

Dr. David Mathewson, Revelation, Session 23, Revelation 17:7-18:8, Beast and Fall of Babylon Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Revelation, Session 23, Revelation 17:7-18:8, Beast and Fall of Babylon, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture analyzes Revelation 17:7-18:8, interpreting the "beast" as a representation of the Roman Empire and its emperors. He argues that the seven heads symbolize the complete reign of Rome, not seven specific rulers, and the ten horns represent the nations allied with it. **The lecture further examines the fall of Babylon**, which is allegorically linked to Rome's destruction, emphasizing its self-destructive nature stemming from idolatry, violence, and excessive wealth. **The analysis draws heavily upon Old Testament prophecies**, using the imagery of judgment and lament to portray Rome's downfall and the subsequent rejoicing of the saints. Finally, the lecture explores the non-chronological structure of Chapter 18, highlighting the use of various voices and lamentations to depict the consequences of Rome's fall.

2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 23 – 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_Revelation_Session23.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts on Revelation 17:7-18:8 by Dr. Dave Mathewson:

Briefing Document: Revelation 17:7-18:8 - Interpreting the Beast and the Fall of Babylon

Introduction This document summarizes Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture (Session 23) on Revelation 17:7-18:8, focusing on the interpretation of the beast, the fall of Babylon, and their symbolic significance. The lecture emphasizes the apocalyptic nature of the text, its use of symbolism, and its message for the early church facing Roman oppression.

Key Themes & Ideas

1. John's Astonishment and the Angel's Explanation

- John is astonished by the vision he sees, possibly due to fear, perplexity, and even attraction.
- The angel responds by explaining the mystery, starting with a detailed description of the beast.
- This astonishment highlights the shocking nature of the visions and their significance.

1. The Beast as a Parody of God

- The beast is described using a three-part phrase: "was, is not, and is coming," which is a deliberate parody of the description of God in Revelation: "who was, who is, and who is coming."
- Quote: *"Here, in this verse twice and then later on in verse 11, John will use the language of the beast was, is not, and is coming. This is probably meant as a direct contrast to and a parody of the way that God is described..."*
- The "is not" phase refers to the beast's defeat through the death and resurrection of Christ.
- The "is coming" refers to the beast's future appearance but ultimately for destruction, contrasting with the salvific purpose of Christ's coming.
- This parody emphasizes the beast's ultimate defeat and the contrast between God's eternal nature and the beast's temporary power.

- The beast's coming out of the abyss to his destruction echos apocalyptic literature (e.g., Enoch) regarding the release and judgment of demonic beings.

1. The Seven Heads: Multiple Interpretations

- The seven heads of the beast are interpreted in two ways: as seven hills (symbolizing Rome) and as seven kings (or emperors).
- Quote: *"The seven horns and the seven heads are interpreted in two ways. And this is, this would not be unusual in apocalyptic that an image could have more than one meaning."*
- Five kings have already fallen, one is currently ruling, and one is yet to come.
- The seven heads are not to be taken as a specific literal list of seven Roman emperors to pinpoint a date. Rather, "seven" is used symbolically to indicate the complete rule of Roman emperors.
- The language "five have fallen, one is, and one is to come" is a parody of the divine formula and is meant to demonstrate the temporary nature of the empire's rule and that its end is near.
- Quote: *"So he's portrayed not only the beast, but he's portrayed the entire existence and life of the Roman Empire and its emperors once more as a parody of, and an imitation of the existence of God..."*
- The beast as an "eighth king" refers to the future coming of the beast at the end of history, but he is still associated with the seven and will still be destroyed. This illustrates that the beast is present in all the iterations of the empire.

1. The Ten Horns: Nations in Collusion with the Beast

- The ten horns represent ten kingdoms, which symbolize the complete collection of nations colluding with the beast (Rome).
- These nations are the same kings of the earth described in earlier chapters, deceived by Satan and the false prophet to engage in war with the Lamb.
- This coalition demonstrates the widespread influence and appeal of the beast but also its ultimate and complete destruction.

1. The Waters and the Prostitute Babylon

- The waters on which the prostitute Babylon sits symbolize the peoples, nations, multitudes, and languages over which she rules, which demonstrates Babylon/Rome's authority.
- The beast and the ten nations turn on Babylon, representing the self-destructive nature of evil and empires built on exploitation and violence.
- Quote: *"...the beast and the 10 nations seem to turn on the prostitute Babylon, the great city, and destroy her. What I think this is simply suggesting is that, ironically, those who depended on her and even colluded with her for their economic well-being and practices now turn on her and destroy her."*
- The prostitute represents Rome's seduction of other nations into idolatrous economic practices and its persecution of God's people.
- Quote: *"It is a prostitute that seduces other nations to be involved in its idolatrous economic practices. It seduces other nations to participate in its wealth, excessive luxury, and lust for more. It also is guilty of violence in killing those who oppose it..."*

1. The Fall of Babylon/Rome - Chapter 18

- Chapter 18 provides more details on the destruction of Babylon, acting as a kind of judgment oracle using Old Testament texts (Jeremiah 50,51, Isaiah 21).
- The chapter's structure is not chronological, using a series of laments and speeches to demonstrate the nature of Babylon's fall.
- Quote: *"...it appears to me that the audition, all these auditions are not necessarily in chronological order."*
- The chapter assumes the fall of Babylon without explicitly narrating it.
- Quote: *"Although the angel promises to show John the destruction of Babylon, there's really no narrative of the destruction at all. Chapter 18 really does not depict in any detail the destruction."*
- The fall of Babylon is a result of its idolatrous economic practices, excessive luxury, self-exaltation, violence, and seduction of nations into sin, as well as the persecution of the saints.
- The first set of speech is an Old Testament taunt song, indicating that Babylon has already fallen and is reduced to a desert wasteland inhabited by unclean and demonic beings.

- The voice from heaven in verses 4-8 call God's people to "come out of her" not physically, but by refusing to compromise and conform to her idolatrous economic practices. This concept of "leaving" Babylon is a new exodus.
- Babylon's sins are said to have "piled up to the heavens," and God remembers her crimes, a fulfillment of God's promise of judgment.
- The punishment will fit the crime, with the author noting the law of retaliation (as she has done, so shall she be done to) and potentially speaking of equivalent or balanced out punishment.
- Quote: *"The crime or the punishment fits the crime. It's a duplicate of the crime. It balances it out."*

1. Laments and Mourning

- The various groups that benefited from Rome's wealth (kings, merchants, sea captains) mourn over its fall because their own economic prosperity is tied to it.
- These laments are modeled on the lament for Tyre in Ezekiel 27, which also critiqued the city for its economic exploitation.
- Quote: *"...John will model the responses of those who have benefited from Rome. He will model their responses on those who responded with mourning and lament to the downfall of Tyre..."*
- The mourners' laments are not about their sin or Rome's evil, but about the loss of wealth, underscoring their complicity in Babylon's idolatrous economic system.

Implications for the Church

- The lecture highlights the importance of maintaining faithful witness and resisting compromise with worldly powers.
- The true nature of the oppressive power is unveiled.
- It calls for separation from idolatrous economic practices and systems.
- The saints should rejoice in the fall of Babylon, understanding it as God's justice and vindication of his people.
- The book ultimately gives hope and assures believers that evil is temporary and that the Lord will ultimately prevail.

Conclusion

Dr. Mathewson's lecture provides a comprehensive look at the complex symbolism of Revelation 17-18, emphasizing the contrast between the beast and God, the temporary nature of earthly empires, and the call for faithfulness in the face of oppression. The fall of Babylon, while a vision of destruction, ultimately serves as a promise of God's justice and vindication of His people. The lecture emphasizes that the readers of Revelation do not need to fear Rome, for Rome will be destroyed.

4. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 23, Revelation 17:7-18:8, Beast and Fall of Babylon

Revelation Study Guide: Interpreting the Beast and the Fall of Babylon (Revelation 17:7-18:8)

Short Answer Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. How does the description of the beast in Revelation 17:8 contrast with the description of God in earlier chapters of Revelation?
2. According to Dr. Mathewson, what are the two interpretations of the seven heads of the beast?
3. Why does Dr. Mathewson believe that the number seven associated with the heads should be taken symbolically rather than literally?
4. How does the beast function as an eighth king in Revelation 17:11?
5. What do the ten horns on the beast represent in Revelation 17?
6. What is the symbolic meaning of the waters upon which the prostitute Babylon sits?
7. How do the beast and the ten nations turn on and destroy the prostitute Babylon, according to Dr. Mathewson?
8. What are the two reasons the call to come out of Babylon is given in Revelation 18:4?
9. According to Dr. Mathewson, what Old Testament text serves as a model for Revelation 18?
10. What three groups lament the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18?

Answer Key

1. The beast is described as “was, is not, and is coming,” which is a parody of God's description as “was, is, and is coming.” The beast's description highlights its defeat and temporary nature in contrast to God's eternal existence.
2. The seven heads are interpreted as both the seven hills of Rome, identifying the beast with the city, and as seven kings or rulers of the Roman Empire. This dual

interpretation is common in apocalyptic literature, allowing for multiple layers of meaning.

3. Dr. Mathewson suggests that seven should be viewed symbolically because it is a number of completeness and perfection in apocalyptic literature. He contends it represents the complete rule of Rome rather than referring to any specific seven literal rulers.
4. The beast, as an eighth king, is a representation of the future coming of the same evil power that inspired the seven. It suggests a final, culminating manifestation of evil at the end of history before its ultimate destruction.
5. The ten horns represent the nations of the world that collude with the beast and the Roman Empire. Like the number seven, the number ten should be understood as symbolic of completeness and fullness, not ten literal kingdoms.
6. The waters symbolize the peoples, nations, multitudes, and languages over which the prostitute Babylon has authority. This imagery portrays her influence and control over the global population.
7. The beast and the ten nations, who initially allied with Babylon for economic gain, turn against and destroy her. This act signifies the self-destructive nature of evil and the downfall of an empire that arrogates divine power.
8. The call to come out of Babylon is given both to avoid sharing in Babylon's sins and to avoid receiving her plagues. It is a call to not participate in her idolatry or share in her judgment.
9. Jeremiah 50, as well as oracles against Tyre and Nineveh, serves as a model for Revelation 18. It borrows from these texts to highlight the economic exploitation and judgment of Babylon, focusing on themes of wealth and excessive luxury.
10. The three groups who lament the fall of Babylon are the kings of the earth, the merchants of the earth, and the sea captains and sailors. All of these groups had profited economically from their association with Babylon.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each of the following essay questions in a well-organized, thoughtful essay of about 500-750 words each.

1. Analyze the symbolic meaning of the beast in Revelation 17, exploring its multiple layers of interpretation and its connection to both the Roman Empire and a more cosmic evil. Consider how these interpretations work together to contribute to the overall message of the text.
2. Compare and contrast the descriptions of Babylon as both a seductive prostitute and a powerful, wealthy city in Revelation 17 and 18. Discuss the implications of this dual portrayal for understanding the nature of evil and the forces that oppose God's people.
3. Discuss the significance of the "come out of her, my people" command in Revelation 18:4. How does Dr. Mathewson interpret this call, and what does this command mean for the early churches and for believers today?
4. Examine the role of the Old Testament in shaping the imagery and themes of Revelation 17 and 18. What specific passages are referenced, and how do they contribute to the overall message of John's vision?
5. Explore the theme of judgment and justice in Revelation 17 and 18. How does the downfall of Babylon serve as a demonstration of God's justice, and what lessons can be learned from the fate of those who ally themselves with evil?

Glossary of Key Terms

Apocalyptic Literature: A genre of literature characterized by symbolic visions, divine revelation, and a focus on the end times or the cosmic struggle between good and evil.

Beast: A symbolic figure in Revelation representing a powerful, evil force in opposition to God, often associated with earthly empires and the devil.

Babylon (Prostitute): A symbolic representation of the Roman Empire in Revelation, portrayed as a seductive and idolatrous force that corrupts nations. It is depicted as both a great city and a prostitute, highlighting its economic and moral depravity.

Seven Heads (of the Beast): Symbolically represent both the seven hills of Rome and seven kings or emperors, suggesting the political power and authority associated with the beast.

Ten Horns (of the Beast): Symbolically represent the nations of the world that collude with the beast, signifying the global influence of evil and opposition to God.

Abyss: A deep, bottomless pit often associated with the realm of the demonic. The beast is said to emerge from the abyss and ultimately return to it.

Parody: An imitation of something, usually for the sake of mockery or contrast. The beast's description is a parody of God's, emphasizing the beast's corrupt and temporal nature.

Lament: A passionate expression of grief or sorrow. In Revelation 18, laments are used to express the loss and ruin resulting from the downfall of Babylon.

Idolatry: The worship of false gods or idols. In Revelation, idolatry is associated with both religious practices and the pursuit of wealth and power.

Economic Exploitation: The practice of taking advantage of others for financial gain. In Revelation, Babylon is criticized for exploiting nations and individuals for her own excessive luxury.

New Exodus: The idea of a new deliverance from bondage, drawing on the Old Testament story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. In Revelation, it refers to the call for believers to separate from the corrupting influences of Babylon.

Self-Destructive Nature of Sin: The idea that sin, when pursued, ultimately leads to ruin and destruction. The destruction of Babylon serves as a vivid illustration of this principle.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Revelation, Session 22, Revelation 17:7-18:8, Beast and Fall of Babylon, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Revelation 17-18 - Interpreting the Beast and the Fall of Babylon

1. **Why is John astonished in Revelation 17:6 when he sees the woman riding the beast?** John's astonishment is likely a mix of fear, perplexity, and perhaps even a strange attraction to what he sees. The vision is overwhelming and hard to grasp. He's probably struggling to understand the meaning behind the bizarre imagery. It's such a striking scene, a woman riding a beast, that it makes him pause in wonder. The angel's response implies a need for explanation.
2. **What is the significance of the beast being described as "was, is not, and is to come"?** This description of the beast is a direct parody of God's self-description as "the one who was, who is, and who is coming" in Revelation 1:8 and 4:8. The phrase "was" likely refers to a previous state of power and influence, which is then followed by "is not," indicating a defeat or judgment, perhaps due to Christ's death and resurrection, suggesting his power is not eternal. "Is coming," which is how it's always described, contrasts with Christ's coming for salvation and implies the beast will return from the abyss for destruction and judgment rather than triumph. This highlights the beast's nature as a counterfeit power destined for ruin.
3. **How should we interpret the seven heads of the beast?** The seven heads are interpreted in two ways: as seven hills (symbolizing Rome) and as seven kings or rulers. The angel's explanation notes that five have fallen, one is currently ruling, and one is yet to come. It is better to view the seven heads as symbolic of the complete rule of Rome's emperors rather than trying to pinpoint seven specific historical figures. The number seven often denotes completeness in apocalyptic literature. These represent the totality of Roman rule, and also how it is a parody of the divine.
4. **What is the significance of the beast also being described as an "eighth" king?** The beast, though associated with the seven heads (representing the span of Roman emperors), is also called an eighth. This suggests a future manifestation of the beast at the end of history. It implies a continuation of the same evil power that fueled the Roman empire, appearing again at the very end times, but

ultimately this eighth manifestation is also destined for destruction, like the seven before it.

5. **What do the ten horns on the beast symbolize?** The ten horns symbolize ten kingdoms, not necessarily ten specific, literal kingdoms that can be identified on a map. The number ten, similar to seven, is used to signify completeness, representing all the nations of the world that will align themselves with the beast and its power. These are nations that will collude with the beast and the Roman system, opposing God.
6. **Why does the beast and the ten horns turn against the prostitute Babylon (Rome) in Revelation 17?** This is indicative of the self-destructive nature of evil. Those who benefited from and were in league with Babylon (Rome) for its economic power and luxury eventually turn on her and destroy her. It's a demonstration of how a system built on sin and self-interest inevitably implodes, those who are part of the system are the first to betray it. It showcases that any system that puts itself over God is destined for failure.
7. **What is the meaning of the call to "come out of her" in Revelation 18:4?** The call is not necessarily a literal call to physically leave Rome, as that was not feasible for many believers of that time who lived outside the city. Instead, it's a call to spiritually separate from the sinful practices and idolatrous economic system of Babylon (Rome). It calls for believers to refuse to compromise, conform or participate in Rome's wealth-driven, oppressive system. It is a call to maintain a faithful witness and reject her seductive influence. It is a new exodus, in the manner of the Israelites who left Egypt for the promise land.
8. **How does chapter 18 portray the destruction of Babylon (Rome)?** Chapter 18 doesn't give a detailed narrative of the destruction itself. Instead, it assumes that Babylon's destruction has already happened and focuses on the reactions to it. There are laments from different groups - kings, merchants and sailors, who benefited from Babylon's wealth and luxury, mourning the demise of the city and the end of their prosperity. This is very similar to the laments over Tyre in Ezekiel. The chapter serves more as an interpretation of the reasons for Babylon's fall and its implications. It is a mixture of Old Testament judgment oracles against nations, such as the oracles in Jeremiah 50-51, oracles in Isaiah and Ezekiel. The language and laments help readers understand the nature of Babylon's fall as the result of its wickedness, its idolatrous economic practices, and its self-glorification.