

Dr. David Mathewson, Revelation, Session 22, Revelation 17-18, Introduction to Babylon Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Revelation, Session 22, Revelation 17-18, Introduction to Babylon, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. Dave Mathewson's course on the Book of Revelation **analyzes chapters 17 and 18**, focusing on the symbolic representation of **Babylon as Rome**. Mathewson argues that Babylon represents the **idolatrous, oppressive, and wealthy Roman Empire**, drawing parallels between its actions and Old Testament depictions of Babylon's judgment. He highlights the contrasting imagery of **Babylon (the prostitute)** and **New Jerusalem (the bride)**, showcasing the movement from judgment to salvation. The lecture **examines the symbolic details** within John's vision, including the woman riding a beast and the significance of "seven hills," to support his interpretation. Finally, it explores how **Rome's seductive nature masked its evil**, providing a model for understanding sin's allure.

2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 22 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Revelation).



**Mathewson_Revela
tion_Session22.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpt on Revelation 17-18:5, with quotes included for emphasis:

Briefing Document: Revelation 17-18:5 - Introduction to Babylon

Overall Theme: This lecture focuses on understanding Revelation chapters 17 and 18, which provide a more detailed explanation of the judgment of Babylon, a theme initially introduced in earlier parts of Revelation. Dr. Mathewson argues that these chapters are not an appendix but rather a climax and heart of the book, serving as a contrasting pair to the description of the New Jerusalem in later chapters.

Key Points and Ideas:

1. Context: The End Times and Judgment:

- The seventh bowl judgment (Revelation 16) signifies the end-time judgment, with language of earthquakes, thunder, and lightning (drawing on theophany of Exodus 19) indicating the finality of the event.
- The judgment on "the great city, or Babylon," is mentioned in the context of the seventh bowl, with God remembering her crimes and giving her the cup of His wrath.
- "So, this is the final judgment. This is end time judgment at the very end of history in the form of God coming in in his theophanic presence now to judge the entire earth."
- Chapters 17 and 18 unpack seal number seven and provide a more detailed account of the nature of Babylon and its judgment.

1. Chapters 17 & 18 as a Paired Section:

- These chapters function as a pair, with chapter 17 describing "the prostitute Babylon" and 18 describing its judgment.
- They stand in direct opposition to the description of the "bride, new Jerusalem" in Revelation 21:9-22:5
- The parallels in language at the beginning and end of each section (angel with bowls, being "carried away in the spirit", and the prohibition of worshiping the angel) further highlight them as a pair.

- "So note both sections begin with one of the angels holding the seven bowls...an angel comes to him and tells John I will. I'm going to show you something, and then he carries him away in the spirit, and he shows him a woman. In one case, it is the prostitute Babylon. In the other case, it is the bride of New Jerusalem."
- "Both sections end with a command to write, and also an interesting account...of John bowing down to worship the angel and the angel responds don't do it; I'm only a servant worship God only"
- This pairing is not an "appendix" but is "the climax and heart of the entire end of the book of Revelation...the goal the a pairing of a final vision of judgment in terms of Babylon and now the final reward of God's people in terms of the bride new Jerusalem."

1. **Movement from Babylon to New Jerusalem:**

- Revelation 18:4 calls believers to "come out of her" (Babylon) to avoid sharing in her judgment, implying they move towards and "enter the new Jerusalem"
- This represents the church's move, as highlighted in Revelation 2-3, where overcoming believers inherit the blessings of the new creation.
- "Now John's calling the churches in chapters 17 and 18. This movement from the prostitute Babylon to the bride of New Jerusalem is the movement that John himself wants his churches to make. That is, by coming out of her by overcoming by refusing to compromise by remaining pure and retaining their faithful witness, they will come out of her, and instead, they will move into, and they will enter into their inheritance, the New Jerusalem if they overcome."

1. **Symbolism of Babylon:**

- Babylon is a long-standing symbol of "godless, arrogant, prideful humanity," often traced back to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11).
- In the Old Testament, Babylon was the place of Israel's exile, representing idolatry, pride, and oppression (esp. as found in Daniel).
- "Babylon then becomes almost a symbol of almost an indicator of any nation or any people that is so characterized a people that is idolatrous, prideful, and arrogant who usurps God's authority and and demands the worship that only belongs to God that pridefully sets themselves over God and who oppresses and harms the people of God as well."

- Dr. Mathewson argues that in Revelation, Babylon is most likely a "code for Rome," not a literal rebuilt city. He claims the historical context of John's first readers, the characteristics of Rome, and other clues within the text suggest this connection.

1. **Rome as Babylon:**

- "If John is addressing seven churches living within the context of the Greco-Roman Empire and under the pressure of, under the thumbprint of Roman imperial rule, then it would make sense for the first readers to read this and think in terms of Babylon or think in terms of Rome as Babylon."
- 1 Peter 5:13, where Babylon is used to reference Rome, provides supporting evidence for this interpretation: "she who is in Babylon chosen together with you sends you her greetings".
- Babylon is a "perfect fit for Rome" because it mirrored the idolatry, godlessness, oppression, and usurpation of God's authority from old Babylon.
- "So I think John is following suit here, although he's not using Babylon solely because it was a common designation for Rome in the first century. He uses it because of its Old Testament background and because he finds now in Rome the ultimate expression of what Babylon embodied during that time in the Old Testament."

1. **Evidence within Revelation for Rome:**

- Revelation 17:9 speaks of the seven heads of the beast being "seven hills on which the woman sits," likely referencing the seven hills of Rome.
- "The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits."
- Dr. Mathewson also references a coin depicting Rome as a goddess seated on seven hills which provides further evidence of Rome's association with the number.
- John "drops clues in the text" to suggest the identification of Babylon with Rome, using the "common designation for Rome among Christians."

1. **Structure of Chapters 17 and 18:**

- Chapters 17:1-2 function as an introduction, setting the scene for the destruction of Babylon.

- Chapter 17 primarily demonstrates *why* Babylon (Rome) is guilty and deserves judgment.
- Chapter 18 primarily describes *the judgment itself* of Babylon.
- Chapter 17 is primarily a vision and its interpretation, whereas Chapter 18 is primarily auditory, containing laments and speeches describing Babylon's downfall.

1. **Description of the Prostitute Babylon in Chapter 17:**

- "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, come, I will show to you the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters. With her, the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."
- Babylon is depicted as a "great prostitute who sits on many waters," with kings and inhabitants of the earth committing adultery with her and being "intoxicated" by this relationship.
- She sits on a "scarlet beast" with blasphemous names, seven heads and 10 horns (similar to beasts in earlier chapters)
- She is "dressed in purple and scarlet" and "glittering with gold" and holds a "golden cup filled with abominable things," all denoting wealth, luxury, and sinfulness.
- She is named "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes, and the abominations of the earth," portraying her true nature.
- She is responsible for violence, "drunk with the blood of the saints."
- The desert location of the vision carries negative connotations of evil and judgment
- Her status as "prostitute" indicates that she has seduced the nations, causing them to commit adultery with her.
- This description of a woman riding a beast highlights her power over or connection to the beastly power it represents.

1. **Babylon's Crimes:**

- Babylon's primary crimes are:
- Seducing nations to "commit adultery" with her via her economic system and excessive luxury, as in Isaiah and Nahum where foreign nations were compared to a prostitute seducing other nations for their economic benefit.
- Exhibiting arrogance and excessive wealth and luxury.
- Persecuting the saints and shedding their blood.
- The nations are described as intoxicated by Babylon's attractiveness, blinded to its evil nature.
- The image of Babylon as both a woman and a city highlights the full scope of the corruption.
- Dr. Mathewson claims "the emphasis here is not on Israel committing adultery, but it's on Rome as a prostitute causing other nations to commit adultery with her in reflecting texts like Nahum chapter 3 and also the Isaiah 23 text."
- "That is the crime leveled against the foreign cities in Nahum and Isaiah, and that is the crime now that is leveled against the city of Babylon, Rome."
- He suggests the attractive and seductive nature of Rome helps it cover up its evil, violent nature in the same way sin operates, masking its terrible consequences behind "a facade of attraction and allurements"

1. **Old Testament Influences:**

- Jeremiah 50 and 51 are key texts for the language of Babylon's judgment: "you who live by many waters and are rich in treasure" (Jeremiah 51:13) connects to descriptions of Rome as a great prostitute sitting on many waters.
- "So John clearly draws upon Old Testament depictions of Babylon, historical Babylon, and its judgment to describe another Babylon-like city and its judgment as well."
- The description of Babylon as a prostitute draws parallels to Isaiah 23 and Nahum 3, where foreign nations were portrayed as prostitutes seducing other nations.
- Isaiah 21:10 is considered the likely background for the backdrop of John's vision in the desert, though he is unsure of this connection.

- John uses a composite picture based on the Old Testament, drawing from the oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah, as well as other texts that condemn godless cities like Tyre (for its wealth) and Nineveh.

1. **The Beast and the Woman:**

- The fact that the woman rides the beast may suggest that she controls it or that the beast's authority underlies her actions. The beast represents "far more than Rome", representing past and potentially future forces of idolatry and oppression, now manifested in Rome.
- The Beast is "the same beast from the past that we saw in Old Testament texts; this same beastly figure that underlies the same monster that underlies other empires"
- By separating the beast from the woman, John implies that the true power behind Rome lies in these deeper, darker, and satanic forces.
- **Interpretation of the Vision (from v.7 onwards):**The angel interprets John's vision as often happens in Jewish apocalypses, but "the angel's interpretation doesn't help us out all that much"
- The angel's interpretation is often just as problematic as the vision itself and requires careful consideration.

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathewson positions Revelation 17 and 18 as critical passages that offer a deeper understanding of the judgment of Babylon, which he argues is a symbolic representation of Rome. He emphasizes that these chapters are not an addendum but central to the narrative of Revelation, and they depict the stark contrast between the corrupt nature of Babylon and the glorious reward of the New Jerusalem, calling believers to separate themselves from the former to embrace the latter. The rich imagery and connection to the Old Testament, particularly the use of Babylon as an archetype of godless empires, is emphasized throughout the lecture.

4. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 22, Revelation 17-18, Introduction to Babylon

Revelation Study Guide: Babylon and the New Jerusalem

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. How does the seventh bowl judgment in Revelation 16 relate to the events described in Revelation 17 and 18?
2. What is the significance of Babylon in the Old Testament, and how does this influence its use in Revelation?
3. How does the author of Revelation use the language of "prostitute" and "adultery" to describe Babylon?
4. In what ways does Revelation 17 present Babylon as a contrast to the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21-22?
5. According to Dr. Mathewson, what is the most likely interpretation of Babylon in the context of Revelation?
6. What are the two main sections within Revelation 17, and what is the primary difference in the material covered?
7. Why does the vision of Babylon in Revelation 17 take place in the desert?
8. Describe the two main figures in the vision of Babylon in Revelation 17, and explain their relationship.
9. What does Dr. Mathewson mean when he says the "beast" in chapter 17 is "more than Rome?"
10. According to Dr. Mathewson, what is the significance of Rome's attractive and seductive nature in the context of the vision?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The seventh bowl judgment in Revelation 16 anticipates the final judgment and includes a pronouncement of judgment on Babylon. Chapters 17 and 18 then unpack this judgment by providing more detail about Babylon's nature and its downfall, expanding on the brief mention in chapter 16.

2. In the Old Testament, Babylon is a symbol of godless, arrogant, and oppressive humanity, as seen in the Tower of Babel and the Babylonian exile. Revelation uses this historical understanding of Babylon to represent any entity that is idolatrous, prideful, and persecutes God's people.
3. The author uses "prostitute" and "adultery" to portray Babylon's seduction of other nations, drawing on Old Testament language of covenant infidelity. Babylon entices nations into economic partnerships, gaining wealth and luxury at the expense of others.
4. Babylon, the prostitute, represents an idolatrous, oppressive city, while the New Jerusalem, the bride, symbolizes God's faithful people and their eternal inheritance. The contrast is drawn in their descriptions, which mirror each other as two distinct "women" and "cities".
5. Dr. Mathewson argues that Babylon is most likely a code for Rome, the dominant empire of the first century, based on its characteristics of idolatry, pride, oppression, and persecution of Christians. The historical connection between Christians and Rome is a likely source for the use of "Babylon."
6. Revelation 17 has two main sections: a vision of the prostitute Babylon in verses 3-6 and an angel's interpretation of that vision in verses 7-18. The vision is primarily visual while the interpretation is focused on the symbolism.
7. The desert is used in Revelation 17 as a place of evil, inhabited by wild animals and demonic beings, signifying judgment. This setting foreshadows Babylon's ultimate fate as a haunt of demons.
8. The vision of Babylon includes a woman, representing Rome, riding on a beast. The beast is described with blasphemous names, seven heads, and ten horns, similar to earlier depictions in Revelation, and is interpreted as the power behind Rome.
9. Dr. Mathewson suggests that the beast in chapter 17 represents not just Rome but a broader, recurring force of evil and idolatry seen throughout history. Rome, therefore, is just one manifestation of this enduring evil.
10. Rome's seductive nature, according to Dr. Mathewson, is a facade that hides its oppressive and evil nature, causing nations to participate in its system while being blind to its true character and impending judgment.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the ways in which Dr. Mathewson uses Old Testament texts to illuminate his understanding of the nature and significance of Babylon in Revelation. How do these texts contribute to his argument that Babylon is a code for Rome?
2. Discuss the contrasting images of the prostitute Babylon in Revelation 17 and the bride of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22. How does this juxtaposition enhance the message of the book of Revelation, and what does it reveal about the nature of good and evil?
3. Explain Dr. Mathewson's interpretation of the "beast" in Revelation 17. What does it represent, and how does its relationship with the woman (Babylon) help clarify the author's message to the original audience?
4. Explore the role of economic critique in Revelation's depiction of Babylon. How does Babylon's wealth and luxury function as a form of seduction, and what are the consequences for the nations that participate in its system?
5. Consider the significance of Dr. Mathewson's assertion that the angel's interpretation in Revelation 17 is "almost as problematic to understand as the vision itself." What does this suggest about the nature of apocalyptic literature, and how should readers approach its interpretation?

Glossary of Key Terms

Babylon: In Revelation, a symbol of a godless, arrogant, and oppressive entity; interpreted by many scholars as a code for Rome. Also used as a symbol of any system or power that opposes God and persecutes His people.

Prostitute/Harlot: A term used in Revelation to describe Babylon, signifying its seduction of nations through economic and idolatrous practices. This characterization is drawn from the Old Testament concept of covenant infidelity.

New Jerusalem: In Revelation, the symbolic representation of the eternal dwelling place of God's people, the Bride of Christ. It is often contrasted with Babylon.

Theophany: A visible manifestation of God, often involving phenomena such as lightning, thunder, and earthquakes; used in Revelation to signify God's power and judgment.

Beast: A powerful, monstrous figure in Revelation that represents a force of evil and oppression. In chapter 17, it supports the "prostitute" and represents the power behind empires that challenge God's authority.

Seven Bowls: The seventh of the final series of judgments in Revelation that serves as a prelude to the final judgment. In particular, the seventh bowl introduces the downfall of Babylon in chapter 16.

Seven Heads & Ten Horns: Features of the beast, often interpreted symbolically to represent different rulers and kingdoms that oppose God. In Revelation 17 they are interpreted as seven hills of Rome and as other kings.

Adultery: In Revelation, a metaphor for spiritual infidelity and idolatry; also represents the economic and idolatrous relationship between Babylon and other nations.

Desert: In Revelation 17, a symbolic place of evil and judgment, contrasting with other uses of the desert as a place of refuge or testing.

Greco-Roman Empire: The political and cultural context in which Revelation was written, and against which the book's messages must be read.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Revelation, Session 22, Revelation 17-18, Introduction to Babylon, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Understanding Babylon in Revelation 17-19

- **What is the significance of the "seventh bowl" in Revelation, and how does it relate to the judgment of Babylon?**
- The seventh bowl is the final of the seven bowl judgments, and like the seventh seal and trumpet, it signifies the end of history. It is characterized by dramatic theophanic language such as lightning, rumblings, thunder, and a great earthquake, which all signal God's final judgment on the earth. Within this final judgment, the judgment of "Babylon," or the "great city," is declared. This judgment is then unpacked and explored in much greater detail in Revelation chapters 17-19. In short, the seventh bowl initiates the final events, including the judgment of Babylon.
- **Why are Revelation chapters 17-19 significant, and how should we understand their relationship to other sections of Revelation?**
- Chapters 17-19 are crucial because they delve deeper into the fall of Babylon, which was previously announced in earlier chapters (such as 14 and 16). These chapters reveal why Babylon is judged and describe the judgment itself. Instead of being viewed as an appendix, they form a paired climax with the description of the bride, New Jerusalem, in chapters 21-22, a pairing which is central to the message of the book. They show a movement from Babylon towards New Jerusalem which is the movement the churches of Revelation are meant to make. This movement begins with the command to "come out of her" in chapter 18 and finds its conclusion in the promise of the New Jerusalem.

- **What does Babylon symbolize in Revelation, and why does the author use this specific imagery?**
- Babylon symbolizes a prideful, arrogant, oppressive, and idolatrous entity that usurps God's authority and persecutes God's people. This imagery has roots in the Old Testament, where Babylon is a symbol of godless humanity (Tower of Babel) and a place of exile and oppression for Israel. In the context of Revelation, Babylon most likely refers to the city of Rome and its empire due to its similar characteristics of idolatry, arrogance, and persecution of Christians. The author draws on Old Testament prophecies of judgement of Babylon and other idolatrous cities to describe the judgment and destruction of Rome.
- **What are the key characteristics of the "prostitute Babylon" as described in chapter 17?**
- The prostitute Babylon is depicted as a woman adorned with wealth and luxury (purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones) and riding a scarlet beast with blasphemous names, seven heads, and ten horns. She is a seductress who intoxicates the nations with the "wine of her adulteries," referring to her economic practices which ensnare other nations into idolatry. She is also drunk on the blood of the saints, demonstrating her violence against God's people. She is called "mystery, Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes" on her forehead, an expression of her true nature.
- **What does it mean that Babylon sits on many waters and how does this idea relate to the Old Testament?**
- The "many waters" where Babylon sits symbolize peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages, indicating her vast influence and dominion over various populations. This image is drawn from Old Testament texts, particularly Jeremiah 51:13, which describes the historical city of Babylon as dwelling by many waters and being rich in treasures. The image highlights Babylon's vast reach and influence as well as her wealth.

- **What is the significance of the beast that the woman rides in chapter 17, and how does it relate to previous descriptions of the beast in Revelation?**
- The beast, with seven heads and ten horns, is reminiscent of the beasts from Revelation 11 and 13, indicating a continuation of the same oppressive, satanically inspired force from the past. While elsewhere the beast can be understood as a symbol of Rome, here it is suggested that the beast's power is far greater than Rome, and perhaps points to the broader, historical roots of oppressive power which has now found its fullest expression in Rome and its empire. The beast is the foundation of Babylon's power. The beast may also represent the military might or political forces that drive Babylon's oppressive actions, but, importantly, the woman controls the beast.
- **How is Babylon's economic seduction linked to her spiritual harlotry?**

Babylon's economic system is described as a means of seduction, where other nations are enticed to participate in her pursuit of luxury and wealth, which is then identified as a form of spiritual adultery. By participating in Babylon's system, nations become reliant on her for wealth and security, and are also drawn into idolatrous practices. This economic and political control is thus a form of harlotry which leads them astray from God.

- **What is the relationship between the visions of the prostitute Babylon in chapters 17-18, and the bride New Jerusalem in chapters 21-22?**
- The descriptions of Babylon and New Jerusalem form a contrasting pair. They begin in a similar fashion, with an angel showing John the vision, and they end similarly with a command to write followed by John being told not to worship the angel, but God only. The prostitute Babylon (chapters 17-18) represents the forces of oppression, idolatry, and seduction, while the bride, New Jerusalem (chapters 21-22), represents the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan, where the saints enjoy eternal fellowship with Him. The movement out of Babylon and into New Jerusalem represents the path of the church, which comes about through faithful witness and refusal to compromise with the ungodly world, so that those who overcome will inherit the new creation.