

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 35, Revelation Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 35, Revelation, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Dave Mathewson's New Testament Literature lecture focuses on interpreting the **Book of Revelation**. The lecture emphasizes that Revelation was written to Christians in Asia Minor facing the temptation to accommodate the Roman Empire. **Mathewson argues that Revelation is not primarily a prediction of the future but a prophetic unveiling of Rome's true nature as arrogant, oppressive, and anti-God.** He highlights the use of Old Testament imagery, such as the plagues of Exodus, and symbolic numbers to expose Rome and encourage Christians to resist its influence. **The lecture also explores Revelation 12-13, which depicts the dragon (Satan) and the beasts (Roman Empire and Emperor) as forces opposing God's people, and concludes with an examination of the New Jerusalem as the ultimate destiny for those who remain faithful.** Finally, Mathewson stresses that Revelation calls believers to worship God above all else, resist empire, and persevere in the face of suffering.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 35 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



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3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 35, Revelation

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from Dr. Mathewson's lecture on the Book of Revelation:

Briefing Document: Dr. Dave Mathewson on the Book of Revelation

Overview: This lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson provides an overview of the Book of Revelation, emphasizing its historical context and symbolic nature. Dr. Mathewson argues that Revelation is not primarily a prediction of the future, but rather a prophetic exposure of the true nature of the Roman Empire and a call to Christians to resist its influence and maintain their allegiance to God. He stresses the importance of interpreting the book's imagery and numbers symbolically rather than literally, and highlights its connections to the Old Testament and Genesis.

Main Themes and Ideas:

- **Historical Context: Addressing Accommodation, Not Primarily Persecution:**
- Revelation was written to Christians in Western Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).
- The main problem they faced was not intense widespread persecution, though some individuals had suffered martyrdom. "One person had died because of his witness to Jesus Christ."
- The more significant challenge was the temptation to accommodate the Roman Empire, including emperor worship. "But a larger problem facing the church was not persecution but more accommodation to Roman Empire."
- The pressure to conform came primarily from local authorities seeking favor with Rome.
- The core issue was allegiance and loyalty: "Who was the true God? Who was truly seated on the throne? Was it God himself or was it Caesar? Who would they give their loyalty to?"
- Revelation serves as a call to exclusive loyalty to God and a rejection of compromise with imperial power.

- **Revelation as Prophetic Exposure (Apocalypse):**

- Revelation unveils the true nature of Rome, exposing its arrogance, oppression, and exploitation. "But what John wants to do is expose the true colors... it unveils, it pulls back the curtain behind history to allow them to see the true nature of things."
- It reveals Rome as a "bloodthirsty beast" that persecutes Christians.
- Dr. Mathewson draws an analogy to political cartoons, emphasizing the use of symbolic language to comment on real-world events and evoke emotional responses: "In a sense, Revelation is a long political cartoon in that it gets the readers to see Imperial Rome and their first-century situation in a brand-new light."

- **Old Testament Connections and Typology:**

- Revelation utilizes imagery and language from the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah).
- The plagues in Revelation are modeled after the Exodus plagues. "Basically, he's simply modeling the judgment that he describes that's going to happen, he models it on the Exodus."
- The purpose is to demonstrate that God will judge Rome in the same way He judged Egypt: "in the same way, that God judged the evil empire of Egypt, so he will also judge Rome."
- The comparison of Rome to Babylon highlights its role as an oppressive empire in opposition to God: "If you're a first-century reader reading Revelation, what are you going to identify Babylon with? Probably Rome."

- **Symbolic Interpretation of Numbers:**

- Numbers in Revelation (3.5, 666, 7, 12, 1000 etc.) are primarily symbolic, not literal. "The main importance of the numbers is not their mathematical value, but the main significance is their symbolic value."
- Seven represents completeness or perfection. "Seven signifies completion or perfection, the complete number of judgments or the perfected, completed judgment of God upon his people."
- Twelve symbolizes the people of God (12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles).

- 666 symbolizes Satanic opposition to God's people and, in the first century, likely alluded to Nero and the Roman Empire. "It symbolizes satanic opposition to God's people. It symbolized, for the first-century readers, it symbolized Rome in opposition to God and his people."
- **Revelation 12-13: The Dragon, the Beasts, and Genesis 3:**
- The dragon represents Satan. "It's the serpent of old. It's Satan from Genesis chapters 1, 2, and 3."
- The two beasts likely represent the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor. "Probably the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor."
- These chapters expose the true nature of the conflict between Christians and Rome, revealing that Satan is the driving force behind the empire's persecution.
- John draws parallels to Genesis 3 (the curse on the serpent, the enmity between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed), highlighting that the conflict is part of an age-old struggle. "What they face in trying to deal with Imperial Rome is just Genesis chapter 3 resurfacing again."
- **Revelation 21-22: The New Jerusalem:**
- The New Jerusalem is contrasted with Babylon (Rome).
- The New Jerusalem symbolizes the perfected people of God in the new creation, not primarily a literal city. "John is not particularly describing a literal city... primarily what John is describing, when he describes the New Jerusalem, he is describing the people themselves, the perfected people of God in the new creation."
- The vision portrays a physical, earthly destiny for God's people in the new creation, emphasizing continuity with the original creation.
- The imagery evokes the Garden of Eden, signifying the restoration of humanity's original relationship with God. "It even uses Garden of Eden imagery. Read chapter 22. The first five verses, refer back to the Garden of Eden."
- **The Message of Revelation:**
- A call to worship God and the Lamb above all else, no matter the cost. "Revelation is a call for God's people to worship God and the Lamb no matter what the cost."

- A call to expose and resist empire, defined as any anti-godly, arrogant, and pretentious power structure, even in the modern world: "To us, it's a call to expose and resist empire... God calls us to resist that today wherever it may be found, including in the United States of America."
- A call to endure, trusting that God will vindicate His suffering people.

Key Quotes:

- "What revelation primarily does then is Revelation is not so much a prediction of what's going to happen in the future. It's an attempt to prophetically expose the true nature of Rome."
- "Revelation, like a political cartoon, uses graphic, sometimes exaggerated symbolism that's not to be taken literally."
- "The main thing is that you will recall that just as God judged in the day of the Exodus, so He will judge Rome as well."
- "Your battle is not with flesh and blood... but instead, it is with the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms."
- "Revelation is more than just about end times and eschatology... Revelation is a call for God's people to worship God and the Lamb no matter what the cost."

Implications:

Dr. Mathewson's interpretation of Revelation encourages a critical examination of contemporary power structures and a commitment to resisting any form of empire that opposes God's will. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the symbolic language of the book and applying its message to the present context.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 35, Revelation

Revelation: A Study Guide

I. Quiz

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

1. What was the primary problem facing Christians in Western Asia Minor that Revelation was written to address?
2. According to the lecture, what is Revelation's primary purpose concerning the Roman Empire?
3. What is the modern-day analogy used in the lecture to help understand the symbolic nature of Revelation? Explain this comparison briefly.
4. What Old Testament event are the plagues in Revelation modeled after, and what is the significance of this connection?
5. Explain the symbolic significance of the number "7" in the Book of Revelation.
6. According to the lecture, what does the number 666 symbolize in the Book of Revelation?
7. In Revelation 12-13, who does the dragon represent, and who do the two beasts likely represent to the first-century readers?
8. How do Revelation 12 and 13 allude to Genesis 3 and the curse on the serpent?
9. In Revelation 21-22, what is contrasted with the "prostitute Babylon," and what does this symbolize?
10. According to the lecture, what is the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22 symbolic of, and is it intended to be interpreted as a literal city?

II. Quiz Answer Key

1. The primary problem was not direct persecution, but accommodation to the Roman Empire. Christians were tempted to render allegiance to both Jesus Christ and the emperor, leading to issues of worship and exclusive loyalty.

2. Revelation primarily aims to expose the true nature of Roman rule, unveiling its arrogance, oppression, and bloodthirstiness, which contradicts its perceived beneficence. It prophetically exposes Rome's true colors.
3. The political cartoon is used as an analogy. Like Revelation, political cartoons use symbolic language to comment on and expose the true nature of a situation, evoking emotions and providing new perspectives.
4. The plagues are modeled after the Exodus. This connection is significant because it demonstrates that God will judge evil empires, like Rome, in the same way He judged Egypt.
5. The number "7" symbolizes completeness or perfection. This symbolism is rooted in the seven days of creation, representing the complete number of judgments or the perfected judgment of God.
6. The number 666 symbolizes satanic opposition to God's people and, for first-century readers, symbolized Rome's opposition to God and His people. It represents pretentious and arrogant displays of human power.
7. The dragon represents Satan, the serpent of old. The two beasts likely represent the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor, who are trying to enforce worship and persecute Christians.
8. Revelation 12 and 13 allude to Genesis 3 by portraying the serpent (Satan) attacking the woman (people of God) and her offspring (Jesus Christ). The conflict between the serpent and the woman's offspring mirrors the curse in Genesis 3.
9. The "prostitute Babylon" is contrasted with the "bride, New Jerusalem." Babylon symbolizes the evil empire (Rome), while the New Jerusalem symbolizes the faithful people of God and their ultimate destiny.
10. The New Jerusalem symbolizes the perfected people of God in the new creation, in God's presence. It is not intended to be interpreted as a literal city with architectural blueprints but as a symbolic representation of the redeemed community.

III. Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer the following essay questions in a well-organized and thoughtful manner. Draw upon the lecture material to support your claims.

1. Discuss the socio-political context of Revelation and explain how it addresses the challenges faced by first-century Christians living in the Roman Empire.
2. Analyze the use of Old Testament imagery and allusions in Revelation, specifically focusing on how these references enhance the book's message to its original audience.
3. Explain the symbolic significance of numbers and plagues in the Book of Revelation. How do these symbols contribute to the overall message of the text?
4. Explore the eschatological themes in Revelation, focusing on the contrast between Babylon and the New Jerusalem. What does this contrast reveal about the ultimate hope for believers?
5. Critically evaluate the lecture's interpretation of Revelation as a "political cartoon." What are the strengths and limitations of this analogy in understanding the book's message?

IV. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalypse:** A literary genre in which a revelation or unveiling of hidden truths is presented, often through symbolic visions and imagery.
- **Eschatology:** The study of end times or the final destiny of humanity and the world.
- **Emperor Worship:** The practice of venerating Roman emperors as divine beings, often involving oaths and sacrifices.
- **Symbolic Language:** The use of figurative language, imagery, and symbols to convey deeper meanings and messages.
- **New Jerusalem:** A symbolic representation of the perfected people of God in the new creation, often depicted as a radiant city in Revelation 21-22.
- **Babylon:** A symbolic representation of evil empires and systems of oppression, particularly associated with Rome in the Book of Revelation.
- **Plagues (in Revelation):** Symbolic judgments of God modeled after the Exodus plagues, signifying divine wrath against evil and injustice.
- **The Dragon:** A symbolic representation of Satan, the ultimate adversary of God and His people.
- **The Beast(s):** Symbolic figures representing earthly powers and authorities, particularly the Roman Empire and its emperors, who oppose God and persecute believers.
- **Accommodation:** The act of conforming or adjusting to the prevailing customs, attitudes, or ideas of a group or society.
- **Political Cartoon:** A drawing (often including caricature) made for the purpose of conveying editorial commentary on politics, politicians, or current events.
- **Western Asia Minor:** A geographic region corresponding to the western portion of present-day Turkey where the seven churches mentioned in Revelation were located.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 35, Revelation, Biblicalearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Book of Revelation

1. What was the primary issue facing the Christians to whom Revelation was originally written?

The main problem wasn't widespread, centrally organized persecution (though some persecution existed). It was the temptation to accommodate to the Roman Empire, particularly its system of emperor worship and the benefits it offered. This posed a challenge to their exclusive loyalty to Jesus Christ.

2. What is the main purpose of Revelation according to this lecture?

Revelation's primary purpose is to expose the true nature of the Roman Empire, revealing its arrogance, oppression, and bloodthirsty nature, which contrasted sharply with its perceived image of peace and prosperity. It is less about predicting the future in detail and more about helping first-century Christians understand their present situation.

3. How does Revelation function similarly to a political cartoon?

Like a political cartoon, Revelation uses highly symbolic and sometimes exaggerated language to comment on real events and situations. It aims to evoke an emotional response and offer a new perspective on Imperial Rome and the Christians' relationship with it, rather than providing a literal description of events.

4. How are the plagues described in Revelation related to the Exodus story?

The plagues of Revelation (seals, trumpets, and bowls) are modeled after the plagues of the Exodus. This is meant to demonstrate that God will judge evil empires like Rome in the same way He judged Egypt. The emphasis is not on a literal interpretation of the plagues but on the underlying message of divine judgment.

5. How should we understand the numbers used in Revelation?

The numbers in Revelation (e.g., 3.5, 666, 7, 12, 1000) should be understood symbolically rather than literally. For example, seven signifies completeness or perfection, while twelve represents the people of God (the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 apostles). The number 666 probably symbolized Nero and the evil that the Roman empire was capable of.

6. Who do the dragon and the two beasts in Revelation 12-13 represent?

The dragon is identified as Satan. The two beasts, one from the sea and one from the land, likely represent the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor, who seek to enforce worship and persecute Christians. This portrayal aimed to reveal the satanic force behind Rome's oppression.

7. How does Revelation draw on Genesis 3 (the Fall) to explain the Christians' conflict with Rome?

Revelation connects the Christians' struggle with Rome to the age-old conflict between the serpent (Satan) and the woman (God's people) described in Genesis 3. John uses the events of Genesis to help the first-century audience see their conflict with Rome as a continuation of that original struggle, helping them to better understand, cope with, and resist the empire.

8. What is the significance of the "New Jerusalem" in Revelation 21-22?

The New Jerusalem is symbolic of the perfected people of God in the new creation, rather than a literal city. It emphasizes that God's people will have a physical, earthly existence. This vision provides hope and reinforces the value of sacrificing allegiance to "Babylon" (Rome or any oppressive empire) for the ultimate reward of eternal life in God's presence on a restored earth.