

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 22, Revelation 17-18--Introduction to Babylon

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All right, so today we're diving deep into the book of Revelation, exploring a lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson on, well, specifically chapters 17 and 18, and this idea of Babylon. Ooh, Babylon. Yeah, Babylon.

You know, when you hear that word, what pops into your head? I mean, is it just like a historical empire, or is there something more there? Yeah, it's a loaded word, that's for sure. Dr. Mathewson really unpacks some fascinating layers about how John, the author of Revelation, uses Babylon as this powerful symbol. A symbol of? Well, he suggests there's this really interesting connection between the fall of this symbolic Babylon and, get this, the rise of the new Jerusalem.

How are those two things connected? Okay, yeah, I see where this is going. It's like one's got to fall for the other to rise. Classic kind of apocalyptic imagery.

Exactly. But there's more to it than that. What I found really fascinating is how Dr. Mathewson traces the meaning of Babylon all the way back to the Tower of Babel story.

Oh, yeah, right back to the beginning. It's not just about a specific place, right? It's this whole idea of humanity's ambition, trying to reach heaven and kind of overstepping God's authority. Yeah, trying to be like God.

That's a big no-no in the Bible. Huge no-no. And that kind of sets the stage for how Babylon is used throughout the Bible, right? It represents all this stuff: idolatry, pride, arrogance, oppression- anything that tries to replace God in our lives.

So basically anything that says, hey, move over, God, I got this. Right. Like, step aside, God, I'm in charge now.

And it's interesting because Dr. Mathewson makes this pretty strong case that in Revelation, Babylon is actually pointing directly at the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire. Yeah, especially the way they treated those early Christians.

Oh, man. It makes you think about what those Christians were going through under Roman rule. But how can we be sure that that's what John, the author of Revelation, was really getting at? Is there evidence for that? Well, the cool thing is there are actually clues sprinkled throughout the text.

In 1 Peter 5.33, Peter just straight up uses Babylon as code for Rome. Really? He just comes right out and says it? Yeah, no messing around. And then in Revelation 17.9, John describes this woman sitting on seven hills.

That's a clear image of Rome. I mean, anyone back then would have gotten that reference right away. It's like he's painting a picture with words.

Exactly. So, John is taking all that baggage, right, all those negative associations with Babylon from the Old Testament, and using it to critique Rome. It's a pretty clever way to get his message across, especially for Christians who are, like, living under Roman rule.

Yeah, it's a sneaky way to get a message out there without getting yourself in too much trouble. Exactly. But wait, there's more.

Dr. Mathewson also points out that Babylon isn't just about Rome. It's not. It's this recurring archetype of corrupt power throughout history.

Wow. So, it's like any time, anywhere. It makes you wonder if we might even see traces of Babylon in our own time.

Oh, yeah, for sure. I mean, it makes you think. It's like a warning, right? Totally.

A warning about the seductive nature of power and how easily it can corrupt. Because it does, right? Power corrupts. It does, yeah.

And that idea of seduction really stood out to me in the lecture. It focuses on why Babylon is judged, and the imagery John uses is intense. He describes Babylon as like a prostitute seducing kings and the inhabitants of the earth.

Whoa, that's pretty heavy imagery. It is. But it's like that Old Testament idea of spiritual adultery, you know, where Israel worshiped foreign gods and turned away from God.

Like cheating on God, basically. Exactly. It's like choosing these other powers over God.

But Dr. Mathewson takes it even further. He argues that the seduction in Revelation isn't just about religious idolatry. It's about economic entrapment.

Economic entrapment. Yeah. Think about those predatory lending practices you see these days.

They offer tempting deals, but with all these hidden consequences. Yeah, you think you're getting a good deal, but... Exactly. So, Babylon, or in this case, Rome, uses wealth and luxury to tempt other nations into participating in its corrupt system.

It's like getting hooked on the material benefits, even though you know it's wrong. It's like you know it's bad for you, but you just can't resist. Totally.

And it makes you think, right? Are there systems or institutions that we might be complicit in, even if we don't realize it, because of the benefits we receive? That's deep. I'm going to have to think about that one. Me too.

And Dr. Mathewson brings up some interesting points about this from texts like Isaiah 23 and Nahum 3. It's not just Israel that's depicted as a prostitute in those passages. It's foreign nations too, luring others in, primarily through economic exploitation. It's like this kind of manipulation has been around forever.

Yeah, there's the new under the sun, right? I guess not. But the imagery John uses to describe Babylon is just so captivating. This woman adorned in riches, riding a beast.

Yeah, it's a powerful image. It's almost mesmerizing. But it makes you wonder: what's really hiding beneath this seductive facade? What is she hiding? Well, that's exactly what John is trying to expose.

He's showing us that Babylon's allure, all that glitz and glamour, is just a mask concealing its true violent nature. Think about Roman propaganda, like Roma Eterna, eternal Rome, and Pax Romana, peace of Rome. John's vision is like he wants to shatter those myths and reveal the reality behind the propaganda.

So it's all fake. It's like he's saying, don't be fooled by the glitz and glamour. There's a dark side to this empire.

Right. Don't believe the hype. Exactly.

You know, this reminds me of something I read recently about, like, the opioid crisis. The article was talking about how these pharmaceutical companies were downplaying, you know, the addictive nature of these drugs while marketing them as, like, these miracle cures for chronic pain. It's like a modern example, right? How something can seem so alluring, but underneath there's this potential danger.

That's like that quick fix, right? It seems so good, but... But it comes with a price. Exactly. You know, I noticed Dr. Mathewson kept referring back to other corrupt cities besides Babylon, places like Tyre and Nineveh.

Do you have any thoughts on why that is? Hmm. That's a good question. You know, that's something we should definitely unpack further in our next segment.

But for now, maybe we could just pause here and let our listeners kind of ponder this idea of Babylon, you know, as this recurring pattern of corruption throughout history. Think about what connections you're making to your own life, the world around you. We'll be back soon to continue this deep dive into Revelation.

So we're back and ready to keep digging into Revelation. Back into the depths of Revelation. Last time we really got into this idea of Babylon as a symbol of corrupt power, and not just in ancient Rome, but potentially throughout history, which is something I've been thinking about a lot.

What about you? Yeah, it really makes you look around and wonder, doesn't it? It does. And this time we're going to dive even deeper into, you know, the fall of Babylon, specifically in Revelation chapter 18. And you know, it's a pretty dramatic shift from chapter 17; like, the language changes, the tone changes.

It's almost like in chapter 17, we get all this visual symbolic language, right? Lots of imagery. But then in chapter 18, we move into this, like, almost auditory experience. It's filled with these pronouncements of Babylon's demise and all these laments.

Oh, so it's like we're hearing the echoes of Babylon's destruction. Exactly. But before we get to those echoes, I'm curious, why does Babylon fall in the first place? Why does it fall? Yeah.

What are like the specific crimes that lead to its downfall? Well, Dr. Mathewson is really clear about this. He says that Babylon is judged for a few things, like its seductive economic practices, its excessive luxury, and its violent persecution of God's people. So it's not just one thing that brings it down.

Right. It's like a whole web of corruption. And remember that image of the prostitute, you know, covered in all the gold and jewels? Oh, yeah.

That was a striking image. Well, it's not just about wealth itself, right? It's about how the allure of wealth can blind people to the truth. Yeah.

It's easy to get caught up in that. It makes me think about how often we're told that wealth equals happiness, you know? But what if that pursuit of wealth like comes at the cost of our values or relationships, even our own well-being? That's such a good point. It's like, what are we sacrificing for the sake of wealth? Right.

And that's where this idea of economic entrapment comes in, right? Babylon seduces these other nations into this system, this web, and they become completely dependent on its wealth and luxury, even if it means, like, compromising their own values. It's like an addiction, you know? You get hooked, and you can't stop even when it's hurting you. Exactly.

And just like an addiction, when that source is cut off, the withdrawal can be devastating. Yeah, absolutely. It's a hard crash back to reality.

And Dr. Mathewson points out that this is like a recurring theme in the Bible, right? This warning about the dangers of putting your trust in worldly power and wealth. So Babylon's fall, it's not just a historical event. It's like this cautionary tale.

It's a warning for all of us, right? No matter what time period we live in. Totally. And then when we look at how this justice unfolds in chapter 18, there's this phrase that's repeated over and over.

It's like, fallen, fallen is Babylon. Fallen, fallen, yeah. It really emphasizes just how final and complete its destruction is.

There's no coming back from that. Right. It's this massive cosmic announcement declaring Babylon's fate to the entire world.

It's almost like a victory cry, you know? It is. But it's not just a declaration. It's a call to action.

A call to? Action. Okay. In Revelation 18.4, we hear this really urgent plea.

It says, come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues. Come out of. So it's like an invitation to escape.

Totally. It's like God is saying, hey, I see what's going on here, and I'm offering you a way out. Don't get caught up in this mess.

Just get out while you still can. Exactly. And it just makes you think, right, about those times in our lives when maybe we're tempted to compromise our own values for, I don't know, maybe convenience, comfort, even just fitting in.

Yeah. It's easy to just go with the flow sometimes, but this passage is telling us to go against the flow. Totally.

And it really highlights the importance of discernment, of recognizing the signs of corruption and separating ourselves from anything that opposes God's will. That makes sense. Because if we don't recognize it, we could get swept up in it without even realizing it.

Exactly. Exactly. And remember that contrast between the prostitute Babylon and the bride, New Jerusalem.

Yeah, the bride. Well, this is where that contrast becomes super clear. Those who heed this call to come out of her, they're essentially choosing New Jerusalem over Babylon.

It's like choosing a side. It is. It's like choosing between two totally different paths.

Two destinies, almost. Right. So it's not just about avoiding judgment.

It's about actively aligning yourself with a different way of being, with God's kingdom. Aligning yourself with a new way of being. Okay, that makes sense.

But how do we do that? How do we even recognize what those values are, especially when the world around us often feels so Babylonian? That's the big question, right? How do we discern what's truly good and right, especially when it seems like everything is so mixed up? Yeah, because sometimes it's hard to tell what's what. Totally. Dr. Mathewson talks about how Babylon is this place of deception, sorcery, and abominations.

These words suggest this twisting of what's actually good and right. It makes me think about those times when maybe we get caught up in something that seems exciting or promising at first, but then as we get further in, there's this underlying feeling of unease, like something's not quite right. Oh, yeah.

Like that gut feeling that tells you something's off. Exactly. It's like your internal alarm system is going off.

Yeah, your intuition. And that's when discernment comes in. It's not always easy to spot.

But there are those warning signs, those red flags that should make us pause, like step back and examine things a little more closely. So we can't just blindly follow along. We have to pay attention.

Exactly. We can't just be on autopilot. We have to be actively engaged, asking questions, like looking beneath the surface.

It seems like discernment is this ongoing practice, not just a one-time decision. It's something you've got to keep working at. Right.

Especially in a world that's constantly bombarding us with all these different messages and ideologies. Yeah, you're constantly being pulled in different directions. It can be exhausting.

It can be. But let's not forget about those who don't heed the warning, you know, those who choose to remain under Babylon's influence. What happens to them? Oh, right.

What about the people who stay? Yeah. What does Babylon's fall look like for them? Well, Chapter 18 doesn't sugarcoat it. It describes the scene of utter devastation and despair.

It talks about people weeping and gnashing their teeth, merchants mourning the loss of their wealth, kings lamenting the destruction of their power. Wow. It paints a pretty bleak picture.

It does. And it's a stark contrast to, you know, the joy and the abundance described in New Jerusalem. It's a harsh reminder that aligning ourselves with these corrupt powers is ultimately going to lead to our own downfall.

It's like if you play with fire, you're going to get burned. Exactly. Yeah.

But it makes me wonder about the people caught in the middle, you know, those who might not be like the ones pulling the levers of power, but are still part of the system. What happens to them? That's a really good question. And it brings us back to, like, the urgency of that call, you know, coming out of her.

It's a reminder that we all have a choice to make, regardless of like our position, our circumstances. We all have a choice. We do.

But I think it's also important to remember that God's justice is always tempered with mercy. So there's hope, even in the midst of judgment. There's always hope.

Even in the midst of all this talk of judgment and destruction, you know, there's this thread of hope running through Revelation. That's encouraging. You know, we've talked a lot about the fall of Babylon, but I'm curious to hear more about, you know, the rise of New Jerusalem.

Earlier, you mentioned how these two sections, they're like paired and contrasted throughout Revelation. Oh yeah, they definitely are. They're like two sides of the same coin.

So how does that New Jerusalem vision tie into everything we've been talking about? Well, that's a great question, and it's the perfect way to move into our final installment. Okay. I like where this is going.

But for now, let's just remember that this New Jerusalem vision gives us this glimpse of the ultimate hope and restoration that's waiting for those who choose to follow God. It's this vision of a world free from the corruption and oppression of Babylon, a world where God's presence and justice reign supreme. Sounds pretty good to me.

It's definitely something to look forward to. I'm ready to hear more. Well, stay tuned for our final part where we'll really unpack this whole vision and what it means for us today.

Okay. So we've journeyed through the origins of Babylon. We've seen its fall.

Now let's shift gears and talk about something truly spectacular: this glorious vision of New Jerusalem. Yeah. It's a pretty stark contrast to Babylon, that's for sure.

I feel like we've, you know, earned a little good news after all that talk about corruption and destruction. Definitely. It's like a breath of fresh air.

So New Jerusalem, it's like the ultimate come-out-of-here destination. Well, sure. Right.

It's the place to be. You reject Babylon, embrace God's ways, and find your true home in New Jerusalem. Sounds like a pretty good deal to me.

Right. And think about how, you know, Babylon was all about economic entrapment, that seduction through wealth and luxury. Yeah, all that flinging.

But New Jerusalem doesn't need any of that. In fact, Revelation 21.21 tells us that the street of the city is pure gold, clear as glass. Pure gold streets.

Wow. It's like the very things Babylon uses to corrupt and control are pure and abundant in New Jerusalem, reflecting God's generosity and grace. It's like the whole system is flipped on its head.

It's like a total inversion of values. And if you remember how Babylon was associated with violence and, like, the persecution of God's people, in New Jerusalem, there are no more tears, no more death, no more pain. No more suffering.

It's a complete reversal of everything Babylon stands for. It's a pretty powerful picture of hope, especially after everything we've been talking about. It is.

But New Jerusalem isn't just some, you know, utopian fantasy, right? Like, how does this vision apply to us today? Like, what are we supposed to do with it? Well, that's where things get really interesting. Dr. Mathewson emphasizes that this New Jerusalem vision is not just about the future. It's meant to inspire us to live differently right now.

So how do we do that? How do we bring a little bit of New Jerusalem into our everyday lives, especially when, like, the world around us often feels so Babylonian? Right. Because it's not like we can just teleport ourselves to New Jerusalem. Exactly.

We're stuck here for now. Ah. So I think it starts with looking inward.

You know, like what values are we holding on to? Are we clinging to the ways of Babylon with all its greed and materialism and that pursuit of power? Or are we striving to embody, you know, the values of New Jerusalem? Love, compassion, justice, service to others. That's a tough question. And it's a constant challenge.

It is. But that's where I think the power of the New Jerusalem vision comes in. It's like having this incredible destination in mind; even when the journey is tough, it gives you something to aim for.

Exactly. It reminds us that there's something way better, more enduring than the fleeting pleasures and the false promises of Babylon. It's like we're citizens of a different kingdom.

We are. A kingdom that's yet to come. But that kingdom, it's breaking into the present.

Even now. What do you mean? Think about it. Every act of kindness, every pursuit of justice, every moment of genuine love.

These are all glimpses of New Jerusalem. It's like we're building that kingdom, you know, brick by brick through our choices and actions. So it's not just about waiting for heaven.

It's about bringing heaven down to earth. Exactly. And that's the ultimate message of hope we can take away from this whole deep dive into Revelation.

I like that. Hope. Yes.

There's judgment for those who choose, you know, the ways of Babylon, but there's also incredible beauty and promise for those who choose to follow God, those who embrace the values of his kingdom. This has been such an incredible journey from the origins of Babylon to its downfall. And then, you know, to this awe-inspiring vision of New Jerusalem, I feel like I've learned so much.

What about you? Me too. It's really made me think about the choices I'm making, you know, and what kind of world I want to be a part of building. That's what it's all about, right? Making those choices day after day.

It is. And remember, this deep dive doesn't have to end here. Take these insights with you.

Ponder them. Explore the source material further. There's always more to uncover, more connections to make, more to apply to your own life as you navigate this crazy world.

That's great advice. So to all our listeners out there, thank you for joining us on this deep dive. Until next time, keep exploring, keep asking questions, and keep seeking the truth.

Because it's out there waiting to be discovered.