

BABYLON

“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark “ (1 Pet 5:13)

Peter and Mark were obviously in Babylon at the time these words were written. The question is, where was this city? There are at least three possibilities.

The original city of Babylon was founded by Nimrod in the land of Shinar (Gen. 10:10). Nimrod was such a mighty warrior and hunter (Gen. 10:8 - 9) that Assyria itself came to be known as the “land of Nimrod” (Micah 5:6). Nimrod founded Babylon on the Euphrates River about 50 miles south of modern Baghdad. It became a very important city and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon were considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Since “Babel” means “confusion” (Gen. 11:9), the city of Babylon became a symbol of confusion and apostasy. There are some, however, who think Peter wrote these words from the original city of Babylon.

There was also a city named Babylon in Egypt. It may have been founded by refugees from Nebuchadnezzar’s army or later exiles. It does not seem likely, however, that Peter was in Egypt.

The most likely explanation, however, involves the association of the name Babylon with Rome. There are five references to Babylon in the book of Revelation (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 18:2, 10, 21) and conventional wisdom is that they all refer to Rome. Note: the Babylon of Revelation was: sitting on many waters (17:1); the fount of abominations (17:5); persecuting the saints (17:6); upon 7 hills (17:9); an international center (17:15); known for trade and sea power (18:3, 11, 19); etc. Each of these references fits perfectly with Rome. The theory is strengthened by the fact that two times we are told that the “Babylon the Great” mentioned in the book of Revelation was a “mystery” (Rev. 17:5, 9). Further, history tells us that Peter was in Rome and even died as a martyr in that city. We also know that Mark was in Rome (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Tim. 4:11).

So we have an interesting possibility. It seems that Peter sent greetings from a church that existed and flourished in the midst of confusion. This, of course, is a source of optimism and encouragement for believers in our own day and age.

The parable of the Prodigal Son provides the same dramatic contrast. When the prodigal came to himself he was also in the midst of confusion. When he left his father he suffered mentally, physically, and spiritually. He apparently accepted the “confusion” of his life as “normal” because everybody else was just as confused. Then, “he came to his senses” and went back home (Lk. 15:17). The difference was dramatic because God, our Heavenly Father, is not the Author of confusion but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33).

So, let’s take a closer look at Rome. Let’s try to understand what was considered as “normal” by these pagans. First, remember that “slavery” was considered “normal”. The population of Rome was approximately 900,000 and 25 - 40% of these people were slaves. The worship of many gods was also considered “normal”. The word “Pantheon”, literally means “all the gods”, and this huge temple was a celebrated part of Roman life. Health problems were also “normal” because Romans were well known for their overeating and sexual promiscuity. Vomiting, in fact, was an accepted part of a Roman meal. Venereal disease was also “normal”. Divorce was also considered “normal”, and it was also “normal” for unwanted babies to be abandoned at the city dump. Death for sport was also a “normal” form of entertainment. The “normal” way for an emperor to die was by assassination. This happened to Julius Caesar, Tiberius Caesar, Caligula Caesar, and Claudius Caesar. The Emperor Nero ordered the assassination of his brother, his mother, his first wife, Peter and Paul, and thousands of Christians, etc. No wonder Peter considered himself to be writing from “Babylon”!

But what about you and me? The fact that the church of the Lord Jesus could thrive in Babylon provides us with a note of encouragement. We need not be dismayed by pagan conduct in our own generation for such conduct is “normal” for pagans. This is where we came in. Jesus planted His church in precisely this type of an environment. For this reason, let us as aliens in this world abstain from those fleshly desires that war against our soul (1 Pet. 2:11).