

Lots of stunning news came out of the elections that took place last week, but [one story](#) you might not have heard involves the California town of Oceanside... close to where my father used to live. Oceanside's city treasurer (Gary Ernst) was re-elected—despite the fact that he died in September.

So how did that happen? Ernst was still on the ballot due to the Election Code ("because he had died less than 68 days before the election") and "a prominent city councilman had urged voters to elect Ernst rather than challenger Nadine Scott, promising to appoint a replacement for Ernst."

You may imagine that Scott is rather upset at losing to a dead candidate—and she is. ... She put her heart and soul (not to mention her financial commitment) into her campaign ... and she lost to someone who was dead. I do not know anything about Nadine Scott and why so many people chose the deceased man over her... but... think how humiliating it must have been to invest yourself whole heartedly into your desire to serve the public... only to have them say... *"No thanks... we prefer someone who is deceased..."*

Thinking about this made me consider the way people reject Christ for a false religion (one that is dead.) *"No thanks... We will take our chances and cast our vote for something that is lifeless..."*

But isn't our world turning away from organized religion... whether it is Christianity or any of the world's religious systems? ... Is our world becoming overwhelming secular?

Not exactly, says researcher Rodney Stark. In a book he published earlier this year Stark writes:

The world is more religious than it has ever been. Around the globe, four out of every five people claim to belong to an organized faith, and many of the rest say they attend worship services. In Latin America, Pentecostal Protestant churches have converted tens of millions, and Catholics are going to Mass in unprecedented numbers. There are more churchgoing Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else on earth, and China may soon become home of the most Christians. Meanwhile, although not growing as rapidly as Christianity, Islam enjoys far higher levels of member commitment than it has for many centuries, and the same is true for Hinduism. In fact, of all the great world religions, only Buddhism may not be growing. Furthermore, in every nook and cranny left by organized faiths, all manner of unconventional and unchurched supernaturalisms are booming: there are more occult healers than medical doctors in Russia; 38 percent of the French believe in astrology; 35 percent of the Swiss agree that "some fortune tellers really can foresee the future," and nearly everyone in Japan is careful to have a new car blessed by a Shinto priest.

We are dealing with... today... a passage in Revelation that shows (what I believe are things we can see today)... of how this rejection of Christ for a dead religion... is all coming together... to bring God's judgment on earth. The thirst for it is alive and well today... all over the earth... It will only intensify... and then culminate during the Tribulation.

Now... I have spoken often... since we began our series in Revelation... and shown verses that lead me to believe that the true church of Jesus Christ will not go through the great tribulation. ... Those who truly know the Lord and who are alive when this period comes... will be caught up to be with Him before the tribulation begins.

But let's be clear about this... All of what general society considers the church today to be... will not necessarily be included in that promise. All of "Christendom" is not the true church... in other words. There is a dead church that goes through the great tribulation... and we come to that matter in our studies in Revelation now.

We had a hint of this in the letter to Thyatira in the 2nd chapter of this book, where the Lord describes a woman there named Jezebel who taught the people to commit immorality, and of whom the Lord said,

Revelation 2:22 (ESV)

Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works,

We get the full account of that here in Chapters 17 and 18. ... In chapters 17 and 18 we see the judgment of the two Babylons (Mystery Babylon and the soon-to-be-rebuilt literal city of Babylon. ... We will first see the apostate church (those who rejected Christ... and took instead a lifeless religion)... in the Great Tribulation in chapter 17... and then we will see not only this religious Babylon but also the government and commercial Babylon in chapter 18.

The world certainly looks as if it is wildly spinning out of control... but looking at these two chapters assures us... that God sits sovereign upon His throne. He is perfectly working His plan of the ages before our very eyes.

Revelation 17:1-6

We have already learned that the beast represents a great political leader who will dominate world government and economics in the last days. He will be empowered by the great dragon... who is Satan... and is the false Christ... or the Antichrist.

(We will see more of this beast later in this chapter). But... for now... the Apostle John calls us to focus on this woman... who sat on the beast.

There are several clues... in fact ten of them... which are given to help us identify the woman. ... What does this symbolic woman mean? ... Two full chapters are devoted to this. ... No symbol in the book of Revelation is given more identifying marks... than this woman. This should tell us that she must represent something very important to end-times prophecy.

Here are the clues: **First**, we are told that this woman is a "prostitute."

As a verb... to prostitute something is to take something that has a proper use... and to use it in an improper way. A prostitute... of course does this with the sexual act. Sex has a legitimate purpose with marriage... but a prostitute takes that which has a legitimate purpose... and uses it in an **il**legitimate way. ... A prostitute is one who offers sexual satisfaction... as a wife would... but does not otherwise fulfill that role.

In our passage here... this prostitute does this with religion. ... There is a proper use of religion... as James points out...

James 1:27 (ESV)

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

True religion is taking on the role of a servant. True Biblical religion means servanthood... service... serving people who have needs... and meeting their needs. ... However when religion is prostituted... it moves from the position of servanthood... to the position of lordship... where it begins to rule.

This is what is being described by our passage. We see here a religious prostitute has moved from serving to ruling.

The **second** clue given... is that this woman has universal influence. She is described as "*the great prostitute, who sits on many waters.*" ... We do not have to guess what that means for in Verse 15 of this same chapter John says...

Revelation 17:15

Many peoples all over the earth are affected by the teachings of this prostituted religion. ... In Verses 1 and 2 we read, "*With whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality...*" ... She will have power over the leaders of nations... "the kings of the earth"... and she makes the common people "*drunk on the wine of her adulteries.*" She... seemingly... has the ability to successfully mix religion and politics together to serve her own interest.

When religion controls the head of state... she carries a great deal of influence over the inhabitants of that state. To a limited degree... we can see this with Islam. In the Islamic states... religion carries tremendous power and influence. I say it is limited... because its influence is only over a single nation at a time. However, there is a different example that better

fits this passage. Islam and other religions have tried to control a political government. However... only one has been successful in going beyond their own culture... race... and language... and crossed all barriers to impact a vast majority of the world.

The capitol of this religion... to this very day... operates as a separate sovereign nation within the city and nation where it is located. ... They have embassies within many capitols of the world. ... At the present time... the United States has an ambassador assigned to this religious capitol... therefore recognizing this particular religion - as a governmental entity.

The **third** clue is that she is seated upon the beast. That pictures a relationship between them. ... It is clear that the woman dominates the beast for a period of time. ... She exercises tremendous power over the Antichrist for a short time. We know that it is only a brief period because eventually Verses 16 and 17 will be fulfilled.

Revelation 17:16-17

The Antichrist and his subservient 10 kings will eventually destroy the woman... (or this prostitute religion.)

All through these sections... we see constant reminders that God is in overall control. ... Did you notice that in verse 17...? God allows things to happen... and they will actually accomplish His ultimate purposes.

The **fourth** clue is that the woman is obviously very wealthy and expensively adorned. ... (Verse 4) She was "dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls." This prostitute religion will have a vast amount of wealth.

The **fifth** clue is that she holds "a golden cup in her hand." ... Outwardly it is of gold... which is a symbol of divine activity... It looks to be divinely given... but it is filled with false religious concepts... "with abominable things"... with spiritual adulteries... filthiness of teaching.

As many commentators point out, this is intended to be a contrast with the communion cup of the New Testament, "the cup of the Lord," which is associated with the truth of God. This is a counterfeit of the cup of the Lord. It looks like it is the true thing - but is *not*.

Then the **sixth** clue is given: she is called "Mystery, Babylon the Great." The word "Mystery" indicates there is something deeper here than appears on the surface. ... We are not to simply think of the physical city called Babylon.

To understand these passages relating to the final doom of Babylon, we must refer to the first mention of Babel in the Scriptures. In Genesis 10 and 11 we have a detailed record of the rise of that political religious system known to Bible students as Babylon.

We are told that after the Flood the descendants of Noah... forgetting the lesson they should have learned... turned from God and moved to a region to the east of Palestine... in the vicinity of the original Garden of Eden. ... It was called the land of the Shinar... and was in the region of the Euphrates River... one of the three principle rivers of the Garden of Eden.

A certain man... Nimrod by name... seems to have been the leader of this great movement... and was supported by a great company of followers. He began building of a city... which was to become one of the seven great

wonders of the world. ... In this land of Shinar... he built a city and called it Babel. ... In the midst of the city was a gigantic temple dedicated to Belus... later called Baal. ... At the same time he also built a tower... usually referred to as the Tower of Babel... As the city represented the political national strength and ideals of Babylon... so also there was a tower which was the symbol and center of Babylon's religious program and worship. Babylon stood for man's rejection of God... in favor of a religion of their own making. Babylon represents man-made religion... where certain men's writings and teaching have constructed it.

The **seventh** clue is that she is called "The mother of prostitutes." ... This woman will not be a new phenomenon... who suddenly shows up during the time of the Tribulation. She will have been around for a while... because she is the "mother of prostitutes." She is probably in existence today... giving birth to many heretical teachings... and has been doing do for some time.

Then, the **eighth** clue is that she is a persecutor of the true believers in Christ: "I saw the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus." She cannot tolerate any opposition that reveals the falsehood she is perpetrating. She opposes with violence and death all those who preach the truth contrary to the lie she promulgates.

No doubt she will do this during the period of the Tribulation... but if she has already been around for a while... perhaps she has already engaged in persecuting true followers of Christ.

Two other clues appear elsewhere in this chapter which we will consider along with these to be sure we have properly identified this woman. One is found in Verse 9, and the other in Verse 18, the last verse of the chapter. These add further confirmation to the woman's identity.

The **ninth** clue is found in verse 9... and with this I will stop beating around the bush...

Revelation 17:9

Ancient writings existing today are in abundance that describe **Rome** as the city built on seven hills. ... This was familiar terminology in the 1st century. ... Rome was called the city of seven hills. And that identification is further confirmed by what John is told in Verse 18:

Revelation 17:18

Now please notice the verb tenses in this verse. It is all present (and not future.) "...the woman that you saw **IS** (not "*will be*") the great city..." Then he goes on... "The great city that **HAS** (in other words – "right now" - not "*will have*") dominion over the kings of the earth.

As the angel spoke this to John... what city (which also happened to be built on seven hills) – had dominion over the kings of the earth – at that time...?

In John's day that could only be one city -- Rome. "The great city," which was the capital of the Roman Empire that dominated the whole known world of that day, literally ruled over the kings of the earth.

Now stop and think how John probably responded to this revelation. I'm sure he must have been confounded... (totally baffled.)

You see... at that time... the church in Rome was not a prostitute religion. ...It was a genuine Christian assembly. ... At the end of the 1st century when John is being told this this... it was church under tremendous persecution... and driven to the catacombs. ... They were so persecuted and hounded... they had to hide in the caves of the earth... underneath the city. ... They were hiding for their lives – because they professed the truth... They were nothing like a wealthy... powerful... world influence of falsehood!

That probably explains the last part of Verse 6... where John tells us that when he saw the woman seated upon the beast... that he was greatly astonished." Why? Doubtless it is a great surprise to him to see that the church he knew in Rome would become a great prostitute of religion... dominating the kings of the earth.

So the Angel goes on to explain to John just how the church that he knew would go through such change. Let me paraphrase for you what I think the next several verses say... and then we will read them.

John, don't be so alarmed. The church you are thinking about... in its final form... will be comprised of those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life... (It will not be comprised of true believers... like the one you know in Rome right now.) And these will be deceived by the Antichrist... who will have a fake resurrection... And something else, John. This religious prostitute will also be the product of seven kingdoms – five that have already existed... Egypt... Assyria... Babylon... Persia... and Greece)... plus the current Roman

Kingdom... and then the rule of the Antichrist and his 10 subservient kings.

Revelation 17:6-13

Verse 14 foreshadows Christ's victory which is in chapter 18...

Revelation 17:14

When we put all the clues together of the woman of Revelation 17... it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that this pictures the Roman Catholic Church. ... It is a church that arises during the church age we looked at in Revelation 2:18-29 – the Church of Thyatira. And it comes to its greatest power during the first half of the Tribulation after the true church has been raptured.

I must include here something that is very important... I don't want anyone to miss it: When I say that the mystery woman of Revelation 17 is the Catholic Church... please know that I am not talking about Roman Catholic people.

In our protestant circles... we think of the church as people... but the Roman church itself teaches that the church is the clergy... the papacy and the hierarchy... not the people.

Also... it would be simplistic to say this describes the Roman Catholic Church and that church alone. ... We must remember... first of all... that there are many true saints within the Roman Catholic Church. ... There have been godly popes... bishops... priests and nuns through the centuries. ... I have met some of them; so, perhaps, have you.

What we need to understand is that it is the teaching of the Roman church that is described here -- the extra-biblical teachings from pagan sources that have been brought in under the name of Christendom. They involve a seeking of earthly power or status gained by religious authority. That is this prostitute religion. That is what first arose in the city by the Euphrates -- a search for earthly power and glory by religious means. The Tower of Babel was built unto heaven, and the people said, "We will make a name for ourselves." That is Babylonianism.

There are many religious groups and churches today that are afflicted by this taint. Not only the Roman Catholic Church, but also Orthodox churches, Anglican churches, Eastern churches, Western churches, Protestant churches, Independent churches, Charismatic churches, and Evangelical churches -- many of them reflect this same error.

Because they are so closely connected... I would like to now read through chapter 18... but I don't think much comment is necessary...

Revelation 18:1-3

The church at Rome... which John knew had become a dwelling place for demons and every detestable doctrine. The kings of the earth committed immorality with her. And this is why Jesus destroyed her.

Revelation 18:4-5

Come out of any church that will become part of this prostitute religion... Catholic or otherwise! Come out... lest you share in her plagues.

Revelation 18:6-8

Both the religious aspect of Babylon (the prostitute religion) and the commercial city... the center of the Antichrist's government... will be destroyed. We saw this last week as we studied the Armageddon Campaign. It will be phase two of that campaign.

Revelation 18:9-24

Let us now leave that solemn and sobering picture. The quarrel God has with Babylonianism (wherever it may be found)... not only in the Roman Catholic church... but in many churches which fall prey to this error... is that "she glorifies herself" in the name of God.

Whenever a church seeks to rule people... rather than be a servant... you have the seeds of Babylonianism present. ... And whenever a church seeks to influence by impressing people with outward splendor... you have the seeds of Babylonianism present. ... And whenever individual Christians try to appear pious and devout... while the heart runs after material gain or status... Babylon is ever present.

In the New Testament the occasion where this began... was the judgment that came upon Ananias and Sapphira. That couple seemed to be godly and devout, but what they were after was not the glory of God but self-glory. They were using an apparent act of devotion on their part in selling their land and giving only a part of the proceeds to the apostles to gain a false status in the midst of the people.

We must ask ourselves... "Why does God show us all this?" ... All through Revelation we are seeing the end of things that are present with us now.

We are shown this because... if we see how things will end... we can turn away from them now.

Is there anything about this church and our service to our community... or to world missions... where we are seeking status from mankind... or a sense of rule...?

Is there any part of your kingdom service where you desire status or authority for authority's sake...?