

Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 30, Interpretive Process Applied to Revelation 12-13 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 30, Interpretive Process Applied to Revelation 12-13, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture analyzes Revelation 12-13, employing various interpretive methods to illuminate the text's meaning for its original audience and contemporary readers. He situates the text within its first-century Greco-Roman context, highlighting the challenges faced by Christians under Roman rule, particularly the pressure to participate in imperial cult worship. The lecture interprets the symbolic imagery—the woman, the dragon, and the beasts—as representing a spiritual battle between God's people and Satan, demonstrating how the text's narrative unfolds and how symbols draw on both Old Testament and Greco-Roman traditions. The lecture concludes by emphasizing the ongoing spiritual conflict between good and evil and encouraging perseverance in the face of persecution.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 30 – 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).



**Mathewson_Herme
n_Session30.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided source, "Mathewson_Herm_EN_Lecture30_Rev12_13.pdf," with quotes included:

Briefing Document: Revelation Chapters 12 and 13

Introduction:

This document provides an analysis of Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on Revelation chapters 12 and 13. The lecture focuses on interpreting this complex text using various hermeneutical methods. Mathewson emphasizes understanding the historical context and the symbolic nature of the apocalyptic genre to avoid misinterpretations. The core argument is that these chapters reveal the true nature of the conflict between God's people and the forces of evil, a conflict that transcends the immediate political realities of the Roman Empire.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Contextual Interpretation:

- **Historical Context:** Mathewson stresses that Revelation was written to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) within the Roman Empire. These cities had imperial temples and pagan religious practices, pressuring Christians to participate in emperor worship. "It was expected that they would worship and engage and participate in activities of worship for the pagan gods, but also for the emperor himself."
- **Patron-Client Relationship:** The Roman emperor was seen as the patron providing peace and prosperity, expecting gratitude and loyalty in return. This political system was intertwined with religious practices.
- **Christian Response:** Christians faced a dilemma: participate in Roman society and its religious practices or maintain their exclusive allegiance to Christ. This led to both compromise and resistance, with some facing persecution.
- **Author and Date:** The book was likely written toward the end of the first century during the reign of Emperor Domitian.

1. Genre and Literary Approach:

- **Apocalyptic Genre:** Revelation is a unique blend of apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle.
- **Visionary Experience:** Apocalyptic literature records a seer's visionary experience, couched in symbolic language, aiming to provide a new perspective on reality. "The purpose of this is to help the reader see their own reality in a new light."
- **Prophetic Function:** It serves as a proclamation to God's people, offering comfort, exhortation, and warning. "It's also a prophecy, in that this is primarily a proclamation, a message that addresses in terms of comfort, but also exhortation and warning, addresses God's people."
- **Epistolary Nature:** The text is relevant to the specific situation of its readers and should be interpreted in a way that they could have understood. "It meets a specific situation and occasion, therefore it must be something that could have been understood."

1. **Revelation 12: The Dragon, the Woman, and Her Child:**

- **Symbolic Characters:** The key characters in chapter 12—the woman, the dragon, and the male child—are symbolic, not literal figures.
- **Woman as Israel/Church:** The woman symbolizes both Old Testament Israel and the Church. This "one people of God" is initially shown as Israel but merges into the Church, the followers of Christ.
- **Dragon as Satan:** The dragon is identified as "the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray."
- **Male Child as Christ:** The male child is clearly identified as Jesus Christ, the messianic ruler destined to rule the nations. "The child that this woman is pregnant with is none other than Jesus Christ. The messianic ruler, the son of David."
- **Compressed Narrative:** The story of the birth, life, and ascension of Christ is presented in compressed, symbolic form.
- **Conflict in Heaven:** The battle between Michael and his angels against the dragon and his angels represents the defeat of Satan at the death of Jesus Christ. "The true source of Satan's defeat then is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross." This defeat leads to Satan's fury against God's people.

1. **Revelation 12: The Woman and Her Offspring**

- **Symbolic Unity:** Though seemingly separate entities, the woman and her offspring likely represent the same thing: God's people (the church). However they are looked at from two different perspectives.
- **Perspective of the Woman:** The woman fleeing to the desert shows the preservation and spiritual safety of God's people. "By having the woman flee to the desert, this is a clear indication of her preservation and safety."
- **Perspective of Her Offspring:** Her offspring's suffering represents the persecution and physical struggles that God's people face in the world, yet their spiritual preservation remains secure.
- **Symbolic Numbers:** The three and a half years (or time, times, and half a time) mentioned in chapter 12 is symbolic, representing the entire period of the church's persecution, not a literal period of time. "I take it the three and a half years is referring simply to the entire period of the church's existence."

1. Intertextual Connections to Genesis 3

- **Echoes of the Fall:** Mathewson connects Revelation 12 and 13 to the Genesis 3 account of the fall, specifically verse 15. This shows that the battle between the woman (people of God) and the dragon (Satan) has been going on since the beginning. "What you see going on is simply this ongoing conflict that goes all the way back to the beginning of creation."
- **Enmity and Conflict:** The enmity between the serpent and the woman in Genesis is reflected in the conflict between the dragon and the woman/her offspring in Revelation. "Notice that it begins with a conflict between the woman and the dragon, a battle or conflict between the woman and the dragon over her son."
- **Crushing of the Head:** While not directly said about the dragon, the wound to the head of one of the dragon's offspring (the first beast) is an allusion to the crushing blow on the serpent, as promised in Genesis. "This is the crushing blow to the head of the dragon through crushing the head of one of his followers, one of his offspring."
- **Pain in Childbirth:** The woman's pain in childbirth mirrors the pronouncement made to Eve, linking the struggles of God's people with the consequences of the fall. "She was pregnant and cried out in pain as about to give birth, which probably reflects Genesis 3.16"

- **Purpose:** This connection highlights that the conflict is not new but part of an ancient struggle, helping Christians see their situation in a larger, cosmic context. "To go back to the background of Revelation, for Christians living in the Roman Empire, many of them experiencing hostility at the hands of Rome, this now is explaining the true nature of their conflict."

1. **Revelation 13: The Two Beasts:**

- **Unholy Trinity:** The dragon and the two beasts form a parody of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, Spirit). "And again these three beastly figures probably form what some interpreters have called an unholy trinity."
- **Beasts as Symbols:** Beastly figures represent evil, chaos, and antagonism against God. "By using beastly, serpentine, dragon-like figures... a beast or serpent-like figure usually symbolizes features of evil and chaos and antagonism, destruction, everything opposed to life and order, etc."
- **Beast from the Sea:** The first beast likely represents the Roman Empire and the Emperor, seen as oppressive forces that demand worship.
- **Beast from the Land:** The second beast probably represents local elites and those who promote Emperor worship and Roman idolatry through economic and religious pressures. "Most likely, the second beast represents the elite, or at least anyone, anyone who promotes and fosters worshiping, and forces worshiping, the Roman Empire and the Emperor."
- **Deception:** The second beast performs signs to deceive people and promote the first beast. "Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth."
- **Economic Pressure:** The second beast uses economic sanctions (the "mark of the beast") against those who do not comply with emperor worship.

1. **The Number 666:**

- **Symbolic Significance:** The number 666 is not literal and should be seen within its historical context. Modern interpretations like the mark on chips, etc. are far beyond what John and his audience could have conceived.
- **Intentional Identification:** The mark is not accidental but an intentional act by those who choose to identify with and worship the beast. "But this is an intentional receiving of this mark by those who will indeed pay allegiance to and even worship to the beast."

- **Counterfeit Identity:** It likely functions as a counterpart to the seal that God gives to his people, identifying the followers of the beast.
- **Possible Interpretations:** A numerical representation of Nero's name (one spelling).
- A symbol of imperfection falling short of the perfect number 7.

1. **Spiritual Warfare:**

- **True Nature of Conflict:** These chapters reveal that the church's struggle is ultimately a spiritual battle against powers of evil, not simply a political one against Rome. "In a sense, Revelation chapter 12 and 13 is a symbolic narrative of what Paul says in Ephesians 6. Our battle is not with flesh and blood, but against the rulers and authorities and powers in the heavenly realms."
- **Heavenly Battle:** The earthly conflicts are a reflection of a larger spiritual battle. "The true nature of the battle is not a flesh and blood one with the rulers and authorities of the earthly realm... but your true battle is a spiritual one with the rulers and authorities in the heavenly worlds."
- **Empowerment:** Understanding the spiritual nature of the conflict can empower the reader to resist evil and persevere through persecution. "Chapter 12 and 13 then help God's people to come to grips with the true nature of the struggle and to be able to respond to it appropriately."

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathewson's analysis of Revelation 12 and 13 emphasizes a symbolic reading of the text within its historical context. He argues that these chapters reveal the true nature of the church's conflict, which is a spiritual battle against the forces of evil that have been at work since creation. By understanding the symbolism, the readers (both first-century and contemporary) are better equipped to resist oppression, maintain allegiance to Christ, and persevere through persecution. This framework provides a powerful lens for interpreting not only this text but the ongoing struggles of faith throughout history.

4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 30, Interpretive Process Applied to Revelation 12-13

Revelation 12 & 13: A Study Guide

Short Answer Quiz

1. **Describe the initial conflict in Revelation 12.** The initial conflict is between a pregnant woman, symbolizing God's people, and a dragon, identified as Satan, who seeks to devour her child, who is identified as Jesus. The child is rescued and ascends to heaven, thus frustrating the dragon's intentions.
2. **What role does Michael play in Revelation 12?** Michael, along with his angels, engages in a war against the dragon and his angels. This battle results in the dragon being cast out of heaven. This event is interpreted as a symbolic portrayal of Satan's defeat through Christ's death.
3. **What is the symbolic meaning of the woman's flight into the desert?** The woman's flight to the desert is symbolic of God's protection and preservation of his people during times of conflict and persecution. It emphasizes God's constant care despite the wrath of Satan.
4. **How are the woman and her offspring similar and different?** Both the woman and her offspring symbolize the people of God, but from two perspectives. The woman symbolizes God's people's spiritual preservation, whereas her offspring highlight their experience of persecution.
5. **Explain the significance of the "time, times, and half a time" (or 3.5 years).** The "time, times, and half a time" is symbolic, not literal. It represents the entire period of the church's existence and its ongoing struggle with persecution initiated by Satan.
6. **How does Revelation 12 connect to Genesis 3?** Revelation 12 connects to Genesis 3 through the imagery of the serpent (dragon) and the woman. It alludes to the conflict between the serpent and the woman's offspring, paralleling the enmity in Genesis 3:15. This shows the ongoing conflict from creation onwards.
7. **What is the significance of the dragon's "seed" in Revelation?** The dragon's seed refers to the two beasts in chapter 13, who are described in similar terms as the dragon. They serve as the dragon's agents and continue the conflict against God's people, the woman's offspring.

8. **What do the two beasts in Revelation 13 represent?** The first beast from the sea is associated with the Roman Empire and its emperor, symbolizing an oppressive political power. The second beast, from the earth, symbolizes the local elites who enforced emperor worship and the imperial cult.
9. **How does the number 666 relate to the overall message of Revelation 13?** The number 666 is symbolic and serves as a mark of the followers of the beast. It's possibly a reference to the emperor Nero or represents falling short of the perfection symbolized by the number 7. It identifies the true allegiance of individuals to the beast and the empire.
10. **What is the ultimate message of Revelation 12 & 13 regarding the nature of conflict?** Revelation 12 and 13 emphasize that the true conflict is not merely earthly but also spiritual. It exposes the battle behind political and social oppression as a spiritual struggle against Satan and his forces, reminding Christians to persevere with their faith.

Answer Key

1. The initial conflict is between a pregnant woman, symbolizing God's people, and a dragon, identified as Satan, who seeks to devour her child, who is identified as Jesus. The child is rescued and ascends to heaven, thus frustrating the dragon's intentions.
2. Michael, along with his angels, engages in a war against the dragon and his angels. This battle results in the dragon being cast out of heaven. This event is interpreted as a symbolic portrayal of Satan's defeat through Christ's death.
3. The woman's flight to the desert is symbolic of God's protection and preservation of his people during times of conflict and persecution. It emphasizes God's constant care despite the wrath of Satan.
4. Both the woman and her offspring symbolize the people of God, but from two perspectives. The woman symbolizes God's people's spiritual preservation, whereas her offspring highlight their experience of persecution.
5. The "time, times, and half a time" is symbolic, not literal. It represents the entire period of the church's existence and its ongoing struggle with persecution initiated by Satan.
6. Revelation 12 connects to Genesis 3 through the imagery of the serpent (dragon) and the woman. It alludes to the conflict between the serpent and the woman's

offspring, paralleling the enmity in Genesis 3:15. This shows the ongoing conflict from creation onwards.

7. The dragon's seed refers to the two beasts in chapter 13, who are described in similar terms as the dragon. They serve as the dragon's agents and continue the conflict against God's people, the woman's offspring.
8. The first beast from the sea is associated with the Roman Empire and its emperor, symbolizing an oppressive political power. The second beast, from the earth, symbolizes the local elites who enforced emperor worship and the imperial cult.
9. The number 666 is symbolic and serves as a mark of the followers of the beast. It's possibly a reference to the emperor Nero or represents falling short of the perfection symbolized by the number 7. It identifies the true allegiance of individuals to the beast and the empire.
10. Revelation 12 and 13 emphasize that the true conflict is not merely earthly but also spiritual. It exposes the battle behind political and social oppression as a spiritual struggle against Satan and his forces, reminding Christians to persevere with their faith.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the symbolic significance of the woman, the dragon, and the male child in Revelation 12. How do these symbols contribute to the chapter's overall message?
2. Discuss the function and representation of the two beasts in Revelation 13. How do they relate to the dragon and what do they reveal about the nature of evil and opposition to God?
3. Compare and contrast the use of Old Testament allusions in Revelation 12 and 13. How do these references shape the narrative and its interpretive framework?
4. Explore the theme of spiritual warfare in Revelation 12 and 13. How does the text portray the conflict between good and evil, and what implications does this have for its audience?
5. How does the apocalyptic genre of Revelation influence the interpretation of chapters 12 and 13, particularly in relation to symbolism, imagery, and historical context?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalypse:** A literary genre characterized by visionary experiences of a seer, often involving symbolic language, descriptions of the heavenly realm, and revelations about the future.
- **Dragon:** In Revelation, primarily symbolic of Satan, the ultimate antagonist of God and his people, drawing on Old Testament imagery of a chaotic serpentine figure.
- **Woman:** Symbolizes God's people, both Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church, representing the community that God has established, and is protecting.
- **Male Child:** Symbolizes Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who is destined to rule all nations with an iron scepter, alluding to Old Testament messianic prophecies.
- **Offspring:** Can refer to the descendants of the woman (God's people) but also the seed of the dragon (the two beasts), showing the intergenerational and ongoing nature of the conflict between the forces of good and evil.
- **Beast (from the sea):** In Revelation 13, primarily symbolic of the Roman Empire and its emperor, representing oppressive political power, a parody of the divine.
- **Beast (from the earth):** In Revelation 13, primarily symbolic of local elites and authorities who promote emperor worship and enforce the imperial cult, acting as agents of the dragon and the political beast.
- **Imperial Cult:** The system of worship directed towards the Roman emperor, which included acts of allegiance and religious rites, representing loyalty to Rome and its ruler.
- **Time, Times, and Half a Time:** A symbolic phrase referring to a period of persecution and tribulation for the church, not a literal timeframe, but representative of a broader time of conflict.
- **666:** A symbolic number in Revelation 13, interpreted as the mark of the beast and possibly alluding to Nero or a symbol for the imperfection of the unholy trinity.
- **Intertextuality:** The relationship between different texts, whereby one text echoes or alludes to another, enriching their meaning and understanding.
- **Parody:** An imitation of a work, that exaggerates and distorts its features for satirical or critical purposes.

- **Greco-Roman World:** The historical and cultural context of the Roman Empire with Greek influence and traditions.
- **Symbolism:** The use of objects, characters, or ideas to represent something else, particularly employed in apocalyptic literature to communicate deeper meanings.
- **Spiritual Warfare:** The conflict between good and evil, both in the heavenly realm and manifested on earth, emphasizing that earthly conflicts have spiritual origins and consequences.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 30, Interpretive Process Applied to Revelation 12-13, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Revelation 12-13

1. **What is the primary setting and context of Revelation 12 and 13, and why is this important for interpretation?**
 - Revelation 12 and 13 are addressed to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor (modern-day western Turkey) during the late first century, likely around the time of Emperor Domitian. These churches were located in cities with significant pagan temples and imperial cult worship. The Roman Empire was generally seen as a source of peace and prosperity, and citizens, including Christians, were expected to participate in religious activities honoring both the emperor and pagan gods. Understanding this context is crucial because it highlights the pressures on early Christians to compromise their faith and shows that Revelation was written to encourage them not to compromise and to see a different perspective on their situation. The churches were wrestling with how much they could participate in the culture of the Roman Empire without compromising their allegiance to Jesus Christ. Some Christians were refusing to participate and facing persecution as a result, while others were compromising, and the book was addressing this struggle.
1. **What is the literary genre of Revelation, and how does this genre influence how we interpret the text?**
 - Revelation is a unique blend of three genres: apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle. As an apocalypse, it records a visionary experience using highly symbolic language to reveal a heavenly perspective on earthly realities, with the goal of helping the reader see their situation in a new light. As a prophecy, it is a message of comfort, exhortation, and warning to God's people. As an epistle, it addresses a specific situation and occasion relevant to its readers. The blend of these genres means we need to interpret the symbols and images in a way that the first-century readers could have understood, focusing on the message John intended to convey, rather than strictly literal interpretations that would have been foreign to them. It also means that there is a story or a narrative and so the text should be understood as a whole and not just by isolating various images.

1. Who are the main symbolic characters in Revelation 12, and what do they represent?

- Revelation 12 introduces several symbolic figures: The woman, likely representing Old Testament Israel, who transitions into the people of God in the New Testament and then more specifically the Church. She is pregnant with the male child, who is clearly identified as Jesus Christ, the messianic ruler of all nations. The dragon is identified as Satan, the ancient serpent from Genesis, who seeks to destroy both the child and the woman. Michael and his angels battle the dragon and his angels, resulting in Satan's expulsion from heaven. The key idea is that what is going on on earth is part of an ongoing struggle in the heavenly realms. The desert symbolizes divine protection and preservation. These are not necessarily literal characters, but they represent spiritual and historical realities of the church and the struggle against evil.

1. What is the significance of the war in heaven and Satan's expulsion in Revelation 12?

- The war in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels symbolizes the defeat of Satan and his powers. This defeat, however, is not primarily an event that happened separate from earth, but is a symbolic portrayal of the defeat of Satan that happened through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This event is further explained by the voices of the heavenly realm which talk about "the blood of the lamb." The dragon is cast down, not because he lost the war but because of the death of Jesus Christ. This event isn't chronologically sequential to the birth of the child, but rather a further explanation of the child's life and death. It explains why Satan is now full of rage and why he pursues the woman and her offspring. The battle has already been won and the rest of the story demonstrates the outworking of this victory. This symbolizes a crucial turning point where Christ's victory over evil is shown in the heavenly realms.

1. How does Revelation 12 relate to the events in Genesis 3, and what is the significance of this connection?

- Revelation 12 draws heavily on the narrative of Genesis 3, where Satan, as the serpent, deceives Adam and Eve and creates enmity between the serpent and the woman and her offspring, including striking the heel and crushing the head of the serpent. Revelation uses this theme when describing the conflict between the woman and the dragon (Satan), as well as between the dragon's offspring and the woman's offspring. The connection highlights that the conflict faced by Christians in the first century is not new but part of a larger, ongoing spiritual battle that began at the dawn of creation. This shows that the situation in the Roman Empire and the conflict they were facing is part of an age-old conflict where God has already won and will continue to win.

1. Who are the two beasts in Revelation 13, and what do they represent?

- Revelation 13 introduces two beastly figures: The first beast, emerging from the sea, most likely represents the Roman Empire, especially the Emperor, and the imperial power structures that demand worship. The second beast, from the earth, likely symbolizes the local elites or propagandists who promote the worship of the Roman Empire and its Emperor and enforce its practices. This includes the worship of pagan gods. They serve the dragon and its interests by leading the people astray, and the second beast has miraculous power to deceive and get people to worship the first beast. They are in essence a false trinity that represents Satan and his desire to be worshipped instead of God. These beasts highlight that earthly powers can become instruments of evil and oppression that deceive and demand worship in place of God.

1. What is the significance of the "mark of the beast" and the number 666 in Revelation 13?

- The "mark of the beast" (666) is symbolic of total allegiance to the Roman Empire and its Emperor. It's not just a random number, but an intentional act of receiving a mark to identify oneself with the beast, thus rejecting their faith in Christ. It's a parody of God's seal on his people. The number 666 most likely either corresponds with a spelling of the name Nero, a notorious Roman Emperor, and/or that the number 666 is symbolic of a lack of perfection by falling short of the perfect number 7. It signifies the total allegiance to Satan that is opposed to the allegiance to God.

1. **What is the main message of Revelation 12 and 13 for the first-century churches, and what is the significance for Christians today?**
 - Revelation 12 and 13 explain the true nature of the conflict of God's people, first century and beyond. It's not just against earthly powers, but also against spiritual forces in heavenly realms. The message for the first-century churches was to understand that their struggle against the Roman Empire was part of a larger, age-old cosmic battle that began with creation, to see the system behind their oppression and not to be deceived by it, and to not compromise their faith. It also served as encouragement that, though persecuted, they are preserved by God. Today, these chapters remind Christians that our ultimate battle is not against people or earthly institutions, but against spiritual powers of evil. The book urges perseverance, faithfulness, and resistance to any system or authority that demands ultimate allegiance or demands worship instead of God. It also reassures them that God's victory has already been secured through Jesus' death and resurrection, and that ultimate vindication awaits God's people.