

New Testament Literature: Excursus – Revelation 11, 20–22

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Dave Mathewson interprets the concluding chapters of Revelation as a symbolic call to Christian faithfulness rather than a literal chronological timeline. He demonstrates how the two witnesses represent the church's prophetic witness in a hostile world and explains the millennium as a brief symbolic depiction of God's final vindication and judgment. Contrasting the fallen city of Babylon with the New Jerusalem, Mathewson emphasizes that the ultimate biblical hope is a renewed physical earth where God dwells with His perfected people. Ultimately, believers are urged to resist worldly compromise and maintain exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Outline

I. Introduction and Context of Revelation 11, 20–22

- A. Interpretation of Revelation as symbolic and non-literal
- B. The ultimate destiny of believers and God's creation

II. The Two Witnesses and the Church's Prophetic Role (Revelation 11)

- A. Modeling on Moses and Elijah
 - 1. Old Testament background of plagues and authority
 - 2. Requirement of two or three witnesses for legal validity in Old Testament law
- B. Symbolic Representation of the Church
 - 1. Church as the corporate witness in a hostile pagan culture
 - 2. Measuring of the temple as God's spiritual protection and security
- C. Suffering, Martyrdom, and Final Vindication
 - 1. Roman Empire (the beast from the abyss) opposition
 - 2. Ultimate resurrection and vindication of faithful witnesses

III. Understanding the Millennium (Revelation 20)

- A. Three Historical Views of the Millennium
 - 1. Premillennialism: Christ's return precedes a literal or transitional 1,000-year reign

- 2. Postmillennialism: Church establishes golden age through gospel prior to Christ's return
- 3. Amillennialism: Symbolic 1,000 years representing Christ's current reign from heaven

B. Mathewson's Proposal on Revelation 20

- 1. Reference to 1,000 years as symbolic rather than a specific chronological period
- 2. Focus on total vindication of saints and defeat of Satan/evil

IV. A Tale of Two Cities: Babylon vs. New Jerusalem (Revelation 17–18, 21–22)

A. Babylon as the Fallen Roman Empire

- 1. Seductive power, idolatry, and emperor worship
- 2. Command for believers to "come out of her" and resist compromise

B. New Jerusalem as the Consummated People of God

- 1. Old Testament background (Isaiah, Ezekiel) fulfilled in Christ
- 2. City dimensions (multiples of 12) symbolizing perfected community of God

C. The New Earth as Ultimate Destiny

- 1. Contrast with Gnostic ideas of disembodied heavenly existence
- 2. Continuity with original creation (Genesis 1–2) where God dwells on earth with humanity

V. Excursus: Creation and New Creation in Biblical Theology

A. Creation and Fall in Genesis

- 1. God's original intent for humanity in Eden
- 2. Failure of Adam and Israel; expulsion from the land

B. Prophetic Hope of Restoration

- 1. Isaiah 65 and cosmic transformation
- 2. Inaugurated (already) in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and consummated (not yet) in Revelation

VI. Conclusion and Challenge

- A. Call to exclusive worship and allegiance to God and Jesus Christ
- B. Summary of the New Testament Literature series