

Dr. David Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 35 - Revelation

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Welcome to our deep dive, everyone. We're tackling the book of Revelation today. You know, it's really amazing how this ancient text is still so relevant and speaks directly to us even now.

You've brought us a lecture from a New Testament lit class. Should be fascinating to crack this open. Oh, absolutely.

This book gets a lot of attention. People are always trying to find predictions about the future in it. Right.

Like it's some kind of crystal ball or something. But this lecture really emphasized how Revelation was written for a specific audience at a specific time. Christians under pressure from the Roman Empire; they were facing some pretty intense stuff.

Yeah, you can definitely see that historical context shining through. It's almost like Revelation is a coded message using these wild symbols and images to critique those in power. Yeah, exactly.

Like the writers holding up a mirror to the Roman Empire and saying, hey, take a good look at yourselves. That's what apocalypse really means, isn't it? Unveiling, revealing. Exactly.

It's about pulling back the curtain and exposing the truth about the Roman Empire in this case. That's what makes Revelation so powerful; it still resonates with us today. Okay.

So we've got this unveiling of Rome, but then we've got all these crazy images, plagues, beasts, a dragon, even. How do we even begin to make sense of all that? Well, the lecture pointed out these interesting parallels between Revelation and the book of Exodus, like how the plagues in Revelation mirror those in Exodus, the ones God sent on Egypt. It's suggesting that God will judge Rome just as he judged Egypt.

Oh, wow. That's a powerful connection. It reminds us that God is against injustice, no matter the time period.

But I got to ask, are these plagues something we're supposed to take literally, or is there a deeper meaning there? What do you think about that? Honestly, that's a question scholars have been debating for centuries, literally centuries. The lecture seemed to lean towards a symbolic interpretation, pointing to deeper spiritual realities at play. Makes sense.

Revelation is trying to communicate on multiple levels. So if the plagues are symbolic, what about all the numbers we see in Revelation? 7, 12, 6, 6, 6. The lecture mentioned that those numbers aren't random. They have meaning.

Right. They hold symbolic meaning, not just mathematical, like the number seven signifies completeness, perfection, like the seven days of creation. I see.

So it's not just about counting. It's about the idea behind the number. What about other numbers? Are there any other examples of that in Revelation? Yeah, definitely.

The number 12 often symbolizes the people of God, representing wholeness and unity. And then there's the infamous 6, 6, 6. Oh, yeah. I can't forget 6, 6, 6, the mark of the beast.

I mean, everyone knows that one. But what does it actually mean? Well, the lecture connected it directly to the Roman Empire. It represents Satanic opposition to God's people.

It embodies those forces that were actively persecuting Christians back then. You mentioned satanic opposition. So is Revokushin saying this isn't just a conflict with Rome, but like a bigger spiritual battle as well? Yeah, that's exactly it.

It's unveiling that spiritual battle against evil, with Rome as the earthly representation of those forces. And the story of the dragon and the two beasts in Revelation 12 and 13 really brings this to light. Oh, right.

Those beasts. So the dragon represents Satan, and the beast symbolizes the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor as well. Exactly.

It's this picture of a spiritual battle against evil. And Rome is like the face of those forces in the physical world, almost like what Paul talks about in Ephesians, you know, about battling spiritual forces. It's a reminder that we face pressures even today.

That's so true. Pressures to conform to whatever the powers that be are, to compromise our values. Yeah.

But Revelation reminds us that real strength comes from resisting those things, resisting the things that oppose God. Absolutely. Resisting is key.

It's not always easy, though. You know, it's funny when you were talking about the dragon and the beasts; it made me think of that story in the Garden of Eden with the serpent. Is there a connection there? You're spot on.

That's where things get really interesting. Revelation 12 and 13. It actually echoes the curse on the serpent in Genesis 3. You see the references to the woman, her offspring, the serpent, and even the crushing of the serpent's head.

Wow. So it's like tying the conflict with Rome back to this ancient struggle between good and evil, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden, this cosmic battle playing out on the stage of history. Exactly.

And that raises a really important question. How does understanding this ancient conflict give us perspective on the challenges we face today? What are those Babylonian forces in our world, the ones we need to stand up to? Yeah. It really gets you thinking, doesn't it? About those battles we face, not just out there in the world, but even inside ourselves.

The struggle to stay true to ourselves, to what we believe. Oh, absolutely. It's so easy to get caught up in everything around us, the culture, and compromise on what we know is right deep down.

And speaking of resisting, the lecture talked about this contrast between Babylon and the New Jerusalem. What really stood out to you about those two images? You know, it's fascinating. It's how Revelation uses those cities as symbols to represent these two opposing realities.

Like Babylon, it symbolizes Rome, right? The embodiment of everything opposed to God and his people. Right. It's the ultimate symbol of oppression and exile, the place where God's people are held captive.

And I think it goes even beyond just Rome. It represents any system that tries to control and manipulate people. Oh, totally.

It's about recognizing those Babylonian forces, the ones that try to define us, dictate our choices. So if Babylon represents those powers, you know, ones we're called to resist, what about the New Jerusalem then? What does that symbolize? The New Jerusalem. That's the ultimate counterpoint to Babylon.

It represents the perfected people of God, a community living in harmony with God and with each other. I love how the lecture emphasized that this New Jerusalem isn't just some ethereal, otherworldly place. It's described as a physical city.

That's a huge point. It's not about escaping this world, but about God's presence transforming and renewing creation. It's about restoration of everything.

Yeah. And it connects back to the Garden of Eden too, with those references to the tree of life and the river of life, like this beautiful vision of wholeness and healing. And it's not just a pretty picture, you know; the New Jerusalem represents the ultimate goal for God's people: that restored relationship with him, a transformed world.

Yeah. It's a powerful reminder. Even in the midst of suffering and injustice, there's a hope that goes beyond our circumstances, a hope that keeps pulling us forward.

That's what's so beautiful about Revelation. It doesn't shy away from the darkness, but it always points us towards the light. And that light is found in Jesus, the Lamb, who is right there at the center of the New Jerusalem.

The lecture made a great point about sacrifice, choosing the New Jerusalem over Babylon. It takes sacrifice. What do you think is worth sacrificing for in the present, in light of this future hope? That's a question we all have to grapple with.

It's about aligning our values with God's values, even when it costs us something. Yeah. It really makes you think.

Yeah. But what really matters? What are we willing to give up, to let go of, in order to embrace that vision for a better future? It's recognizing that our choices today have eternal consequences, and Revelation is encouraging us to choose wisely. So as we're starting to

wrap up this deep dive into Revelation, what are the key takeaways here? What should our listeners remember? First and foremost, Revelation is a call to worship, to worship God and the Lamb, no matter the cost.

It's a reminder that we're part of this larger spiritual battle. And even when we face huge forces, we can find strength in resisting conformity and holding onto hope for a better future- a message of resilience and hope. In the face of oppression, we might not be facing a literal Roman Empire anymore, but I think we all experience those Babylonian pressures in our own lives.

For sure. Those forces that try to, I don't know, force us into a mold, make us conform to a certain way of thinking or acting. Revelation says, hey, we don't have to give in.

It's like, you know, when I think about those pressures, it makes me think of that scene in Revelation, where everyone has to take the mark of the beast to buy or sell anything. It feels so relevant, you know, with the way technology and consumerism can kind of be used to control us. It really is amazing how this ancient text speaks to us now in such a real way.

It's like a call to discernment, to really examine the systems and ideologies that are shaping our world, asking ourselves, are these forces good, aligned with God, or are they leading us astray? It makes you wonder: what would it look like to actually resist those pressures in our everyday lives? How can we say no to the mark of the beast, so to speak? What are the practical steps? I think it starts with honesty, with ourselves, recognizing our vulnerabilities. Where are we tempted to compromise? Where do we feel the most pressure to conform? And then once we see those things, we can start to set boundaries, make choices that line up with our values, even if they're not popular. It's about being brave enough to be different, to stand out, even if it means going against the grain, facing opposition, or even just getting laughed at.

Exactly. And that's where that vision of the New Jerusalem is so powerful. It's a reminder that there's a whole community out there striving for something better, living out God's values, even when the world pushes back.

Yeah, a vision that gives us hope, reminds us we're not in this alone. And that's the heart of Revelation, a message of hope. It's a promise that even when things are dark, when there's oppression, God's light will win in the end.

It reminds us that our choices have power, that even small acts of resistance make a difference, and that no matter what, there's always hope. The biggest takeaway from Revelation is a message of hope. Even in the face of oppression and persecution, God's people will ultimately triumph.

This has been an incredible deep dive. I feel like I have a whole new understanding of Revelation. And what it means for me.

It's been a pleasure exploring this with you. Thanks so much for all your insights. And to our listeners out there, we'll leave you with this.

As you navigate this complex world, think about those Babylonian forces in your own life. What do you need to resist? And what does your New Jerusalem look like? What kind of future are you working towards? Keep diving deep, everyone. And remember, there's always hope.