

## Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 21, Apocalyptic Literary Genre, Part 2 Resources from NotebookLM

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

### 1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 21, Apocalyptic Literary Genre, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from a hermeneutics course focuses on interpreting the Book of Revelation. **The lecturer emphasizes a symbolic, rather than literal, approach,** highlighting the importance of understanding the historical context (first-century Roman Empire) and the intended audience. **He outlines several key interpretive principles,** including recognizing the symbolic meaning of language and numbers, avoiding anachronistic interpretations, and considering the overall message alongside detailed analysis. **Specific examples are provided to illustrate how to analyze symbols and words,** emphasizing the need for careful consideration of context and avoiding common interpretive fallacies in word studies. Finally, the lecturer recommends using reliable commentaries and approaching interpretation with humility.

**2. 17- minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 21 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series → Hermeneutics).**



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### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts:

#### Briefing Document: Understanding Apocalyptic Literature and Lexical Analysis

##### I. Introduction

This document summarizes the key principles for interpreting apocalyptic literature, specifically the Book of Revelation, and the methods for conducting lexical analysis (word studies), based on the provided lecture excerpts. The primary focus is on moving beyond literal interpretations, understanding symbolic language, and analyzing words within their original context and range of meanings.

##### II. Key Themes and Ideas: Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature

- **Symbolic Communication:** Apocalyptic literature, especially Revelation, communicates through symbols and metaphors, not literal descriptions. It references historical and future events but portrays them symbolically.
- **Quote:** *"We said that one of the characteristic features of apocalyptic literature, but especially the Book of Revelation, is that it communicates symbolically. Yes, it refers to actual events and persons in history, and also in the future, when God returns to bring history to a close, but it describes them not literally, but describes them through the medium of symbolic communication and metaphorical type of language."*
- **Three-Step Approach to Symbols:** To interpret symbols effectively, one should:
  1. **Note the symbol:** Identify the symbol and its characteristics (e.g., the beast with seven heads).
  2. **Understand its meaning:** Determine the meaning or connotations of the symbol (e.g., the beast signifies evil, chaos, destruction).
  3. **Identify the referent:** Determine what the symbol is referring to in history (e.g., the beast likely refers to the Roman Empire or Emperor).
- **Examples of Symbols:**
  - The Beast:** Represents evil, chaos, destruction, likely referring to the Roman Empire or Emperor.
  - Locusts:** Symbolize carnage, destruction, widespread damage, and potentially demonic beings from the abyss.

- **Two Witnesses:** Represent the church's witness of truth in the face of conflict, likely symbolizing the entire church.
- **Symbolic Value of Numbers:** Numbers in Revelation are not primarily for mathematical or temporal information but for their symbolic value:
- **Seven:** Represents perfection or completeness.
- **Quote:** *"Seven, as most people recognize and can identify, seven indicates perfection or completeness."*
- **Twelve:** Symbolizes the people of God, often in multiples (e.g., 144,000).
- **Quote:** *"The number twelve is significant because it is the number of the people of God, modeled after the twelve tribes, or the twelve apostles..."*
- **Three and a Half Years:** Represents a short, intense period of time that is cut off, often associated with persecution or conflict.
- **Quote:** *"Probably three and a half years is there, once again, not to indicate a literal temporal time... but instead three and a half probably symbolizes the idea of a short, intense period of time, but that gets cut off."*
- **One Thousand:** Signifies a complete or perfect period of time, not necessarily a literal 1,000 years.
- **Quote:** *"Instead one thousand, again, I think communicates the idea of completeness or a complete or perfect period of time and not so much a specific literal temporal designation."*
- **Jesus' Symbolic Interpretation in Revelation 1:** Jesus himself interprets symbols in Revelation 1, illustrating how the rest of the book should be approached. The seven stars are interpreted as angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands as the seven churches.
- **Quote:** *"So do you see how Jesus has understood that the seven stars are not literal stars, but they symbolize, the stars that John saw symbolize seven angels that belong to the seven churches, and the seven lampstands that he saw in his vision refer not to seven literal lamps, but they symbolize and refer to the church."*
- **Old Testament Influence:** Much of the symbolism and imagery in Revelation is drawn from the Old Testament.

- **Quote:** *"The other feature of the symbolism, just to mention in passing, is much of John's language comes out of the Old Testament... much of John's images, much of the symbolism he picks up, comes out of the Old Testament."*
- **Historical Context:** Revelation must be understood within its original historical context, the Roman Empire, and its complex relationship between politics, economics, and religion.
- **Quote:** *"Revelation was written in response to and during a time of imperial domination, that is, the Roman Empire ruled over the world of that time... "*
- **Christian Compromise:** The book addresses the situation where Christians were tempted to compromise their faith by participating in Roman idolatrous practices, including emperor worship. The book both comforts those persecuted for their faith and warns those compromising.
- **Quote:** *"So that Christians then were frequently tempted to, by being involved in the political and the social and economic life of Rome, were in peril of also compromising with the religious idolatry of the Roman Empire..."*
- **Intended Audience:** Interpretations must be plausible for the original 1st-century readers and not imposed anachronistically.
- **Quote:** *"Any interpretation that John could not have intended, or his readers could not have understood, is probably to be rejected."*
- **Focus on the Main Message:** Don't get lost in the details, like the specific fulfillment of plagues, but instead grasp the overall message about God's judgment and deliverance, similar to the Exodus.
- **Quote:** *"Don't lose sight of the forest for the trees. That is, don't get so bogged down in the details that you miss the main message of the text that you're dealing with."*
- **Use of Commentaries:** Rely on good commentaries and scholarly resources for help with the complexities of Revelation.
- **Humility:** Approach the text with humility, avoiding dogmatic assertions and being open to different interpretations.

### III. Key Themes and Ideas: Lexical Analysis (Word Studies)

- **Words as Symbols:** Words mark out a range of meaning and seldom have just one meaning. Context is vital for determining which meaning is intended.

- **Quote:** *"A word is basically a symbol that marks out a field of meaning, or a range of meaning. That is, words seldom have only one meaning."*
  - **Changing Meanings:** The meanings of words change over time. What a word meant in the past might be very different now.
  - **Quote:** *"Words change meaning over time... Sometimes the changes are minor, but at other times... it can become a rather significant change that has very significant implications on how you use that word."*
  - **Synonyms and Hyponyms:** Words relate to each other through synonyms (overlapping meanings) and hyponyms (one word is a more specific category of the other).
  - **Words are not the primary carriers of meaning:** The meaning of a word is found within the larger context of clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and discourses.
  - **Common Language:** The Bible was written in the common languages of the day (Hebrew and Koine Greek).
  - **Quote:** *"The Old and New Testament communicated in Hebrew and Greek utilized the common language of the day... The Greek of the New Testament is nothing less than the common, ordinary, everyday language of the common people of the 1st century."*
  - **Distinguishing Meaning from Referent:** The meaning of a word is distinct from what it refers to. For example, the word 'ship' is not synonymous with the 'Titanic', even when referring to it.
1. **Three Stages of a Word Study:**
    - Select the word:** Choose words that are important, rare, disputed, or theologically significant.
    - Determine the field of meaning:** Explore the range of possible meanings using concordances, word study tools, and theological dictionaries.
- **Quote:** *"The second stage is to determine the field of meaning. What could this word possibly mean? What are the possibilities? What is the range of meaning?"*
1. **Determine the intended meaning in context:** Based on context, identify the meaning most likely intended by the author.
- **Quote:** *"the third step is to determine, out of the range of meaning and the possibilities, what most likely is the author intending in this context."*

- **Fallacies to Avoid: Etymological Fallacy:** Do not place too much emphasis on the history or root meaning of a word.
- **Quote:** *"don't be influenced or overly influenced by the history or etymology of a word... what is important for understanding a word's meaning is not what it meant in the past historically, or in its origin, but what it means at the time it is being used."*
- **Semantic Overload:** Do not overload a word with all its possible meanings.
- **Quote:** *"don't overload a word with too much meaning... whenever a word occurs in a text, it doesn't necessarily mean, and usually doesn't mean, everything that it possibly could."*
- **Confusing a word with a concept:** A word is distinct from the theological concept with which it is associated.
- **Quote:** *"don't confuse a word with a theological concept that is found in the text... a word is to be distinguished from the broader theological concept that it might be referring to."*

#### IV. Conclusion

This lecture excerpt provides a robust foundation for interpreting apocalyptic literature like Revelation, emphasizing the importance of symbolic interpretation, historical context, and avoiding anachronistic readings. It also underscores the necessity of careful lexical analysis when doing word studies, and understanding the many ways in which words interact with language and ideas. By adhering to these principles, students can approach biblical texts more faithfully, and with an eye to the context of their original authors and audiences.

## 4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 21, Apocalyptic Literary Genre, Part 2

### Interpreting the Book of Revelation: A Study Guide

#### Quiz

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

1. According to the lecture, what are the three steps to understanding the symbolism within the Book of Revelation?
2. What does the number seven symbolically represent in Revelation? Give an example from the text.
3. What is the symbolic meaning of the number 12, and how is this significant within the text of Revelation?
4. Why are numbers like 3 1/2 years, 42 months and 1260 days in Revelation not to be interpreted literally?
5. What does Jesus' interpretation of the lampstands and the stars in Revelation 1:20 suggest about the interpretation of symbols in Revelation?
6. According to the lecture, what was the main historical context of the book of Revelation?
7. How might a Christian living in the first century have been pressured to compromise their faith according to the lecture?
8. What is the problem with interpreting Revelation by connecting it directly to modern-day events or technologies, according to the lecture?
9. What does it mean to not lose sight of the "forest for the trees," in the context of interpreting the book of Revelation?
10. According to the lecture, what is a good, and necessary practice when approaching the book of Revelation?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The three steps are: First, identify the symbol and its depiction; second, understand the meaning of the symbol and what it communicates; and third, determine what person or event the symbol refers to.

2. The number seven symbolizes perfection or completeness. For instance, the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls represent the complete judgment of God on the world.
3. The number 12 symbolizes the people of God. It is based on the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, often representing a great number or completion.
4. These numbers are not meant to be literal temporal periods, but rather they symbolize a short, intense, and incomplete period of time, particularly referencing the turbulent, but limited, time of the Church.
5. Jesus' interpretation suggests that the symbols in Revelation are not to be taken literally but have symbolic meanings that refer to real, albeit different, entities: the seven stars are not stars, but angels, and the lampstands are churches.
6. Revelation was written in the context of the Roman Empire's rule, during a time when Christians faced pressures to participate in imperial political, economic, and religious practices that compromised their faith.
7. Christians were tempted to participate in the economic and political life of Rome which was intertwined with religious idolatry. They were also tempted to worship pagan gods or the Emperor.
8. It removes the book from the context and understanding of its original audience, who were meant to understand its message and application to their lives; such interpretations fail to consider the author's intention and the historical context.
9. It means not getting bogged down in minor details and missing the main, overall message of the text. An example in the lecture was that the plagues of Revelation echo the plagues in Exodus, focusing on the overarching themes of deliverance and judgment.
10. The lecture indicates that humility is necessary. Given the symbolic nature of Revelation and the varying interpretations, it is crucial to approach it with an open mind, acknowledging the difficulty of full certainty.



## Essay Questions

1. Discuss the importance of understanding the historical context of the Book of Revelation. How does this context influence the interpretation of its symbols and messages?
2. Explain the role of symbolism in the Book of Revelation and analyze how the symbolic language impacts the interpretation of the text. Use specific examples from the lecture to illustrate your points.
3. Compare and contrast literal vs. symbolic interpretation of the book of Revelation. Include the reasoning why the lecturer favors a symbolic reading.
4. Discuss the relationship between the original audience of Revelation and its interpretation. How does recognizing the intended audience and their context help in understanding the text?
5. How does a lexical analysis of a word aid in better understanding the text of scripture? Discuss potential issues that may arise when doing word studies and suggest practical solutions.

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalyptic Literature:** A literary genre characterized by symbolic language, visions, and the revelation of divine secrets, often focused on the end times and the triumph of good over evil.
- **Symbolism:** The use of objects, people, places, or events to represent something else, often an abstract idea or concept.
- **Historical Context:** The social, political, economic, and cultural environment in which a text was written, which significantly affects its meaning and interpretation.
- **Pax Romana:** "Roman Peace," a period of relative peace and stability in the Roman Empire.
- **Lexical Analysis:** The study of the meaning of words, considering their range of possible meanings, usage in context, and historical development.
- **Semantic Overload:** Incorrectly applying all the possible meanings of a word to a specific usage in a text, thereby overloading the word with meaning that isn't present.
- **Etymological Fallacy:** The error of assuming that a word's current meaning is based solely on its historical root meaning.
- **Synchronic Approach:** An analysis of language at a specific point in time, often contrasted with diachronic analysis.
- **Diachronic Approach:** An analysis of language through time, tracing the historical development and changes in language and word meanings.
- **Koine Greek:** The common, everyday Greek language of the Hellenistic period, used for the New Testament.
- **Referent:** The actual object or idea that a word refers to in the real world, which is distinct from the meaning of the word itself.
- **Concordance:** A tool to find each place a specific word is used in the text, for the purpose of study.
- **Hyponyms:** Two or more words that share a general term, like flower and rose.

## 5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 21, Apocalyptic Literary Genre, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ on Interpreting the Book of Revelation and Biblical Lexical Analysis

1. **How should we understand the symbolic language used in the Book of Revelation?**
2. The Book of Revelation communicates through symbols and metaphors, not literal descriptions. To understand these symbols, first identify the symbol and its characteristics. Then, determine what meaning or connotations the symbol conveys (e.g., a beast might symbolize evil or chaos). Finally, consider what person, event, or concept the symbol might refer to, such as the Roman Empire or demonic forces. Even numbers in Revelation are symbolic, representing concepts like completeness (seven) or the people of God (twelve).
3. **Are the numbers in Revelation meant to be understood literally or symbolically?**
4. Numbers in Revelation are used symbolically rather than literally for their mathematical or temporal value. For example, seven often represents completeness or perfection. Twelve symbolizes the people of God, often found in multiples such as 144,000. Three and a half years signifies a short, intense period of time that is cut short. Similarly, a thousand represents a complete or perfect period, not a literal thousand years.
5. **How does the original historical context of Revelation impact its interpretation?**
6. Revelation must be interpreted in light of its 1st-century historical context. The book was written during a time of Roman imperial domination, where political, economic, and religious systems were intertwined. Christians faced pressure to participate in Roman idolatry, including emperor worship, and had to decide whether to resist or compromise. Revelation addresses this struggle, comforting the persecuted and warning those compromising.
7. **What does it mean to say that the Book of Revelation was not "sealed up" and should be understood by its original readers?**
8. Unlike the book of Daniel, which was sealed up for a later time, Revelation was meant to be understood by its original 1st-century readers. John intended to address the specific issues and situation of his contemporaries, not some later generation. Therefore, interpretations that assign meaning to modern events or

technology, such as computer chips, nuclear war, or specific nations, are likely to be incorrect as they would have been unintelligible to the original audience.

**9. What is meant by the "forest and trees" principle of biblical interpretation?**

10. It's crucial not to get so focused on the minute details that you miss the main message. For example, when reading the plagues associated with the seven trumpets and seven bowls, the primary message isn't what each one will look like literally or when they will be fulfilled, but that they mirror the plagues in Exodus, demonstrating how God judges evil nations and delivers his people.

**11. What are the key steps in conducting a word study (lexical analysis)?**

12. A word study involves three steps. First, select the words carefully, focusing on words that are problematic, rare, significant, or theologically important. Second, determine the possible meanings or range of meaning the word could have in its original language (Greek or Hebrew), using tools such as concordances, word study dictionaries, and lexicons. Third, determine which meaning the author most likely intended in the specific context using textual analysis.

**13. What is the "etymological fallacy" and how does it relate to word studies?**

14. The etymological fallacy is the mistake of relying too heavily on the historical origin or root meaning of a word, instead of understanding how it's used at the time of its writing. While the root might be interesting, it's essential to consider what the word meant to its original users and in its immediate context in the text. For example, the word 'ekklesia' (church) comes from "called out ones," but by the time of the New Testament, it simply meant "assembly."

**15. What are some common mistakes (fallacies) to avoid when studying word meanings?**

16. Avoid the "etymological fallacy" of overemphasizing the root or history of a word. Don't overload a word with all possible meanings, known as "semantic overload" or the "dump truck" method; context limits the word to one primary meaning at a time. Finally, do not confuse a word's meaning with the broader theological concepts associated with it. A word can contribute to the development of a theological concept, but is not the concept itself.