

Dr. David Mathewson, Revelation, Session 8, Chapter 4 as Introduction Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Revelation, Session 8, Chapter 4 as Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture analyzes Revelation 4 and 5, exploring the identities and significance of the 24 elders and four living creatures. He proposes that these beings represent a combination of angelic figures and heavenly representatives of God's people, drawing parallels between the descriptions in Revelation and Greco-Roman imagery of emperors and their courts. The lecture argues that this imagery emphasizes God's sovereignty in contrast to Caesar's, highlighting a counter-imperial message. Furthermore, the lecture examines the symbolic meaning of the glassy sea and the significance of the scroll and the Lamb in Revelation 5, ultimately interpreting the Lamb as Jesus Christ, whose sacrificial death and resurrection qualify him to open the scroll and initiate God's plan. The lecture concludes by emphasizing the importance of worship and acknowledging God's sovereignty.

2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 8 – 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_Session08.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts on Revelation chapters 4 and 5:

Briefing Document: Revelation Chapters 4 & 5

Introduction:

This document summarizes Dr. Mathewson's lecture on Revelation chapters 4 and 5, emphasizing their crucial role as the "fulcrum" or theological center of the book. These chapters transition from the more straightforward evaluations of the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 to the apocalyptic vision proper, setting the stage for the rest of the book.

Main Themes and Key Ideas:

1. Chapters 4 & 5 as a Single Visionary Unit:

- Dr. Mathewson stresses that chapters 4 and 5 should not be viewed as separate entities, but rather as one continuous visionary piece within the narrative. He states, "Chapters 4 and 5 probably should not be treated as two separate chapters at all. Chapters 4 and 5 constitute one visionary piece within the narrative, one section."

1. Setting and Preparation for the Rest of Revelation:

- These chapters provide the setting and preparation for everything that follows in chapters 6 through 22. They establish the foundation for the blessings of salvation and the judgments that are detailed later.
- "Literarily, the first point I want to make is from a literary perspective, chapters 4 and 5 provide sort of the setting or preparation for the rest of the vision. That is in chapters 6 through 22."
- All events in chapters 6-19 flow from this visionary section, establishing that God is in control.

1. God's Sovereignty:

- A central theme is God's absolute sovereignty. The vision in heaven with God on his throne is a reminder that He is in control, even when the world seems chaotic. This rejects the idea of a dualistic conflict between good and evil.

- "Revelation 4 and 5 remind us that in the cockpit, so to speak, in the throne room, God is seated on his throne, and he is in control of all things that take place in chapters 6 through 19. Nothing happens apart from his watchful eye."
- There's no dualism, but God's sovereignty is the starting point.

1. **Heaven vs. Earth:**

- Chapters 4 & 5 depict a heavenly scene where God's sovereignty is universally acknowledged and worshipped. This contrasts sharply with earth, particularly the Roman Empire, which contests and rebels against God's rule.
- "Heaven is a place where all of heaven bows down and worships God, acknowledging his sovereignty. The problem is earth does not."
- The question is how God's heavenly sovereignty will eventually be acknowledged on earth.
- The remainder of Revelation describes how the heavenly scene transpires on earth through judgments and ultimately through a new creation in Revelation 21-22.

1. **Revelation as a Book of Worship:**

- Dr. Mathewson emphasizes that Revelation is primarily a book about worship, not just about the end times. It challenges believers to consider who is truly worthy of worship and allegiance.
- "At the essence, Revelation is a book about worship. Chapters 4 and 5 remind us again that it raises the question, who is really worthy of our worship?"
- The book emphasizes that only God and the Lamb are worthy of worship, and worshipping anything else is idolatry.
- Chapters 4 & 5 are "a direct counterclaim to the claims of the Roman Empire."

1. **Counter-Imperial Claims:**

- The portrayal of God on his throne directly challenges the authority and claims of the Roman Empire and the Emperor.
- "You cannot have two thrones. You cannot have God and the Lamb on their throne, sovereign over all things, and Caesar. It doesn't work."

1. **Structure and Content of the Vision (Chapter 4):**

- Chapter 4 starts with an open door in heaven, and John is summoned to see what must take place.
- It's primarily a static scene that is highly descriptive of the heavenly environs, establishing the setting for the action in chapter 5. There are very few indicative verbs in the Greek text, which highlights the descriptive, setting-establishing nature of the chapter.
- The focus is on the throne, which is a symbol of sovereignty and rulership. The word "throne" appears 13 times in chapter 4.
- The description of the one seated on the throne is not detailed but is instead described through precious stones, such as jasper, carnelian, and emerald, which evoke the idea of God's holy temple.
- The throne is surrounded by 24 other thrones with 24 elders, and four living creatures all of which offer ceaseless praise to the one seated on the throne.

1. **The 24 Elders & Four Living Creatures:**

- These beings have one main function: to offer worship to God. The primary emphasis is on *what they do* (worship), rather than on exactly *who they are*.
- The twenty-four elders could be: 1) symbolic heavenly beings modeled after the 24 courses of priests in the Old Testament, 2) representatives of the church who have been taken to heaven, 3) heavenly representatives of both Israel and the church (12+12=24), or 4) angelic beings belonging to a heavenly court.
- The four living creatures are similarly symbolic but they are not discussed in detail in this section.

1. **Approaches to Interpreting Revelation 4-22**

- Dr. Mathewson mentions the common approaches to interpreting the chapters from 4 to 22, but he makes it clear that the most important is not to try and put the text into one of these categories, but instead to understand the meaning of the text as the original audience would.
- **Preterist:** Claims most of or all of the text refers to the first century.
- **Historical:** Claims the text predicts periods of church history leading up to the modern day, but this view is largely not seen now.

- **Idealist:** Claims the text is a symbolic portrayal of the battle between good and evil throughout all time.
- **Futurist:** Claims that most or all of chapters 4-22 have not yet happened.
- Dr. Mathewson suggests that many interpretations will likely incorporate elements of several of these approaches.

1. **John's Vision and the Old Testament:**

- John's visionary experience is presented in the context of the Old Testament visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah.
- The opening of heaven is a common theme in apocalyptic literature, similar to what is described in Ezekiel 1:1.
- John draws on Ezekiel in the order the book of Ezekiel unfolds, and he draws on Isaiah thematically.
- John's experience is a real vision, communicated through language and images borrowed from the Old Testament.

1. **No Chronological Order**

- The phrase "after this" throughout Revelation does not indicate a chronological order of events. Instead, it shows the order that John witnessed them.
- The chapter lacks clear temporal markers and may portray an eternal reality.

Significance:

These chapters establish God's absolute sovereignty as the foundation for all that happens in Revelation. They challenge the earthly claims of power and provide a heavenly perspective on the realities faced by first-century Christians and Christians throughout history. The focus on worship emphasizes that true loyalty and devotion belong to God and the Lamb alone.

Quotes:

- "Chapters 4 and 5 probably should not be treated as two separate chapters at all."
- "Literarily, the first point I want to make is from a literary perspective, chapters 4 and 5 provide sort of the setting or preparation for the rest of the vision."
- "Revelation 4 and 5 remind us that in the cockpit, so to speak, in the throne room, God is seated on his throne, and he is in control of all things that take place in chapters 6 through 19."
- "Heaven is a place where all of heaven bows down and worships God, acknowledging his sovereignty. The problem is earth does not."
- "At the essence, Revelation is a book about worship. Chapters 4 and 5 remind us again that it raises the question, who is really worthy of our worship?"
- "You cannot have two thrones. You cannot have God and the Lamb on their throne, sovereign over all things, and Caesar. It doesn't work."
- "John is not only dependent on Ezekiel for this concept of vision of heaven, but we're going to see Isaiah in chapter six as well."

This briefing document captures the essential points from Dr. Mathewson's lecture and should be helpful in understanding the significance of Revelation chapters 4 and 5 within the broader context of the book.

4. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 8, Chapter 4 as Introduction

Revelation Chapters 4 and 5: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How do chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation function in relation to the rest of the book?
2. What is the significance of the throne in Revelation 4, and how does it challenge the Roman Empire?
3. According to the lecture, what is the primary focus of the book of Revelation, and how do chapters 4 and 5 support this?
4. Describe the literary nature of Revelation chapter 4 in terms of verbs and action. How does it differ from chapter 5?
5. What are the four main ways of approaching Revelation chapters 4-22, according to the lecture?
6. How does John's vision in Revelation 4 connect to the Old Testament, particularly the books of Ezekiel and Isaiah?
7. Why is the opening of heaven in chapter 4 significant within the apocalyptic genre?
8. What role do the 24 elders and the four living creatures play in the heavenly scene of chapter 4?
9. What is the significance of the precious stones and rainbow described around God's throne?
10. What are some of the possible interpretations of the identity of the 24 elders?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Chapters 4 and 5 act as a literary and theological foundation for the rest of Revelation. The visions of salvation and judgment described in chapters 6-22 stem from the heavenly scene presented in these earlier chapters, emphasizing God's sovereignty.

2. The throne in Revelation 4 symbolizes God's supreme authority and rulership over all creation. This directly challenges the Roman Empire's claim to absolute power and the emperor's demand for worship.
3. Revelation is primarily a book about worship, not just the end times. Chapters 4 and 5 highlight that God and the Lamb alone are worthy of worship and allegiance, emphasizing the true locus of power.
4. Chapter 4 is a highly descriptive and largely static scene with few verbs denoting action, which serves as a backdrop. Chapter 5, however, is full of verbs that describe movement and activity, thus emphasizing action.
5. The four main approaches are: Preterist, which interprets the events as solely referring to the first century; Historical, which views Revelation as a prediction of church history; Idealist, which sees it as a symbolic depiction of good vs. evil; and Futurist, which posits that most of the events are still yet to occur.
6. John's vision draws heavily on Ezekiel's description of the open heavens and throne room and Isaiah's heavenly visions. This establishes John as a prophet with the same visionary experiences as his predecessors in the Old Testament.
7. The opening of heaven is a typical element of apocalyptic literature, signifying access to divine reality and a breaking down of barriers between the earthly and heavenly realms. It allows John to see a new perspective on the world and the true nature of reality.
8. The 24 elders and four living creatures function to give continuous praise and worship to God, acknowledging His sovereignty. They lead heaven in worshipping the one who sits on the throne, the creator of all.
9. The precious stones represent the divine presence and connection to the temple and new Jerusalem. The rainbow symbolizes God's faithfulness to his covenant, as well as his commitment to creation.
10. The 24 elders have been interpreted as representing heavenly beings mirroring the Old Testament priests, the raptured church, a heavenly representation of Israel and the church, or angelic beings belonging to a heavenly court. The main function, though, is to worship God, regardless of their specific identity.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze how the imagery of Revelation 4 and 5 creates a counter-narrative to the Roman Empire's claims of power and authority, and why this is important in the first century context.
2. Discuss the significance of worship in Revelation, particularly as portrayed in chapters 4 and 5, and how this theme shapes the rest of the book.
3. Compare and contrast the different approaches to interpreting Revelation 4-22 (Preterist, Historical, Idealist, and Futurist), and discuss the strengths and limitations of each.
4. Evaluate the various interpretations of the identity of the 24 elders, and consider why the author may have left their identity ambiguous.
5. Explore the connections between the visions in Revelation 4 and 5 with Old Testament passages like Ezekiel and Isaiah, and explain how these connections reinforce John's message.

Glossary of Key Terms

Apocalypse: A literary genre characterized by visions, symbolic language, and the revelation of hidden truths, often concerning the end times and the cosmic struggle between good and evil.

Apocalyptic Literature: A body of writings characterized by symbolic language, visions, and a dualistic worldview with a focus on the end times and the triumph of good over evil.

Dualism: The belief or idea that there are two opposing forces or principles, often good and evil, in the universe, but the lecture notes that Revelation is not a dualistic text.

Elders: In Revelation 4, a group of 24 beings who sit on thrones around God's throne, worshipping and praising God. Their identity is debated, with interpretations ranging from representatives of the church or Israel to angelic beings.

Futurist Approach: An interpretative approach to Revelation that understands the majority of the events described in chapters 4-22 as yet to occur in the future.

Historical Approach: An interpretative approach to Revelation that views the visions as a forecast of church history, tracing from the first century up to the present day.

Idealist Approach: An interpretative approach to Revelation that sees the book as a symbolic portrayal of the spiritual battle between good and evil, not tied to specific historical events.

Lamb: A title for Jesus in Revelation, depicted as both sacrificial victim and conquering king; this is further explained in chapter 5.

Merkava Apocalypse: A type of Jewish apocalyptic literature featuring an ascent through various heavens to the throne room of God.

Preterist Approach: An interpretative approach to Revelation that interprets the majority of the events as referring to events that took place in the first century.

Sovereignty: The supreme power or authority, in Revelation, refers to God's absolute control over all creation and the universe.

Throne: Symbolizes power, authority, and rulership. In Revelation, the throne is central to both God and the Lamb, representing their ultimate sovereignty.

Vision Proper: In the context of Revelation, the visionary section of the book starting in chapter 4 where John sees heavenly realities.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Revelation, Session 8, Chapter 4 as Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Understanding Revelation Chapters 4 and 5

1. **What is the significance of Revelation chapters 4 and 5 within the larger book?**
 These chapters are crucial as they serve as the setting and foundation for the rest of the book (chapters 6-22). They depict the heavenly throne room, with God sovereignly ruling, and establish that all subsequent judgments and salvation described in Revelation flow from this divine authority. These chapters remind us that God is in control despite any chaos on Earth. They are also considered by some to be the "fulcrum" or theological center of the book, focusing on worship.
2. **How do chapters 4 and 5 function in relation to the conflict between heaven and earth?**
 Chapters 4 and 5 portray a scene in heaven where God's sovereignty is universally acknowledged and worshiped. This contrasts with Earth, particularly the Roman Empire at the time of writing, which refused to acknowledge God's authority and claimed its own sovereignty. The rest of Revelation (chapters 6-22) describes how God's sovereignty, acknowledged in heaven, will eventually be recognized on Earth, culminating in a new creation where all will worship God.
3. **How do chapters 4 and 5 relate to the Lord's Prayer?**
 These chapters can be seen as an expansion of the Lord's Prayer, specifically the lines "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Heaven demonstrates the hallowing of God's name, the realization of His kingdom and will, and the rest of Revelation shows how these will be established on Earth.
4. **What is the main purpose of the book of Revelation, according to the lecture, and how do chapters 4 and 5 contribute to this?**
 The lecture emphasizes that Revelation is primarily a book about worship, rather than just a prediction of end times. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the heavenly worship of God and the Lamb, establishing that they alone are worthy of worship and allegiance, challenging the worship of earthly powers such as the Roman Emperor. This worship focus shapes the entire book.

5. **What does the throne represent in Revelation 4 and 5 and what conflict does it introduce?**
6. The throne is a central symbol of God's sovereignty and rulership. Its prominence directly challenges the claims of the Roman Empire and the Emperor's authority, creating an immediate counter-imperial claim. The presence of God's throne contrasts with the earthly thrones, raising the question of who truly holds ultimate power and is worthy of allegiance and worship.
7. **What is the significance of the 24 elders and the four living creatures in chapter 4?** The 24 elders and the four living creatures are part of the heavenly court and their primary function is to offer ceaseless praise and worship to God, acknowledging his sovereignty. While their exact identity is debated, these symbolic groups are not meant to be literal figures, but rather convey the entire creation and people of God acknowledging and worshipping the Creator. The elders may symbolize a heavenly court, perhaps representing Old Testament priests, the Church, or a combination of Israel and the church. The living creatures appear to have roots in Old Testament imagery, particularly Ezekiel and Isaiah, adding to the sense of God's glorious presence.
8. **What is the nature of John's vision described in Revelation 4, and what is its literary context?** John's vision begins with an open door in heaven and a voice inviting him to ascend, mirroring similar apocalyptic visions in Jewish literature, particularly from the book of Ezekiel. This ascent is not a literal rapture, but a visionary experience where the veil is lifted, allowing John to perceive the true heavenly reality behind earthly situations. This context establishes John's vision in the tradition of his Old Testament predecessors. John experiences this vision and then recounts what he saw through the language of others that had similar visions.
9. **How should we interpret the temporal aspects of Revelation 4 and 5?** The lecture argues that we should not be overly concerned with the specific timing of events in chapters 4 and 5. Instead of being a chronological prediction, these chapters depict a continuous reality: God's eternal sovereignty and the heavenly worship that stems from it. The lack of specific temporal markers in chapter 4 suggests we should view this as a timeless reality rather than a particular moment in history. The main focus should be on the thematic content and its function in challenging the first century readers as to who was worthy of their allegiance.