**THE ONE WORLD CHURCH**

**REVELATION CHAPTER 17**

Begin with the Spurgeon quote. What do you think he meant when he said this? *[churches struggling to remain relevant in an ever changing culture often compromise biblical truth in favor of messages that make people feel good and draw them to the church, embrace the culture, promote tolerance of all beliefs]*

These next 2 chapters in Revelation deal with the evil world system that the antichrist will establish during the Tribulation. Ch 17 describes the religious system he endorses. This system is closely associated with the anti-christ’s political system described in Ch 18. The church & state are 1.

The word that is used in both chapters to describe the religious and the political organization of the antichrist is “Babylon.” Babylon was an actual place (mentioned in the OT). It was an ancient city on the Euphrates River in present day Iraq. It was founded by Nimrod (Gen 10). Archaeologists tell us that Babylon is the cradle of civilization. It was the site of the famous tower of Babel. Babylon’s long history is replete with godless governments, immorality and idolatrous practices (sometimes called “mystery” religions). Some Bible scholars believe that the reference to Babylon in Ch 17 & 18 means that it will be rebuilt and become the physical location of the anti-christ’s capital during the Tribulation. Who knows? I see that Babylon is synonymous with the antichrist’s evil world system that has church and state linked together.

*[Note: I will be bouncing around, not going in verse order]*

V 1-2: Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.”

Who is the “great prostitute,” v 1? She is identified at the end of the chapter. V 18: “And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.” So this woman, this prostitute represents the religious system embraced by the antichrist’s church-state government. *[Go back to v 1].* This prostitute falls under God’s judgment. Why? Because she is not truly of God. She will have all the outward religious symbols and trappings of a real N.T. church, but without a relationship with the One True living God. It’s all a façade. Some scholars refer to this Tribulation “church” of the antichrist as the apostate church. I prefer to call it the hollow church. It has an empty form of Christianity without Jesus Christ at its center. You can see the makings of this kind of church in our world today. *[crayon box example I have used before]*

The “many waters,” v 2 is a reference to the fact that this false world church endorsed by the antichrist is not in a centralized location. The angel speaking to John gives him an interpretation of this later in v 15: “And the angel said to me, ‘The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.”

So the church of the Tribulation is a worldwide church composed of many nations of varying religious persuasions.

*[Go back to v 18]* The “kings of the earth,” v 18, refers to world leaders; those in positions of power and influence. During the Tribulation there will be the establishment of a one world church that will be embraced by all of the world leaders. This church will be powerful because it has a broad political backing. In effect, church and state will become married to each other. Even today you can see a push in this direction.

*[Show slide of pope’s recent trip to South Korea, Aug 2014]*

In a Church-State form of government, the state-backed religion becomes very powerful and there are often abuses that take place. We could point to any number of examples in world history of such abuses. One example that comes to mind is the infamous Spanish Inquisition which eventually spread throughout Europe. The Catholic Church, backed by the government, persecuted Jews and anyone they considered to be heretics. Over a period of about 300 years close to a million people were martyred all in the name of God and with the support of the church. We can expect a similar environment to exist under the antichrist’s regime.

V 3: And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.

The angel shows John a vision of a woman. I believe this woman is the prostitute of v 1 and 2. She is in a wilderness, which should come as no surprise. In effect all those who reject the one true God and His Son, Jesus Christ are in a spiritual wilderness. She is seated on a scarlet beast. This beast is described exactly like the beast we saw back in Rev 13:1 – it has seven heads and ten horns. Who is this beast? The antichrist. The ten horns and seven heads are explained in v 8.

V 8: The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

Sounds like a riddle, doesn’t it? Let me explain. We know from our previous study of Rev13 that the antichrist will be killed (or so it will appear) and then be “miraculously” raised back to life by Satan. This event will influence many to follow the beast. We also know from looking ahead to Ch 19 that the antichrist will be defeated and destroyed. Putting these two pieces together offers us a reasonable explanation. “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction.” This beast, the antichrist, is the “little horn” of Daniel 7 and 8. He is also the “man of lawlessness” of 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

V 9-10: This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while.

Some theologians say that the seven heads refers to the Seven Hills of Rome and believe that this is where the one world church of the antichrist will be located. I do not personally agree with this and here’s why – because of the interpretation given here v 9 & 10. The seven heads represent seven kings of which “five of whom have fallen.” In John’s day the five great empires that had come and gone were Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Assyria and Greece. “One is” speaks about the present Roman Empire, the ruling world power at the end of the 1st Century when John wrote down the words in this book. “The other has not yet come” is a reference to the future kingdom of the antichrist, which, like the other six before it, will be vast and powerful and godless. However, unlike the other six, he will “remain only a little while.” The duration of the antichrist’s world domination will only be less than seven years, much shorter than any of those other world powers.

V 11: As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.

This is a tough verse to understand. John MacArthur explains it this way: “The antichrist’s kingdom is said to be both the 7th and 8th kingdoms because of his supposed demise and resurrection (Rev 13:3). He is the 7th king before and the 8th king after his “resurrection” when he destroys the prostitutes religious empire and demands exclusive worship of himself.”

V 12-13: And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast.

Horns here represent human power. The “ten horns” here represent a ten-nation alliance, which I just alluded to. It is a confederacy of states united in one purpose, to promote the evil agenda of the antichrist. Who are the ten nations? We don’t know. Back in the 1970s Hal Lindsay and others speculated that the ten-nation alliance was Europe, because the European Common Market consisted of ten nations. Today the European Union (as it is known now) has 27 member states. As a result the so-called experts have abandoned that opinion. The “one hour” time frame probably is not literally one hour, but simply indicates that this ten-nation alliance will be relatively short-lived.

Just to finish the earlier thought in verse 3, “a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names” – this is in obvious reference to the fact that Satan, the antichrist and their followers exalt themselves to a position as gods. But we know that there is only ONE true God. The beast, the antichrist, elevates himself to the status reserved for God alone and thru supernatural power and deception influences the people of the world to follow him and to worship him.

One characteristic of all the godless world governments throughout history is that they leave God and Jesus Christ out of their lives and elevate themselves and their regimes to the status of Supreme Ruler. Nimrod did that; the Egyptian pharaohs did that; Nebuchadnezzar did that; Alexander the Great did that; the Roman emperors did that; Genghis Khan did that; Henry the Eighth did that; Napoleon did that; Hitler and Stalin did that. Sadaam Hussein did that. North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Il has done that. In the same way, the antichrist will rise to supreme position, a god-like figure, during the Tribulation – ruthless, godless, with absolute power.

Well, I felt it was important to jump ahead and establish who the antichrist is because the prostitute mentioned at the beginning of the chapter is tied directly to his kingdom. So now let’s go back to the discussion of the prostitute, the woman, v 4 and following.

V 4: The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.

This woman is the prostitute of v 1-2. She is religious Babylon, the church-state government endorsed by the antichrist. This church is worshipping but it is not worshipping God. True religion has been prostituted. Notice that she is clothed in purple and scarlet, the colors representative of rulers. The church, however, is not intended to rule. The church is to be separate from government. Only when Jesus returns and sets up His Millennial kingdom will the church rule and that will be under a theocracy. Until then, the church has a specific purpose, which is, to take the light of the truth of Jesus Christ, the Gospel, to a world darkened by sin and to allow God to transform lives. Society will never be changed by rules and laws. You cannot legislate morality. Man is NOT basically good as some might try to make you believe. The Bible says quite the opposite. Man is a sinner. Only God can change a human heart.

The gold, jewels and pearls indicate that the church-state government will be quite wealthy. Wealth and power go together. In her hand are abominations and impurities. This hollow church of the antichrist is immoral and it flaunts its immorality in the face of God.

V 5: And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.”

In this vision John is able to see the religious Babylon, the church state system of the antichrist, for what it really is. The mask, the pretense of religiosity is stripped away. The word I want to focus on, v 5, is “mystery.” I believe this refers to the practices of the so-called mystery religions of ancient Babylon that eventually found their way into the church.

The abominations found here in this one world church exist even today in several forms. These abominations do not begin in the future in the Book of Revelation. They’re already here. And they are rooted in centuries of tradition. Let me give you a few examples…

1. The worship of Mary as “queen of heaven”

The legend of the mother and child was incorporated into the religious rites and found its way into various religious cults. Idols picturing the mother as queen of heaven with the babe in her arms found their way into many religions in the ancient world. Mother-and-child occult worship shows up in Ishtar, Ashteroth, Baal, Isis, Aphrodite, Eros, Venus, and Cupid. Eventually mother-and-child worship found its way even into Christianity. Nowhere in the Bible is Mary deified and referred to as the “queen of heaven.” Nowhere in scripture is Mary held up as an object of worship co-equal with Jesus. In fact that was not set up until the 4th Century A.D. The Bible makes it clear that Mary was a godly woman, but not herself deity.

1. Confession to a priest

In the ancient Babylonian cult before a member could be initiated into the cult they had to first “confess” to the Priest. This made the subject vulnerable and placed him in the Priest’s power. In the N.T. believers are instructed to confess directly to God. When we do so, Jesus Christ acts as our high priest and makes intercession to the Father on our behalf.

1. The practice of sprinkling holy water

This also had its roots in pagan religions. This practice is not scriptural.

1. The establishment of an order of virgins

The ancient religions often incorporated orders of virgins dedicated to religious prostitution (for example, the “Vestal Virgins” of pagan Rome). Celibacy, the Tonsure and the Order of Monks and Nuns have no warrant or authority from scripture. The Bible never directs this practice.

1. The pope and the title “pontiff”

The Roman equivalent of the title Pontifex Maximus (Supreme Pontiff) was used by Julius Caesar in 63 B.C. Later Roman emperors continued this title. It was adopted as the title for the pope (the bishop of Rome) in the early centuries of the Christian church. Contrary to popular belief, Peter was never established by Jesus as the church’s first pope. This is a great heresy. In fact, if you study the Book of Acts, you will observe that it is James, not Peter, who became the early church’s first leader! The office of pope is never mentioned in the Bible.

1. The holy rosary

Again, this is not a Biblically based practice, but has its origins in pagan religions that pre-date Christianity.

I am not against traditions. But we must be careful that our traditions do not replace sound Bible doctrine. We are “born again” spiritually, not by keeping the holy sacraments of a church or by following the traditions of some organized religion, but by our faith in Jesus. That must be at the heart of our message. It DOES matter what we believes. We need to know what we believe and why we believe it. This is why Bible study is so vital.

V 6-7: And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly. But the angel said to me, “Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.”

The “blood of the saints” and “the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” refers to the numerous Christians who were killed at the hand of the antichrist’s regime, all with the full support of his evil church-state government.

V 14-15: “They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.”

All the nations of the world are unified under the regime of the antichrist and will wage war against the Lamb, against Jesus. This war refers to the Battle of Armageddon which we will llok at in Ch 19.

V 16-18: And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

At some point toward the end of the Tribulation something happens and there is a rift between the worldwide church and the antichrist’s gvt. No specific details are given. All we know is that the prostitute, the hollow church, is destroyed. It implodes. It falls in on itself like a house of cards. It had no substance anyway. It was all a façade. What the devil means for evil, God turns into good. God’s purposes ultimately win out.

Is your name written in Lamb’s book of life? Most people out there believe that somehow someway they will make it to heaven. They just cannot bring themselves to believe that God would send them to hell. The truth is that there is only one way to heaven and it is a narrow road and it travels through Jesus Christ.

Let me wrap up this lesson with a word of warning from our Lord to His disciples in Matt Ch 7. It serves as a warning to us as well.

READ Matt 7:13-15 and 21-23 out of the New Living Translation.