

## 6.

# THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

It is with much reluctance that I enter into the following discussion, but I feel forced to do so because of the great prevalence of misguided opinions. There are many, many Christians who have been taught and are convinced that the Babylon of Revelation is the Roman Catholic Church. Moving on from this conclusion, they then begin to fabricate some very fantastic eschatology.

Some have the Pope as the antichrist. Others have the Roman Church secretly running the world. Still others have the Ecumenical movement, with the Catholic Church in the lead, rising up to dominate the world. These and numerous other such conclusions are a result of misunderstanding a few simple Bible verses.

One of the most prominent of these is found in verse 9 of chapter 17 of Revelation where we read that the harlot sits on “seven mountains.” Many Bible teachers have looked at this verse and thought, “Aha, seven hills! This must be a reference to Rome,” since ancient secular literature refers to her as a city on seven hills.

I have even heard it said that John used this phrase as a kind of code to refer to Rome. Some say that since he was a prisoner of the Romans, he did not dare write the true name but had to use a kind of cipher. As you go along in your Christian journey, you too will no doubt hear all kinds of such explanations. The truth is John wrote just exactly what the angel showed him.

Let us here remember that in John’s day there were no longer seven prophetic mountains. As we have seen, five of them had already fallen. This left only two. Therefore, this cannot be and is not a secret reference to Rome. Consequently, the Roman Catholic Church is not in view.

Also, we cannot take our inspiration from secular literature such as the story of Romulus and Remus, but only the word of God. Nowhere in the Bible is Rome referred to as “the city on seven hills” or any similar thing.

Unfortunately, the King James Version of the Bible (and NKJV) is responsible for a large part

of this confusion. This version introduces an extra word in the text which is in no Greek manuscript that I can find, including the Textus Receptus from which the KJV was taken.

It is this extra word which produces much error. This is the word "there." In the NKJV chapter 17:9,10 we read: "The seven heads are seven mountains...*There* are also seven kings." Putting the word "there" in this verse disassociates the mountains and the kings grammatically. Now instead of being equal, they are additional. So then when you read: "Five have fallen," this could refer only to the kings, leaving the seven mountains intact.

But in fact, in the original Greek texts, the word "there" does not appear. All of them read instead: "The seven heads are seven mountains...and *are* seven kings." The heads, mountains and kings are all equal. So then when we read that "five have fallen" this not only refers to the kings but to the mountains and heads as well. This then is not a secret reference to Rome and therefore does not point us to the Roman Catholic Church.

When we think about this with a clear head, other problems with the Catholic Church as the prostitute become evident. No doubt, those who first invented this doctrine lived in a different time and place than we do. All of us tend

to interpret scripture in the light of our current geopolitical situation. Such a suggestion was first made centuries ago when the Roman Church was affluent and powerful. At that time she seemed exceedingly rich and dominated much of the political scene in Europe. However, times have changed.

Rome is not known as a seaport. She is located on the Tiber River, some distance from the sea. The seaport near her which would service her maritime needs cannot be considered to be one of the principal ports of the world.

Further, it could not be said today or even imagined that the Catholic Church is making every shipowner rich. It is simply not true that all the merchants of the world are getting wealthy selling their stuff to the Vatican. Also we have already studied the difficulty of one single city being the source of so much commerce and wealth.

Further, the influence of the Vatican over the governments of the world is waning more and more every day. For example, in Brazil, which is considered to be the largest Catholic country in the world, the percentage of Catholics is decreasing dramatically. Although the Catholic church does still have some sway in many parts of the world, she could not be thought of as "reigning" over them.

While the Roman Church did persecute and martyr many believers in past years, this is not something which is prevalent in our time. Trying to fit the Catholic Church of today into the Revelation prophecy is like trying to jam a square peg into a round hole. It just doesn't fit.

Another logical difficulty we encounter with the "Rome as Babylon" scenario is that Babylon is destroyed "in one hour" (Rev 18:17,19). Although this may may not signify one literal "hour" it certainly indicates a short period of time. So how could someone destroy the Catholic Church in one hour? Would they plant time bombs in every cathedral timed to go off at the same time? This is patently ridiculous.

Would they simply blow up the Vatican? Eliminating the Vatican would not end Catholicism. Probably it would have the opposite effect. Most persecuted religions end up only increasing instead of disappearing. There is no logical way anyone could destroy the Catholic Church with fire in "one hour."

When we think about this calmly and unemotionally, the Roman Catholic Church does not really match, in most of the clear details, what we see in the scriptures.

One source of this Rome as Babylon teaching is a book written by Alexander Hislop entitled "The Two Babylons," which was first pub-

lished in 1916. In it Mr. Hislop points out many parallels between the Catholic Church's rituals, vestments, practices and symbols, etc. with those of ancient Babylon.

Reading this work is a dry and dusty task. He does succeed, however, in demonstrating that the Roman church has many Babylonian trappings. But, this does nothing to prove that she *is* the Babylon of Revelation.

The fact that the Roman Church and even many of our modern "evangelical" churches are full of worldly symbols, teachings, methods and practices is obvious. But much more than this is needed (for example some concrete, clear scriptures) to conclude that this is Babylon the Great Prostitute.

## THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD

It may be that many churches in our day appear to be part of Babylon. This means that they have the flavor and character of the world. For example, many use increasingly worldly means and methods to attract and hold members. Frequently, today's churches employ an earthly style of authority structure. Often their various "officers" are chosen because of their social position or economic standing in the community. It is common for the content of

their meetings and activities to be much more worldly than spiritual. Many churches today have an emphasis on wealth, luxury and prosperity. Sometimes their members seem to be more interested in the pursuits and activities of the world than the kingdom of God. Therefore, these churches appear Babylonian.

What we should understand from this is: just as in the Old Testament, so today too, many of God's people have been carried away captive into Babylon. They have been seduced by the spirit of this age. They are in bondage to the luxuries and the ways of the world. They are living in "Babylon."

Yet this does not mean that they *are* Babylon, only that they are *in* Babylon, spiritually speaking. It reveals that they have been influenced and contaminated by her. Ancient Babylon had many of God's people living in her. There they were seduced by her idols and practices. Yet they were never thought of as being "Babylon."

It has often been taught that chapter 17 of Revelation speaks of a "religious Babylon" by which people mean the Roman Catholic Church, perhaps along with other institutional type churches. Then they teach that chapter 18 is a description of "economic Babylon," which is the one which I have described earlier in this writing.

However, when we analyze chapter 17, we cannot find one piece of evidence which clearly supports their assertions. Nothing religious is found here. No religious items are mentioned. No idols, no priests, no offerings, no temples, no sacred vestments, no rituals, no sacrifices, nothing clearly indicating something religious is found. In short, “religious Babylon” is noticeably absent from chapter 17.

The original Greek text was not divided up into chapters. There is no compelling reason to separate it and this vision into two parts. Truthfully, there is only one Babylon, not two Babylons, described in these two chapters.

All this is in direct contrast to the Old Testament prophecies concerning Babylon. There we do find religious items such as idols, priests, etc. So you see that the final Babylon revealed in Revelation is actually notable for its *lack* of religion. Instead of being a religious entity, it seems to be very secular. What should be really impressive to us is the *absence* of any clear mention of anything religious. This writer is forced to conclude that there is no “religious Babylon” to be found in the book of Revelation.

## **BABYLON WAS NEVER GOD’S CITY**

Many believers imagine that Babylon is the

worldly church of our day. They base their opinions on the fact that she is called a “prostitute.” Therefore, they reason that she must once have belonged to God, but then prostituted herself, much like Hosea’s wife (Hos 1:2). However, when we take an unemotional, calm look at the scriptures, no such indication is found.

God’s “woman” is revealed in Revelation chapter 12. She is a holy, shining, glorious being. She is persecuted by the dragon, not riding on the beast. She is protected by God rather than judged by Him. Her “son” is caught up to heaven to rule the nations (vs 5). Her other offspring “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (vs 17). She may not be perfect, since she needs to be “fed” (vs 6) perhaps indicating a need for more spiritual nourishment. But she is certainly not described as a prostitute or called Babylon.

The woman found in Revelation 17 and 18 is a completely different story. Here we find no scriptural indication that she ever belonged to God. In fact, when she appears, she is riding on a scarlet beast. She is the devil’s woman from the beginning. He is her source. Her dependence is on him.

Further, she is not called an “adulteress” (which is in Greek MOICHOS (Js 4:4) indicat-

ing that she once had a marriage commitment), but a prostitute, PORNE (Rev 17:1.) There is no necessity for a prostitute to have ever been married. No verses demonstrate that she was ever even betrothed to the Lord.

The Babylon of the Old Testament was also never God's city. She was not the place nor the people whom He had chosen for Himself. God never uses the name Babylon to describe His people or His land. So when God selects the word "Babylon" in Revelation to describe the prostitute, He clearly is not trying to indicate His own people or His church. Although some of God's people are living in Babylon, she herself is not and never has been His.

When we look at this logically rather than emotionally, this "Babylon" of Revelation cannot be a reference to God's people. Therefore, the assumption that Babylon is the church or some part of her which has become sinful does not seem to have any biblical basis.

## **A WRONG SPIRIT**

Another serious problem with the "Roman Catholic church along with most denominations" as Babylon teaching is that it seems to generate a wrong spirit. In almost all of the groups I have encountered which hold this

opinion, there is a strong “we are better than they are” attitude. They look down their noses at people who are “in the religious system.” They feel superior to all those other Christians who are so corrupted. Much of their unity and a large part of their “spirituality” comes from their idea that they have “come out” and are a kind of spiritual elite.

This attitude does not reflect the heart of God. If we are in touch with the heart of the Father, seeing any dear fellow believers involved in an impotent, worldly religion should generate a different sort of reaction. We would weep for them. We would pray for them. And we would try to lovingly minister to them God’s truth.

It is without question that the great prostitute would succeed in seducing the church in her country and also in the nations over which she holds sway. It is only logical that she would corrupt them and make them just as fallen as herself. If then the church of today has become worldly in many respects, this is because she too has been drinking of the wine of the fornication of Babylon.

It is sad, but true, that the churches of our day are becoming increasingly worldly. The temples seem to be ever more opulent and the work increasingly success oriented. The

emphasis on sin and repentance is being replaced by an easy, comfortable way where God is our servant and our obligation is merely to attend somewhat regularly and give generously. However, all this does not qualify these institutions to be the Babylon but only a part of her. They have become Babylonian in their character and nature. They have been carried away captive into Babylon.

Since writing the first draft of the book, I have received much feedback from believers who insist that Babylon is today's church. Many of the arguments which I hear are emotional. Frequently they are tinged with an antipathy or even hatred for some church or denomination.

Perhaps these brothers have been wounded by some religious group or other and therefore have difficulty detaching themselves from their experience and looking clearly at the word of God. Virtually all of the proofs offered by these dear believers to demonstrate that Babylon is the Catholic Church along with the denominations are quite vague or must be understood symbolically.

The danger I see here is that while many are focusing on these quite tenuous "spiritual" revelations, the clear and simple verses of these two chapters are being ignored. Perhaps the

emotion which some feel against the “religious system” blinds them to any other possibilities. While they are trying to prove the case for a religious Babylon they seem to ignore many extremely clear verses which need little, if any, interpretation.

These verses are those which point to a “commercial Babylon.” They point to a physical place which we can probably identify today. It is a wealthy, proud, self-confident “city” which is importing everything the merchants of the world have to offer. It is a physical place which we urgently need to be able to accurately identify. It is this secular, commercial, opulent location that will soon be destroyed by fire. Therefore, it is *this* entity which we need to identify.

Perhaps you have not been convinced by my arguments against a religious Babylon, and still believe that she is “the religious system.” So be it. I do not need to convince you. But please consider the following carefully.

It is clearly a “commercial Babylon” which will be destroyed by fire. Therefore, putting the religious ideas aside for the moment, every believer desperately needs to understand where this commercial entity is and, if they reside there, prepare to flee before her judgments come.