

The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 17:1-18

Topic

John sees a woman sitting on a scarlet beast representing the influence of the city of Babylon over the antichrist during the first half of the future seven-year Tribulation

Title

"Beauty on the Beast"

Introduction

How long - start to finish, groundbreaking to ribbon cutting - do you think it would take to build a 30-story luxury hotel?

If I told you it could be done in *fifteen days*, would you believe me?

A construction crew in the south-central Chinese city of Changsha built a 183,000 square-foot hotel, with no injuries to any worker, in just fifteen days. That's only 360 hours.

The Ark Hotel was built on Dongting Lake, in the Hunan Province. It can withstand a magnitude 9 earthquake, which is five times more quake-resistant than conventional buildings.

Another developer in China built an entire 57-story building in just 19 days.

The Sky City building was put up brick by brick at a rate of three full stories a day in Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province. The building has 800 apartments and enough office space for 4000 people.

You've heard of Dubai, but have you heard of Dubai Internet City? It was built as a tech-center just a few miles from Dubai. Occupying 400 acres, it opened with ten buildings, three hundred companies, and 3500 users.

It was built, start to finish, in just 12 months.

Let me tell you what this has to do with chapters seventeen and eighteen of the Revelation. We're going to read about Babylon, and there is lively scholarly debate about whether or not the apostle John meant the city of Babylon rebuilt on its historic site on the Euphrates River in Iraq; or whether he meant Babylon as a spiritual description of some other city, or even something allegorical, like the evil world system.

When I say he meant it as a real city, built on its original site along the Euphrates River in Iraq, the critics say, "It's not possible for such a city to be built quickly enough to be significant in the seven-year Tribulation."

O, yes it is; today it is. And it **will** be built - just in time to be destroyed by God.

In chapter eighteen, we will be introduced to the political and economic side of Tribulation Babylon. Here in chapter seventeen we see the spiritual side of that great but terrible city.

Spiritually speaking, Babylon will be described as a harlot; in fact, she is called the "mother of all harlots."

Since she is the "mother" of **all** spiritual harlots, her influence has been felt in every generation. She is active *now*, seeking to seduce people away from the pure love of God into spiritual fornication.

As we look at Tribulation Babylon, I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You're Made Aware Of The Constant Seduction Of The Spiritual Harlot, and #2 You're Made Aware Of The Coming Destruction Of The Spiritual Harlot.

#1 You're Made Aware Of The
Constant Seduction Of The Spiritual Harlot

(v1-6)

Let's share a doctrinal moment. We are what is called 'futurist' in our approach to the Revelation of Jesus Christ. We see most of the book as describing future events - things that have yet to occur.

The other approaches to interpreting the Revelation all allegorize the text to a certain extent.

It is important we be consistent in our futurism. We can't accuse others of seeing allegories in the Revelation, then do that ourselves.

Futurists sometimes stumble a little when it comes to Tribulation Babylon. They suggest it is 'code' for another city, like Rome, or New York, or the Vatican. Or that it is 'code' for evil in a general sense. In other words, we tend to allegorize Babylon.

When we are consistent, then Babylon in the Revelation means the literal city of Babylon, rebuilt on its ancient site in Iraq.

There is absolutely no biblical reason to suppose that all of a sudden, in the future, Babylon means *something* or *somewhere* else.

After Jerusalem, Babylon is the most mentioned city in the Bible. There are some three hundred references to it.

Babylon will be quickly rebuilt, and for the first three-and-one-half years of the Tribulation, it will be the home base for a world-dominating false religion.

In verses one through six, John receives a vision of the religious system of Tribulation Babylon. The interpretation of what he saw is then given in verses seven through eighteen.

Rev 17:1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,

Chapter sixteen ended with the pouring-out upon earth of the seventh, and final, bowl of the wrath of God. It marked the end of the seven-year Tribulation. Chronologically, chapter nineteen comes next, with the Second Coming of Jesus to earth.

What we have in chapters seventeen and eighteen is a parenthesis - a pause - to tell us about the rise and fall of Babylon during those seven years.

God considers Babylon "the great harlot." He sees her as a spiritual seductress.

- In the Old Testament, God describes His relationship to Israel as that of a Husband and wife.
- In the New Testament, the church is called the bride of Jesus Christ.

If we are being seduced by a spiritual harlot, and if we succumb to her, then we are committing fornication, and are spiritual adulterers.

It is a powerful illustration, to get us to understand how very serious the love of God for us is.

God's love is jealous. Now, we always think of jealousy in a bad light. We ought to be glad, and rejoice, that God is jealous for us. It means He knows what is best for us, and works in our lives to keep us from giving our hearts to harlots who will only leave us ruined - spiritually and literally.

Rev 17:2 with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

"Kings of the earth" lets us know that Babylon has exerted its influence throughout history. We get a lot of that history from the book of beginnings - Genesis.

Babylon was founded by Nimrod. In Genesis we are told he began to be "a mighty one" - meaning a tyrant. We read, "he was a mighty hunter against the Lord." Nimrod may have hunted game, but this phrase describes him hunting other men; not for sport, but to subdue them. He set himself against God by searching out men, subduing them, and bringing them under his own rule.

In Genesis 10:10 we read, "And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel..." Nimrod, then, was the world's first dictator, and his capital city was Babel, which we know as Babylon.

By the way - Nimrod prefigures the final world dictator, the antichrist, whose capital city will also be Babylon.

Babylon is the location where mankind first began to worship in organized rebellion against God at the Tower of Babel. The tower was not an attempt to build a stairway to Heaven. It was what archaeologists call a *ziggurat*. These are terraced stepped-pyramids built to worship other gods.

One such excavated *ziggurat*, called the Burs Nimûd, is described by archaeologists as follows:

"The [tower]... was built of kiln-burnt bricks, and the building rose in seven receding stages, in conformity with the [Babylonian] planetary system... The entire original height...would thus have been 156 feet... the different stages were colored after the hue of the planets to which they were respectively dedicated... On the seventh stage there was probably placed the ark or tabernacle... [which] must have nearly covered the top of the seventh story... The whole [structure] formed a kind of oblique pyramid."

Extensive historical information exists documenting the Babylonian religion established at the Tower of Babel. We know that the wife of Nimrod became the head of this religious system. She was known by the name Semiramis.

She gave birth to a son who she claimed was conceived miraculously. This son, Tammuz, was considered a savior.

Both Semiramis and her son were worshipped. She was depicted as the queen of heaven, seen holding her infant son in her arms.

Tammuz, according to the tradition, was killed by a wild animal and then restored to life. It seems to be a satanic anticipation and counterfeit of Jesus Christ's resurrection.

To halt the progress of the Tower of Babel, God confounded human languages, so that folks could not understand one another. As those who could still communicate went out from Babel, the false religion of Babel went in every direction.

- In Assyria, you find Ishtar and her son, Tammuz.
- In Phoenicia, you find Astarte and her son, Baal.
- In Egypt, Isis and her son, Osiris.
- In Greece, Aphrodite and her son, Eros.
- In Rome, Venus and her son, Cupid.

It is therefore a fact of recorded history that Babylon has exerted its influence upon kingdoms, including today.

Rev 17:3 So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

Rev 17:4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.

Don't get antsy; the angel showing John these things is going to interpret them.

Rev 17:5 And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

As we have explained before, a "mystery" in the Bible is something previously concealed that is being revealed. The mystery revealed here is that Babylon has, indeed, influenced "the kings of the earth" and "the inhabitants of the earth."

She is the "mother" from which all other false religions have their origin. I suggested some direct comparisons in kingdoms that had a mother-son worship. Whether or not a religion copies those Babylonian practices, the rebellion that occurred at Babel, with its attempt to worship *something* or *someone* other than God in an organized, systematic way, is the influence for everything that is false, and that opposes the Word of God.

"Abominations" and "filthiness" are summary words to describe the results of leaving God behind and worshipping the creation, or the creature, rather than the Creator. The first chapter of Romans does a nice job of explaining the deterioration that accompanies spiritual seduction. Let me read just a portion.

Rom 1:25 [they] exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever...

Rom 1:26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

Rom 1:27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

Rom 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

Rom 1:29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,

Rom 1:30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

Rom 1:31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;

Rom 1:32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Abominations and filthiness are the wake of being seduced by the harlot.

Rev 17:6 I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

Pop quiz: Who does the Bible say was "a murderer from the beginning?" The devil (John 8:44). Satan is, of course, the malevolent force behind Babylon, and its murderous rebellion.

His particular target has been the ancestors and successors of the chosen nation of Israel. But he's killed a bunch of Christians along the way that leads to the Tribulation - where the devil goes on a rampage against all the followers of Jesus.

Here is what these opening verses establish. The Satan-inspired religious rebellion of the human race at Babel spread from there throughout history to every culture in every corner of the world.

It will come to its zenith in the future seven-year Tribulation Babylon.

It is just as much at work in the world today.

You are constantly being spiritually seduced by a murderous harlot whose purpose it is to see you destroyed. The things that seek to undermine your walk with Jesus are no less whorish, and no less horrible.

Don't try to be like Ulysses. He wanted to hear the song of the beautiful Sirens, which drove sailors mad, causing them to crash and die upon the rocks. Ulysses had his men tie him to the mast, then stuff wax in their ears. While they rowed safely by, he heard the Sirens, and survived.


Are you tied to some sinful mast? Repent, and keep yourself in the love of God. Jesus is your heavenly Bridegroom, busy cleansing you, adorning you, to meet our Father in Heaven.

#2 You're Made Aware Of The Coming Destruction Of The Spiritual Harlot

(v7-18)

Babylon will be quickly rebuilt, becoming the capital of what is either a one-world religion, or (more likely) an ecumenical center open to all faiths.

It's more likely that it is something open to all faiths because we know it will coexist with Jews worshipping at their rebuilt Temple.

It's like those  (coexist) bumper stickers.

The seven symbols come from various ideologies and religions.

- The first is a crescent moon with a star, an Islamic symbol.
- The second is a peace sign.
- The third is the letter "e" with male and female symbols incorporated into it.
- The fourth is the star of David, the religious symbol for the Jewish faith.
- I believe the fifth is the letter "i" with the dot as a pentagram - a symbol used with Wiccan and witchcraft.
- The sixth letter is the letter "S" with a ying and yang symbol behind it. Ying and yang are a representation of perfect balance or equality used in Chinese Philosophy.
- Last, the Cross, representing Christianity.

A kumbaya arrangement continues for the first three-and-one-half years of the Tribulation, until the antichrist - whose other name in this chapter is "the beast" - openly demands to be worshipped. When he does, he and those aligned with him destroy all that has to do with the religious aspects of Tribulation Babylon.

Rev 17:7 But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

If we only had the vision, we'd be confused. We could agree with those who say that the Revelation is full of signs and symbols that cannot be understood. As always, be patient and read on - and everything is made clear.

Rev 17:8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book

of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

Earlier in our studies we saw, mid-Tribulation, the antichrist assassinated, but raised back to life. That is what John means when he says he "was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit."

After the Tribulation, he is destined to "go to perdition." He will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire to suffer eternal conscious torment.

We explained in a previous study that the Book of Life is the Book of the Living - a record of every human being. Your name remains there unless you die having rejected Jesus as your Savior. When that happens, your name is removed - blotted out.

The Tribulation folks whose names have been blotted out chose to worship the beast even though they were warned by God to not do so. The choice they make to worship the beast is a conscious, willful rebellion against God, and a rejection of Jesus, from which they will not repent.

Rev 17:9 "Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.

Rev 17:10 There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time.

The key to deciphering this kingdom math is that the angel tells John "one [kingdom] is." One of the kingdoms existed in John's day. It was the Roman Empire.

That means the “five” kingdoms had “fallen” prior to Rome. They were: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. Along with Rome, these are the kingdoms that the Bible is most interested in.

They are the ones the angel shows Daniel in his prophecies. We’re looking at history from God’s point of view, not ours.

Rome is thus the sixth kingdom, *and* it is a seventh kingdom that “... has not yet come.” It is described in verses eleven and twelve:

Revelation 17:11 "And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.

The beast, the antichrist, was part of the seventh kingdom, and is also the eighth kingdom... Huh?

It's really not that confusing!

- Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece are kingdoms one, two, three, four and five.
- Rome, at the time of John, is six.
- The Roman Empire will be revived in the first years of the Tribulation, making it kingdom number seven.
- The Revived Roman Empire ruled by the antichrist during the last half of the Tribulation would be number eight in this list.

The antichrist, then, was "of the seven," but comes to supreme power, and is the eighth kingdom.

What about the comment, "the seven heads are seven mountains upon which the woman sits."

Some say her HQ must therefore be in Rome, in Italy, because Rome is, after all, renowned as the city of seven hills.

Bible commentator J.A. Seiss wrote,

The seven hills of the city of Rome, to begin with, are not mountains, as every one who has been there can testify... But the taking of them as literal hills or mountains at all is founded upon a total misreading of the angel's words.

... the angel... does not say, "the seven heads are seven mountains, where the Woman sitteth upon them," and there leave off; but he adds immediately, "and they are seven kings," or personified kingdoms. **The mountains, then, are not piles of material rocks and earth at all, but [kingdoms].**

Rev 17:12 "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast.

Rev 17:13 These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.

After demanding to be worshipped following his assassination and resurrection, the antichrist will consolidate the Revived Roman Empire into an eighth world empire. It will consist of a coalition of ten kingdoms, or probably regions, of the world subordinate to his supreme power. These rule as the eighth kingdom.

Rev 17:14 These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."

Jesus returns to earth in His Second Coming and, when He does, all the armies of the earth turn against Him, but are destroyed by Him.

Someone is with Jesus at His coming, at His victory. Who are those "called, chosen, and faithful?"

It's **us** - the church - having been raptured prior to the start of the Tribulation.

Rev 17:15 Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.

O yeah; we were talking about a harlot. Did we get sidetracked talking instead about the antichrist?

No, not at all. The harlot, who had so much influence over the whole earth, is going to have a problem mid-Tribulation. If the antichrist demands to be worshipped as god, how can the false, one-world, coexist religion go on? It can't.

Rev 17:16 And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

Rev 17:17 For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

Whatever the final form of the religion of Tribulation Babylon is, whether a one-world religion, or an ecumenical union of all religions, when the beast arises from the Abyss empowered and indwelt by Satan, his ten buddies will aid him in destroying her.

You must either worship him, or else. "It's my way, or the die-way."

Rev 17:18 And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

The harlot "**is** that great city" in that she is headquartered there. If I say, "Vatican City," you think of the Roman Catholic religion. It's a real city, but, at the same time, it is a seat of global religious power and influence. Same idea here.

By the way, what about Roman Catholicism? Isn't *she* the harlot, as the Reformers, and many evangelicals, thought and taught?

To the extent Roman Catholic doctrine is a religion of works that promotes idol worship, it will certainly be a part of the 'coexist' religions of Tribulation Babylon.

But so will **all** false religions and philosophies. So I'm no longer singling-out Catholicism as **the** harlot, all by herself; but she doesn't get a pass, either.

Someone let me know that it was Linda Ronstadt's birthday on the 15th. She's 69.

I sarcastically commented, "When will she be loved?"

Jesus loves you. He demonstrated His love by taking your place on the Cross; by dying in your place,

He took your sin upon Himself so you could be declared righteous by God, have your sins forgiven, and enjoy eternal life, both now and forever.

Satan, who is behind the mother of all harlots, is a pimp. He has a stable full of seductresses. Like the Sirens, get too close and you will turn towards them, and be shipwrecked.

Who are the Sirens in your life? Don't think you're going to be able to get closer-and-closer to them. Get away from them.

Flee into the arms, and heart, of the Lord, Who loves you with an everlasting love; and who drew you to Himself.