tested and found wanting; it has usually been pronounced out of the question from the start. We have not proved the Egyptian theory. There may be tremendous holes in the theory which we have overlooked. Our aspirations for this thesis are humble: we hope that we have presented the material honestly and clearly enough to prove that the Egyptian theory ought to "be conceded to be worthy of more consideration than it has received."¹⁵⁰

We believe that the Mesopotamian theory has very little merit. If one accepts the tradition and metaphorical interpretation of the Roman theory as valid, the Roman theory will be strong. For the person who demands a literal interpretation, the Egyptian theory is the best. We should like to repeat what we said when discussing the literal interpretation: before accepting a metaphorical interpretation it is necessary to prove that the literal interpretation is impossible.

J. E. Huther considered the Mesopotamian and the Roman theories the only possibilities. He said that the question is "by no means settled as yet."¹⁵¹ The addition of a third theory serves, at the least, to show how far from settled the question actually is.

¹⁴⁹G. T. Manley, "Babylon on the Nile," The Evangelical Quarterly (April 1944), XVI, 142.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 145-146.

¹⁵¹J. E. Huther, "Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude," Meyer Commentary, translated from the German by Rev. Paton J. Gloag et al. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1887), p. 189.

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