

The New Age Movement Is Not New Revelation 17:1-18

Introduction

False religion is not new. It has been with us since the garden of Eden and it will be humanity's companion until Jesus comes again. False religion comes in many shapes and sizes. Often it appears harmless and attractive. However it is always harmful, and sometimes even lethal.

1. **Baptist Leader Counters Dalai Lama's Views**

*Alpharetta, Ga. (BP) – A Southern Baptist interfaith leader has called on the Dalai Lama to reconsider his recent criticism of Christian witness. The Dalai Lama, the exiled leader of Tibetan Buddhists, joined Hindu leaders in condemning the Muslim and Christian practice of actively seeking converts after a January meeting with leaders of the World Hindu Council in India. “Whether Hindu or Muslim or Christian, whoever tries to convert, it’s wrong, not good,” the Dalai Lama said. The Dalai Lama and others signed a statement saying: “We oppose conversions by any religious tradition using various methods of enticement.” Rudy Gonzalez, director of interfaith evangelism for the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board, took issue with the Dalai Lama’s statement that “conversions are out of date now.” “I doubt that people who come to faith in Jesus Christ consider their life-altering decision to be some sort of passing fad. Many people who come to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior do so at considerable peril.” **Baptist Press, March 2001***

2. **Millennium Madness**

A. James Rudin / 2000 Religion News Service

The recent horrific news that some thousand members of a Ugandan religious cult were murdered by the group's leaders forever end the ridiculous comment that such crimes are “unbelievable.” Tragically, cult murders are quite believable and are growing in number. The slaughter of the innocents in Kanungu, Uganda, represents a lethal example of millennium madness. The leaders of something called the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments was led by 20 former Roman Catholics who asserted that the Virgin Mary had personally told them the world would end on December 31, 1999. When that apocalyptic event did not happen, the date was moved forward to Dec. 31 of this year, but the movement's hierarchy could not wait. Instead, during February and March they systematically burned and stabbed some 1,000 poverty-stricken cult members. When Ugandan authorities first discovered the grisly and charred remains, they termed it a mass suicide, but they soon realized it was something else: cultic mass murder.

3. **Syncretism and Secularism**

***Nihilism has become irrelevant, but what will come next?** By Gene Edward Veith*

Perhaps more dangerous in the post-postmodernist era is what may happen to religion. Suddenly, [following Sept. 11, 2001] the cultural hostility to faith went up in smoke, when Americans faced real pain and real spiritual need. This was a good sign. And yet, in the well-intentioned “interfaith prayer services,” a more disturbing note was sounded. Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus were all worshipping together, praying, it was said, “to the same God.” Such multi-faith worship may be the beginning of the much-anticipated “one-world

religion,” which, though filled with pious emotionalism and religiosity, will be far different from Christianity. (October 20, 2001 / World).

4. Yes, false religion is alive and well. It is dangerous not harmless. Never will this be more apparent than during the Great Tribulation, when religious Babylon will flourish and assist Antichrist in ushering in his kingdom.
5. Chapter 17 may be the most difficult chapter in all of the Revelation to interpret. Great caution and care is a must. Never is dogmatism in interpretation more out of bounds. Chapters 17 & 18 actually go together. Chapter 17 addresses the spiritual and religious nature of Antichrist’s kingdom. Chapter 18 addresses the economic and material nature of Antichrist’s kingdom. As we examine the salient characteristics of this spiritual and religious system of ancient origin, religious Babylon, we will discover significant similarity with the New Age thinking of our own day. Indeed we will see, the New Age is not new.

I. Religious Babylon has significant influence. 17:1, 15

*One of the 7 angels of the 7 bowls connects the judgment of the great harlot with the bowl judgments of chapter 16.

*Great harlot denotes false religion, spiritual whoredom. It stands for idolatry, religious apostasy and spiritual defection. Nineveh (Nahum 3:4), Tyre (Isaiah 23:15-17) and even Jerusalem (Isaiah 1:21) are so designated.

1. Her influence crosses racial barriers. 17:1, 15

*Note what the many waters entail (peoples).

*Black, brown, red, yellow and white will experience and yield to the seduction of her illicit ways.

2. Her influence crosses national barriers.

*Multitudes and nations – No nation will escape the intoxication of the cup of her abominations and filthiness (v. 4). Our nation, every nation, will dine at her table.

3. Her influence crosses cultural barriers.

*Multitudes and tongues – Rich and poor, educated and uneducated, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jew, Christian, Animist, Secularist, all will be welcomed and feel drawn to this queen of darkness, this spiritual seductress. A worldwide ecumenical religion proclaiming tolerance for all will, for a time, reign supreme.

II. Religious Babylon promotes spiritual infidelity. 17:2-4

*Fornication (3 times in vs. 2-4) – means idolatry, loyalty and devotion to a false god.

1. She is wicked. 17:2

*harlot

*fornicator

*makes drunk – her spiritual lies are intoxicating.

*seduces both “the kings of the earth and the inhabitants of the earth.”

2. **She is wise. 17:3**

*Carried away in the Spirit (cf. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).

*Harlot sits on the scarlet (luxury, wealth, splendor, royalty; also sin and blood!) beast. She rides the Antichrist.

1) He supports her!

2) For a time she controls him!

*Description identifies this beast with the beast of chapter 13.

3. **She is wealthy. 17:4**

*These are garments of wealth, luxury and splendor.

Purple – royalty / Scarlet – magnificence

*Cup – golden speaks again of wealth, but it is defiled and vile, filthy and immoral.

*She deceives the world into following false gods and rejecting the true God. She is enticing, attractive, alluring. False religion always works this way. Delightful on the outside with death on the inside.

*What is the nature, in sum, of her teachings, and how do they compare to modern New Ageism?

A Comparison of Religious Babylon and The New Age

Babylonianism	New Age
1) Polytheistic and idolatrous	1) Pantheistic and idolatrous
2) Salvation by mystical knowledge (spiritually deceptive)	2) Salvation by mystical knowledge (spiritually deceptive)
3) Deifies special humans	3) Deifies all humanity
4) Affirms reincarnation (esp. of nature & the salvation child Tammuz)	4) Affirms reincarnation
5) Promotes mystical religious rituals	5) Promotes mystical religious rituals
6) Founded a mother/child cult	6) Worships mother earth and her offspring [Romanism fosters a mother/child doctrine]
7) Accepts evolution, at least implicitly	7) Accepts evolution explicitly
8) Amoral	8) Amoral
9) Utopian in outlook	9) Utopian in outlook
10) Human centered	10) Human centered
11) Uses religion to achieve political ends	11) Infiltrates political processes to achieve its own purposes
12) Emotionalism and ecstatic utterances prominent	12) Emotionalism and ecstatic utterances prominent
13) Astrology is important	13) Astrology is important
14) Sensually oriented	14) Sensually oriented

III. **Religious Babylon is rooted in seductive intellectualism. 17:5-6**

John now receives additional understanding as to the nature and character of the great harlot. The degree to which she stands in contrast to the Church, the bride of the Lamb (19:8) is striking and instructive. She is a fornicator and idolater. She is also a mother and a murderer.

1. **She is mystical in her indoctrination. 17:5**

* Forehead a name written (W.A.R.) – 7 other references in Revelation to marking the forehead. Prostitutes in the ancient world often wore a headband with their name on it (Jeremiah 3:3). She is not ashamed of who she is and what she does.

* Mystery Babylon – Meaning: “She has a name which is a mystery: Babylon.” A mystery is a truth previously concealed but now revealed. This mystery is explained in the next statement/truth.

2. **She multiplies her influence. 17:5**

* The Mother (source, origin) of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth. “She is the fountainhead, the reservoir, the womb that bears all the individual cases of historical resistance to God’s will on earth; she is the unholy antithesis to the woman who wed the Lamb (19:7-8) and to the New Jerusalem (21: 2-3)” (Johnson, 155).

3. **She is murderous in her intent. 17:6**

* “Drunk with the blood of the saints ...” She has a lust for violence and a lust for blood. Throughout history she has murdered millions of believers and her final genocide of Christians will be her bloodiest ever. She only tolerates her kind. All who oppose her must be exterminated.

* *This diabolical religious system can be traced from Nimrod’s establishment of the city of Babel (Gen. 10:8-10), later called Babylon. Nimrod built a huge tower made of sun-dried bricks, known as a ziggurat, on the plains of Shinar (Gen. 11:4). The tower was recognized as a temple or rallying center and a symbol of mankind’s pride and rebellion against God. God poured out judgment on this rebellious act by confounding their language and scattering them across the face of the earth (Gen. 11:7-9). However, this did not mean the demise of the Babylonian religious system. Ancient tradition records that Nimrod’s wife, Semiramis, became the head priestess of an idolatrous system of secret religious rituals known as Babylonian Mysteries. Babylon became the fountainhead of idolatry and the mother of pagan systems that spread across the world. Semiramis supposedly gave birth to a son named Tammuz, who was miraculously conceived by a sunbeam. He was presented to the people as a Savior. Tradition says that Tammuz was killed by a wild boar, but after a 40-day fast he was resurrected from the dead on the feast of Ishtar (Easter). This legend of a mother-son cult became part of the Babylonian mystery ritual and was quickly included in other idolatrous religious practices worldwide. The mother-son cult was headed by a priesthood that promoted salvation by means of sprinkling holy water, ceremonial cleansing, and purgatorial cleansing after death. Semiramis established an order of virgins dedicated to religious prostitution. She became known and worshipped as the “queen of heaven.” Ezekiel condemned the practice of Jewish*

“women weeping for Tammuz” (Ezek. 8:14). Jeremiah condemned Judah for offering cakes and burning incense to the “queen of heaven” (Jer. 7:18; 44:17-19, 25). Zechariah personified wickedness as a woman who will be reestablished in the land of Shinar (Babylon) in the latter days (Zech. 5:6-11). After the Medo-Persian Empire took over Babylon, the city and temples were eventually destroyed. However, the Babylonian cult survived and found a new home in Pergamos of Asia Minor. It thrived and eventually was headquartered in Rome. The chief priests wore miters shaped like the head of a fish, in honor of Dagon, the fish-god, the lord of life – another form of the Tammuz mystery. In Rome the chief priest took the title Pontifex Maximus. When Julius Caesar became head of the Roman Empire, he took the name Pontifex Maximus, a title held by all of the Roman emperors down to Constantine the Great, who became head of both church and state. The title was later adopted by the Bishop of Rome. Over time, the church in Rome absorbed many of the Babylonian practices and idolatrous teachings, obscuring the true meaning of Scripture – such teachings as worship of the virgin Mary and various festivals such as Easter, or Ishtar, one of the titles of the Babylonian queen of heaven, to name only two. Many of these teachings can be attributed to Constantine, who combined paganism with Christianity when he adopted Christianity as a state religion.

- * *The vision of the Great Harlot and the revelation of her as Babylon is perhaps the most enigmatic of the visions of the Apocalypse. John himself registers considerable astonishment (v. 6). Nor is he able to comprehend the mystery. Idolatry began in Babylon or Babel with Nimrod (cf. Gen. 11:1-9). The cult of mother and child, Semiramis and Tammuz, was there initiated. This cult, along with other constituent elements of the Babylonian mysteries, was conserved by Roman and Greek religious systems. By the end of the first century, elements of the mysteries had also been adopted by some advocates of the Christian faith. Constantine’s actions between 313 and 323 A.D. brought about the marriage of church and state, and with this union came undiluted doses of those ancient idolatrous faiths. By the time of the Reformation, those ancient myths and mysteries had been thoroughly assimilated into the Christian faith. The scarlet woman of this chapter is, in effect, a resurgence of those same erroneous doctrines. The difference seems to be that the ecumenicity of this latter-day system embraces virtually all religious faiths. Few still comprehend the nature of genuine Christianity, and they suffer at the hands of the drunken harlot as in eras past. Thus Babylon here does not refer to any actual city, past or present. She is a symbol or portrait of all that stands against the true and living God. At the end of history, she will gather all her children into one grand one-world faith. The seeds of her empire are being sown even as we gather here.*

IV. Religious Babylon is supported by several institutions. 17:7-14

* In verse 7 the angel promises to explain more fully the vision of the beast and the harlot and their relationship to each other. Interestingly, the angel begins with a further description of the beast on whom the harlot rides.

1. **Antichrist supports her. 17:7-10**

- * 7 heads and 10 horns connects with 13:1 (same beast).
- * Was, is not, will ascend – 1) parody of Christ’s resurrection (by Antichrist?), 2) reference to Roman Empire. Rome was a great empire. She ceased to be a great empire. In the future she will again be a great empire.
- * Antichrist (revived Rome) source of strength is the Abyss.
- * Antichrist (revived Rome) destiny is destruction.
- * Unbelievers will be amazed, deceived, and damned by the faith they put in Antichrist.
- * 7 heads = 7 mountains – Rome
- * 7 heads also = 7 kings
- 1) 7 Roman emperors – Julius Caesar, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Domitian, and Antichrist; or Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian & Titus.
- 2) 7 is simply symbolic of world power in opposition to God.
- 3) * 7 world empires with particular significance to Israel: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece [5 have fallen, one is [Rome of John’s day and the other has not yet come [revived Rome]. Hence the beast embodies the strength, wickedness, brutality, greatness and splendor of these great world empires. **What a Man! What a Machine!** For a time, the harlot, false religion will rest in good hands, in powerful hands.

2. **Others support her. 17:10-14**

- * Revived Rome lasts, unlike ancient Rome, for a very short period, 3 ½ years most likely.
- * The 7th king (revived Rome) grows into (at the mid-point of the Tribulation) an 8th. What is its nature?
- 1) It will be destroyed (cf. v. 14).
- 2) 10 future kings will give Antichrist their loyalty enabling him to gain worldwide control (cf. 13:7).
- 3) The reign of the 10 kings will be brief (v. 12b).
- 4) They picked the wrong opponent! Verse 14!!! (Looks to 19:11-21). We who are the called, chosen (God’s part) and faithful (our part) will be with Him (cf. 19:14).

V. **Religious Babylon is destined for shameful indignity. 17:16-18**

* What do you do with a whore when you are finished with her? The Pretty Woman scenario is a tragic myth. No, you don’t take her home to mother, neither do you marry her. You discard her, leave her on the street or, as is the case here, you destroy her.

1. **She will be destroyed. 17:16**

An abrupt turnabout will be made by the “ten horns” (v. 16). The language recalls the words of Ezekiel 23:11-35. They will awaken from their drunken stupor with the woman, whose charm and seduction will have lost their lure. They have a new love in the Antichrist. Love for the woman will turn to “hate” (v. 16.) They will strip her of all the wealth she has confiscated throughout the world. They will make her “naked” (v. 16), tear away her personal support, position, power, and prestige, and expose her moral corruption. They “shall eat her flesh” (v. 16) like dogs devoured the corpse of

Jezebel (cf. 1 Kings 21:23, 2 Kings 9:30-37). They will “burn her with fire” (v. 16), or totally eliminate any identity of the woman’s false religious system.

2. Her destruction will be initiated by God.

This hostile action, her destruction, will be initiated by God: “For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will” (v. 17); that is, to rid the world of this pseudo-religious system. The kings mentioned above will believe that they are carrying out their own program for conquest, but actually they will accomplish God’s providential program. Having destroyed the woman, the Antichrist will unite the world’s religious and political systems under his control. The 10 nations will agree to “give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (v. 17). God’s prophetic program will reach its intended goal as He sovereignly allows the kingdoms of this world to come under the beast’s control until the end of the Tribulation. The angel concludes his revelation by identifying the woman simply as “that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth” (v. 18). The early church believed the verse was speaking of Rome. Many scholars today identify the city with Rome because of her dress (v. 4), reference to the “seven mountains” (v. 9), and belief that Rome will be the religious center of the world during the Tribulation. Still others believe that John was anticipating the woman’s fall and the religious emphasis shifting from the woman to the beast. Thus, this great anti-God system will continue, both as power (political) and cult (religion), united in one figure - Antichrist. Some teach that the verse is not referring to the woman as a religious system but as the literal city of Babylon yet to be built on the Euphrates River. This city will become the center for a religious system that opposes true Christianity. A better interpretation teaches that the woman is identified with the “great city” Babylon in its religious, not historical, significance. According to verse 5, “BABYLON THE GREAT” is not referring to the literal city of ancient Babylon but to its diabolical religious system. As Babylon conquered cities politically, its religion dominated political states. Thus, the meaning cannot be confined to a city in the past or future, such as Rome or Babylon. This verse refers to a trans-historical system of satanic evil, which is an extension of ancient Babylon, forming the one-world religious system during the Tribulation. After the destruction of the woman, this religious system will reside in the Antichrist, who will manifest all of its satanic evils.

Conclusion

What we believe really matters. Who we follow is crucial. Who our spiritual lover is, is decisive.

- 1) Is your name written in the Book of Life? (v. 8)
- 2) Are you one of the called, chosen and faithful? (v. 14)

This is no trivial matter. Your soul truly hangs in the balance. Be certain you follow the Christ and not the Antichrist. Be sure you love Jesus and not the harlot.