

WHAT KIND OF "CAPTIVITY"?

By Steven M. Collins

Many Believing denominations have an understanding of prophecy which expects a time of great trauma during the "latter days" of this current age, prior to the return of Yahshua Messiah. The terms "Great Tribulation" and "Jacob's Trouble" have been applied by some to this prophesied time of trouble. In some of the Churches of God, there has long been an expectation that this time of trouble would include some kind of "captivity" for Yahweh's people in the latter days of this age.

Even today, some Believers still believe that the modern nations of the tribes of Israel will be "taken captive" by a Nazi-like "beast" power which will arise in Europe. The Worldwide Church of God once taught that concept, but its teaching failed in 1972 and, in the 34 years since that date, nothing has happened which indicates such an event will ever occur. Some Believing denominations still expect that a "beast" power is likely to emerge in Europe. However, many secular observers have noted the dramatic weakening of Europe on the world stage. Europe has largely disarmed and is under dire demographic threat from the millions of radicalized Moslems living in its midst. Indeed, the term "Eurabia" has been coined to describe the ongoing invasion of Europe by Moslem immigrants. Europe is a target ripe for attack, not a candidate to "carry captive" any other nations.

Is any "captivity" going to occur in the latter days ahead of us, just prior to the return of Messiah? Given the grim warnings of many prophecies about severe hard times before the end of this age, such a possibility must be considered. This article would like to point out that biblical "captivities" come in more than one form. By focusing only on the extreme captivity which ancient Assyria imposed on the kingdom of Israel, circa 721 BC (i.e. a military invasion with forced relocation of Israel's conquered people to other regions), modern Believers overlook a much more common form of biblical "captivity."

This article will examine the biblical record of an alternate kind of captivity, which repeatedly befell ancient Israel, and which could be happening again today, not only to the modern nations of the tribes of Israel, but also to the entire world. The author of this article assumes that most readers are familiar with historical research indicating the USA, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, and prominent European nations were primarily founded by descendants of the migrating ten tribes of Israel. Evidence confirming that these western nations were founded by the migrating descendants of the ten tribes of Israel is found in the author's books, which can be previewed at www.bibleblessings.net.

Captivities In the Book of Judges

After the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the book of Judges details a series of alternating periods of good years (when the Israelites obeyed Yahweh) and bad years (when they disobeyed Yahweh). It is often overlooked that the good years far outnumbered the bad years, in the book of Judges. Many decades of prosperity and peace are briefly mentioned in single verses, while many chapters are devoted to the events of a few unhappy years. Consider Judges 3:11, 3:30 and 5:31. These single verses briefly mention three periods of peaceful obedience and "rest" in the land which totaled 160 years! The three preceding periods of time in which the Israelites were "captive" to foreign oppressors lasted a total of only 46 years (Judges 3:8, 3:14 and 4:3).

As the reader can see, the good years far outnumbered the bad years, during the first 206 years of the Israelites in the Promised Land. At no time in the book of Judges, even when Yahweh's "anger was hot" against the Israelites in their times of disobedience, did He ever allow the Israelites to be carried "captive" into a foreign land. Foreign oppressors afflicted the Israelites, while the Israelites remained in their own lands. Only in the final captivities of Israel and Judah did God allow foreign armies to successfully invade Israel and Judah and remove their people from the Promised Land.

Overwhelmingly, biblical precedents show that, when Yahweh is angry at his people for disobedience, he allows events to occur in which foreigners oppress the Israelites, while they remain in their own land. Let's look at the examples of servitude which Yahweh repeatedly imposed on disobedient Israelites, in the book of Judges, and consider whether that kind of event is even now coming to pass in the nations of modern Israel.

Judges 2:11-23 summarizes the repeated cycles of obedience and punishment which the Israelites experienced within the Promised Land. It says of the periods of punishment, when Yahweh was angry with the Israelites, that He "delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them and He sold them into the hands of their enemies" (verse 14). Notice that Yahweh "sold them" into the hands of "spoilers" who seized control of the goods and properties of the Israelites. The term "sold" is an economic term which indicates these servitudes occurred via economic or commercial activity. A Bible Concordance will confirm that the English word "sold" is based on the Hebrew word "maker," which is often used in passages mentioning the buying and selling of merchandise, land and slaves.

The very first time Yahweh brought an economic "captivity" (or servitude) upon the Israelites in the Promised Land is described in Judges 3:5-10. The Israelites disobeyed Yahweh and he "sold them into the hand of... [the] king of Mesopotamia." Mesopotamia was a considerable distance from where the Israelites lived. How could the Israelites come under the domination of the Mesopotamians via economic/commercial actions? A brief history lesson offers a very likely answer.

Babylon Invents "Capitalism"

One of the leading cities of Mesopotamia was Babylon. Centuries before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the Babylonians invented the economic system called "capitalism." The Encyclopedia Britannica (1943 Ed., Vol. 3, "History of Banks," p. 67) notes that the Babylonians had developed a banking system "as early as 2000 BC." The same article notes that the banking system began as an invention of the sun-god temples, and it states; "the temples of Babylon ... were also the banks." This Britannica article cites a document from that period which mentions a person who had borrowed silver and that, "He will pay the sun-god's interest." At the time of the harvest he will pay back the sum and the interest upon it!" Farmers were even then borrowing money from banks to plant their crops.

The same article states that "about 575 BC," there was...an institution that has been compared to the Rothschilds of 19th century Europe-the Igibi Bank of Babylon...the records of this bank show that it...loaned on crops, attaching them in advance ... loaned on signatures and on objects deposited, and received deposits, on which it paid interest." We see in this account that modern banking practices had their origins with the sun-god temples of ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia. The description of Babylonian banking practices in the 6th century BC gives us an insight into Babylonian banking practices in previous centuries as well.

Biblical warnings about Usury

When Yahweh led the Israelites out of Egypt into the Promised Land, He gave them repeated warnings about the dangers of usury (borrowing money or things with an interest premium). Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:35-37 and Deuteronomy 23:19-20 all forbid the practice of usury in Yahweh's Theocracy, although Israelites were allowed to lend money at interest to non-Israelites. Yahweh was so aware of the enslaving powers of debt that he mandated regular debt-relief programs in the years of release (Deuteronomy 15) and the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25). These institutions were designed to prevent debt from overwhelming and enslaving the Israelite population. Centuries later, King Solomon warned about the inexorable, enslaving power of debt, when he wisely observed, "The borrower is servant to the lender." (Proverbs 22:7)

When ancient Israelites forsook Yahweh, they embraced sun-worship idolatry, which included the banking practices of the sun-god temples. Marketers at the sun-god temples likely had "easy incentives" to entice Israelites to take out loans to buy things, which they could not afford to purchase on a cash basis. This practice stimulates the economy in the short-term, but it has severe long-term effects when borrowers fall on hard times and cannot repay their loans. Then, as now, lenders were entitled to foreclose on collateral backing the loans, when borrowers could not pay their loan obligations. Significantly, the very first period of Israelite servitude to a foreign power was to the Mesopotamians, the very group which invented the banking system and capitalism as part of their sun-god worship.

It is easy to see how the ancient Israelites gradually took on too much debt, and the Mesopotamian moneylenders, in the sun-god temples, legally foreclosed on the assets and properties of the Israelites in the Promised Land, resulting in a situation where Israelites were reduced to being serfs, serving foreigners on the Israelites' former lands. When Yahweh's laws were not obeyed, there were no years of release or Jubilee Years to liquidate the debts or regain properties. The Israelites would "cry out to Yahweh" for deliverance in these cycles of oppression, and Yahweh would send deliverers who would overthrow foreign domination and the people would then obey Yahweh for a time. Inevitably new generations arose, which had not experienced the dangers of idolatry, borrowing money at the sun-god temples, etc., and the cycle of servitude would begin again.

Economic Captivities:

Notice how the book of Judges often describes the servitudes (or "captivities") of the Israelites in economic/ commercial terms. In Judges 4:2, Yahweh later "sold" the Israelites into the hands of the Canaanites and, in Judges 10:7, Yahweh "sold" the Israelites into the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites. When the Israelites abandoned Yahweh's laws and served sun-god deities, they were "sold" into the hands of oppressors, who ended up owning the goods and properties of the Israelites (Judges 2:14). Once we understand that the moneylenders were part of the sun-god temples, we can see how this economic oppression occurred repeatedly. As an aside, this also sheds new light on why Yahshua Messiah became so angry at the "moneychangers" who had taken up residence in the Temple of Yahweh (Matthew 21:12-13).

It appears that the ancient Israelites repeatedly lusted for short-term gratification and amassed debts too large to repay to the money-lenders at the sun-god temples. This gave foreigners the legal right to gradually seize Israelite properties, without having to invade Israel's territories with an army. As debt levels became unsustainable, foreigners would again own

everything in the Israelites' lands and a new economic captivity was upon them. In none of the captivities mentioned in Judges did any foreign oppressor exile the Israelites to other lands. Why would they want to do that? It served their interests to retain the Israelites as oppressed "sharecroppers" or slaves, working the land they had formerly owned. Judges 6 shows Gideon was secretly threshing wheat, to hide his harvest from Midianite overlords who would have seized it. The account of Judges 6:27-30 is consistent with a situation in which the Israelites had lost legal control of their land and sops, and Midianites were enforcing the consequences of foreclosure actions.

Secular historians have also noted the enslaving qualities of the Babylonian commercial system, based on money lending and capitalism. Gwendolyn Leick's book, *The Babylonians*, states, on pp. 88-89, that typical Babylonian interest rates were "20-33%," and adds the following about Babylonian business practices: "...they would squeeze from the primary producers as much return as possible ... such "capitalist" practices contributed ... to the impoverishment of the farming population. More and more [producers] lost control over their means of production, by having to sell their fields, boats, livestock and...enter into a serf like dependency on their creditors." Leick adds that these money lending practices were "intimately linked to... temple institutions."

The recorded effects of Babylonian "capitalism" and money-lending led to the very kind of economic serfdom that the Bible records actually happened to the Israelites, when they adopted the practices of sun-worshipping foreign nations. Interestingly, the ancient interest rates typically set by Babylonian bankers includes the range of interest rates charged on some modern credit cards. Let us now examine prophecies about "Babylon the Great' and the final beast system," to gain some insights into what kind of "captivity" will befall the modern Israelite nations in the latter days.

Modern Capitalism and Its Risks

Modern nations have forsaken Yahweh's laws to large degrees. While vestiges of Yahweh's laws remain in Western societies, economic and commercial practices have completely adopted the banking-based capitalism born in ancient Babylon. There are no "years of release" or "Jubilee Years," so people are going further into debt, gradually becoming economic serfs, who scramble to pay their debt obligations. Millions of debtors have lost assets in bankruptcy proceedings. Let's focus on events in modern America. The US government is so hopelessly in debt that it maintains an image of solvency only via a myriad of accounting tricks (putting much of the deficit "off budget," hiding the real costs of spending programs, by placing their real costs in future budget years, hiding the real rate of inflation via "hedonic" CPI calculations, etc.). Many state and local governments, businesses and private citizens are also oppressed by huge debt obligations. A future economic crisis could result in a massive transfer of assets and properties from debtors to their creditors (as Proverbs 22:7 warns). When this happens, many millions of Americans will become virtual economic slaves (as did the ancient Israelites), as moneylenders seize people's homes and properties.

The debt owed by American governments, businesses and citizens is increasingly held by foreign creditors. Due to the shockingly large debts run up by the US government in its budget and trade deficits, foreign lenders have hundreds of billions of excess dollars to "invest" (i.e. buy up assets and properties) in America. Many American businesses and properties are being bought up by foreign nations and businesses, and this "investment" of foreigners in America is actually a

hidden form of foreclosure as ownership (and control) of American assets and properties is steadily transferred into foreign hands. When American port facilities were to be transferred to Arabs from Dubai, Congress had a brief spasm of protecting American interests, by forbidding the sale. However, "borrowers are servants to lenders," so the Dubai Arabs instead quietly assumed ownership of \$1.2 billion worth of "manufacturing plants in the US that supply ... parts to the Pentagon" (Wall Street Journal, "Dubai Firm's deal for Pentagon Supplier Is Cleared," 429-06, p. A4). Because of the excessive borrowing practices of the American people and their governments, American assets will increasingly be transferred to foreign owners in the future. This trend is not a secret. Another Wall Street Journal article, "Economists worry about who holds US Debt", May 9, 2006, p. A8, examines the dangers of allowing foreigners so much control over the US economy. A book by CNN personality Lou Dobbs, *Exporting America*, also examines this danger.

Because Congress is an elected body representing a nation of debtors, it is increasingly powerless to protect American Interests. Consider Congress' threats to impose duties on Chinese goods, which are greatly under-priced due to China's predatory monetary practices against the USA and the world. In an article in *The Week* magazine, "Should the US pressure China on trade?" May 5, 2006, p. 39, we find this observation: "...despite lots of tough talk, Congress will never retaliate with high tariffs, and China knows ft. China could respond by cutting back on its purchases of US Treasuries, sending money markets into "cardiac arrest." Because of America's "debtor-nation" status, China's President Hu came to America in 2006 as a creditor increasingly able to dictate terms to America. President Bush assumed the role of a debtor, trying to put a happy face on increasingly strained Chinese-American relations. It was revealing that President Hu, of China, met with the corporate barons of Microsoft and Boeing before meeting President Bush. (The Chinese President understood that multinational corporations are the real powers in Western societies and that the political leaders serve the interests of the multinational corporations.)

Babylon the Great

The Bible predicts that a 'beast' power will arise in the latter days which will dominate "all kindreds, tongues and nations" (Revelation 13:1-7). Revelation 13:17 adds that this global power will dominate the world, via its ability to control "buying and selling." In other words, prophecy indicates this powerful global entity will come to power via economic/commercial actions. This language reminds us of the many "captivities" which befell the Israelites in the book of Judges, when they were "sold" into servitude to foreign nations with Babylonian banking/capitalist practices as part of their sun-worship system.

Revelation 18 reveals this end-time entity with power over "all nations" (verse 3) will be an alliance of the "merchants of the earth" (verses 3, 11 and 15) and the "kings of the earth" (verses 3 and 9). In other words, it will be an alliance of global, multinational corporations and the political leaders of many nations. k gives this end time 'beast' power a name: "Babylon the Great." This name indicates that this globally dominant power, in the end time will be dominated by the institutions invented in ancient Babylon. These institutions included capitalism, banking, etc. In the latter-lays, the capitalistic system of ancient Babylon will grow "great" as it spreads its power over all nations. Has this already happened? Of course it has. The entire world is already dominated by global capitalism, and the enslaving power of debt is gradually bringing "all kindreds, tongues and nations" under its control.

Read Revelation 18's description of Babylon the Great. It enslaves men, even as it markets all manner of merchandise to the world's nations. However, the leaders of both the "merchants of the earth" (verse 3) and the governmental leaders (verse 9) are "Waxed rich" as they live "deliciously." The leaders of global corporations are "Waxed rich" in modern times, as political leaders arrange global 'free trade' agreements, which allow the global corporations to become wealthy, even as the people of the world are reduced to serfs. Consider the inexorable effects of free trade agreements: Many workers in China and undeveloped nations toil in sweat shops as virtual slaves, producing goods for the wealthier nations of Babylon the Great. Workers in developed nations are increasingly laid off from good jobs, as manufacturing facilities are relocated to foreign nations. Much of America's industrial base has been effectively "stolen" by foreign nations as the "merchants of the earth" enrich themselves, by making their products at slave labor wage rates in other nations, instead of the normal wage rates in the Western world.

The current "hot button" issue of immigration is easily explained, when one understands the prophecy of Revelation 18. The "merchants of the earth" want even cheaper labor, for jobs in the USA, and they benefit from millions of illegal immigrants pouring into the USA, across the porous US-Mexican border. Because their workers are illegal, the mega-businesses of Babylon the Great can oppress them in low-paid jobs, which act to pull down the wage scale all across the USA (further benefiting the global corporations). This does immense harm to America's security, economy and cultural integrity. States and local governments are financially overwhelmed by the costs of hosting a large class of illegals, drug smuggling abounds, etc. Does the US government have the right (and obligation) to secure its borders to stop this situation? Of course. But to the chagrin of many, the federal government refuses to enforce its own federal immigration laws and it drags its feet in order to prolong the status quo. Revelation 18 makes it easy to understand why this situation exists. The political leaders of the USA, who are drawn from the ranks of the large global corporations, are serving the interests of Babylon the Great, by subordinating the interests of the nation and its citizens to the financial interest of the global corporations.

Believers do not need to look for some new "beast power" to arise in Europe. Revelation 18 reveals the end-time beast power will be Babylon the Great, an unrighteous alliance of the leaders of global corporations and national political leaders who shape economic and political matters to enrich themselves. It is here now. It is all around you. The Babylonian system of banking-based capitalism already dominates "all kindreds, tongues and nations." This reality confirms the remarkable accuracy of biblical prophecy, confirming that the Divine Creator who inspired the Bible is able to direct world geopolitics to ensure His prophecies are fulfilled. That same Bible also prophesies that Babylon the Great will experience a complete collapse (or "fall") at the end of our age.

The Mark of the Beast

If the "beast system" is none other than Babylon the Great, then it begs the question of "What is the mark of the Beast?" Since it involves "buying and selling" (Rev. 13: 16-18), it clearly involves financial activity. While this article will not offer an authoritative answer to that question, it will try to motivate you to "think outside the box" about what it could be. Most Believing Denominations often assume this "mark" will be some computer device which is implanted in your hand or forehead. Some people once thought it was bar-coded commercial products. Maybe such concepts will prove correct, but there are other alternatives.

Believers would be wise to heed an often-missed, but sober warning, in the parable of the

ten virgins in Matthew 25. Believers commonly understand that the virgins are Yahweh's people at the end of the age, that the bridegroom who is about to return is Yahshua Messiah, and that the oil is symbolic of the spiritual condition of the saints. What is often overlooked is that NONE of them, regardless of their spiritual condition, realized that the return of the bridegroom was imminent. None of the "virgins" realized that the bridegroom's return was almost upon them, until it was too late to change the nature of their spiritual condition. This parable warns us that the community of believers will NOT be expecting Messiah's return when He arrives. How could this happen? It can happen because the believers misunderstand prophecy. This parable infers that, as many prophecies are fulfilled in the world around them, believers will not recognize these fulfillments. They will be blinded by their own prophetic dogmas. Because they are awaiting and looking for events which will never happen, they are unable to see Yahweh's prophecies being fulfilled in a manner they did not expect. That message in this parable should make all of us humble enough to reexamine our prophetic dogmas and expectations.

Let's apply this lesson to the "mark of the beast." It clearly involves commerce, as no one can "buy and sell" without this mark. However, the economic/political aspect of Babylon the Great will be joined to the religious aspect of Babylon the Great, as a great religious deceiver will align himself with Babylon the Great and "do miracles" (Rev. 13:11-14). The Bible calls these two political and religious leaders the beast and the false prophet. Eventually, this evil system will try to kill all of Yahweh's people (Rev. 13:15). However, when will that extreme position occur? Will it occur during the entire three and a half years of the beast's final reign (Rev. 13:5), or will it occur only at the climax of this period, after the protective power of the Two Witnesses ends, when they are slain by this beast power (Rev. 11:7-9)? The Bible prophesies the Two Witnesses' power will exceed that of the beast and the false prophet for three and a half years (Rev. 11: 3-6), so it is logical that the final, murderous fury of the beast power can only be released after the Two Witnesses are slain. If this murderous rage of the beast power is unleashed only in the last three and a half days of this age (Rev. 11:11) when the Two Witnesses are deceased, it makes sense that Believers would then realize the return of the "bridegroom" is imminent, but it will be too late to make any significant changes to one's character.

Believers also have literally applied the language in Revelation 13:16-17 about the "mark of the beast" even as they allegorically apply the language in Revelation 9 about the weaponry of the end times as being a representation of tanks, helicopters, and planes. Should we be consistent in our approach? What if there is also an allegorical component to the economic language of Revelation 13:16-17? Could "no man might buy or sell" simply mean that no one "will have access to money" or "participate in the marketplace," except through the lending systems of Babylon the Great? If so, that situation is almost a reality now.

Is the "Mark" Visible?

Let's consider another possibility about this mysterious "mark." Did you realize Yahweh also has a "mark" on his people? Ezekiel 9 addresses a time when the sins of the house of Israel and the house of Judah are very great (verse 9). It cannot reference the fall of the kingdom of Israel in 721 BC, because Ezekiel wrote this prophecy approximately 130 years after Samaria fell; therefore, it was intended for a future time. It reveals that when Yahweh sends punishments upon the house of Israel (something prophesied to occur in the latter days in many prophecies), He first places a "mark" upon the "foreheads" of all those who "sigh and ay" at the abominations done in the land. Yahweh's mark is placed (and seen) by beings personified as "men" who are in

the presence of Yahweh, a "cherub" and Yahweh's altar. These "men" have to be angels, with the appearance of men, and one of them with a "writer's inkhorn" is told to make sure this mark is on the heads of the righteous, so that they will be spared when Yahweh's destructions are poured out on the land.

There is no evidence in Ezekiel 9 that humans will be able to see Yahweh's "mark" on the foreheads of the righteous. Perhaps Yahweh's "mark" is the presence of the Kodesh Spirit in their minds (the forehead being the seat of consciousness). Only the angels administering Yahweh's punishments need to see this "mark" of Yahweh on their foreheads of the righteous, in order to know who to spare. This "marking" of Yahweh's people in Ezekiel 9 is strikingly like the event foretold in Rev. 7:1-3, where angels "seal" the righteous before Yahweh's punishments are poured out on the rest of mankind. This, again, appears to be a mark visible only to angels, not to humans. Could the "mark" of the beast in one's forehead also be invisible to humans, but obvious to angels? Could the "mark" of the beast be the lack of Yahweh's spirit in one's mind (or "forehead"), while Yahweh's "mark" is the presence of the Kodesh Spirit in one's mind?

Revelation 9:4 shows an angel unleashing plagues on those without the "seal" of Yahweh "in their foreheads." This prophecy says the mark will be "in" one's forehead, which implies that one's thoughts are being referenced. Again, the context indicates that only angels see this mark. The mark of the beast is on the "forehead" and the "hands." Our actions and deeds reveal our thoughts. Perhaps the "mark" prophesied in Rev. 13 simply refers to one's thoughts ("the forehead") and deeds (done with "hands"). People will surely show their allegiance to Yahweh or the final beast system in their thoughts and their deeds. Presenting these options will, hopefully, motivate readers to think in broader terms for prophetic fulfillments than they have in the past. One lesson of the parable of the ten virgins is that many Believers will still be waiting for expected prophetic events (perhaps including the "mark of the beast") to become a reality, when, in fact, the prophecies about such events will have already been fulfilled, in a manner which they did not expect.

What is "Coming Out of Babylon?"

Some readers, mindful of Revelation 18:4's statement about "coming out of Babylon," may feel that they are obligated to forsake all banking services and the many other aspects of a capitalistic economy. To do that completely, one would need to "live off the land" as a backwoods "survivalist." Is this reaction necessary? This author thinks not. We need a balanced approach.

Let's consider biblical examples in determining what "coming out of Babylon" means. The prophet Daniel was apparently one of the three most righteous men who ever lived (Ezekiel 14:14), yet he served as Nebuchadnezzar's appointed regent over ancient Babylon itself! Daniel 2:48-49 shows that Daniel accepted the appointment, and his three friends later received high appointments in the government of Babylon (Daniel 3:30). Neither Yahweh nor Daniel and his three friends saw any conflict in serving Yahweh while being in high administrative positions in the government of Babylon. When the Babylonian Empire was replaced by the Persian Empire, Daniel was promoted to being "First President" of that new empire, under King Darius himself. Ezra and Nehemiah served in high positions in the Persian Empire; Esther became Queen of Persia and Mordechai was promoted to a very high Persian office (Esther 9:4, 10:3). Since Yahweh "changes not" (Malachi 3:6), we can expect that Yahweh will have a similar viewpoint today on how His people should relate to "Babylon the Great." These biblical heroes had all "come out of Babylon" in their hearts and minds even as they physically lived in Babylon

(or its successor empires), and even served in its ruling structure.

We need to realize that we live in a fallen world. Yahweh's government will not be present on the earth until Yahweh's Son, Yahshua Messiah, returns to establish and administer it. Therefore, all people face the inescapable reality of living now in humanly devised systems of society. Even with its many sins, capitalism, the modern descendant of ancient Babylon's economic/political/religious system, is far preferable to other "-isms" devised by mankind (communism, socialism, fascism, etc.). With such righteous people as Daniel, Mordechai, etc. at the helm, the capitalist system of ancient empires surely had a "kinder, gentler" impact on people than when prideful and greedy people were at the top. The same is to be expected in our time. The oppressiveness of the Babylonian capitalist system is directly related to the character of its leaders. When Believing leaders governed America, the enslaving power of debt was restrained and the interests of the nation and its people were placed ahead of the interests of the "merchants of the earth." As Christianity has waned as a force in western societies, those priorities have been reversed.

In the time of Messiah and the apostles, the Roman Empire was the successor to the system of Babylon (as is clear from the "great image" vision in Daniel 2). Yahshua led no revolt against "the system," and he refused to be a tax resistor (Matthew 22:15-22). Paul told Believers to pay Roman taxes, customs, duties and tolls in Romans 13:6-7, and to be good citizens (Romans 13:1,5, Titus 3:1). Paul was both a Believing apostle and a citizen of the Roman Empire (Acts 16 and 22). 1 Peter repeated these themes in I Peter 2:13-17. We can easily see that neither Messiah nor the apostles told Believers to "flee from the Roman empire," or "don't pay Roman taxes" as any part of their need to "come out of Babylon." Modern Believers should also follow the instructions of Messiah and the apostles by paying our taxes and being good citizens in our modern nations. What then is expected of us in "coming out of Babylon?"

I Timothy 5:8 states that Believers are 'Worse than infidels' if they do not provide for the needs of their families. That command exists regardless of the economic or political system in which you live. This means that you need to provide food, clothing, shelter, etc. to yourself and your dependents. Unless you are wealthy in our society, this means that you will periodically need a mortgage to buy a house, a loan to purchase a car, etc. Are you condemned by Yahweh as part of "Babylon the Great" if you simply do such things to shelter and transport your family? The above biblical examples from both the Old and New Testament, indicate the answer is "no." However, the truth of Proverbs 22:7 still governs all modern economic activity. All borrowers become "servants" to their lenders. The greater your debt levels, the more you become an "indentured servant" to moneylenders in Babylon the Great's capitalist system. A common reason for amassing too much debt is simple greed: People want more "things" than they can afford, so they accept "servant" status to a moneylender in order to enjoy now what they cannot afford to buy now. What is ironic is that much of people's servitude to Babylon the Great's debt-based system is voluntary! Has any money-lender ever held a gun to your head and ordered you to borrow money for something? People voluntarily choose their degree of servitude to Babylon the Great's system based on how deeply they go into debt.

Many people have chosen a high degree of debt-servitude to "Babylon the Great" by buying an expensive house they "had to have", or a luxury car that some advertiser said they "deserved." Revelation 18:11-13 foretold that the end-time "Babylon the Great" system would have "slaves" and make merchandise of many things, including 'the souls of men.' Because our recent historical experience includes the Holocaust of World War II, Believers tend to assume this prophecy has to be fulfilled by some horrific concentration camp experience. Babylonian

capitalism has no desire to kill you in a death camp, but it can make financial slaves of people, via loaning money at interest. Media articles have documented that many millions of people are little more than "wage slaves" living from paycheck to paycheck due to high debt payments. Many national, state and local governments, businesses and people are so heavily in debt they could not financially survive an economic crisis.

Conversely, if you are a money-lender, you are also a part of Babylon the Great. There is really no way out of the system of Babylon the Great. Even if you decide to rent instead of buy a home, in order to avoid a mortgage, your rent money still goes to a landlord or real estate developer who will use your money to pay off the debt incurred in building your rental unit. If you simply deposit money in a bank, have certificates of deposit or a money-market account, you are a "money lender" to the bank (although one could plausibly assert that if you receive less than the real rate of inflation in interest on your deposits, you are not lending money via usury). Again we need a balanced approach to "coming out of Babylon."

Many Believers have focused on "coming out" of the religious aspects of Babylon the Great, even as they voluntarily become "slaves" of Babylon the Great's financial system by amassing high debt burdens.

Prophetic Implications

Unless you are wealthy, you will periodically need to go into debt to buy essential housing and transportation for your family. However, applying Yahweh's financial laws in our society is still possible. All Believers should carefully minimize and manage their debt levels, and have a plan to (hopefully) get out of debt, so you do not become a "debt slave" to Babylon the Great. Living within your means is a prudent manner of "coming out" of Babylon the Great's financial system. There is a syndicated radio program, hosted by Dave Ramsey, which helps people minimize and/or get out of debt. His program is based on biblical principles, and he also has a website (www.daveramsey.com). Readers who want to apply biblical financial principles to modern life are encouraged to consider his advice about getting out of debt. As you implement biblical principles in your financial affairs, you will also "come out of Babylon" financially.

Believers must not have their hearts in the numerous and complex financial options of today's Babylon the Great system (which will collapse at the end of our age). Our hearts and minds should be in the coming Kingdom of Yahweh, not in building an empire of "mammon" for ourselves in today's society. Based on the prophetic implications of modern world events, the greed-based system (Revelation 18:14) of Babylon the Great is nearing its end. Where is your heart and mind? Is it in amassing wealth and many possessions, via the economic system of Babylon the Great? All investment vehicles (stocks, bonds, currencies, derivatives, etc.) require you to bet on whether something is going up or down in the vast "financial casino" of Babylon the Great. Remember that, in any casino, the odds are stacked so the "house always wins." All the investment options of Babylon the Great will cease to exist when Yahshua Messiah returns. However, your character and the fruit you bear for the kingdom's sake will remain.

Revelation 18 prophesies that the debt-based, capitalistic money system invented in ancient Babylon will grow to a point where it dominates the economies and politics of all nations in the end times. That has now happened. The explosion of debt in modern societies has transformed nations, businesses and millions of people into debt-slaves. If a world crisis occurs which devastates borrowers, the modern nations of the house of Israel (and other nations as well) will enter an economic "captivity" like the ones experienced repeatedly by the Israelites in the book of Judges. Foreign money-lenders and "investors" will "Foreclose" on the properties

and assets of the modern Israelite nations, just as they did on the Israelites in the time of the Judges. Each time the Israelites entered such an economic political captivity, they cried to Yahweh for deliverance. Each time, Yahweh did send a deliverer. However, biblical prophecy tells us that at the end of our age, the captivity of all mankind to Babylon the Great will not be ended by a human deliverer. The final deliverer will be Yahshua Messiah Himself. It is no coincidence that right after Revelation 18 (the chapter predicting Babylon the Great's fall) is Revelation 19, the chapter describing the return of Yahshua Messiah, at the head of his heavenly armies which will destroy permanently the political, economic and religious institutions of Babylon the Great.

Believers need to stop obsessing about a Nazi-like "beast power" emerging in Europe which will "carry you captive." Instead they need to open their eyes to the economic captivity to "Babylon the Great", which is spreading steadily over the entire earth, and is growing more oppressive with each passing year. The book of Judges records that the Israelites were blind to the onset of the economic "captivities" which occurred when they forsook Yahweh's laws and Yahweh "sold" them into the hands of other nations. People in the modern world are just as blind, and the cycle is happening again in the modern world. When people are fully captive to Babylon the Great, they will again cry out for a deliverer. You can read about the deliverer's arrival in Revelation 19:11-21.

2006 - Steven M. Collins

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