

Dr. David L. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 30, Bride New Jerusalem; How to read Revelation 6-Min. Video Overview

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Alright, today we are diving into one of the most notoriously confusing and frankly coolest parts of the entire Bible: the final vision in the book of Revelation. It is packed with some wild imagery, but hiding inside is a puzzle that, once you solve it, really unlocks the meaning of the whole book. So let's get into it.

So here's the central mystery in a nutshell. The text describes all these nations of the world, right? And they side with evil, they fight against God, and they get judged for it. But then, almost in the next breath, the very next chapter, these same nations are seen just walking right into the holy city of New Jerusalem.

So what gives? Are they destroyed, or are they saved? It can't be both, can it? And when you put the texts side by side, you can really see the problem. On the one hand, in chapters 19 and 20, you have the nations that teamed up with the beast, which is the book's symbol for Rome's corrupt, idolatrous empire, and they are judged and wiped out. But then, turn the page to chapter 21, and you see these nations bringing all their wealth and glory into paradise.

It really feels like a flat-out contradiction. So yeah, that right there is what we're going to unpack. It's one of Revelation's biggest puzzles.

But the answer is actually surprisingly simple once you get your hands on the right key. And just to make it a real head-scratcher, the author, John, uses the exact same phrases – the kings of the earth and the nations – to describe both groups. So he's not talking about some other, more righteous group of nations.

Nope. He means the very same ones. How is that even possible? Well, here's the secret sauce.

According to biblical scholar Dr. Dave Mathewson, the key is to stop treating this like a math problem. We're not supposed to be trying to count souls, you know, who's in and who's out. Instead, we need to see this as a really powerful rhetorical move.

John is using a literary trick called rhetorical juxtaposition. It's a fancy term, but the idea is simple. He's painting two absolute, all-or-nothing pictures, and putting them right next to each other.

He's not trying to give us a percentage of who makes it into heaven. He's trying to make a much, much bigger point with these grand, sweeping images. And here's the point he's making.

John wants to show a total shift in power. A complete regime change for the entire cosmos. He illustrates the complete and utter end of the kingdom of evil, and then the complete and glorious beginning of God's kingdom.

It's a total transfer of allegiance. The subjects of that old, corrupt kingdom have now become the subjects of the new, perfect one. So think of it like this.

You have two giant snapshots. The first picture, total judgment, shows the absolute, comprehensive defeat of Satan's rule. It is done.

Finished. The second picture, total salvation, shows the absolute, comprehensive arrival of God's rule. See? The focus isn't on counting individual people, but on showing the totality of these two kingdoms.

One is completely over, and the other is completely beginning. Okay, so now that we have that key- that this is about rhetoric, not math- we can unlock the incredible symbolism in the rest of the vision. And what we see is this breathtaking picture of paradise being fully restored.

Now first, it's really important to get this. When we flip to chapter 22, we're not suddenly in a new location. John is just zooming in, giving us a closer, more detailed look at the new Jerusalem he's already introduced.

He's taking us to the very heart of this new creation. And what he shows us at the heart of this city is this incredible mashup. He merges the imagery of two of the most sacred and important places from the entire Old Testament into a single, unified vision.

On one hand, you have the Garden of Eden, humanity's first home, where we walked with God. And on the other, you have the Holy Temple, the sacred spot where God's presence dwelt among His people. And look at the parallels.

Both had a life-giving river, both had trees that gave life, and both were all about God dwelling with humanity. John just smashes them together to create this ultimate picture of a fully restored paradise. He even gives us this beautiful, and let's be honest, physically impossible image.

A single tree of life that is somehow on both sides of the river at the same time. I mean, think about that. That's a huge clue that we are not supposed to take this as some literal architectural blueprint.

It's a symbol of complete, overflowing, abundant life that has been totally restored and is available to all. And here it is. Here's where it all clicks together and connects right back to our original puzzle.

The text says the leaves of this impossible tree are for the healing of the nations. The very same nations that were under judgment are now healed and restored. It completes that powerful rhetorical picture of total transformation from the kingdom of evil to the kingdom of God.

So you might be thinking, okay, cool story. But what was the point of all this for the people reading it back then? Well, this wasn't just some pretty picture of the distant future. It was a powerful message designed to have a very practical impact on their everyday lives.

There's a great saying that revelation is not so much a script of the end times as it is a script for the church. It was written to shape how believers were supposed to live their lives right then and there in the middle of the Roman Empire. John basically presents his readers with this stark choice between two cities.

On one side, you've got Babylon, his codename for the corrupt, oppressive Roman system. He tells them, come out of her, resist, don't become part of that. And on the other side is the New Jerusalem.

This incredible vision of a healed and restored future wasn't just escapism, it was the fuel they needed to stay faithful in a really hostile world. So what about us? If this isn't just a roadmap for predicting the future, what are we supposed to do with it today? How does this ancient vision speak to us right now? Well, Dr. Mathewson suggests this vision leaves us with five powerful calls to action. First, it's a call to worship and give our ultimate allegiance only to God.

Second, a call to witness, to actually live out the values of this new creation in our lives today. Third, it calls us to discern and resist the Babylon-like systems of our own world. Remember, the goal isn't just about escaping the world, but about God transforming it.

Fourth, it's a call to obedience, to follow the Lamb no matter what. And finally, it's a call to hope, to trust that history is actually going somewhere and that God will set all things right in the end. And all of that leaves us with a pretty big question to chew on, doesn't it? The first readers were called to resist the Babylon of ancient Rome, its injustice, its idolatry, its seductive power.

So in our own complicated world, with so many things competing for our allegiance, where might we be called to discern and to resist Babylon today?