

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 23, Revelation 17:7-18:8--Beast and Fall of Babylon

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Alright, so get ready because today we're diving into some seriously wild imagery. Oh yeah, buckle up. We're talking about the book of Revelation, specifically the fall of Babylon in chapters 17 and 18.

It's one of the most vivid and frankly kind of terrifying sections in the whole Bible. Definitely intense stuff. And we're going to be digging into a lecture transcript by Dr. Dave Mathewson.

He's like the go-to expert on all things Revelation. Yeah, a super respected biblical scholar, and his analysis in this lecture is just wow. Yeah, he really gets into the nitty-gritty of the symbolism, like what's up with all those desert owls and unclean birds? Right, and that city consumed by fire.

Like, what's the message behind all that craziness? Well, and this is what's so cool. It's not just about some ancient city getting destroyed, you know? There's got to be more than that, right? Exactly. Dr. Mathewson argues that it's actually a powerful critique of power, wealth, and anyone who abuses them.

Ooh, spicy. I like where this is going. Right.

It's a message that's like surprisingly relevant even today. Okay, so let's get into the specifics. Dr. Mathewson starts off by connecting this symbolic Babylon to the Roman Empire.

Yeah, which a lot of scholars do. Right, and he points to those clues in the text, like the seven hills and the seven kings. Uh-huh, classic symbols associated with Rome.

But then it gets a little tricky because the number of Roman emperors doesn't perfectly line up with that seven kings thing. True. It's not an exact match.

So how does Dr. Mathewson explain that? Well, he suggests that the number seven might be more about representing, like, the completeness of Roman rule. Interesting. So not necessarily a literal count of emperors.

Yeah, it's about capturing that whole sweep of Roman power, you know? More about the idea than the specific details. Exactly. Okay, that makes sense.

But then we get even deeper into symbol land with the whole beast with seven heads and ten horns and, wait for it, the prostitute riding the beast. Yeah, that's where things get really wild. So help me out here.

What's going on with all that? Okay, so the beast, it's a pretty classic symbol, actually, of chaos and just, like, untamed power. Like a force of nature almost. Yeah, exactly.

And then you've got the prostitute on top of it, and she's representing Rome's influence, like how it seduces and corrupts other nations. So it's not just about military might, then? Not at all. It's also about this seductive aspect of power, how it can tempt people to, like, compromise their values for a piece of the good life, you know? It's so true, though.

Like, who hasn't been tempted by that shiny stuff at some point? Right. It's a very human struggle. But here's where things get really interesting, because Dr. Mathieson points out that eventually the beast in all the nations actually turns on the prostitute and destroys her.

What's going on there? Okay, so that's where the symbolism gets really juicy. Right. Definitely a head-scratcher.

Well, Dr. Mathieson suggests a couple of possibilities. On one level, it could be about the self-destructive nature of evil. Like, even those who benefit from corrupt systems will eventually turn on each other when it's convenient.

Yeah, when their own interests are at stake. But it could also be saying something about power itself, like how even the mightiest empires will eventually crumble. You know, from within, like, their own success is what destroys them.

It's a fascinating idea, isn't it? Like, this built-in obsolescence to evil itself. Makes you wonder: what does that say about us humans? Deep questions, man. Deep questions.

Well, speaking of tough questions, Dr. Mathieson also talks about the call for God's people to come out of Babylon so they can avoid getting caught up in this judgment. And that's a bit of a head-scratcher too, right? Like, is this literally about running away from Rome? Yeah, that's a great question. And Dr. Mathieson's take is that it's more about this spiritual and moral separation from the empire's corrupt system, you know? Less about physically escaping and more about what? Like, resisting internally.

Exactly. It's about refusing to compromise your own values even when it's super tempting or convenient. So even if you can't literally get out, you can still draw a line in the sand, so to speak.

Exactly. It's that inner resistance, you know, holding on to your integrity. That's powerful.

But, like, what does that actually look like in practice? How do you come out of Babylon in your everyday life? Right. And that's where it gets challenging because it's not about following some specific set of rules, you know? It's not like a checklist: how to avoid Babylon in 10 easy steps. Exactly.

It's more about a way of life. Like, this constant questioning: is what I'm doing right now aligned with what I believe? So it's about being mindful and making choices that reflect your values, even when they're hard. Yeah.

It's about asking yourself, am I contributing to the system of injustice, or am I working towards something better? Man, that's deep. And it actually connects to another point. Dr. Mathewson brings up the idea that judgment mirrors the offense, you know? Like, there's a direct connection between what you do and what happens to you.

Yeah. The consequences fit the crime, so to speak. He gives some really specific examples, right? He does.

Like, Rome's violence against the saints, its seduction of other nations into idolatry, all that boasting and self-exaltation. The text is emphasizing this divine justice, you know, where actions have consequences. Whoa, like cosmic karma on a grand scale.

Exactly. You reap what you sow. And then you can't talk about the fall of Babylon without mentioning those merchants who are totally freaking out because, well, their party's over.

Oh, yeah. The lament of the merchants. It's a classic.

And it's so interesting because they're not sad about the injustice or the suffering Babylon caused. They're just bummed that their source of wealth and luxury is gone. Right.

It's all about woe is me, my fancy stuff, my money. They totally bought into this lie that wealth and power are the ultimate goals. And they're completely blind to the, you know, spiritual and moral decay that comes with it.

It's like a giant warning sign for us today, don't you think? It totally is. Like, what are we building our lives on? What are we truly valuing? Are we more concerned with comfort and security, or are we striving for something, I don't know, more meaningful? Something that actually transcends all this material stuff. Big questions.

Yeah, this is heavy stuff. It feels like, in some way, we're all susceptible to that allure of Babylon, whether it's chasing wealth, power, or just fitting in. Oh, absolutely.

It's a timeless human struggle. So how do we resist that pull? How do we come out of Babylon in our own time? Well, that's something we'll keep exploring as we dive deeper into Dr. Matthewson's lecture. Ooh, can't wait.

But one thing's for sure: it starts with taking a good, hard look at ourselves. You know, being honest about our own complicity in these systems. And then making choices that are truly aligned with our values, even when those choices are, you know, difficult or costly.

It's about recognizing that seductive power of Babylon, no matter what form it takes in our lives. And then choosing a different path, one of justice, compassion, and integrity. I love that.

A different path. All right, well, we've just scratched the surface here, folks. So stay tuned, because we're going to continue this deep dive into the fall of Babylon and uncover even more insights from Dr. Matthewson's lecture.

You won't want to miss it. So we've been unpacking this idea of coming out of Babylon, like this spiritual and moral separation from those messed-up systems. And it seems like that's a major theme in Dr. Matthewson's look at chapters 17 and 18.

But he also really gets into those laments for Babylon after it falls. So what really stood out to you about those parts? You know, those laments are really interesting, because they

highlight how complicated this whole story is. Like, on the one hand, you've got this judgment against Babylon, this image of a corrupt empire finally getting what it deserves.

But then you have these voices that are, like, mourning its fall, and their grief feels so misplaced. That's what I thought, too. They're not, like, upset about the injustice or the suffering that Babylon caused.

You know, it's more like they're just mad that their own easy street is gone. You know what I mean? That's it, exactly. Yeah.

And Dr. Matthewson actually breaks down how the chapter is structured around these different voices who are mourning the fall of Babylon, like the kings and the merchants and the seafarers. And he points out that the order might not be, like, strictly chronological, which is something you see a lot in apocalyptic literature. So it's less about a historical timeline and more about creating a powerful picture of what Babylon's fall means for everyone, right? Like, each group represents another part of the world that was feeding off of Babylon's corrupt power.

Yeah, exactly. And he starts with this sort of prophetic taunt song, kind of echoing Isaiah, where Babylon is declared fallen and becomes like this desolate wasteland haunted by demons and unclean animals. And it's a stark contrast to all that opulent imagery we saw before, all the gold and jewels and fancy clothes, you know? Oh, I see.

So it's like a complete reversal of fortune. This symbol of power and luxury suddenly becomes this, like, repulsive and empty shell. And it drives home the point that worldly glory just doesn't last.

Exactly. And then right after that, we get that urgent call to come out of her, my people, which Dr. Matthewson connects back to those Old Testament calls to flee Babylon, especially from Isaiah and Jeremiah. And it creates this powerful image of separation, reminding us that God's people are called to be different, to stand apart from the world's corrupt systems.

And we've talked about this a little. Coming out isn't necessarily about literally, like, packing your bags and fleeing, right? No, not really. It's more about that spiritual and moral separation, right? It's about refusing to compromise your faith and your values, even when you're surrounded by a culture that, you know, doesn't share those things.

So it's about holding on to your integrity and faithfulness, even when it costs you. But this call to come out, it's also directly tied to that judgment that's about to fall on Babylon, right? It feels like there's this real sense of urgency. Like, if you don't listen to the warning, you're going to get swept up in the destruction too, right? Yeah, totally.

Dr. Matthewson is really emphasizing how God remembers Babylon's crimes. You know, the violence, the way it lured other nations into idolatry, all the self-importance. And God is bringing about justice.

So it's not just about getting yourself off the hook. It's about taking sides with God's justice and refusing to go along with evil. And then we get to, like, the heart of this chapter, the laments.

And we talked about those three main groups, the kings, the merchants, and the seafarers. And what's so striking is how totally self-centered their grief is, right? Oh, absolutely. It's all about what they've lost, their power, their money, their comfortable lives.

Dr. Matthewson compares these laments to Ezekiel's lament over Tyre, which, you know, also focuses on the economic losses instead of, like, a moral reckoning or something. It's like they've completely bought into this lie that wealth and power are all that matter. And they're missing the whole point about the spiritual and moral rot that comes with it.

And, I mean, that's a warning for us today too, right? Oh, for sure. For sure. It makes us think about what our own lives are built on, you know? What are we really attached to? Are we more concerned about having stuff and feeling safe, or are we pursuing what's actually right and just? Let's break down each group's lament a little.

Like, first up, the kings. Dr. Matthewson points out how they're mourning this loss of their... And he actually uses the word adulterous relationship with Babylon. Like, they were all in on her seductive power and enjoyed the benefits of that deal.

You know what I mean? Yeah, they were totally complicit. And now they're freaking out because they're seeing the smoke from her burning and realizing, like, uh-oh, maybe our judgment is coming next. It's this moment of reckoning where they finally see what they got mixed up in.

And then you've got the merchants, who are maybe the most dramatic in their grief. And Dr. Matthewson really emphasizes how upset they are about losing all their fancy stuff. You know, everything from gold and silver to spices and expensive fabrics.

And he even points out that they're lamenting the loss of the bodies and souls of men, which is just like a chilling reminder of what Babylon's empire actually cost in terms of human life. It's intense. And he draws a parallel to the lament over Tyre in Ezekiel 27, where the merchants, you know, similarly grieve the loss of their trade routes and exotic goods.

And it's kind of amazing how that ancient imagery still speaks to us today, you know, with our global economy and, like, consumerism and everything. It's crazy. Like, greed and materialism, they never go out of style.

Yeah. This passage really makes us look at our own stuff and ask ourselves, how much is enough? And what are we willing to give up just to stay comfortable? Right. And then there are the seafarers, all those ship captains and sailors, and everyone who was making bank off of Babylon's trade.

And they're just stunned by how quickly it all fell apart. They're like, was there ever a city as great as this one? I mean, their lament kind of echoes that shock and disbelief you see when any big empire falls, you know, throughout history. It's this reminder that no human power,

no matter how vast or impressive, is going to last forever, especially when it goes against God's will.

And right after all that, we get this voice from heaven calling for, you know, celebration. Rejoice over her, O heaven. Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets.

God has judged her for the way she has treated you. It's such a stark contrast to all that mourning and lamenting. Right.

Instead of all that sadness and, like, feeling sorry for themselves, there's this feeling of vindication, of celebration, you know? It's like, even when things seem really dark and unjust, there's always hope for those who stay faithful. And this rejoicing actually echoes the song of Moses and Miriam after the Israelites escaped Egypt in the Exodus. And Dr. Mathewson points out that this connection really strengthens the idea of a new Exodus for God's people, like a freedom from spiritual and moral slavery.

So it's not just about Babylon getting knocked down. It's also about the triumph of God's justice and the hope for a new beginning for those who stay true. And then the chapter ends with this incredibly dramatic image, you know? A mighty angel throws this massive boulder into the sea, which symbolizes, like, the complete and utter destruction of Babylon.

It's like watching the curtain close on this once powerful empire, and there's nothing left but silence. Dr. Mathewson is really highlighting how final Babylon's destruction is, you know? Totally. And he actually points out that this image calls back to Jeremiah 51, where a similar stone is thrown into the Euphrates River, symbolizing Babylon's fall.

And the angel even says that Babylon will never be found again, which is a powerful statement about what happens when you choose to be a part of evil and oppression. Yeah, it's like Babylon's legacy becomes one of ruin and desolation, you know? A warning to anyone who tries to build their own empire on top of injustice and taking advantage of others. And then the chapter ends with this chilling list of everything that will never be heard in Babylon again, like music, craftsmanship, even, like, the sounds of daily life, even wedding celebrations.

It really hammers home how complete and final her destruction is. Yeah, it's almost deafening, isn't it? Like, the silence itself is part of the judgment. Oh, absolutely.

You know, it makes you stop and think, right? That silence, it represents, like, everything that's gone- all that stuff Babylon stood for, the never-ending chase for wealth and power, all that noise and showing off and just indulging yourself. It's all just, poof, vanished. It really makes you wonder what's left in its place.

You know, Dr. Mathewson points out something that I thought was really interesting. Even though the chapter is all about Babylon falling apart, it never actually describes the destruction itself. Like, we don't get any fiery explosions or crumbling buildings or anything like that.

It's more about, like, why Babylon falls and how people react to it. What do you think that means? That's a great observation. It could be that the point isn't really about the spectacle

of it all, you know? The focus is more on the moral and spiritual side of things, like what Babylon's choices actually led to, you know? The text wants us to think about the why behind the what.

So it's less about a literal fiery apocalypse and more about, like, the process of things falling apart morally and spiritually? Yeah. And then what happens because of that? Exactly. It's about this idea of moral decay and the consequences that can't be avoided.

And that's something we need to think about even today, you know? We can't just sit back and watch while injustice and oppression become the norm around us. This passage is like a wake-up call. It's telling us to speak up, to resist, to break free from whatever Babylon represents in our lives, both individually, A-N-D, as a society.

It's like a challenge, right? To stand up and do something. Yeah, absolutely. Dr. Mathewson also points out how this chapter echoes those Old Testament judgment oracles against cities like Babylon, Nineveh, and Tyre.

He even draws a direct line to Isaiah 52, where God's people are told to leave Babylon and to not touch anything unclean. It's all part of this new exodus. That connection to the exodus story is super important, you know? It's saying that the fall of Babylon isn't just some event in the past.

It's this timeless pattern that keeps happening throughout history. Every time human power becomes corrupt and oppressive, God steps in and sets things right. So it's like we're seeing this huge story of sin and judgment, rebellion and redemption, playing out on this cosmic scale.

And with that in mind, that call to come out becomes even more urgent. So how does that call to action, how does that translate to our lives today? What do you think? Well, I think it starts with realizing that we're not just watching this all happen, you know? We all have a choice to make. Are we going to stand with God's justice? Or are we going to go along with the corruption that's all around us? It's about looking at ourselves honestly, checking our priorities, and asking, what am I basing my life on? Are we part of the problem, like helping to build up this modern-day Babylon? Or are we working towards a new exodus, you know? A world where justice and righteousness actually win in the end.

Those are the questions this text really pushes us to think about. And honestly, they're questions we should be asking ourselves all the time, not just when we're having this deep dive. This whole exploration of Babylon's fall has been quite the journey, honestly.

It's been intense and challenging, but it's also given us a message of hope, you know? Even when evil seems like it's winning, God's justice and love are going to come out on top in the end. And each of us can choose to be a part of that, you know? It starts with looking inward, making sure our lives are aligned with justice and compassion, and having the courage to resist whatever Babylon looks like in our lives. It's about choosing a different path, right? One that leads to something better.

Absolutely, a path worth fighting for. Well, thanks for joining us for this deep dive into the fall of Babylon. We hope it's given you a new way of looking at this ancient text.

And you see how relevant it still is today. Maybe it's even given you some things to think about on your own journey. Like, what unclean things are you being called to let go of? Where do you see the seductive power of Babylon at work in your life, and how can you resist it? And that wraps up our deep dive for today.

Thanks for listening, and we'll catch you next time.