

The Harlot, the Bride, & the Lamb

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Despite the trenchant critique of Babylon we just heard, the Bible is not anti-city. We know this because history ends with a city, the resplendent New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. What's going on? A tale of two cities: Babylon & Zion. As the tale unfolds, you're asked to consider where you *actually* live.

Babylon

The chapter opens by zooming in on the seventh bowl judgment of Babylon but immediately switches metaphors designating the city *a seductress*: [Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations \(5\)](#); [the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk](#)" (1-2). A graphic indictment, but what city is he referring to? Contemporary Rome fits the bill, but Babylon is described as the mother of *the earth's* abominations, influencing the *kings of the earth*, so it can't be just one city. It's a meta-city. The city of all cities. Isn't it harsh? Notice she sits on many waters. Why is that? This is from Jeremiah, who describes historic Babylon the same way (51). In fact, ancient art often depicted cities *as their patron goddess enthroned on the shore of a river*. The city a dwelling place of a deity. This goddess-city is: [arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup](#). What's not to like? She's booming, attractive, powerful; adored by kings, merchants, and shipmasters, what we might call politicians, businessmen, and technologists. It's a prosperous city. In his survey of thriving cities Joel Kotkin notes that all significant cities throughout history have three things in common: *they are sacred, safe, and busy*, sacred spiritual order, safe political order, and busy a bustling economy. In Babylon, safe and busy are obvious, *but where's the sacred?* That's just it; she's not sacred; she's sacrilegious: *a counterfeit city*. Her beauty is an imitation of the beauty of Zion, adorned in 21 with similar stones. In fact this precise description is found on the high priests attire. Do you see? Babylon is passing herself off as religious. She looks like Zion on the outside but on the inside she's corrupt. Instead of flourishing, her citizens are intoxicated with the wine of her sexual immorality, a metaphor of her seductive powers. She seduces: [the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her](#) (political seduction, 9); [the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living](#) (financial, 3); [the shipmasters: all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth](#) (technological 19). All sectors wealthy and powerful. What's wrong with that? Don't we need that for a good standard of living? It's not the power; it's how power is used. The merchants weep [since no one buys their cargo anymore: gold, silver, pearls, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls](#) (13). In 2014-2016, 313,000 people were trafficked into Texas, a quarter of them minors. It's not like the movies, cops busting into a bedroom to rescue a child. It's more often like Crystal Sepulveda's story, trafficked by a family member, brought across the border, used until she found herself in a probation system, then sent to facility for the trafficked. Far from sacred, Babylon's domain is *godless*. She rides a beast covered in blasphemous names. Her golden cup filled [with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus](#) (17:6). It's not just socially evil; it's spiritually evil. The seven headed, ten-horned beast is a picture of complete oppression, the city-harlot a transhistorical image of demonic exploitation. Babylon is a religious parody, a counterfeit city where in a vacuum of the sacred everything become sacrilegious. As M-83 sings, "the city is my church" and her members worship sex, money, power. I have seen countless Christians drink her

wine and depart from the faith. It begins with subtle compromise: the city replacing the church. Work more important than worship, side hustle replacing spiritual vitality, important things replacing eternal things. The harlot-city is attractive and powerful. Her seductive powers even affect John who marvels at her, promptly rebuked by the angel, *Why do you marvel?* If you think you're above falling for Babylon, think again. *Have you allowed yourself to be seduced? Has her liturgy of sex, money, power replaced faith, hope, and love? Have Babylon's pleasures numbed you to Christ's delights?*

Get Out

How do we disentangle ourselves from Babylon? A voice from heaven says: *Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues* (4). The word *come out* is a *command* that can be translated, *Get out!* Run. What do you do in a burning house? You run! *Do you live in fear of not having enough money?* You are standing in a burning house. **Money is not the solution to your problems; Christ is the solution to your problems.** His seal is your only security. Nothing else is guaranteed. *Do you use your power simply to make life more comfortable or to help the marginalized?* Don't drink what everyone else is drinking; be distinct, be Zion. *Do you treat sex as an animal instinct to be satisfied, as fluid, or as a sacred way to honor God and love your spouse?* Get out! Run, lest you normalize Babylon's toxic views of sex, money, and power. *How do we get out?* **By breaking up with Babylon and tying the knot with the Lamb.** 19:6 *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his Bride has made herself ready.* We get out by looking down the aisle of the future, where our Groom awaits joy in his eyes and love in his heart, and *move toward him*. How do we do that? *The Bride has made herself ready.* How do brides prepare for their wedding day? Just roll out of bed. They prepare, beautify, whip themselves into shape for their Groom. The text says, *It was granted to her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.* We word clothe means **to put on**. It's used a dozen times in Revelation. Half the time referring to our putting on white garments, We get out by putting on, clothing ourselves with deeds fitting for Jesus. We adorn ourselves with purity and goodness and mercy. But isn't that earning?—O, no—it's effort. Grace is opposed to earning but not to effort. Some of you need more effort, more discipline, more earnestness in your faith. **We get ready because Christ is worthy.** The other half of the uses of clothe refer to what Christ puts on: *He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood* (19:13) to pardon our sin; *wrapped in a cloud a rainbow over his head* (10:1) to surround us with his glory. You see *Jesus* supplies the gown and we **put it on**. *It was granted to clothe herself with fine linen.* *Granted, given, pristine righteousness. Put it on by faith.* His righteousness, your deeds. How do we get out of Babylon? Putting on Zion. Making ourselves ready *and* keeping our eyes on Christ. *We get out...by putting on.* Imagine a city where Christians did that their whole lives!

The Victory

Finally, the Harlot, the beast, and her kings gather to: *make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.* The war is over before it's even begun: *and the Lamb will conquer them*, unilateral defeat of the unholy city. Where are the details of the battle? Why no gory closeups of victory? 1) **The war is spiritual not physical**; we battle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. Remember that next time you seethe at the headlines, and put on Christ. 2) **There's no hope for the beastly army.** You thought Babylon was great, the beast of seven heads and ten horns worthy of marveling over? Jesus says, Hold my beer: *for he is Lord of*

lords and King of kings. Christ is the victor. But the Lamb isn't merely flexing; he's after the spoils of war, his treasured trophies of grace: **the called, chosen, and faithful**. Church, see how the Lamb fights for you, and calls you his own? By his side, forever. So get out and put on. 3) **Christ not war is the hope and glory of the entire book**; it is the Revelation of *Jesus Christ*. Is it any wonder, then, that the saints respond in *triple hallelujahs*? The great multitude of the redeemed, the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures cry out, *Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah: Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just, for he has judged the great prostitute*. Evil is no more. Zion is coming. Glory to God. So they sing: *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his Bride has made herself ready*. Get out of harlot-city. Put on the glory of the Bride-city, the victory of Christ. The wedding day is coming!