

# New Testament History and Literature

## *The Book of Revelation*

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**Session** 35

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### Keywords

Book of Revelation, Roman Empire, apocalyptic symbolism, emperor worship, Old Testament, 666, Exodus plagues, New Jerusalem, New Creation, prophetic critique

### Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Dave Mathewson interprets the Book of Revelation not as a literal timetable of future events, but as a prophetic critique of the first-century Roman Empire designed to challenge Christian accommodation. Utilizing apocalyptic symbolism analogous to a modern political cartoon, the text draws heavily on Old Testament motifs such as the Exodus plagues and the Genesis spiritual warfare to expose Rome as an arrogant, oppressive beast allied with Satan. Ultimately, Revelation calls believers to exclusive worship of God and the Lamb, encouraging patient endurance through the hope of a restored, physical New Creation.

### Outline

#### I. Introduction and Context of Lecture 35

##### A. Class Context and Course Logistics

1. Final New Testament Literature lecture of the semester
2. Announcement of upcoming Exam #4 and final exam review details
3. Preview of upcoming May term course on interpreting Revelation

##### B. Historical Setting of the Book of Revelation

1. Written to churches in Western Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey)
2. Primary threat: Cultural and religious accommodation to Rome rather than state execution
3. Local pressure surrounding emperor worship and civic allegiance
4. Core theological crisis: Exclusive loyalty to Jesus Christ versus Caesar

#### II. Literary Genre and Purpose of Revelation

##### A. Apocalyptic Literature as Unveiling

1. Meaning of apocalypse: Pulling back the curtain on historical realities
2. Exposing the true nature behind Rome's attractive facade
3. Critique of imperial arrogance, economic hoarding, and oppression of the poor

4. Portrayal of Rome as a bloodthirsty beast devouring God's people

#### B. Analogy to Modern Political Cartoons

1. Use of graphic, exaggerated symbolism to evoke emotional response
2. Reference to real political events without literal or scientific descriptions
3. Reframing first-century political life through symbolic commentary

### III. Old Testament Allusions and Symbolic Motifs

#### A. The Exodus Plagues and Divine Judgment

1. Plagues of sores, darkness, blood, and locusts modeled on Exodus
2. Core message: As God judged ancient Egypt, so He will judge imperial Rome
3. Symbolic function focusing on certainty of judgment rather than literal mechanics

#### B. Symbolic Significance of Numbers

1. Numbers interpreted symbolically rather than mathematically
2. The number 7: Completeness and perfection (rooted in Creation week)
3. The number 666: Symbolic of satanic opposition, human arrogance, and imperial rule (allusion to Nero)

#### C. Revelation 12–13 and Cosmic Spiritual Warfare

1. Dragon identified as the ancient serpent of Genesis 3 (Satan)
2. Two beasts representing the Roman Empire and imperial local authority
3. Echoes of Genesis 3:14–16 (woman, birth pangs, offspring, crushing serpent's head)
4. Re-framing Christian struggle as part of an age-old spiritual conflict

### IV. The Climax of Revelation: New Jerusalem and New Creation

#### A. Contrast Between Two Cities

1. Prostitute Babylon: Symbol of Rome, systemic evil, and impending judgment
2. Bride New Jerusalem: Symbol of the perfected, faithful people of God

#### B. The Physical Nature of Eternal Hope

1. New Jerusalem as a symbol for God's community rather than literal architectural blueprints
2. Final destiny as a physical, earthly existence in a restored creation (heaven and earth united)
3. Present motivation: Ultimate earthly hope worth sacrificing current imperial compromises for

### V. Conclusion and Practical Call to Action

#### A. Dual Challenge for Believers

1. Call to exclusive worship of God and the Lamb regardless of cost
2. Call to patient endurance and faithful witness under political pressure

#### B. Contemporary Application

1. Mandate to expose and resist arrogant, anti-God empire in every era
2. Assurance of God's final vindication and restoration of His suffering people