Living for the City

Human civilisation is a god who God overthrows.

# Introduction

David Malouf has his character who lived in 1940’s Brisbane say this about poor shabby unromantic Brisbane

‘[...] it was difficult to see how anything could be made of [it]. Nothing seemed permanent here.A huge shanty town set down in the middle of nowhere. It wouldn’t have surprised anyone to wake up one morning and find that Brisbane [...] had died overnight. Its corrugated iron sold off for scrap.

And who, Johno asked, would know the difference? Brisbane was nothing; a city that blew neither hot nor cold, a place where nothing happened, and where nothing ever would happen, because it had no soul.

People suffered here without significance. A place where poetry could never occur.’

That was Brisbane of the 1940’s.

But how things have changed. Brisbane is a beautiful prosperous city.

I have stood on the 39th Floor of the Riparian Plaza building on Eagle Steet, overlooking the River and Kangaroo point.

On the balcony is a 25 metre lap pool, with an indoor section and an outdoor section,

Divided by a piece of glass that you can swim under between sections.

Brisbane has changed.

She is a Brisbane is a beautiful prosperous city.

It is a wonderful city that we live in but is it a city we should live for?

Is it a city that should grab our hearts and minds?

Is it a city that reward us as we pay it homage?

We are going to ask all these questions and more by thinking through another beautiful, prosperous city - Babylon from Revelation 18.

## Who is Babylon?

Revelation 18 is all about the city of Babylon.

But who or what is Babylon?

The background matters here:

The name Babylon

1. has its roots in the city of Babel in Genesis 11.

God said scatter and fill the earth.

But instead humanity, gathered together to build a great tower and city.

And their aim – so that they might reach heaven and make a name for themselves.

An anti God city where people built in rebellion against God to have a name and glory for themselves and not for God.

1. Babylon was also the name of the city of the Babylonians in 500 BC.

The Babylonians are the ones who finished off the nation of Israel in the OT and took them into exile.

Bablyon was so powerful that other nations revered it.

And they sought to be under Babylon’s protection and to receive reflected radiance from her glory.

But Babylon was a dark city for her people were cruel, violent and feared.

Babylon a city. But not just a city

Babylon in the Bible represents human civilisation.

For in the Bible, human civilisation that finds its height, its peak, its epitome in the city.

Human civilisation in all its brightness and all its dark, darkness is the city.

So what about Babylon

# 1 Declaration of Desolation

It starts with what John sees.

V1, the language of an eyewitness,

A reminder this is a vision from Jesus that John has written down. 1:1-2, 1:9-10

This is one of the last parts of John’s vision

And what he sees is a mighty angel, coming from the presence of God in heaven.

And it is empowered with great authority. V1

And it is glorious it reflects the radiance and glory of God.

So much so, end of verse 1 **earth was made bright with its glory**

And this angel calls out, it declares, in a great voice,

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

These few lines capture the descent of the city of Babylon.

Fallen Fallen is Babylon the Great.

She was great, grand and glorious.

And she has become the home and dwelling place of

Demons, spirits, birds and beasts.

The point of this is that each of these is that unclean things live in her.

She *was* a filled with luxury and shown admiration.

**Now** she is filled with unclean things and despised.

Think for a moment – New Idea, or is it New Woman, or Be woman or anyway some Women’s magazine.

On the 3rd page in when they have run out of intelligent things to say – there are the pictures of the best dressed and glorious – And Babylon is among them.

She is looking ever so fine.

But flip over a page where the poor stars and starlets are caught looking and doing their worst and there is Babylon.

Fallen in the gutter – in a riches to rags story.

This is a picture of absolute desolation, the proud achievement of the human race become the demonic haunts of unclean and detestable creatures.

And Babylon falls for three reasons

## The rulers in her commit idolatory

V3 For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

Chapter 18 is full of poetry and imagery.

And here there is a triplet about the nations, the kings of the earth and the merchants.

The nations –

have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality

And the Kings of the nation have been formost in this.

**Kings of the earth have committed immorality with her**

They have so wanted to be part of Babylon and her power that they have committed immorality with her.

But what is this sexual immorality that people have committed with a city?

The image of sexual immorality is used in the old testament an an image to explain apostasy from the true God and teh worship of other Gods.

So in Hos 4:12 For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore. Jer 3:1,. Is 57:8, Mal 2:11

Babylon has lead nations away from the worship of the true and living God.

And Babylon is condemned because her merchants of the earth, the powerful ones in Babylon.

‘grown rich from the power of her luxurious living’

There lots to be said here but I won’t say it.

But Babylon has another crime – not just her leaders committing idolatory.

## The claim to deity

7 As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.' 8 For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her."

Babylon sees herself as mistress of the world.

She is a ruler – ‘I sit as a queen’

She is untouchable regarding disaster or grief. - , ‘I am no widow’

She thinks that is is an unconquerable and all conquering ruler ‘and mourning I shall never see’

This echoes Is 47:7-8

ESV **Isaiah 47:7** [...] Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children":

Here those words she says in verse 8 ‘I am and there is no one besides me’

These are the very words that Yahweh in Isaiah 45:5-6 says about himself

‘I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God;’

Babylon doesn’t just represent a powerful city.

It doesn’t just represent might and security.

Babylon represents human civilisation in its idolatory.

Human civilisation as it seeks to be God.

Human civilisation wants to set itself up as God.

It wants our honour.

It wants our money.

It wants us to glorify it.

It wants us – body and soul.

But Babylon has another crime.

## Babylon the Bloodthirsty

In the last two verses of this chapters‘

Verse 23 - for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

The merchants – the great ones led people away from God.

‘they deceived all the nations’ into worshipiping Babylon

And worse – in this city ‘24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

Again, we see the city is more than Rome.

‘For in her was found the blood of *all*  who have been slain.

All who have been murdered.

Babylon represents human rebellion against God.

It is human civilisation in its peak and power and all its gory glory.

And it is anti God.

Cities in the Bible are the places of arrogance and rebellion and wickedness.

The first city was built by Cain who had murdered Abel.

The second city was Babel – the anti God city.

Oh come on Glenn, cities in the Bible aren’t all bad.

What about the city of David – Jerusalem?

Ahh, yes what about that great city Jerusalem?

Here Jesus words.

ESV **Luke 13:34** O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!

Hear the crimes of Babylon – the leaders of the world worship her, she claims to be divine and she kills God’s people.

Babylon – human civilisation.

This has a huge impact for how we think about city ministry

It is tempting to think that Christian ministry in the city is winning the city for Christ.

That as the City Bible forum gets Bible study and prayer groups going in each company we will slowly win that company for Christ

And so make it a Christian company.

And slowly, every slowly we will make the city of Brisbane a Christian city.

It is not possible.

We can win people out of the city.

And through preaching Christ and serving people and good works we can made a tremendous difference to the lives of people

And the eternity of people.

But we will not ever make Brisbane, or that other Babylon Sydney a Christian city.

Instead Christians are to

# 2 So put your running shoes on!

On verse 4 we John again testifies to his vision.

This time it is what he heard.

ESV **Revelation 18:4** Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; 5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

This voice commands with authority to the people of God.

Come out of the city.

Why?

lest you take part in her sins,

lest you share in her plagues

Two reasons, not to share in her sins and so as not to receive her plagues which are judgemtn.

If a believer shares in her sins. They will receive her judgment.

A believer is not to have fellowship or participating in the city’s Sins.

For God’s judgment is coming.

Babylon’s sin has reached full measure ‘they are heaped as high as heaven’

And God, has remembered them.

This doesn’t mean he forgot them.

This is the old testament way of saying – God has taken full stock and will now act.

And the judgement to come is Justice

ESV **Revelation 18:6** Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

It is retribution ‘pay her back as she herself has paid back others’

It is divine retribution.

Is the double portion unjust – no it is the wrath of a righteous deity.

## Spiritually Flee or Spiritually Share

It is a temptation for us, living in this great city to share in her sins.

It is a temptation for us to align ourselves with the goals of Babylon.

Kathryn and I have been looking at and trying to buy a house.

One house we looked at in five years had gone in price from 295,000 to 450,000.

Is buying a house wrong? No.

But the temptation is there, to share in greed.

To buy a house with the hope and goal and desire of making money.

To buy a house willing the real estate market to up, like the rest of home owners.

To have as your goal, the house going from 450, 000 to 700, 000.

But if we think like that – we are sharing in Babylon.

We are sharing in her greed.

She has become our queen and God.

Is it good to enjoy this beautiful city? Yes.

Is it good to earn a living and make money so you can provide for your family and church and mission? Yes.

Is it good to work in the city? Yes.

But do not share in her aspirations.

Do not share in her goals.

Do not let her desire of prosperity and rising housing prices and river front apartments

This city, wants you to live for this city.

It wants you to have the city as your God.

Back to Babylon

And so in order to reveal to Babyon that she is no queen, that she in not as strong as she thinks, that she is not God

Verse 8

SV **Revelation 18:8** For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her."

When she falls – ‘it will come in a single day’

Then she and all people will she that he is not mighty but

Mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.

Eagle Street & 1 Polo Club and the three flood markers, 1893 shins, 1976 thighs, 1896 -3 metres up.

1974 started raining on Friday night and by Sunday flooded.

The next section from verse 9 to 20 is the lament of three groups of people.

It has three poems of woe and grief.

# 3 Lament, Loathing and Loss

The three groups are kings, merchants, shipmasters

The kings lament in verse 9,

The merchants lament staring in verse 11

And the Shipmasters lament starting in verse 17b

## The kings, merchants and sailors love the city

What you see in each lament is the great love they each had for the city.

Verse 9 – The kings of the earth – half way through

[...] will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. 10 They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon!."

And the merchants Verse 11

ESV **Revelation 18:11** And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore,

In verse 15 they will weeping and mourn.

And the shipmasters, The great nation builders of the ancient empires

ESV **Revelation 18:17 [...]** And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off 18 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city?" 19 And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned,

The kings and the merchants and the nation builders – the shipmasters

Love the city of Babylon.

They love her.

They mourn for here.

They weep and wail when she disappears.

They fear her torment and stand far off.

But they give themselves to the deepest mourning – the sailors through dust on their heads in their grief, like they lost a son or a daughter.

Again and again Revelation makes clear – that the powerful ones, the rich and mighty and wealthy love Bablyon.

**Here is a great lesson for city evangelism.**

We sometimes think – if I could just make God attractive enough – people would come.

If I could just make the event appealing enough – people wold come.

If I could just make Jesus more appealing and people noticed the product they would flood to him.

But this passge tells us it just is not so.

The Kings, the merchants and the nation builders they love Babylon.

Your manager at work

Loves the wealth and the power that Brisbylon gives him.

She is so engrossed in it so deeply that she would mourn its passing.

We can’t win the city to Jesus by making him more sexy or advertsing him better.

Sure lets advertise well and be wise and creative.

But we need God’s spiritual invervention.

And God intervenes in two ways through us

1. Prayer so pray desperately for the people in this city.
2. Preach the gospel.

It is as people hear bout the great news of Jesus a sword, the word of God, can cut away their love for the city.

You know, when you quit a job or move on in work – the popular view is don’t burn your bridges.

But maybe, if you are a Christian, when you leave work it is exactly the time to burn your bridges.

You might be the only Christian the people in your team know.

And when you leave, they won’t know another Christian.

So when you leave, burn your bridges – tell your collegues the gospel.

You might not get a job there again – but their eternity is at stake.

But it isn’t just a platonic love that people ahve of the city.

It is a ruthless love.

## The city turns people into commodities

ESV **Revelation 18:11** And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, 12 cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, 13 cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

This list reads like a westfields.

Every possible rich and wealth thing is here.

The list is represents all that is beautiful.

But the last line is telling.

People are part of the commodities.

However, the translators I think haven’t help us here.

The word slaves is actually the word bodies.

People are just reduced to a body.

When prisoners from Ireland were bought to Australia – contractors who the British government paid to take away the prisoners overfilled the boats

Because they were paid per person – who cares that would mean more would die on the way from overcrowding.

And they would feed them poorly – because food costs money.

A minister who worked in that early settlement city – reports of the dead bodies floating in the harbour, bodies thrown overboard when ships arrived with their cargo of bodies – some of them living.

Isn’t to good that things have changed in our society

...that we don’t reduce human beings to bodies

....that we view them in light of their immortal creation and eternal future.

The just recently (2008) in a Smart Investor magazine there was little section called economic clues.

It read like this.

**Economic Clues**

**Indicator:** Births and deaths

**Latest data and trends:** The number of births and deaths has been remarkably stable over the past 15 years but both are now trending upwards. The number of deaths rose to 40,200 in the September quarter; the highest quarterly number recorded to date. The number of births rose to 72,900 – that is also the highest quarterly number recorded.

**Impact:** Positive

**Sectors affected:** Hospital, funeral services.

**Relevant Australian Stocks:** Aevum (AVE), Cyclopharm (CYC), Healthscope (HSP), etc etc. ‘

People are passing into eternity and how does our world view them

As commodity.

As a financial entity by which money can be made.

How do you view those you work with at work?

How do we view our employees?

How do you view your colleagues, your

Those people clogging up the Western Freeway with you – bodies in the way?

Do you view them as eternal beings – whose eternity hangs in the balance?

Or are they a commodity to help you get your work done?

Or are they human souls rushing to eternity?

How do you view the people of this city?

A future is at stake.

All future for Babylon will be destroyed.

# 4 Babylon Destroyed

ESV **Revelation 18:21** Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

"So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; 22 and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, 23 and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more,

The destruction is complete and total.

See how each line phrase ends – the musicians ‘will be heard in you no more’

Craftsman – found no more

The mill no more.

No more,

No more,

No more

It is emphatic. Found never ever again.

Now, it is not that these things are wicked but this shows how complete the destruction will be – even the good things of that culture will end.

Human civilisation in its present form must be overthrown.

ESV **Revelation 18:21** Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

"So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; 22

When the Christians in the first 1st heard this and understood it as a reference to Rome they would have cheered.

Nero the Emperor used to use Christians as human torches in his pleasure gardens in the city Rome.

So when will human civilisation get better?

When will the heights and beauty and glamour of the city be matched with humble, joyous, God honour hearts?

When God ends this city and brings a new one from heaven.

Chapter 21

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man

The Christian city comes when God bring it down from heaven.

It is not something we can create or plan on or hope for.

No, this city is not our home.

But the city were God dwells with us and it must come from heaven.

# Conclusion

Brisbylon is going to hell in a handbasket.

Are you going down with her because you love and live for this city and its lifestyle?

Or are you safe and standing on the side but watching your friends, neighbours and colleagues and thinking...at least I’m saved.

Or, are you praying desperately for the salvation of your friends and colleagues who don’t know Jesus and are about to meet the wrath of God.