

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 37, Excursus: Revelation 2 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 37, Excursus: Revelation 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture explores the Book of Revelation, interpreting it as an **apocalypse, a prophecy communicated as a letter**. He suggests viewing Revelation as a first-century political cartoon, employing symbolic and exaggerated depictions to critique Roman rule and expose its spiritual corruption. **The lecture then examines key sections of Revelation, such as the vision of God and the Lamb on the throne, and the series of seals, trumpets, and bowls, arguing they symbolically represent God's judgment, echoing the Exodus.** He analyzes the symbolic use of numbers like 666 and 7, and interprets Revelation 12 and 13 as a reflection of the Genesis account of the serpent and the woman, to demonstrate that the struggle of first-century Christians with Rome is part of an ongoing battle against evil. **The overall argument is that the book was written to encourage Christians to resist the idolatrous Roman system by exposing its true nature and providing hope.**

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 37 – 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).



**Mathewson_NTLit_S
ession37.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 37, Excursus: Revelation 2

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

Briefing Document: Dr. Mathewson on Revelation

Overall Theme: Understanding the Book of Revelation within its historical context, literary genre (apocalypse as a "political cartoon"), and symbolic language, particularly with reference to the Old Testament. The lecture aims to equip readers to see Revelation as a powerful message of resistance and hope for Christians facing pressure from the Roman Empire.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Historical Background and Purpose:**
 - Revelation was addressed to Christians living under Roman rule, facing pressure to participate in emperor worship and show allegiance to Rome.
 - The core problem was whether to resist Roman demands (potentially facing persecution) or compromise their faith in Jesus.
 - Revelation aims to "exposing the true nature of Roman rule to show its spiritual bankruptcy, to show its corruptness, to expose its pretension, its arrogance, its desire for and hunger for wealth at the expense of the lives of others and the desire to accumulate wealth even if it means oppression."
- **Literary Genre: Apocalypse as Political Cartoon:**
 - Revelation is an apocalypse, a first-person narrative of a visionary experience of a heavenly world and the future.
 - Apocalypses "lifts the veil so the readers can see behind the empirical world into the true heavenly reality and the future that lies behind it."
- **Analogy to Political Cartoons:** Dr. Mathewson argues that understanding Revelation is aided by viewing it as a political cartoon of its time.
 - Political cartoons comment on real historical events and persons but do so through exaggerated and symbolic depictions.

- Understanding the symbols and historical context is crucial for interpreting both political cartoons and Revelation. "Revelation functions like a political cartoon, and if we don't understand the historical situation and background, nor some of the symbols that John used, we'll probably misunderstand Revelation's visions."
- Revelation aims to affect readers both "cognitively, intellectually, and emotionally to get us to respond to the political, and religious situation of the first century and the future towards which history is heading."
- **Vision of God and the Lamb (Chapters 4-5):**
 - These chapters form the "fulcrum" of Revelation, depicting the heavenly reality of God's sovereignty.
 - John ascends to heaven and sees God on his throne, surrounded by symbolic imagery (jasper, carnelian, rainbow, elders, living creatures).
 - Critically, this vision is meant to "usurp and replace another throne," i.e., Caesar's throne and the Roman Empire's perceived dominance.
 - A scroll, containing God's plan for salvation and judgment, is introduced.
 - The Lamb (Jesus), who was slain, is found worthy to open the scroll, meaning that it is through Jesus' death that God's plan will be enacted.
 - This vision parallels the Lord's Prayer ("Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven") as Revelation describes how this heavenly reality will eventually become a reality on earth.
- **Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls:**
 - These three series of seven represent God's judgment upon the world.
 - Understanding the Old Testament background (particularly the Exodus plagues) is key to interpreting the symbolism.
 - These plagues evoke "the Exodus from Egypt," suggesting that "in the same way, that God judged Egypt prior to redeeming His people, God will once again judge wicked humanity for their arrogance, for refusing God, and for oppressing God's people, much as He did the Egyptians."
 - The precise events described are less important than the overall meaning: God *will* judge wickedness.

- It is suggested that these judgments may be directed specifically at Rome's commerce, values, and economic system.
- The relationship between the seals, trumpets, and bowls is debated (sequential vs. overlapping), but the primary message is clear regardless.
- **Symbolic Use of Numbers:**
 - Numbers in Revelation should be interpreted symbolically, not literally or mathematically. "These are not the numbers of a mathematician. They are the numbers of an artist or someone who is writing symbolically."
 - **666:** Probably not a reference to future technology or specific individuals in the 21st century. It may symbolize:
 - Imperfection (being one short of the perfect number 7). "It's the number of humanity. It's the number that falls short of the perfect number 7. So perhaps 666 is just saying something about the Roman Empire. It falls short of perfection. It does not measure up to the number of perfection. It falls short of it. It's imperfect."
 - A reminder of Emperor Nero (whose name, when calculated numerically in certain spellings, totals 666), representing the embodiment of evil.
 - **7:** Represents completeness and perfection. Any multiple of 7 is in the same vein.
 - **3 1/2:** Represents incompleteness, a short, intense period of conflict.
 - **12:** Represents the people of God (12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles). The number 144,000 is an extension of that, symbolizing the complete and perfected number of the people of God.
- **Revelation Chapters 12 and 13:**
 - This section involves a woman, a child, a dragon, and two beasts.
 - Strong parallels to Genesis 3 (the serpent, the woman, their offspring).
 - "It's as if Revelation chapters 12 and 13 is a lengthier portrayal of what you find in Genesis 3, 15 through 16, where again, the author says, I will put enmity between you and the woman, the serpent and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will strike or crush your head and you will strike his heel. To the woman, he said, I will increase your pain in childbirth."

- **Function:** To reveal the true nature of the conflict between Christians and Rome, showing that it is ultimately rooted in the cosmic battle between good and evil that began at creation.
- The conflict is not just with Rome but with Satan himself, who is trying to destroy God's people.
- The "death blow has already been dealt" (the crushing of the serpent's head), so Christians should resist Roman rule.
- Echoes Paul's message in Ephesians 6:12: "Your battle is not with flesh and blood, but with the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies."

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 37, Excursus: Revelation 2

Decoding Revelation: A Comprehensive Study Guide

Quiz

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

1. What was the primary issue facing the Christians to whom Revelation was originally addressed, and how did the book aim to help them?
2. According to the lecture, what literary genre best helps us understand Revelation and why?
3. Explain how understanding the historical background of Revelation is crucial for interpreting its symbols.
4. In Revelation 4 and 5, what scene is John shown and what is the significance of God and the Lamb being on the throne?
5. What does the scroll held by the one on the throne represent, and why is the Lamb worthy to open it?
6. What Old Testament event does Dr. Mathewson suggest we should recall when interpreting the seals, trumpets, and bowls in Revelation?
7. What does Dr. Mathewson identify as the primary meaning of the seals, bowls, and trumpets and why should we focus on that?
8. What does Dr. Mathewson suggest the number 666 represents?
9. What is the symbolic value of the number 7 in Revelation?
10. How does Revelation chapters 12 and 13 draw upon Genesis 3, and what does this connection reveal about the conflict between Christians and Rome?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Christians faced pressure to show allegiance to Rome through emperor worship and risked persecution for resisting. Revelation aimed to expose the spiritual bankruptcy of Roman rule and encourage them to remain faithful to Christ despite the consequences.

2. Political cartoons are a useful analogy because they use exaggerated and symbolic depictions of real-world events and figures to convey a specific perspective or commentary, similar to how Revelation uses symbols to critique the Roman Empire.
3. Understanding the historical background helps us decipher the symbols John used in Revelation. Without this knowledge, we risk misinterpreting the visions and their intended message, just as someone unfamiliar with the political climate might misunderstand a political cartoon.
4. John sees a vision of heaven with God seated on a throne, surrounded by celestial beings, and the Lamb. This signifies God's ultimate sovereignty and power, contrasting with the earthly power of Caesar and the Roman Empire.
5. The scroll contains God's plan to bring salvation and judgment throughout the earth, ultimately establishing His kingdom and sovereignty. The Lamb, through His death, is deemed worthy to open it and enact its contents, signifying the power of Jesus' sacrifice.
6. Dr. Mathewson suggests recalling the Exodus from Egypt. God brought plagues upon Egypt as a form of judgment prior to releasing and saving His people.
7. Dr. Mathewson suggests they primarily represent God's judgment on wicked humanity. He advises focusing on the overall meaning of divine judgment rather than speculating on literal interpretations.
8. Dr. Mathewson suggests it represents imperfection, falling short of the perfect number 7, or it might evoke the memory of Emperor Nero and his wickedness. The symbolic value points to the corrupt nature of the Roman Empire.
9. The number 7 symbolizes completeness and perfection, often referring to the seven days of creation. In the context of Revelation, it suggests the complete and perfect nature of God's actions, such as His judgment.
10. Revelation 12 and 13 echoes Genesis 3 by depicting a woman (representing the people of God) and a dragon (identified as the serpent) in conflict, with their respective offspring also in opposition. This connection reveals that the conflict between Christians and Rome is part of a larger, cosmic struggle that goes back to the origins of sin and redemption.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the challenges of interpreting the book of Revelation, considering its unique literary genre and reliance on symbolism. How can the analogy of a political cartoon aid in understanding the book's message?
2. Explore the significance of the throne room scene in Revelation 4 and 5. How does this vision challenge the authority of earthly powers, and what does it reveal about God's plan for salvation and judgment?
3. Analyze the use of Old Testament imagery, particularly the Exodus narrative, in the book of Revelation. How does this imagery contribute to the book's message of hope and warning for its original audience?
4. Discuss the symbolic meaning of numbers in Revelation, focusing on the numbers 666, 7, and 12. How do these numbers contribute to the book's overall message and impact on its readers?
5. Examine the portrayal of the woman, dragon, and beasts in Revelation 12 and 13. How do these figures connect to the narrative in Genesis 3, and what do they reveal about the nature of the conflict between Christians and the forces of evil?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalypse:** A literary genre characterized by a first-person narrative of a visionary experience of a heavenly world and the future that lies behind the empirical world.
- **Symbolism:** The use of objects, people, or events to represent abstract ideas or qualities.
- **Eschatology:** The study of the end times or last things, including concepts like judgment, resurrection, and the new creation.
- **Fulcrum:** The point on which a lever rests or is supported and on which it pivots, used here metaphorically to describe Revelation 4 and 5 as central to understanding the rest of the book.
- **Exodus:** The biblical event in which God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, serving as a key point of reference for understanding judgment and redemption in Revelation.
- **Nero:** Roman Emperor (54-68 AD) known for his persecution of Christians, and whose name may be symbolically associated with the number 666 in Revelation.
- **Domitian:** Roman Emperor (81-96 AD) who reigned during a time when some scholars believe Revelation was written, potentially during a period of increased pressure on Christians.
- **Sovereignty:** Supreme power or authority; in the context of Revelation, referring to God's ultimate control over all creation.
- **Millennium:** Often refers to the thousand-year reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation 20, a period of peace and righteousness on earth.
- **New Jerusalem:** The symbolic city described in Revelation 21-22, representing the ultimate dwelling place of God with humanity in the new creation.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 37, Excursus: Revelation 2, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Book of Revelation

- **What was the primary purpose of the Book of Revelation?**
- Revelation was primarily written to Christians living under Roman rule, facing pressure to conform to emperor worship and demonstrate allegiance to Rome. Its purpose was to expose the true nature of Roman rule, revealing its spiritual corruption, greed, oppression, and pretension. John aimed to encourage believers to resist compromising their faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of the consequences.
- **What literary genre does Revelation belong to, and how can we best understand it today?**
- Revelation is an apocalypse, a prophecy in the form of a letter. Apocalypses are first-person narratives of visionary experiences of a heavenly world, revealing the true reality and future behind the empirical world. A helpful modern-day analogy is the political cartoon, which uses exaggerated, symbolic depictions to comment on real historical events and figures. Understanding the historical background and the symbolic language is crucial to interpreting Revelation correctly.
- **How does understanding the historical context of the first century help in interpreting Revelation?**
- Just like understanding the context of a political cartoon is essential to grasping its message, understanding the historical, religious, and political circumstances of the first century is vital for interpreting Revelation. John uses symbols from the Old Testament and the first-century world to describe the conflict between Christians and Rome. Without this context, the meaning of the visions can easily be misunderstood.
- **What is the significance of the vision of God and the Lamb upon the throne in Revelation 4-5?**
- The vision in Revelation 4-5 depicts God and the Lamb (Jesus) on the throne in heaven, surrounded by worshiping creatures. This scene serves as the fulcrum of the book, presenting the heavenly reality of God's sovereignty in contrast to earthly powers like Caesar. The rest of Revelation describes how this heavenly reality will eventually be enacted on earth, with God's kingdom and will replacing

Roman rule and embracing the entire creation. It's an expanded commentary on the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

- **What do the series of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls represent?**
- The seals, trumpets, and bowls symbolize God's judgment on wicked humanity, particularly on societies like Rome that oppress God's people and arrogantly set themselves up in the place of God. These series of sevens evoke imagery of the Exodus plagues, reminding readers that God will judge the wicked in the same way He judged Egypt before delivering His people. The series may overlap or follow sequentially. Understanding their meaning, God's judgment, is more important than speculating on their literal appearance or timing.
- **How should the numbers in Revelation be interpreted?**
- The numbers in Revelation, such as 666, 7, 3 1/2, and 12, should be interpreted symbolically, not literally. They are the numbers of an artist, meant to convey deeper meaning and evoke emotions rather than provide mathematical precision.
- **What is the significance of the number 666 in Revelation?**
- The number 666, the "mark of the beast," likely symbolizes imperfection, falling short of the perfect number 7. Additionally, it may have reminded first-century readers of Emperor Nero, a past embodiment of evil. By associating 666 with Nero, John may have intended to highlight the continued presence of similar wickedness in the Roman Empire, encouraging readers to recognize and resist its true nature.
- **What is the meaning and function of the vision in Revelation 12-13 involving the woman, the child, the dragon, and the two beasts?**
- The vision in Revelation 12-13 echoes the conflict in Genesis 3 between the serpent and the woman, and between their offspring. The woman represents the people of God, the child represents Christ, and the dragon represents Satan. The two beasts are Satan's agents. This section exposes the true nature of the conflict between Christians and Rome, revealing that it is part of a larger, cosmic struggle against Satan that began at creation. It encourages believers to resist Rome, understanding that the death blow to Satan has already been dealt through Christ's sacrifice.