17:1One of **the seven angels** who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of **the great prostitute**, who sits by many waters[i.e., Bablyon; cf. Jeremiah 51:13]. **2**With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.”

*v.1 -* ***the seven angels*** *– are the angels with the 7 bowls, and the ones in charge of the 7 churches => the local church is the epicenter of God’s activity on earth against the Whore and the beast, through Word and worship.*

***the great prostitute*** *–this is Rome; see verse 5 and following.*

*v.3 -* ***a wilderness*** *–**The Woman who would bear the child (Rev.12) is hiding in the desert until the dragon is destroyed; perhaps the Whore is in the wilderness to deceive God’s people into thinking she is the true Church.*

**3**Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into **a wilderness**. There I saw **a woman** sitting on **a scarlet beast** that was **covered with blasphemous names** and had **seven heads and ten horns.**

***v. 3 - The Woman and the Beast*** *–* ***The Beast*** *is the beast from the sea (Rev. 13), the “political/social” beast. He does not change throughout Revelation, but is always recognizable because he uses domination and violence as his weapons against the saints.*

***The Woman*** *– this is the final form of the beast from the land (Rev. 13), the “religious/ ideological” beast. She has assumed a different shape each time she appears – as a beast (Rev. 13), a number (Rev. 13), a false prophet (Rev.16), and here, a prostitute. The false “religious” beast varies its shape because deceit is its main weapon against God’s people.*

*Though both are the creations and pawns of the dragon to defeat the people of God (Rev. 13), they are also engaged in an ongoing power struggle between the two of them. Sometimes, as in verse 3, the woman dominates (“sitting on”) the beast; sometimes, as in verse 16, the beast rips her to shreds (because he always hates her, no matter what).*

*The* ***seven heads*** *of the beast symbolize its reliance on human intellect and ambition; the* ***ten horns*** *symbolize its reliance on power; that it is* ***covered with blasphemous names*** *show that it claims divine power and authority for itself that God has not given it.*

**4**The **woman was dressed** in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. **5**The name written on her forehead was a **mystery**:

*v.4 –* ***The woman was dressed*** *– Her clothing and accessories are the marks of great wealth (luxury goods?), but they are bought with (and contain) nothing but filth and abominations. Cf. Matt. 23:27*

*v.5 –* ***mystery*** *– Nobody can know who this is without special knowledge, or until Christ’s return. But John is about to give us that special knowledge.*

***babylon*** *– but everything in John’s description will remind his audience of Rome. This is intentional, as he wants them to connect their current situation with the experience of God’s people during Daniel’s time*

*v.6 –* ***drunk with the blood*** *– the rule of Rome was not merely violent, but the woman is intoxicated by violence against the Church.*

*v.7 -* ***mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides*** *– here follows an explanation of how the public narrative of the Roman Empire of John’s day is not the true story of Rome*

*v.8 –* ***the beast*** *– is the opposite of Him who was, is, and is to come, but not quite the exact opposite. He also comes and goes in one form or another throughout history, from the time of Christ’s ascension to the time of His return, but is always recognizable by his reliance on violence and domination.*

**babylon** the great

the mother of prostitutes

and of the abominations of the earth.

**6**I saw that the woman was **drunk with the blood** of God’s holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. **7**Then the angel said to me: “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the **mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides**, which has the seven heads and ten horns. **8The beast**, which you saw, once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because it once was, now is not, and yet will come.

**9**“This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are **seven hills** on which the woman sits. **10**They are also **seven kings**. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while. **11**The beast who once was, and now is not, is an **eighth king**. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.

*v.9 –* ***seven hills*** *– a direct reference to the city of Rome, and so to the Roman Empire all told.*

*v.10-* ***seven kings*** *–positive identification of these kings would be (and has been, over the ages) fruitless, though many have taken them to refer to certain Caesars, who claimed to be gods as well as emperors.*

*Better to understand them figuratively as Domination Systems, which claim some sort of divine right and so justify their dominion over all their subjects. This is because the beast himself is an* ***eighth*** *and final* ***king*** *(v.11), who brings them all to destruction in the end.*

*v.12-****ten horns*** *– though best taken figuratively as the reliance of all Domination Systems on power and violence to maintain their status quo, if the seven heads are thought to be Caesars, these ten horns might represent other kings outside the Roman Imperial sphere of influence.*

*v.13 -* ***They have one purpose*** *- whoever the heads and horns are, all are minions of the beast who constantly wages war against the Lamb and His people, with their only goal being to destroy the Church.*

**12**“The **ten horns** you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. **13They have one purpose** and will give their power and authority to the beast. **14**They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”

**15**Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. **16The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute.** They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. **17**For **God has put it into their hearts** to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God’s words are fulfilled. **18**The woman you saw is the **great city that rules over the kings of the earth**.”

*v.16 -* ***The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute*** *- ultimately, the political powers will turn on the religious / ideological whore and rip her to shreds. But this is not strictly their own doing, because* ***God has put it into their hearts*** *to destroy the whore by the hands of her brother-beast.*

*v.18-* ***great city that rules over the kings of the earth*** *–one last time in this chapter: Rome*

Some things we should probably talk about:

* Definition of “[**Ideology**](https://www.thoughtco.com/ideology-definition-3026356)”: - It provides an ordered view of the world, our place in it, and relationship to others. As such, it is deeply important to the human experience, and typically something that people cling to and defend, whether or not they are conscious of doing so.”
* Pastor Cahill’s note – a “religion” may be thought of as an “ideology” with a god at the center of it.

Can you give some examples of non-religious ideologies?

Can you give some examples of religions?

What makes ideologies so attractive / seductive? (What makes them more like a Whore than a Bride?)

What makes us think that any ideology can tame / control a political system? (What makes us think a Whore can ride a Beast for very long? )

What are some good (God-pleasing?) ways for Christians to respond to this concept?