A Mimetic and Trauma-informed Perspective on the Fall of Babylon

Introduction

Mimesis (μιμητής) was a deeply held concept in the ancient world.[1] The New Testament writings refer to the concept several times and also use different terminology to demonstrate its currency in the first-century world.[2] While John does not explicitly use the term in the book of Revelation, the aura of mimesis can be detected in many of its visions.[3] This paper combines a trauma-informed lens with mimesis as both of these concepts are still in embryonic use in apocalyptic studies. We propose that the fall of Babylon in Rev 14:8 is a trauma trigger that elicits memory-related and communally oriented trauma through the inversion of mimicry that focuses on both the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and 587 B.C.E.[4]

Methodological Insights

John uses symbols drawn from his cultural context and social environment to communicate not just his visions but his theological agenda and ideological stance to demonstrate the cosmic conflict between God and Satan and to challenge, inspire and motivate his hearers

---

[1] See Cornelius Bennema, *Imitation in Early Christianity: Mimesis and Religious Ethical Formation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2025).

[2] Several New Testament writers attest to the importance of imitation. Paul invited his readers to μιμητής him in 1 Thess 1:5-7; 1 Cor 4:16; 1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:18 and Phil 4:9. Outside of the Pauline corpus, the words μιμητής (Hebrews 6:12) and μιμέομαι (Heb 13:7: 3 John 11) are used, while τύπον or τύπος are also used to encourage readers to follow a good person or dissociate from an evil person (Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:7; 2 Thess 3:9; 1 Tim 4:12; Titus 2;7; 1 Cor 10:6).

[3] A number of commentators use the term parody or mimic in their interpretations of various passages. See G. K. Beale, *Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 692; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 2nd edition (Berrien Springs: Andrews, 2009), 414; Buist Fanning, *Revelation*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 54, 370–371, 489, in commentary on Rev. 6:1–2; 13:1–4, 16–17 and 19:17–18. Researchers have explored the methodological, intertextual, cultural and theological implications of the use of mimesis in hermeneutics, theology and New Testament studies. See for example: William Schwieker, *Mimetic Reflections: A Study in Hermeneutics, Theology, and Ethics* (Washington: Fordham University Press, 1990), Joel L. Watts, *Mimetic Criticism and the Gospel of Mark: an Introduction and Commentary* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013). Cornelis Bennema, *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature: A Study in Johannine Ethics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

[4] David G. Garber, Jr., "Trauma Theory," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, (ed.) Steven L. McKenzie (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 421–428 (427), asks "What trauma or traumatic memories might give rise to the literature shaped in this period leading up to the Maccabean revolt, the emergence of Christianity, or the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C. E.?" Moreover, according to David E. Aune, *Revelation*, Vol. 52B, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998), 830, "The comparison between Babylon and Rome is based implicitly on the parallels between the conquest of Jerusalem by Babylon in 587 B.C. and the conquest of Jerusalem by Rome in A.D. 70."

toward faithfulness to Jesus Christ.[5] Revelation was initially read to hearing communities of faith in Western Asia Minor and presents communal resistance to the traditions of the Empire that use icons, coins and images to communicate and impose Roman hegemony.[6][7]

John's symbols have a mimetic quality that allows contrast, comparison, juxtaposition and nuance that deepens their polyvalent nature and trans-historical applicability.[8] Mimesis describes the ambivalent relationship between the Empire and the Christians. On the one hand, it demonstrates the enticement to accommodate to the allurements of Empire and replicate its values.[9] On the other hand, it seeks to manipulate the narrative of the Empire's dominance of the world so that Christians can reconsider and renegotiate their position in new ways—new ways brought about by the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ.[10] Mimesis, therefore, has social, cultural, ideological and theological aspects to it since it is "an interpreted representation of reality."[11]

We turn now to provide methodological insights on a trauma-informed reading. The

---

[5] For various perspectives see Peter A. Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Revelation 12:7–12*, European University Studies 23 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995), 10–12; Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 9–22, 238–293; Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 174–216; Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns:Commentary on the Cosmic Conflict* (London: T&T Clark, 2015).

[6] While seeing was important in Hellenistic culture, hearing and hence obedience were significant in early Christianity (Luke 11:28; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). The verb "hear" (ἀκούω) is found on forty-six occasions in Revelation (1:3, 10; 2:7, 11,17, 29; 3:3, 6, 13, 20, 22; 4:1; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 7:4; 8:13; 9:13, 16, 20; 10:4,8; 11:12; 12:10; 13:9; 14:2, 13; 16:1, 5, 7; 18:4, 22, 23; 19:1, 6; 21:3; 22:8, 17, 18) and reinforces the prominent place the concept of hearing has in Revelation.After examing Rev 1:3, Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 144, is correct when she states, "it is better to speak of the first 'hearers' of Revelation, rather than the 'readers.'" Others who reach similar conclusions include: R. H. Charles, *Revelation*, ICC, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 6; D. Barr, "The Apocalypse as Oral Enactment," *Int* 40 (1984): 243–256; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Vol. 52A, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1997), 20–21, and Stephen Pattermore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure and Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 53, and a number of other scholarly works.

[7] Kayle B. de Waal, *An Aural-Performance Analysis of Revelation 1 and 11*, Studies in Biblical Literature 163 (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 64.

[8] Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideaia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 206, counsels that assuming that mimetic engagement between symbols has one-to-one correspondence is inadequate and shortsighted.

[9] Stephen D. Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation: Sex, Gender, Empire and Ecology* (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 31.

[10] Kate O'Niell, "Rewriting the Colonial Experience: Robertson Davies' Use of Parody in Tempest Tost," in *Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature: Rewriting Texts, Remaking Images: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Leslie Boldt, Corrado Federici, and Ernesto Vergulti (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 121–32 (122).

[11] Octavian B. Baban, *On the Road Encounters in Luke Acts: Hellenistic Mimesis and Luke's Theology of the Way* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 73.

American Psychological Association defines trauma as "an emotional response to a terrible event."[12] Irene Visser goes further and maintains that "trauma is not only to be understood as an individual, psychological, and/or physical response, but also as a collective, political and cultural condition with far-reaching material and immaterial dimensions."[13] A hermeneutic of trauma is attuned to language that can encode and respond to traumatic experience in ways that correspond to the effects of trauma as well as to the mechanisms of survival, recovery and resilience.[14] It is attentive to human experiences, pain and suffering and illuminates both ancient and present contexts. This hermeneutic also reflects on the psychological, cultural and sociological impacts of traumatic events and explores aspects of meaning previously omitted or ignored and in that way calls into question existing interpretations.[15]

The Text and Interpretation

Καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος δεύτερος ἠκολούθησεν λέγων· ἔπεσεν ἔπεσεν Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη ἣ ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς πεπότικεν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.
A second angel followed and said, "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (Rev 14:8).

This angel is second in a series of angels in chapter 14.[16] The notion of ἔπεσεν suggests spiritual deterioration.[17] Based on its OT usage it points to a future event in the past tense as if it is a *fait accompli*.[18] The designation "Babylon the Great" (Rev 16:9; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21) alludes to the story of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 in this context.[19] Both the symbols of

[12] See www.apa.org (Accessed on 10 July 2025)
[13] Irene Visser, "Trauma in Non-Western Contexts," in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 126.
[14] Christopher G. Frechette and Elizabeth Boase, "Defining Trauma as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation," in Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (eds.), *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 1–23 (13).
[15] Ibid.
[16] Aune, *Revelation*, 823.
[17] Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, AUSDDS 11(Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1988), 279, provides the following verses to corroborate this view (Rom 11:11,12; 1 Cor 10:12; Heb 4:11 and Rev 2:5).
[18] Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 456.
[19] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NCNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 271.

wine and adultery refer to spiritual unfaithfulness.[20] This verse is traditionally interpreted as good news for those in the seven churches who are faithful, while it is bad news for the unfaithful,[21] and as the eschatological good news of the fall of 'end-time Babylon.'[22]

Babylon is a code name for Rome (1 Pet 5:13; *Sib. Or.* 5.137-61) and is an insidious enemy that is both outside of and within the community of faith.[23] As the lector references the fall of Babylon, the early Christians recall that the Empire mimics Babel (Gen 10:1-11), Tyre (Isa 23:15-18), and Nineveh (Nah 3:4) with their wickedness and persecution of God's people.[24] Later in Rev 17:1-3, Babylon is also associated with both high and low class prostitutes in first century society.[25] The image of prostitute frequently occurs in the OT as a metaphor denoting Israel's apostasy to idolatry and, in particular, refers to Jerusalem (see Isa 1:21; Jer 2:24; Ezek 16:15–63; 23:1–49).[26] John therefore conflates the qualities of ancient Israel and Babylon and in doing so reveals the inadequacy of assuming that Rome is Babylon redivivus.[27] Babylon is far more![28]

The fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. in the recent social memory of the early Christians revisits the wounding of the social body which effects the community's self-understanding

---

[20] Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 456.
[21] The apocalyptic viewpoint is uncompromising. A community is either loyal or disloyal. There is no middle ground. See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptyic Literature*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998), 12, 41.
[22] For an extensive study of the typological implications of Revelation's use of "Babylon" and its fall, see Hans K. LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation: The Biblical Drama of Armageddon* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1987), 82–107.
[23] Beale, *Revelation*, 685.
[24] While the comment of Fanning, *Revelation*, 393, "Rome was the replication of the type in the first-century world, most notably in its destruction again of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 and its pressure on Christians to engage in idolatrous practices. It also united a variety of nations in its godless rule as Babylon had done" is helpful, it does not go far enough.
[25] According to Craig A. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Commentary* (New Haven: Yale, 2014), 671, "The woman in John's vision has traits of both high-class and low-class prostitution. Her elegant clothing, gold, and jewels are appropriate for a courtesan; her clients include kings, and she rules like a queen (Rev 17:2; 18:7). Yet the woman is called a whore (*pornē*) rather than a courtesan (*hetaira*), and her drunken behavior is better suited to a street-side tavern than a nobleman's banquet room."
[26] Ibid.
[27] Tonstad, *Revelation*, 206.
[28] See Tonstad, *Revelation*, 254–257 for a deeper probe of the satanic, trans-historical and cosmological implications of Babylon. In fact, Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 378, contends that Isaiah (Isa 13:1–14:23) had already depicted the future fall and judgment of Babylon as exemplary for the fall of Satan (Lucifer, the "morning star") from heaven.

and disrupts it values and identity and causes them to experience communal trauma.[29] Kai Erickson describes communal trauma as "a blow to the basic issues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality."[30] Trauma is "socially mediated attribution" and thus "imagined" in the sense that "imagination is intrinsic to the very process of representation."[31] The followers of Jezebel and the Nicolaitans who accommodate to the dictates and values of Empire experience this trauma.[32] In John's view the actions of Roman sympathizers like Jezebel is compounding the social body's trauma by leading the people farther away from gospel identity.

Mimetically appropriating the first fall leads to perceive the fall of Jerusalem that took place in 587 B.C.E as the next event of consequence as memory-related trauma.[33] Ancient audiences had deep reservoirs of recall. Theorists and clinicians maintain that memory plays a crucial role in trauma, influencing how traumatic experiences are perceived and recalled.[34] The devastation and death of that fall remind the early Christians of the brutality of Empire.

The life of Israel was dominated by Babylonian policy and power prior to and during this time.[35] Babylon had become an oppressor of Israel and God desired to demonstrate his power to defend and deliver his people. Prior to 587 God's sovereignty was demonstrated through Babylon.[36] However, when Israel's time of discipline was up, that is, the 70 years of

---

[29] Brad E. Kelle, "Is Hosea Also among the Traumatized? The Book of Hosea and Trauma Hermeneutics," *JBL* 144 (2025): 63–83 (69).
[30] Kai Erickson, *A New Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma and Community* (New York: Norton, 1994), 187. From my reading it seems that there are
[31] J. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," *Cutural Trauma and Collective Identity*, eds. J. Alexander and et al. (Berkeley: CA, 2004), 1–30 (9).
[32] Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast: Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) provides the strongest case for prophetic rivalry among the seven churches.
[33] William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, ICC, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 1285 and Douglas Rawlinson Jones, *Jeremiah*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 521.
[34] See B. A. van der Kolk, *The Body keeps the Score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma* (London: Viking, 2014).
[35] Walter Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26-52, To Build. To Plant*, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 210.
[36] Ibid., 257.

captivity, God intended to free Israel even if the Babylonians would not. Babylon's eventual demise is not per chance but is part of God's surprising purpose. Cyrus, God's instrument of judgment, becomes his instrument of hope.

Responding to Trauma

As a narrative leader intent on growing story-formed communities, John invites the community into the stories that are behind his use of the Old Testament and to see them afresh from the perspective of the gospel.[37] Shared narratives can help to overcome the fragmentation caused by communal trauma.[38] The primary narrative is that of the gospel, supposedly good news of the Empire, is now re-envisioned as the eternal gospel (αἰώνιον εὐαγγελίσαι) of Jesus Christ.[39] The eternal gospel, the defining marker for community identity, is poignantly revealed in the "lifting up" of the pregnant symbol of Lamb.[40] The Lifted Lamb, slain, maimed and butchered (Rev 5:6) reveals the traumatic death of Jesus Christ.[41] The Lamb absorbs violence in its death and in so doing conquers both violence and death. With a love so deep this is an ordeal that is of eternal consequence for the Lamb, the ever-traumatized one.[42]

---

[37] Larry A. Goleman, "The Practice of Narrative Leadership in Ministry," in *Living Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Culture*, (ed.) Larry A. Goleman (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2010), 5. Narrative leaders seek to harness the power of narratives – from biblical tradition and people's lives – to develop a fresh understanding of ministry and leadership. They especially seek to reframe churches as "story-formed communities" by making narratives central to ministry and leadership.

[38] Robert J. Schreiter, Reading Biblical Texts Through the Lens of Resilience," in Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (eds.), *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 193–207.

[39] According to Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 233, the use of αἰώνιον contrasts with the Roman ideology of *aeterna.* In the first century CE this ideology was applied to emperors, cities (*urbs aeterna*), the Roman people (*Aeternitas Populi Romani*), and the empire itself (*pax aeterna*). Roman rulers presented themselves as guarantors of all that was good about Rome. John qualifies the gospel with the word αἰώνιον and therefore demonstrates that the gospel of Christ is, in effect, greater than the gospel of the empire.

[40] According to James Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), it is used on twenty nine occasions in Revelation, once as a "counter figure" in Rev 13:11 and the other twenty eight times as a title for Christ. Numbers carry interpretational and theological weight in Revelation. Twenty eight equals four times seven. Seven denotes completion/perfection and four denotes the entirety of the known world. Hence the number twenty eight points to complete dominance over the world but a dominance that is perfect.

[41] Brian K. Blount, *Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 107. The word σφάζω carries these meanings.

[42] Beale, *Revelation*, 352, states that the word ἐσφαγμένον (was slain) in Rev 5:6 "expresses an abiding condition as a result of the past act of being slain…"

On the basis of the Lamb's triumph, one way in which contemporary Christians can assist in the management of trauma is by fostering story-formed communities. This means we need to collectively address communal rifts between human beings and between human beings and the created order.[43] These rifts need the healing and help of listening communities that provide practical support and safe places so that persons and communities can flourish.[44]

Conclusion

Since trauma is not just something that happens to us but also in us, hearing the gospel of Jesus in the symbolic universe John has created would have helped both readers and hearers experience healing. The gospel, encoded in the symbol of lamb and reconsidered through the Old Testament stories, cannot remove the impact or effects of trauma but it can bring restoration as it is re-experienced and re-imagined as Christians follow the Lamb in the midst of Babylon.

[43] M. Jan Holton and Jill L. Snodgrass (eds.), *Reframing Trauma: A Psychospiritual Theory and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2025), 223–225.

[44] The academic literature on the power of story to facilitate individual and community change and growth is vast: See, for example, Mary E. Hess, "Finding Learning amidst the Maelstrom: Storytelling, Trauma, and Hope," *Teaching Theology and Religion* (2020):218–230.