

Dr. David Mathewson, Revelation, Session 5, 7 Churches—Ephesus, Symrna (Rev 2-3) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Revelation, Session 5, 7 Churches— Ephesus, Symrna (Rev 2-3), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. Dave Mathewson's course on Revelation **analyzes** chapters two and three, focusing on **the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor**. Mathewson **discusses** the identity of the "angels" of the churches, suggesting they are heavenly counterparts of the earthly congregations. He then **details** the structure and themes of the seven messages, noting their prophetic and imperial edict characteristics, and their **interconnectedness** with the rest of Revelation. Finally, he **examines** the specific situation of the churches of Ephesus and Smyrna, highlighting their unique challenges and the messages of both commendation and condemnation from Christ.

**2. 35 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 5 – Double click icon to
play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (New Testament → Revelation).**



**Mathewson_Revela
tion_Session05.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts on Revelation 2, by Dr. Dave Mathewson:

Briefing Document: Revelation 2 - Dr. Dave Mathewson's Lecture 5

Introduction:

This document summarizes Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture (Session 5) on Revelation 2, focusing on his analysis of the seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor. Mathewson emphasizes the historical and apocalyptic context of these letters, exploring their structure, purpose, and relevance to the broader message of Revelation. He addresses the nature of the "angels" of the churches and the significance of the number seven, and also provides an in-depth analysis of three churches – Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum.

Key Themes & Ideas:

1. The Seven Angels of the Churches:

- Mathewson discusses two main interpretations of the "angels" mentioned in the letters.
- One view suggests they are human messengers or leaders of the churches.
- The other sees them as supernatural, angelic beings.
- Mathewson favors the latter, arguing they represent **heavenly counterparts or representatives** of the earthly churches, a concept common in apocalyptic literature.
- He emphasizes that this is an apocalyptic viewpoint, revealing a heavenly dimension that influences the earthly church. "The idea is not that each church, every church has a heavenly guardian or something like that. It's just in apocalyptic fashion you find that what goes on in earth has a counterpart and is reflected in a heavenly reality."

1. Temple Imagery and the Church:

- The seven lampstands in Revelation 1 are identified as representing the seven churches, linking them to the temple imagery from the Old Testament.
- This signifies the church as God's temple, called to represent His presence and be His witnesses in the world. "So, in a sense, John is already describing the church

as God's temple... they are to represent God's presence in the world, they are to represent God in the world, to be his witness, to be his light in the world, as his temple, represented and symbolized by the seven lampstands."

1. **Prophetic Messages, Not Just Letters:**

- The messages to the churches are not just typical letters, but resemble **prophetic proclamations or imperial edicts**. They lack the typical letter format and structure.
- Their content and language align with Old Testament prophetic texts.
- They echo royal edicts, with Jesus as the King issuing commands to his subjects.
- This frames the messages as authoritative pronouncements that demand obedience.

1. **Structure of the Seven Messages:**

- Mathewson outlines a common five-part structure for each message:
- **Address:** To the angel of the church at a specific city.
- **Identification of Christ:** Using a description from Revelation 1.
- **"I know" Statement:** Describing the church's situation.
- **Commendation/Condemnation:** Evaluating the church's behavior.
- **Promise to the Overcomer:** Offering an eschatological blessing.
- **Call to Hear:** Urging the church to heed the Spirit's message.
- This common structure highlights the intended audience and purpose of these letters, which is to call each congregation to repentance and faithfulness.

1. **Integration with the Rest of Revelation:**

- The messages are closely connected to both the preceding (ch. 1) and subsequent (chs. 4-22) sections of Revelation.
- The character descriptions of Christ in Chapter 1 find particular relevance in the messages, often related to the specific problems or situations of each church.
- The promises to the overcomers are linked to the eschatological vision of Chapters 20-22 (e.g., reigning with Christ, the New Jerusalem).

1. **Significance of the Number Seven:**

- The number seven represents **completeness and perfection**, suggesting that these seven churches represent the full spectrum of experiences for churches throughout all time.
- Mathewson rejects the idea that the seven churches are sequential periods of church history, noting these situations occurred in the first century. He states, "I don't see any hint that that's what John is doing, that he is actually linking or predicting by the messages"
- He further notes that, "instead, what you find is, I think it's better to see these seven messages of the churches as representing issues and problems already taking place in these seven churches and other churches in the first century, but also problems that can be reflected in nearly any period of church history leading up until the present day."
- Instead, he views the seven as representing the full range of issues and problems that could face any church in any time.

1. **Faithful vs. Unfaithful Churches:**

- Five of the seven churches faced significant problems, often related to **compromise and complacency** with Roman culture, commerce and religion including the emperor cult.
- Only two churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, received positive evaluations, because of their suffering due to their faithful witness.
- Revelation functions more as a **warning** to compromised churches than as encouragement for persecuted ones.
- He states, "...Revelation is not, despite the popularity of this approach, Revelation is not primarily, although it does this at least for two of the churches, it's not primarily or exclusively for comfort and encouraging persecuted Christians. It's more so, it's meant as a wake-up call and a warning to churches that are willing to compromise..."

1. **Relationship Between Chapters 2-3 and 4-22:**

- Mathewson argues that chapters 4-22 **symbolically reinforce the themes of chapters 2-3.**
- The vision of the heavenly realm in chapters 4-22 provides a deeper, more symbolic perspective on the issues of the churches.

- Churches would interpret and apply chapters 4-22 based on their situation in chapters 2-3.
- He explains this saying, "what John says in a more straightforward manner in 2 and 3, he now says in a more symbolic way in chapters 4 through 22." He adds, "chapters 4 through 22 will further interpret the situation of the churches in chapters 2 and 3."

Analysis of Specific Churches:

- **Ephesus (2:1-7):**
- **Context:** A major city in Asia Minor with a large population, a temple to Artemis, and a center of the imperial cult.
- **Christ's Identification:** "Him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven gold lampstands."
- **Commendation:** Hard work, perseverance, rejection of false apostles, endurance of hardship, hatred of Nicolaitans.
- **Condemnation:** Forsaking their "first love," potentially meaning love for Christ. He notes that "...they have lost their first love and they are in danger of losing their witness"
- **Call to Action:** Repent and return to the deeds they did at first, else their lampstand will be removed.
- **Promise:** To eat from the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God (linked to the new creation).
- **Smyrna (2:8-11):**
- **Context:** Under intense persecution, likely due to their refusal to participate in the imperial cult and also under pressure from the local Jewish population.
- **Christ's Identification:** "The first and the last, who died and came to life again."
- **Commendation:** None, because they were not in need of correction.
- **Condemnation:** None, this is a church under persecution, not one that has compromised.
- **Call to Action:** Do not fear what is about to suffer, be faithful even to the point of death.

- **Promise:** The crown of life, spared from the "second death".
- Mathewson identifies three strategies the author uses to encourage this congregation. "First of all, John reminds them that they are the true people of God... Second, he reminds them the true source of their suffering is ultimately Satan himself... And then third, the author appeals to an Old Testament example..." Specifically the allusion to the ten day testing of Daniel.
- **Pergamum (2:12-17):**
 - **Context:** Culturally and religiously significant city, known for its library and temples dedicated to various pagan gods (including a living emperor).
 - **Christ's Identification:** "Him who has the sharp double-edged sword."
 - **Commendation:** Staying true to Christ's name, not renouncing their faith even after the martyrdom of Antipas.
 - **Condemnation:** Having people who hold to the teaching of Balaam, which promotes idolatry and sexual immorality, and those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
 - **Call to Action:** Repent, or Christ will fight against them with the sword of his mouth.
 - **Promise:** Some of the hidden manna, a white stone with a new name known only to the receiver.

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathewson's lecture emphasizes the importance of understanding the messages to the seven churches in their historical and apocalyptic context. These letters are not simply messages to first-century congregations, but are prophetic warnings and exhortations for the church in all ages. The letters reveal a consistent call to faithful witness, a refusal to compromise, and an anticipation of the ultimate victory of Christ and His kingdom. They call churches to assess their spiritual condition, their witness, and their love for Christ.

4. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 5, 7 Churches—Ephesus, Symrna (Rev 2-3)

Revelation 2 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Dr. Mathewson, what are the two main interpretations of the "angels" of the seven churches in Revelation 2?
2. How does Mathewson explain the apocalyptic view of earthly events in relation to heavenly counterparts?
3. What is the significance of the seven lampstands in Revelation, according to Mathewson?
4. What is the general structure that Mathewson identifies in the messages to the seven churches?
5. How does Mathewson say the messages to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 connect with the rest of the book?
6. What is the symbolic value of the number seven in the context of the seven churches, according to the lecture?
7. What does Mathewson mean when he says the messages to the seven churches represent the full range of faithfulness and unfaithfulness?
8. What is Mathewson's view on the common interpretation of the seven churches as predicting seven stages of church history?
9. What is the main issue that Mathewson says the church in Ephesus is facing, and what is their commendation?
10. What is unique about the church at Smyrna among the seven churches, according to Mathewson's lecture?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The "angels" of the seven churches are understood either as human messengers or leaders of the churches, or as supernatural beings, heavenly counterparts to the earthly churches. Mathewson believes the latter is the more likely interpretation.

2. The apocalyptic view reveals that earthly persons and institutions often have a heavenly representative behind them, influencing events on earth. It is like lifting a curtain to see the spiritual realm behind the seen world.
3. The seven lampstands, originally a feature of the temple, are used to symbolize the church as God's temple, representing God's presence and witness in the world.
4. The messages to the seven churches follow a similar structure: address to a church, identification of Christ, a description of the situation, commendation/condemnation, a promise to the overcomer, and a call to listen.
5. The messages in chapters 2 and 3 are integrated with what comes before (the description of Christ in chapter 1) and what comes after (the promises in later chapters). The issues and promises connect to and reflect the overall themes in Revelation.
6. The number seven symbolizes perfection and completeness, and in this case, represents the full range of faithfulness and unfaithfulness that can be found in churches in different times and places.
7. The messages to the churches represent a range of possible issues with complacency and compromise, as well as faithfulness, and this spectrum is representative of the history of the church from the first century onward.
8. Mathewson rejects the view that the seven churches represent seven successive periods of church history. He believes they describe situations that the churches in the first century were actually facing.
9. The church in Ephesus is commended for its hard work and resistance to false teachers, but they have lost their first love, which he interprets as love for Christ. This has affected their ability to witness faithfully.
10. The church at Smyrna is one of only two churches that does not receive any condemnation; they are primarily suffering persecution and slander from a hostile environment, and Mathewson highlights the use of imagery and language to encourage them in this.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer the following questions in essay format. There are no right or wrong answers, and the quality of your response will be evaluated on the thoroughness of the answer with reference to the source material.

1. Analyze the importance of the apocalyptic perspective in understanding the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, according to Dr. Mathewson's lecture. How does this perspective shape his interpretation of the "angels" and the relationship between earthly and heavenly realities?
2. Discuss the structure of the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, as identified by Dr. Mathewson. How does this structure enhance the understanding of the messages, and how does it serve to connect these messages to the broader narrative of the book of Revelation?
3. According to Dr. Mathewson, how do the problems and situations faced by the seven churches reflect larger issues that are relevant to the church throughout history? Using the messages to specific churches from the study guide, describe examples of how they can apply to a broad understanding of the church.
4. How does Dr. Mathewson interpret the message of the church at Ephesus? Explore the balance between commendation and condemnation in this message, and consider how it serves as a warning for the church.
5. Examine how Dr. Mathewson uses the example of the church at Smyrna to discuss the nature of persecution and faithful witness in the book of Revelation. What are the main points of encouragement and the implications for Christians facing hardship?

Glossary of Key Terms

Apocalypse: A genre of literature that reveals hidden realities, often involving symbolic visions and supernatural elements. The goal is often to reveal the true nature of a situation in light of spiritual realities.

Eschatological: Pertaining to the end times, or the final events in history, including the ultimate destiny of humankind and the world.

Imperial Cult: The Roman practice of worshiping the emperor as a divine being, which created conflict for Christians who refused to participate.

Nicolaitans: A group of people who were teaching that it was okay to participate in pagan practices of the Roman Empire.

Overcomer: In Revelation, one who maintains their faithful witness to Jesus even in the face of trials and temptations and is promised future eschatological blessings.

Prophetic Message: A message from God conveyed by a prophet to a person, group, or community; an authoritative word from God offering insight, warning, or encouragement.

Synagogue of Satan: A derogatory term used in Revelation to describe a group claiming to be Jews but are actively opposing the church, aligning themselves with evil influences.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Revelation, Session 5, 7 Churches—Ephesus, Symrna (Rev 2-3), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Revelation Chapter 2 and the Seven Churches

1. Who are the "angels" of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2?

The "angels" are not necessarily literal angelic beings in the traditional sense. Instead, they are best understood as the heavenly counterparts or representatives of the earthly churches. This is consistent with apocalyptic literature, where earthly institutions often have a heavenly representation that influences and reflects their earthly existence. It's not that each church has a personal guardian angel, but rather that there's a heavenly dimension that corresponds to each church on Earth.

2. What is the significance of the seven lampstands in Revelation 1 and their connection to the seven churches?

The seven lampstands symbolize the seven churches. This is an example of Old Testament temple imagery applied to the Church in the New Testament. The lampstands, originally part of the tabernacle/temple, now represent the churches, who are meant to represent God's presence in the world. They are to be his witnesses, his light, thus making the church, in a sense, God's temple in the world.

3. Are the messages to the seven churches primarily letters, or are they something else?

While they are often referred to as letters, these messages don't quite conform to the typical format of a first-century letter. Instead, they more closely resemble prophetic proclamations or messages, similar to those found in the Old Testament. Additionally, some scholars suggest they resemble royal or imperial edicts, issued by a king to his people, with Jesus as the King.

4. What is the common structure of the messages to the seven churches?

The messages to the seven churches generally follow a similar pattern:

- An address to the "angel" of the specific church.
- An identification of Christ, using a description from Revelation 1, relevant to the church's specific situation.
- An "I know" section, where Jesus describes his knowledge of the church's situation, deeds, and problems.
- A commendation, condemnation, or both.
- A promise to the "overcomer," using imagery often from Revelation 20-22
- A call to those who have ears to hear the message of the Spirit

5. How are the messages to the seven churches connected to the rest of the Book of Revelation?

The messages are deeply connected to both earlier and later sections of Revelation. The Christ descriptions in Chapter 1 are used to identify Christ in the letters to each of the seven churches. Additionally, the promises to those who overcome often allude to images and concepts from Revelation 20-22. The events in chapters 4-22 are presented as a symbolic, more visionary way to interpret and understand the same issues initially diagnosed in chapters 2-3.

6. Are the seven churches a prophecy about seven historical periods of church history?

While the messages do address seven literal, historical churches, they are not primarily intended to represent or predict seven successive eras of church history. The problems, issues, and types of churches represented were present in the first century. Instead, the number seven is symbolic of completeness and perfection and serves to represent a spectrum of issues and levels of faithfulness and unfaithfulness that can be found in any church, in any place, at any time.

7. What is the significance of the commendation or condemnation given to each church?

The commendations and condemnations serve to highlight the spiritual state of each church. Some churches, like Smyrna and Philadelphia, receive only commendation for their perseverance, faithfulness, and suffering. Other churches, like Ephesus, are commended for their deeds, while simultaneously rebuked for their lack of love for Christ. Some churches, like Laodicea, receive only condemnation. This indicates that the letters are not only meant to comfort the suffering, but also as a call to repentance for churches that are complacent or compromising.

8. What does it mean to "overcome" in the context of these messages, and what is the promise given to those who do?

"Overcoming" generally refers to remaining faithful, steadfast in witness, and refusing to compromise with pagan society, even in the face of persecution or death. For the church in Ephesus, this means returning to their first love and being moved by their love for Christ. The promises given to the overcomers are future eschatological blessings from Revelation 20-22 such as the tree of life, the crown of life, being spared from the second death, hidden manna, a white stone with a new name, and reigning with Christ.