

Theology and the Ecumenical Movement

Charles C. Ryrie

The ecumenical movement is showing some scattered signs of revival after a number of years of decline. This should not surprise students of the prophetic Scriptures, for eschatological Babylon, the harlot, will play a significant role in the tribulation years. Her label, "Babylon the Great," describes her roots, her religion, and her rejection of the truth of God. Like all religions (whether they realize it or not) the future Babylon will have a theological stance that will help unite and hold together this great future religious system. She will promote false theology and probably in a most attractive and appealing way like the Babylons that will have preceded her.

Babylon has had a long and consistently dishonorable history. "And the beginning of his [Nimrod's] kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar" (Gen. 10:10). This probably occurred somewhere around 3,000 B.C. The city and tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) were built to prevent the people from scattering throughout the earth, in direct defiance of God's command to do so. The city and tower served as a rallying point and symbol of the fame of the people of Babel, a fame which exalted man and his desires above God and His commands. The tower was a concrete expression of human pride in open opposition to God. When God in judgment scattered the people throughout the earth, they naturally took with them their own religious ideas about the exaltation of man and his ideas. Each resultant language group had its cultural distinctives, and the names of their respective gods and goddesses were different, but the basic concept of humanism was the same everywhere.

Hammurabi was responsible for making Babylon a religious power about 1600 B.C. This was accomplished by making Marduk the god of the city of Babylon and head of a pantheon of 1,300 deities. This brought all religious tradition into one system.

Extra-biblical sources indicate that the wife of Nimrod became the head of the Babylonian mysteries which consisted of religious rites that were part of the worship of idols in Babylon. Her name was Semiramis, and she served as high priestess of this idol worship. Supposedly she gave birth to a son, Tammuz, who claimed to be a savior and the fulfillment of the promise given to Eve in Genesis 3:15.

This mother-child legend found its way into a number of pagan religions. The mother was pictured as the queen of heaven who could cleanse sins, and the son was purported to have been killed by a wild beast and then brought back to life.

This anti-god religion is alluded to in the Bible in passages like Ezekiel 8:14, Jeremiah 7:18, and 44:17-19, 25. The queen of heaven here is the goddess Ishtar, an Assyro-Babylonian deity. The fourth Babylonian month, July, was named Tammuz.