

# THE GRACE OF WRATH

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Text

Revelation 17:1-18

Topic

The “mystery” global religious system of the Great Tribulation is compared to a harlot riding upon a scarlet beast

Title

***“Ride, Harlot Ride  
Upon Your Mystery Beast”***

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## **Where is Sin City?**

You probably thought of Las Vegas. After all, “What stays in Vegas” isn’t referring to content that is family-oriented.

I was surprised to learn that besides Vegas, nine US cities have earned the designation. No less than thirty-four cities in over thirty countries are dubbed Sin City.

If we limit ourselves to the Bible, probably the overwhelmingly popular choice would be the sinister sister cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

**The city that is the “mother of harlots and of the abominations on the Earth,” is Babylon.**

If that comes as a surprise, you are in good company. It surprised the apostle John as well. The angel talking with John says, “I will tell you the mystery” (v7).

In the Bible, a “mystery” is always the revealing of something previously unknown.

Sin City Babylon is called out for “committing fornication,” mentioned nine times in the Revelation in chapters fourteen through nineteen. Prostitution and human trafficking will be pervasive in Babylon. Her fornication is also spiritual, leading mankind to worship idols and blaspheme God.

I’ll organize my comments around two points: **#1 The Current Ruler Of This World Solicits You To Commit Fornication**, and **#2 The Coming Ruler Of This World Enables You To Flee Fornication**.

### **#1 - The Current Ruler Of This World Solicits You To Commit Fornication (v1-6)**

**Chapters seventeen and eighteen of the Revelation require a synopsis before we go verse-by-verse.**

For one thing, we don’t realize that the angel is describing “Babylon” until verse five.

For another thing, these two chapters are not in chronological order:

- Chapter sixteen ended with the pouring out of the seventh and final bowl of the Wrath of God upon those who dwell on Earth. A voice from Heaven proclaimed, “It is done!” The next thing to happen chronologically is the Second Coming of Jesus in chapter nineteen.
- Chapters seventeen and eighteen are an interlude to fill you in on the influence of Babylon before it is destroyed.

There are two Babylons in these chapters:

1. Chapter seventeen reveals Babylon in its *mystery* form as a global religious system.

2. Chapter eighteen describes Babylon in its *municipal* form as a global political and commercial system embodied in a city, the literal city of Babylon on the River Euphrates.

The mystery Babylon religious system has its origins in the eleventh chapter of the Book of Genesis. Led by Nimrod, nonbelievers began construction at Babel of what archeologists call a *ziggurat*. It is a tower of successive stories erected to worship heavenly bodies.

**The Tower of Babel wasn't an attempt to build a stairway to Heaven, but a Temple to worship the heavens.**

One commentator remarked, "Babylon was the first international, political and religious ecumenical movement in the history of man, and one which has never ceased to exist in one form or another."

Wall Street, Madison Avenue, and Hollywood are real places. Their names, however, are used as synonyms for Finance, Advertising, and Entertainment, respectively. Religious Babylon describes all false religions and idolatry throughout history.

One more thing:

- The Beast (i.e., the antichrist) will make use of Religious Babylon in his rise to power but destroy it mid-Tribulation when he demands the world worship him. We will see Religious Babylon destroyed in chapter seventeen.
- The city of Babylon will exist until the great earthquake we read about in chapter sixteen levels all the world's cities just before the Second Coming of Jesus. We will see its destruction in chapter 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,

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."

God considers the nation of Israel His wife. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah wrote concerning Israel, "For your Maker *is* your husband, The LORD of hosts *is* His name" (54:5).

The angel depicts Religious Babylon as a harlot. Consorting with her is like infidelity in a marriage.

The harlot representing Babylon "sits on many waters." We take words literally *unless* they are otherwise defined. In this case, "waters" *is* symbolic because in verse fifteen you read, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues."

In the New Testament, the word translated "fornication" comes from the Greek word *porneia*. It includes any sexual activity outside of biblical marriage.

**Biblical marriage is a covenant of companionship between one biological male and one biological female in a monogamous heterosexual union to remain in place as long as they live.**

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.

The "Scarlet Beast" with "horns" is *not* **the** Beast who is the antichrist. The Scarlet Beast illustrates the world government that the antichrist will initially be a part of and eventually control.

From here on, I will attempt to call the antichrist the Beast while calling the government the Scarlet Beast. The government's "seven heads and ten horns" are revealed a little later in the chapter.

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.

“Scarlet” dominates the image. We can’t help but associate it with sin.  
“Though your sins be as scarlet,” we’re told in Isaiah 1:18.

Babylon is enticing. There she sits, appealing to your lusts, ready to have a drink with you. But in her cup is a spiritually filthy roofie.

In the New Testament Book of James, he writes, “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (1:14). “Drawn away” and “enticed” derive from fishing.

What is on the end of a fishing line? A lure. We’re attracted; we nibble; eventually, we will become hooked.

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.

Ah. We’ve been talking about “Babylon.” It is a major subject in the Bible.

The Bible reveals the “mystery” that all idolatry and false religions have their origins in ancient Babylon, at the Tower of Babel. It was there that mankind first organized a system of worship in rebellion against God. Her illegitimate offspring are “abominations” that can only rob, steal, and kill, leading a person to perish eternally.

**There is Biblical Christianity and there is Babylon, and that is all.**

Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witness, Islam, Hinduism, Existentialism, Humanism, and the rest are Babylon.

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.

The imagery puts the world's non-Christian religions, godless political systems, philosophies, and psychologies in proper perspective. Following any of them is likened to giving yourself over to bloodthirsty cannibals.

**Fornication** is a word you don't hear much. It sounds like one of those King James Version words that needed to be updated.

In polite society we say, for example, that a couple had "premarital sex." We say they "slept together."

- "Premarital sex" makes it sound OK because the couple is planning on getting married. It comes across as an assignment during "premarital" counseling.
- "Slept together" removes any hint of impropriety.

We need to return to calling such sexual activity outside of marriage "fornication." Those who engage in it, "fornicators."

## **#2 - The Coming Ruler Of This World Enables You To Flee Fornication (v7-18)**

I don't mean to sound sensational, but an argument can be made that we are living in the most fornicatious time in history, thanks to the World Wide Web. Factor in the Bible's prediction that in the last days there will be a great falling away from the faith and you see the dangers we confront.

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.

I don't think the angel is being condescending. He knows that John cannot understand what the vision means until he tells the mystery to him.

The question, "Why did you marvel?" is an encouragement that God will show us what we need to see if we will ask Him and wait upon Him.

Rev 17:8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition...

The Revelation has already introduced the Beast as a world leader who “was, and is not.” He will be assassinated, receiving a fatal head wound, but he miraculously returns to life.

He “will ascend out of the bottomless pit.” Instead of going to Hades when he dies, like every other nonbeliever, God incarcerates the Beast briefly in the Abyss. It is a prison for evil supernatural creatures.

**No human being can exist in the Abyss with a normal human body; he will therefore be, in some sense, supernatural.**

It reads like the origin story of a supervillain in the comics. Flint Marko comes into contact with sand that had been irradiated by an experimental reactor. His body and the radioactive sand bond, changing Marko's molecular structure into sand. Sandman.

He will “go to perdition.” The Beast and his assistant, called the false prophet, will be the first inhabitants of Hell.

Rev 17:8 ... 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.

It is easy to see how nonbelievers will “marvel” at the Beast’s return from the dead with supernatural powers. Add to that, Satan is the power behind him, and he has the false prophet to boot.

We’ve previously encountered “the Book of Life”:

- Since Jesus is the “Savior of all men” (First Timothy 4:10), we say that the names of everyone conceived are in the Book of Life.

- Since Jesus is the “Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (First Timothy 4:10), we say the names of everyone who dies in unbelief is removed from the Book of Life.

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.

One scholar offers this simple explanation:

*The seven heads and mountains are seven successive empires, with the seven kings of verse ten as heads and personifications of those empires. This view agrees with a common metaphorical use of “mountain” or “hill” in the Bible. [For example, King David in Psalm 30:7 referred to his kingdom as “my mountain”]. This is sensible because the next phrase says the heads are also seven kings (verse ten).*

The “seven kings” represent seven Gentile kingdoms: (1)Egypt, (2)Assyria, (3)Babylon, (4)Medo-Persia, (5)Greece, (6)Rome, and (7)the future global kingdom of the Beast.

- John wrote late in the first century AD. The first five empires, (1)Egypt, (2)Assyria, (3)Babylon, (4)Medo-Persia, and (5)Greece, had “fallen.” They were in the past.
- John was living in the sixth kingdom, Rome, and that is what is meant by “one [kingdom] is.”
- The one who “has not yet come” is the Beast ruling over a revived Rome. It was in the future to John. “And when he comes, he must continue a short time,” which we know to be only the last three and one-half years of the Great Tribulation.

I should mention that many commentators insist the “seven mountains” can only mean Rome, known as “the city built on seven hills.” They say “Babylon” is code for Rome.



- If you look it up, many cities claim to be “built on seven hills,” including no less than thirty in the US.
- “Babylon” was not used as code for Rome until much later. The apostle Peter does say, in one of his letters, that he was writing from Babylon. We take it that he was in Babylon.

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

Again I'll quote a reliable scholar:

*As one of the seven, the Beast is a kingdom, but as an eighth, he is the king of that kingdom who sustains the wound and ascends from the Abyss after his wound. When this occurs, he is king over an eighth kingdom because his reign following his ascent from the Abyss will be far more dynamic and dominant than before. **This is the sense in which he is one of the seven, but also an eighth.***

The angel talking with John wants us to know the Beast's destiny. He is “going to perdition,” eternal conscious punishment in the Lake of Fire.

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.

The Beast will establish ten kings over ten regions of the world. It is the final form of the global government. It is mankind returning to Babylon, you could say.

“One hour” isn't literal; it means a short time, which we know to be three and one half years.

*Wait just a minute!* Don't I stress we are to take things literally? Sure, but that doesn't mean we are like Drax in *Guardians of the Galaxy* and cannot recognize common metaphors and figures of speech.

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

*Ten nations, under godlessness, with slavery and injustice for all.*

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."

The world's armies will be gathered together by God in the Valley of Megiddo, in the Middle East, to what we like to call the Battle of Armageddon. When the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, descends, He wins. Easily.

Humans are the only creatures that are "called, chosen, and faithful."

- Human beings are born dead in trespasses and sins. No one comes to God unless they are "called." The Good News is that Jesus, on the Cross, said that He would draw "all men" to Himself.
- God, before the foundation of the world, chose to save believers through Christ and predestined them to Heaven. This grace is received through faith as God the Holy Spirit frees a person's will that they might believe.
- Saved people remain "faithful," but I like to emphasize that Jesus is faithful and can be counted upon to complete the work of salvation He begins in us.

**"Those who are with Him" at His Second Coming is us, the resurrected and raptured church.**

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

The harlot will hold sway over the population of Earth for the first half of the Great Tribulation. It would seem to embrace all faiths and beliefs, not one single religion. It will be the tolerance that all roads lead to God. Except that biblical Christianity will *not* be tolerated.

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.

The ten-nation confederacy will usurp the harlot. The Beast will declare himself 'god,' demanding to be worshipped.

The disturbing imagery of the harlot being hated, desolated, stripped of clothing, then BBQ'd and eaten should remind us that the hearts of men need transforming in a relationship with God. All of the world's religions, philosophies, politics, and psychologies fall short. Far short.

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.

One writer said, "A divine overruling controls the fate of the world's political powers, so that at times Satan is an instrument in serving a providential purpose."

God never causes evil. Neither does He violate our free will. Within His self-imposed limits, however, He sees to it history reaches the end He has written.

My favorite (and therefore overused) example is the story of Esther. She had free will to choose. If she would have refused to be used by God to save the Jews, God would have raised up help from another source.

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

Verse seventeen is our segue from Mystery Babylon to Municipal Babylon of the future.

**L**isten to wisdom from the apostle Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth:

1Co 6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,

1Co 6:10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

- The “unrighteous” are nonbelievers, people who have not been declared righteous by believing in Jesus.
- “Fornicators” are called out, along with a list of other filthy behaviors.

People post polls on social media. How many states have you visited? If you were a dog, which dog would you be? You’re stuck in an 80s movie; which one would it be?

**We could create a poll out of First Corinthians 6:9-10: “How many of these things have you done?”**

1Co 6:11 **And such were some of you.** But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God

“Such were some of us.” When you got saved, you were transformed. The things listed, and many others, were overcome by your becoming a new creature in Jesus Christ.

Take the poll. Are you involved in any of these things? Jesus saved you and He set you free. He can free you again.

**And again, and again, and again...**