

17 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, ² 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." ³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. ⁵ And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." ⁶ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

When I saw her, I marvelled greatly. ⁷ But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. ⁸ The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and

is not and is to come. ⁹ This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; ¹⁰ they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. ¹¹ As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. ¹² And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. ¹³ These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ They will 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."

¹⁵ And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. ¹⁶ And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, ¹⁷ for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. ¹⁸ And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth."

Revelation chapter 17, would have to be one of the most confusing chapters of the whole book, but I'm going to make one statement that I hope might help us to 'get it':

“The enemy of my enemy, is **not** my friend.”

“The enemy of my enemy, is **not** my friend.”

But unfortunately, now I've told you this, you're going to have to wait until next week until I explain it, because I need to spend this week, setting the scene.

In Chapter 17, there are 2 key characters, and they're both evil. And today, we're going to learn about the first key character. This character, is very active in our world today, and she is called, “the great prostitute”.

And as we read on, we discover that this alluring woman in her expensive designer clothes and blinged out with all sorts of gold and jewels and pearls, **holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality** – this woman, actually represents a city – the great city “Babylon”... So, what is this great city Babylon???

Well, let me take you to the region of Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia was *“a historical region situated within the Tigris-Euphrates river system. Today, it roughly corresponds to most of Iraq and Kuwait, the eastern parts of Syria, South*

*eastern Turkey, and sort of skirting the Turkish/Syrian and Iran/Iraq borders.*ⁱ

And Mesopotamia, became a very wealthy and a very developed land. Its technology was ahead of its time. Irrigated agriculture, was a great source of its produce, but trade (world trade) was the great source of its income. And Mesopotamia was a land where urbanisation was developed. It's where archaeologists believe people first began to live in organised civilisation.

- Mesopotamia was one of the first regions of the world, where writing was invented.
- Their mathematics system was based on a sexagesimal number system (base 60). Have you ever wondered why we have:
 - 60 minutes in the hour;
 - 24 hours in the day;
 - 360 degrees in a circle

Well, we have the Mesopotamians to thank for that

- They were also great astronomers – the wise men from the East, very likely came from Mesopotamia

Alright, so it was a very organised and educated region – it was where civilisation itself began.

In a series of articles on archaeology in “The Guardian”, it says this:

*“If Mesopotamia is the cradle of urban civilisation, Babylon is its firstborn child.”*ⁱⁱ

Babylon was the major city – it was the centre of power & influence & affluence. It was the centre of knowledge and commerce. The Babylonians were the ones who developed the earliest system of commercial bankingⁱⁱⁱ.

And yet biblically, Babylon is not admired for all of its greatness. Biblically, Babylon is despised. It has always been an image of:

- Pride
- Wealth
- Status
- Self-sufficiency
- It's a striving to put one's self in the place of God
- Babylon is a place of idolatry and leader worship
- And Babylon represents all of the very **worst** products of man in his self-made civilisation
 - Greed
 - Narcissism (that's a feeling of self-importance, and self-entitlement, and walking over others because we feel we can)
 - Hedonism (which is self-indulgence in luxuries and pleasures)
 - Sexual immorality
 - Idolatry

All the **worst** products of man in his self-made civilisation

In the Bible, the very first mention we hear of Babylon, is the building of the Tower of Babel in the book of Genesis. The Hebrews saw the word "Babel" as "confusion", but before the Hebrews, it was understood to mean, "gateway of the gods". And that's exactly what they did at Babel – their building technology had progressed so much, that they decided that

they would make a name for themselves, and that they would build a tower to heaven (for their glory). They were making bricks that were baked, and so they were strong. And they had begun to use bitumen for mortar... Their aim? They wanted to ascend to the position of God, and to make a name for themselves.

And so, to put them back in their place, God confused their language, and they couldn't understand each other anymore – and they couldn't work together in unity any more, and so they stopped building the tower, and they dispersed across the Earth.

But because of its location, Babylon eventually rose to power again. In fact, under King Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon became a world superpower – they even knocked the Assyrians about.

In our men's Bible Study at the moment, we've been studying the book of Daniel. And King Nebuchadnezzar (the king of Babylon), was a man filled with pride in his wealth and his majesty, and his achievements. And when he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said: ^{Daniel 4:30},
"Is not this great Babylon, which **I** have built by **my** mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of **my** majesty?"

Whereas Nebuchadnezzar had done nothing of the sort – **God** had put him in that position. And so God humiliated him, by sending him insane, and he lived as a wild animal eating grass, until he finally lifted his eyes to heaven and gave glory to God.

But then after Nebuchadnezzar's death, his **son**, King Belshazzar ascended to the throne. And King Belshazzar was just as proud as King Nebuchadnezzar. One night, he threw a great feast (for 1000 of his lords). And showing off, he ordered that the gold and silver vessels that had been plundered from God's temple in Jerusalem be brought in so they could all get drunk from them.... And they did. And ^{Daniel 5:5} Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. ⁶ Then the king's colour changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. (And why wouldn't they???)

And when Daniel interpreted the words that had been written, he said: "The writing's on the wall, fella." By the way, did you know that's where the saying "The writing's on the wall" comes from? This is what Daniel said:

^{Daniel 5:18} O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. ¹⁹ And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. ²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. ²¹ He was driven from among the

children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the **Most High God** rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. ²² And **you his son, Belshazzar**, have not humbled **your heart**, though you knew all this, ²³ but you have lifted up **yourself** against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do **not** see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honoured.

And King Belshazzar didn't survive through to morning.

And so, biblically, Babylon comes to represent Godless, arrogant civilisation, wherever we may see it.

The Old Testament prophets spoke a lot about Babylon. Let me just read a little bit from Isaiah 47:

⁸ 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":**

9 These two things shall come to you
in a moment, in one day;
the loss of children and widowhood
shall come upon you in full measure,
in spite of your many sorceries
and the great power of your enchantments.

10 You felt secure in your wickedness;
you said, "No one sees me";
your wisdom and your knowledge led you
astray,
and you said in your heart,
"I am, and there is no one besides me."

11 But evil shall come upon you,
which you will not know how to charm away;
disaster shall fall upon you,
for which you will not be able to atone;
and ruin shall come upon you suddenly,
of which you know nothing.

The height of the arrogance of godless civilisation... That's what Babylon represents. It claims "I am. There is no one besides me.", but that's God's claim. And many nations – many civilisations, have risen. Super powers rise, and they crash in a day. Babylon today, is:

- Modern humanism – where man sets himself up as the highest authority

- It's the arrogance of power
- It's the arrogance of the self-sufficiency of wealth
- It's the greed of commerce
- It's the opulence of luxurious lifestyles...

The Jews and the early Christians, used to call Rome “Babylon”, because that what it represents.

Where is Babylon today? Well, there **is** a **literal** Babylon. Its ruins still exist in Iraq, in fact, Saddam Hussein began to rebuild it. And stamped into some of the bricks is an example of **his** human arrogance:

National Geographic says this:

Inconvenient historical realities have never discouraged rulers from reshaping the history of Babylon in their own image and generating new myths in the process. One of the most brazen examples is not from antiquity, but from the 1980s, when Saddam Hussein—then dictator of Iraq—set out to create a reconstruction of its royal palace . Like his predecessors, he left behind inscriptions on his building projects. On some of the bricks Hussein had inscribed in Arabic: Built by Saddam, son of Nebuchadnezzar, to glorify Iraq.^{iv}

Where is Saddam today? The arrogance of powerful civilisation, and yet it can fall in a day. And this is a bit telling for me, but it occurred to me that some of you are too young to know about Saddam Hussein, but he was conquered, he was tried by his people, and they hanged him...

But where **is** Babylon today? Is it just these ruins? No. Babylon is a symbol, more than what it is a physical location.

It's the centre of power; It's the centre of finance and influence.

- Babylon is Canberra and Sydney.
- It's New York and Washington.
- On the Tuesday 11th September, 2001, we saw the fall of Babylon, when the world trade centre collapsed. And yet Babylon is still strong on Wall Street.
- Babylon is London and Paris
- It's Moscow and Berlin
- It's Tokyo and Beijing
- Babylon is the EEC, and it's the World Bank
- Babylon met in Germany only a couple of weeks ago, as the G20.
- You can find Babylon as the community of mansions on the canals of the Gold Coast
- Babylon is the Grand Central shopping centre in Toowoomba
- And the Ferrari show room in Brisbane

Babylon, is anywhere where the greed and luxury of world trade and the economic extravagance of a Godless world is expressed.

And so, a **more** scary development (something that was not even **possible** a couple of decades ago), is all of the wealth and trappings – the luxuries of the market place – the indulgences of every twisted sexual perversion – your own stockbroking centre – your own bank branch, is not only on your computer at home, it's on your mobile phone in your pocket – Babylon goes with you, wherever you go....

Technology and the World Wide Web, has made Babylon a worldwide phenomenon.

Babylon is a symbol, of the arrogance and extravagance and the indulgence, of man in godless, arrogant civilisation.... Are you starting to feel, maybe you're living in Babylon??? Well, that's OK... But just like Daniel & Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, (who **were literally** living in Babylon), our task, as Christians, is to live as disciples of Jesus – not as Babylonians.

What do I mean by that?

Well, as a Disciple of Jesus Christ, we are called, in many ways, to live counter to the culture, in which we live. And our culture has been teaching us (right from childhood), how to be good little Babylonians.

I remember how (at school) I used to feel 'left out'. Each week when I went to school, there was a banking day, where half the class would bring their Commonwealth bankbook, along with \$5 or \$10 to deposit for the week. And the teacher would collect this, and a representative from the bank would pick it up from the class room... We were being taught how to be good little Babylonians – saving up our wealth.

I don't think they do that today – Babylon's progressed. Today our kids are being taught they don't need to save, because Babylon is so rich, Babylon will look after you if you don't have any money. In the 2016/17 budget, by far, the biggest spending item of our federal government, was Social security and welfare. More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of what the Government brought in, from income tax, went straight back out again in social security and welfare payments.... Now, I'm not saying that it's a bad thing to look after the poorest people in our

society, but a country cannot afford to do this, unless that country is “Babylon”.

And this is why in every election campaign, you and I have to suffer hearing the government of the day and the opposition of the day, trying to convince us that they have the best economic credentials... “Who do you trust with our economy?”, they keep asking. And it seems like the economy is the most important thing. It doesn’t seem to matter what the issue is, as long as our economy is good, that’ll fix everything else.

It’s like the Adani coal mine is coming to Queensland. Yes, we’ll give them all sorts of discounts on their royalties; and even though they are one of the most wealthy families on the face of the earth, we Australians are going to loan them some money to get them up and running, because as soon as we get the money running around our economy, everything’s going to be better.

And we are being taught to need the extravagance and the opulence & the luxuries that Babylon has to offer...

- The massive salaries attracted by CEO’s of corporations;
- The millions earned by corporate accountancy firms and lawyers
- And it’s not only the **white** collar workers. Think about the ridiculous wages earned by tradesmen and machinery operators during the mining boom

But no matter how much we earn, Babylon will make sure we need more. During the mining boom, in places like Rockhampton, Mackay, Gladstone and Perth, Harley Davidson sales skyrocketed,^{vi} along with boats and flash 4wd’s..... But when the mining boom came to an end, many

of these blue collar workers have gotten used to the extravagance of a mining pay cheque, and they were financially committed... No matter how much you have, Babylon will always want to make you want more.

When I was working at the Ag college, a number of my fellow workers became good little Babylonians by borrowing against their home, to buy 8 or 10 other houses...

We're all told by our financial advisors, how to be good little Babylonians, by putting more and more money away into superannuation, so that we can afford a few more luxuries when we retire, and we can travel, and spend the kids inheritance on ourselves...

Even the job market, is a breeding ground for narcissists. Most recruitment processes these days, don't work on demonstrated merit – they work on how well you can sell yourself. If you can write a sales pitch on how good you are as you address the Key Selection Criteria, and if you can sell yourself at an interview, you're much more likely to get the job, than if you humbly apply and let the evidence of your past work speak for itself... A narcissist can always sell himself really well, because that's what a narcissist does.

This is what we are conditioned for, because we live in Babylon... But as Disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called, in **many** ways, to live counter to our culture. Our culture has been teaching us, how to be good little Babylonians. Even the prosperity theology which is so popular in the western church, is teaching us how to be good little Babylonians – not how to be good disciples of Jesus. Jesus is calling us to live counter

to the culture – to live counter to the culture of arrogant, godless civilisation, along with all of its luxuries and opulence and power...

So, what's so wrong with Babylon?

1.

Well firstly, it's a society that rejects God.

It rejects God because it doesn't need God. The wealth and power of civilisation, has a sense of self sufficiency – “We don't need anything greater than ourselves”. “God” was something that people used to need, but **we** don't need Him anymore.

2.

And so secondly, Babylonians elevate **themselves** to the place of god. Babylon becomes a society of narcissists and hedonists. Where we feel that we're the most important people in the whole wide world, and no pleasure in life is undeserved...

3.

Thirdly, once a civilisation reaches this stage, the laws become blurred. When civilisation first gets going, it's greatest gift to its subjects, is the role that God has given it (law and order)... But when a civilisation rejects God, it very quickly begins to question “Well, what about God's laws?” If there is no God, there can be no absolute right, and no absolute wrong – there's no moral basis for our laws or for morality itself...

You might find yourself wondering, “Why is there such a big push at the moment for same sex marriage?”

Why did I read in the news this very week, that a Canadian transgender parent, won a court case to allow its baby to be given an unassigned gender, so that when this child gets a bit older, it can choose to be a boy or a girl itself?^{vii}

What’s going on? Where does this stuff come from? It comes from living in Babylon. When a civilisation rejects God, there is no right. There is no wrong. There is no morality...

4.

Fourthly, the arrogance of Godless civilisation, tramples the world’s poor, and takes advantage of the world’s weak.

If our wages are growing and growing and growing, so that we can afford to buy more and more and more, how can this be sustained? Surely products are going to outprice themselves – no they won’t. That’s why when I was a boy, everything was made in Japan... But as Japan got in its feet, everything was made in Taiwan... But as Taiwan was getting on its feet, everything was made in China and India... We import workers to do all the mundane and low paying jobs that we don’t want to do. Most of our consumer devices are now made in China, where factory workers earn about \$3/hour^{viii}, as opposed to our **minimum** Australian wage of \$18.29/hr plus 9.5% superannuation.

Australian men holiday in places like Thailand and the Philippines, where sex is cheap, and the girls are young...

Babylon tramples the world’s poor, and takes advantage of the world’s weak.

5.

And fifthly, the arrogance of Godless civilisation persecutes the disciples of Jesus, because not only do disciples of Jesus **live** counter to this culture, but the gospel we preach, tells the arrogant and the godless, that there **is** a God. And that this God – the God whom they reject – is the one to whom they will have to give an account... And the word of the Lord to Babylon, is “repent”...

- Repent of your godlessness, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Repent of your arrogance, and embrace humility
- Repent of your extravagant lifestyle, and live simply, so all may simply live
- Repent of your wealth, and give to the poor
- Repent of your injustices, and do what is right
- Repent of your immorality, and live a life pure for God

This is what it means, to live counter to the culture. We live in Babylon (a centre of godless, arrogant civilisation) – there’s nothing we can do about that... But are we living as disciples of Jesus? Or are we living as Babylonians?

One day, Babylon will fall – it always does... Babylon falls, to be rebuilt somewhere else... But one day Babylon will fall, and it will never be rebuilt again. And we’ll learn more about that next week.

But for us today, as you go out those doors, you’re entering Babylon – you are an alien, in a Godless, arrogant

civilisation... In Babylon, be a disciple of Jesus – not a Babylonian.

ⁱ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/aug/08/lost-cities-1-babylon-iraq-war-history-mankind-greatest-heritage-site>

Justin Marozzi, Monday 8 August 2016 16.45 AEST

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia#Economy_and_agriculture

^{iv} <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/archaeology-and-history/magazine/2017/01-02/babylon-mesopotamia-ancient-city-iraq/>

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This story appears in the January/February 2017 issue of *National Geographic History* magazine.

^v <http://budget.gov.au/2016-17/content/glossies/overview/html/overview-13.htm>

^{vi} <http://www.couriermail.com.au/business/miners-going-the-whole-hog-with-their-big-toys/news-story/a0053530ce896d5803f1c5c704c1030f?sv=4aad270f7d22dc550102797be2a1808>

^{vii} <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-12/parent-wins-case-to-allow-child-to-be-given-unassigned-gender/8702796>

^{viii} https://www.bls.gov/fls/china_method.htm