

Antichrist's One World Church (Part 1)

Text: Revelation 17:1-6

Introduction:

1. Revelation 17-18 give more detail on the destruction of Babylon as anticipated in Rev. 14:8 and announced in Rev. 16:19. Chapter 17 focuses on the religious part of the Babylonian system whereas chapter 18 focuses on the economic element.
2. Mystery Babylon is comprised of these two elements – religious and economic. This chapter describes in greater detail the end times kingdom of Antichrist and the destruction of that kingdom. Religious Babylon is eventually destroyed by Antichrist (See 17:16-17) according to the Providential rulership of God and economic Babylon is destroyed by a direct outpouring of God's judgment (See 18:8).
3. Key points of interpretation in order to properly understand Revelation 17:
 - The woman represents Rome, religious Babylon (Vs. 5, 9, 18).
 - The beast represents the Antichrist and his kingdom (compare Vs. 3 and 13:1).
4. Outline for chapter 17
 - **I. The Description of the Great Whore (Vs. 1-6)**
 - **II. The Definitions concerning the Great Whore (Vs. 7-14)**
 - **III. The Destruction of the Great Whore (Vs. 15-18)**

I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE GREAT WHORE (VS. 1-6)

A. Her Power (Vs. 1)

1. "the great whore" = in prophetic language, prostitution, fornication or adultery is equivalent to idolatry or religious apostasy. (Thomas)
The Word of God is strong and bold in its denunciation of falsehood.
2. The great whore has a worldwide influence – "sitteth upon many waters". The 'waters' are interpreted for us in Vs. 15.
3. Her world-wide influence is further described in the next verse – "the kings of the earth"; "the inhabitants of the earth". She affects both kings and common people. She seduces the world.

B. Her Perversity (Vs. 2)

She engages in...

1. Spiritual fornication – "the kings of the earth" (Vs. 2a). She has an immoral union with world leaders. False religion and human governments are often united in an unholy union.
2. Spiritual intoxication – "drunk with the wine of her fornication" (Vs. 2b). False religion has an intoxicating effect on the hearts and minds of those under its influence. How hard it is to reach someone who is spiritually drunk with false teaching!
3. Walvoord: "False religion is always the worst enemy of true religion, and the moral evil involved in the union of the church with the world imposes a stupefying drunkenness as far as spiritual things are concerned. The hardest to win to Christ and the most difficult to

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instruct in spiritual truth are those who have previously embraced false religion with its outward show of a worship of God.”

4. Challenge: What you need is not the wine of false religion but the water of life, the cup of salvation, that will purify and cleanse you.

C. Her Partner (Vs. 3)

1. The control of the beast (Vs. 3a). She sits on top of the beast which indicates she has power and sway over the beast. At the same time, the beast supports her and she is dependent upon him. She represents ecclesiastical power; the beast political power. “He controls the system politically, but the woman represents the false religion that gives spiritual cohesion to the system.” (Thomas)
2. The color of the beast (Vs. 3b). Scarlet is a brilliant red color. It is the color of luxury and splendor but also the color of sin (Isaiah 1:18) and Satan (Rev. 12:3). It stands in contrast to the whiteness of righteousness and purity (19:11, 14). The beast is the same color as the murderous Dragon (Rev. 12:3).
3. The character of the beast (Vs. 3c). The blasphemous character of Antichrist is again highlighted. Blasphemy is one of the primary features of Antichrist and his reign (See Rev. 13:1; 5-6).
 - i. The alliance of the harlot woman representing the false church with blasphemous antichrist demonstrates the utter depths of apostasy that will characterize the tribulation period. Even today we are seeing the preview of this one world, apostate religion (See 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-8).
 - ii. John Walvoord writes, “That the woman, representing the apostate church, is in such close association with the beast, which is guilty of utter blasphemy, indicates the depth to which apostasy will ultimately descend. The only form of a world church recognized in the Bible is this apostate form destined to come into power after the true church has been raptured.”

D. Her Portrayal (Vs. 4-5)

1. Her Clothing (Vs. 4a)
 - a. ‘purple’ = the color of royalty
 - b. ‘scarlet’ = the color of luxury
 - c. ‘decked’ = she is heavily ornamented with gold, jewels and pearls, indicating she has immense wealth. This is a true picture of false religion with its ornate, expensive cathedrals and jeweled priests.
 - d. See Rev. 18:16 for similar description.
 - e. Note: The harlot’s appearance is in stark contrast to the appearance of the Lamb’s bride (Rev. 19:7-8).
2. Her Cup (Vs. 4b)
 - a. ‘golden’ = adds to her royal image. The outside of the cup looks beautiful to men on the outside but God unmasks the abominable contents on the inside.
 - b. “full of abominations...” = there is no purity in this cup. It is the wine of error full strength! “The harlot thrives on spreading her filthy vices and corruptions by allowing earth’s inhabitants to drink from her beautiful but contaminated cup.” (Thomas)

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3. Her Caption (Vs. 5). “The woman corresponds religiously to what Babylon was religiously.” (Walvoord) Let’s study the harlots title...
 - a. ‘MYSTERY’ = in the N.T. the word indicates a revelation of something previously hidden (See Eph. 3:4-5). “In the N.T., usually a mystery to be revealed. The word implies a new revelation, not something to be kept hidden.” (Thomas)
 - b. “BABYLON THE GREAT” = looks back to ancient Babylon as the source of pagan religion. Here the title is used to describe the **system** of Babylonian religious worship that will emerge in its final manifestation in the tribulation, not the actual location of historic Babylon. “She is the symbol for a system that reaches back to the tower of Babel (Gen. 10:9-10; 11:1-9) and extends into the future when it will peak under the regime of the beast.” (Thomas) In order to understand the Babylonian system which is portrayed here, we need to understand some key points in relation to historic Babylon.
 - i. The first reference to Babylon is in Gen. 10:8-10. Nimrod was its founder and was the first to attempt to create a one-world system of government and belief in opposition to God (Gen. 11:1-9). Babylon is mentioned 262 times in the Bible, more than any other city besides Jerusalem.
 - ii. The tower they attempted to build in Gen. 11:1-9 was a religious tower. Nimrod was seeking to setup a pagan religion in opposition to the worship of the one true God. Ancient accounts reveal that Semiramis, the wife of Nimrod, gave birth to a son she claimed was conceived miraculously. Her son was named Tammuz and he was considered to be a savior of his people. “The legend of the mother and child was incorporated into the religious rites and is repeated in various pagan religions. Idols picturing the mother as the queen of heaven with the baby in her arms are found throughout the ancient world, and countless religious rites were introduced promising supposed cleansing from sin.” (Walvoord)
 - iii. Walvoord: “...Babylon in Scripture is the name for a great system of religious error. Babylon is a counterfeit religion that plagued Israel in the Old Testament as well as the church in the New Testament, and which, after the apostolic days, has had a tremendous influence in moving the church from biblical simplicity to apostate confusion...Babylon is the source of counterfeit religion sometimes in the form of false Christianity, and sometimes in the form of pagan religion.”
 - iv. David Cloud: “This was the beginning of the idolatrous religions. The desire to build a tower to heaven had a religious meaning associated with astrology (worship of the sun and moon and stars) ...It was a tower that would connect them with “the gods” by idolatrous ritual and philosophy. Revelation 17:5 says that Babylon is the mother of false religion. Alexander Hislop, in his book *The Two Babylons*, traced the ancient Babylonian goddess cult back to Nimrod...According to Babylonian myth, Nimrod’s wife, Semiramis, had a virgin-born

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son. That was the beginning of the goddess-child religion which spread over the world. The mother-goddess was also known by the names of Nina, Ningal, Ishtar, Ashtoreth, Astarte, Venus and Isis. The corresponding male deity is Baal, which became a perpetual temptation to Israel. All of this had its origin in Babel.”

- v. The Babylonian mystery religion was in vogue during the time of the prophets and is spoken of by Ezekiel and Jeremiah.
 - i. Ezekiel mentions Tammuz, who was supposed to be the son of the goddess (Ez. 8:14)
 - ii. Jeremiah records that the Israelites were making cakes and burning incense to the queen of heaven (Jer. 7:18; 44:17-19, 25).
- c. “THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” = God’s Word views Babylon as the parent of idolatry and false religion.
 - i. “The Babylonian system has, in one way or another, given birth to all false religions.” (Wiersbe)
 - ii. Cloud: “The Harlot represents every religion and church that does not worship the one true and living God and submit to His Word. It encompasses every false Christ, false gospel and false spirit (2 Cor. 11:3-4); every humanistic philosophy and tradition of men (Col. 2:8); every demonic doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1-4); every fable (2 Tim. 4:3-4); and every false prophet (2 Pet. 2:1). It includes Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, Mormonism, Seventh-day Adventism, Jehovah’s Witnessism, Modernism, Unitarianism, Christian Science, Christadelphianism, Rosicrucianism, the World Council of Churches, Hinduism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Confucianism, Jainism, Spiritism, Earth worship, Paganism, Evolution, Feminism, Theological Liberalism, and every other ism that is in revolt against the teaching of the infallible Scriptures.”

E. Her Persecutions (Vs. 6)

1. “drunken with the blood of the saints” = she has an insatiable thirst for persecuting the saints. Her passion is to shed the blood of the saints. See also Rev. 18:24
2. Saints have died in great numbers from the beginning at the hands of false religion but the persecution that will occur during the tribulation will be unprecedented and unparalleled.

F. Her Present Manifestation

1. Babylon has both an ancient and a future aspect in this passage. It reveals the Babylonian mystery religion and its offshoots have been in existence since the tower of Babel. In Revelation 17 we see the final manifestation of this false religious system in the tribulation period with its alliance with Antichrist. But we can see Babylonish religion in the world today and the push towards the one world church of Antichrist. For example:
2. The Roman Catholic Church

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- a. For hundreds of years Bible believers have identified the Roman Catholic church with the harlot woman of Revelation 17. John Phillips writes, "When Constantine (AD 306-337) became a professing Christian, the ancient Babylonian mysteries were simply transferred bodily into the church. Pagan temples became Christian churches, pagan gods became Christian saints, pagan festival became Christian feasts, pagan customs became the customs of the church. The virgin Mary became the queen of heaven. Little by little, all the trappings of paganism became an established part of the religion of Christendom. Such Babylonian articles of religion as the worship of the mother and child, the dogma of purgatory, the use of holy water, bells, and candles, absolution by a priest, the celibacy of the priesthood, and the dedication of virgins, all became articles of Roman faith..."
- b. The harlot's immoral relationship with the kings of the earth speaks of Rome (Vs. 1-2).
 - i. From the beginning Rome has committed spiritual fornication in its alliances with pagan rulers.
 - ii. The funeral of Pope John Paul II in April 2005 illustrates Rome's influence over the world and world leaders. "The funeral was watched on television by an estimated two billion people. The papal funeral was attended by 200 world leaders, including at least 70 presidents and prime ministers. It was the first papal funeral attended by an Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, the first attended by a British prime minister, and the first attended by a future monarch of England. It was the first papal casket before which a president of the United States bowed and the first papal funeral to draw an entourage of a current and two former presidents of the United States."
(Cloud)
- c. The harlot's clothing speaks of Rome (Vs. 4a). This verse describes exactly how Rome's bishops, archbishops, cardinals and popes are clothed even to this day.
- d. The harlot's wealth speaks of Rome (Vs. 4b).
 - i. Consider the Vatican Palace. "The value of the gold, silver, jewels, fine marble, manuscripts, furniture, and art in the Vatican Palace alone are beyond calculation. These objects were made by some of the world's most renowned artists, such as Michelangelo and Raphael. The palace, the world's largest residence, was begun in 1146. It has 11,000 rooms and 12,000 windows." (Cloud)
 - ii. Arvo Manhattan described Rome's wealth in his book *The Vatican Billions*. He wrote: "The Catholic church, once all her assets have been put together, is the most formidable stockbroker in the world...The Vatican's treasure of solid gold has been estimated by the United Nations World magazine to amount to several billion dollars...But this is just a small portion of the wealth of the Vatican, which in the U.S. alone, is greater than that of five wealthiest giant corporations of the country. When to that is added all the real estate, property, stocks and shares abroad, then the staggering accumulation of the wealth of the Catholic church becomes so formidable as to defy any rational assessment."

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- e. The harlot's cup speaks of Rome (Vs. 4c)
 - i. The chalice used in Roman Catholic mass.
 - ii. The abominations and filthiness inside the cup speak aptly of Rome, apostate Christendom and pagan religion. Their false doctrines and practices are an abomination and the depraved lifestyles that inevitably accompany them.
 - iii. "In *The Priest, the Woman, and the Confessional*, Charles Chiniquy, a former priest, documented the moral vileness associated with Rome's practice of auricular confession, and this is only the tip of the iceberg. Even to this very day, Rome has an immoral testimony. Throughout the world, her priests are renowned for homosexuality and child abuse. In recent years, Rome has paid more than one billion dollars in America to settle court cases brought against child-molesting priests. A 2004 study found 11,757 cases of sexual abuse involving 5,148 priests, and the study only included reporting for about half of the priests in the U.S... According to Roman Catholic Bishop Pat Buckley, studies have shown that 80% of the Catholic priests in Ireland have broken their vows of celibacy." (Cloud)
- f. The Harlot's lust for blood speaks of Rome (Vs. 6).
 - i. It speaks of those who died under the Roman emperors.
 - ii. It speaks of those who died under the Roman Catholic Church's inquisition.
 - iii. "It has been estimated by careful and reputed historians of the Catholic Inquisition that 50 million people were slaughtered for the crime of "heresy" between the A.D. 606 and the middle of the 19th century." (John Dowling, *History of Romanism*, 1847)
- 3. The Ecumenical movement – the Catholic lead movement that is seeking to unite the religions of the world in an unholy union. Organizations such as the World Council of Churches are examples of the push towards the one world church. Contemporary Christian music and the tongues speaking movement are also powerful contributors to this end times movement. "Every effort toward ecumenical unity is a step toward the formation of the final Harlot of Revelation 17." (Cloud)

Conclusion:

1. What should our response be as Bible believing Christians? We are called not to cooperation with error but separation from error!
2. Friend, are you saved? You need a relationship, not religion!