

Dr. David Mathewson, Revelation, Session 9, Revelation 4 Continued Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Revelation, Session 4, Revelation 4 Continued, 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. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 9 – 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_Revelation_Session09.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

Overall Theme: This lecture analyzes the symbolic throne room vision in Revelation 4 and 5, highlighting its counter-imperial message and the central role of God's sovereignty and Christ's sacrifice. It emphasizes the worship due to God alone and the ultimate victory achieved through the Lamb's death.

Key Ideas and Facts:

1. The 24 Elders (Revelation 4):

- **Multiple Interpretations:** Mathewson explores various interpretations of the 24 elders, including angelic beings modeled on the 24 courses of priests, representatives of the church, heavenly representatives of Israel within the church, or members of a heavenly court. He leans toward a combination of angelic beings serving as representatives of God's people and belonging to the heavenly court.
- *"Out of these, I find it difficult to pin it down to one precisely. I wonder if probably a combination of number one and number three, perhaps even four..."*
- **Greco-Roman Context:** Mathewson suggests that the image of the 24 elders may also have a Greco-Roman background, drawing parallels with the emperor's entourage of lictors and priests, some of whom wore golden crowns. This suggests John uses familiar imagery to draw a stark contrast.
- *"So, is it possible that John has constructed an image that relates both to the Old Testament background of maybe 24 courses of priests or the heavenly council and angelic beings as the heavenly representatives of God's people? And that, but at the same time, he has used image that reflects what was going on in the Greco-Roman background."*

2. Counter-Imperial Message (Revelation 4):

- **God vs. Caesar:** The scene in chapter 4 is presented as a deliberate counter to the Roman imperial court. God is depicted as the true sovereign, while Caesar and his rule are a "poor parody" of God's reign.

- *"God's rule is contested by Caesar, but Caesar is a poor parody of, or Caesar is a poor imitation of God's rule..."*
- **Parody:** The throne room scene, including the entourage and acclamation of praise, may be a parody of Roman court scenes. Instead of Caesar on his throne, God is on his throne, receiving the true praise and worship.
- *"And now, in direct parody to that, God is depicted as on his throne, surrounded by his followers or his friends, his court, and they are now shouting words of praise and acclamation to God."*
- **John's Strategy:** John employs both Old Testament (Ezekiel, Isaiah) and Greco-Roman imagery to highlight the conflict between God and Caesar and to establish who truly rules the universe.

3. The Glassy Sea (Revelation 4):

- **Temple Imagery:** It likely represents the basin or laver in Solomon's Temple, further emphasizing the temple context.
- **Ezekiel's Vision:** The expanse, sparkling like ice, from Ezekiel's vision (1:22) may also provide the backdrop.
- *"Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice and awesome. So, this vision of an expanse, sparkling, may resemble or may be the impetus for John's glassy sea that he now sees."*
- **Red Sea Symbolism:** The glassy sea may also anticipate the Red Sea from the Exodus, connecting to themes of deliverance and victory.
- **Calmed Chaos:** The sea, often associated with evil and chaos in Revelation, is already calmed and subdued in God's presence, signaling that God has already defeated evil and bringing order.
- *"So, what you find happening in chapter 4 already is the sea of chaos and evil has already been calmed and defeated. So, what have God's people to fear?"*

4. Thunder and Lightning (Revelation 4):

- **Theophany:** These elements, similar to the Exodus event at Mount Sinai, signify a theophany, underscoring God's presence and readiness to judge.

5. The Four Living Creatures (Revelation 4):

- **Apocalyptic Symbolism:** These creatures, with animal and human features, are a prime example of apocalyptic imagery.
- **Ezekiel and Isaiah:** John draws heavily from Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6 for his description.
- **Angelic Beings:** Like the 24 elders, they are most likely angelic beings, focused on worshipping and praising God.
- **Representative of Creation:** The number four is symbolic of the entire earth, suggesting these beings represent all of created order.
- **Universal Praise:** Their ceaseless praise anticipates the future universal praise of God on earth.
- *"So, these four, such as the four corners of the earth, suggesting that these four living creatures are probably heavenly angelic beings that represent all of created order."*

6. Worship of God (Revelation 4):

- **God's Worthiness:** Worship is not about God needing our praise, but about acknowledging His worthiness as sovereign creator.
- **Transcendental Reality:** Chapters 4 & 5 point to a reality that transcends our earthly experience, one where God's sovereignty is absolute.
- **Anticipation:** The worship in heaven anticipates the future universal worship of God on earth.

7. Casting Crowns:

- **Angelic Act:** The text states it is the 24 elders (likely angelic beings), not the saints, who cast their crowns before the throne. This challenges a common popular interpretation.

8. God's Creative Power:

- **Creator God:** The worship of God as creator in chapter 4 anticipates His new creative acts in Revelation 21 and 22.

9. The Scroll (Revelation 5):

- **Symbol of God's Plan:** The scroll is not a literal document but a symbol of God's plan for establishing His kingdom on earth, which includes both salvation and judgment.
- *"probably this scroll simply contains God's plan for establishing his kingdom on earth. God's plan for bringing both salvation and judgment to the earth."*
- **Ezekiel and Daniel:** John draws heavily from Ezekiel 2 and Daniel 12 for the image of the scroll.
- **Sealed Plan:** The seven seals indicate the plan is closed and requires someone worthy to open it and enact its contents.

10. The Question of Worthiness (Revelation 5):

- **Universal Search:** John's exhaustive search for someone worthy highlights the magnitude of the task.
- **Despair:** John's weeping underscores the fact that if no one is found worthy, there is no salvation, justice, or hope for God's people.

11. The Lion of Judah and the Lamb (Revelation 5):

- **Paradox:** John first hears of the Lion of Judah, a symbol of power, but then sees the Lamb who has been slain. This highlights the paradoxical nature of God's victory.
- *"What follows is one of the greatest paradoxes in the book of Revelation, if not in the entire New Testament and maybe in the entire Bible."*
- **Overcoming through Suffering:** The Lamb's sacrifice and death are the means of his triumph, and this is how the church is also meant to overcome.
- **Juxtaposition:** The text demonstrates a pattern in Revelation of juxtaposing what John hears with what he sees, with what he sees often interpreting what he has heard from a different angle.
- **Central Focus:** The Lamb's taking of the scroll is the climax of the scene.
- **The Lamb's Divine Nature:** The Lamb's ability to take the scroll from God's hand is a statement that he is more than an exalted creature, but stands on the God side of the divine/creation divide.

- *"The point, I think, is that this is no ordinary figure. This is someone who is greater than anyone else in the universe. Even the highest and exalted and most powerful angelic being, this is none other than God himself."*

12. Heaven's Response (Revelation 5): * The lecture concludes by noting that after the Lamb takes the scroll, heaven responds in worship. This will be discussed in further lectures.

Implications:

- **God's Ultimate Sovereignty:** The lecture stresses that God, not any earthly power, is ultimately in control.
- **Christ's Sacrifice:** The victory is won through sacrificial love, not military might.
- **Worship as a Response:** Worship is an acknowledgement of God's worthiness and a participation in heavenly reality.
- **Hope for Believers:** Despite current suffering, believers have hope in God's plan to bring about a new creation.

This document provides a detailed overview of the major themes and ideas discussed in the lecture excerpts. The detailed analysis of the symbols, Old Testament references, and Roman imperial context gives a deeper understanding of the message in Revelation 4 and 5.

4. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 9, Revelation 4 Continued

Revelation 4 & 5 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What are the four main interpretations of the 24 elders, and which one does Dr. Mathewson lean towards?
2. How might the imagery of the 24 elders be related to the Roman Emperor Domitian?
3. In Revelation 4, what does the "sea of glass" possibly represent?
4. What is the significance of the thunder and lightning coming from God's throne in chapter 4?
5. What are the four living creatures, and what is their primary function?
6. According to the text, why does the church worship God?
7. What is the significance of the scroll in Revelation 5, and what does it contain?
8. What problem is presented by the angel in chapter 5?
9. Why does John weep in Revelation 5, and what does that reveal about the situation?
10. What is the paradox of the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb, and what does it signify?

Quiz - Answer Key

1. The four main interpretations are angelic beings modeled on 24 courses of priests, the church raptured away, heavenly representatives of Israel in the church, and members of the heavenly court. Dr. Mathewson finds a combination of the first and third options to be most likely, perhaps with the fourth option also included.
2. The imagery may be related to the lictors and priests that accompanied Domitian, who also wore golden crowns, suggesting John is using familiar images to contrast God's power with the emperor's.

3. The sea of glass may represent the basin or laver in Solomon's temple and the sparkling expanse in Ezekiel's throne vision. It may also anticipate the Red Sea. Additionally, it represents the calming of chaos and evil before God's presence.
4. The thunder and lightning allude to the Exodus and Mount Sinai and indicate a theophany, signifying God's readiness to judge the creation and establish his kingdom.
5. The four living creatures have animal and human features (lion, ox, human, eagle) with six wings and eyes all over them. Their primary function is to worship God ceaselessly, representing the entirety of created order.
6. The church worships God because He is worthy of worship as the sovereign creator and ruler of the universe, and not because God needs their worship.
7. The scroll is a symbol of God's plan for establishing His kingdom on earth, including judgment and salvation. It contains the divine blueprint for how God's will will be accomplished.
8. The angel's question is: "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" This raises the issue that only a truly worthy individual can enact God's plans.
9. John weeps because he searches the universe over and finds no one worthy to open the scroll. This symbolizes the despair that if no one can open it, then God's plan cannot be fulfilled and there is no justice, salvation, or hope for the faithful.
10. The paradox lies in the fact that the Lion is the powerful Messiah, but he appears as a Lamb that looks slain, which highlights Jesus' victory through suffering and death, not through military might.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the ways in which John uses Old Testament imagery and Greco-Roman imagery to construct his vision of the heavenly throne room in Revelation 4 and 5. Consider the symbolism and significance of these references.
2. Discuss the significance of the "sea of glass" in Revelation 4, drawing on the multiple interpretations offered by Dr. Mathewson and others. How does the symbolic function of the sea shift in other parts of the book?
3. Explain the role of the four living creatures in Revelation 4, and consider the reasons why they are described as representing the entirety of the created order.
4. How does the paradox of the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb in Revelation 5 challenge the prevailing notions of power and conquest in the Roman world? How does this image function to communicate the nature of Jesus' victory?
5. How do Revelation 4 and 5 function to establish the theme of God's sovereignty over the universe and the ways in which that heavenly reality has implications for earthly reality, including in a place that contests it?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Theophany:** A visible manifestation of God to humankind. Often accompanied by natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning.
- **Lictors:** Bodyguards of Roman magistrates, including the emperor. They carried fasces, representing the authority of the magistrate.
- **Epistograph:** A document written on both sides. The scroll in Revelation 5 is described this way.
- **Apocalyptic Literature:** A genre of prophetic writing that employs symbolic visions and imagery to describe end times events, often containing hidden or esoteric meanings.
- **Concentric Circles:** An image used in Revelation 4 to describe how different beings are situated around God's throne, beginning with the closest to God and moving outward.
- **Perfect Tense:** A grammatical tense in the Greek language used to highlight an action, making it stand out as especially significant within a text.
- **Counter-Imperial Rhetoric:** Language and imagery used in opposition to or critique of imperial power and authority, such as that of the Roman Empire.
- **Idolatry:** The act of giving worship or allegiance to something other than God.
- **Sovereignty:** Supreme power or authority, often used in reference to God's ultimate rule over the universe.
- **Paradox:** A statement that appears self-contradictory but contains a deeper truth. The Lion and the Lamb imagery is an example of this.
- **New Exodus:** A theological concept that relates the freeing of God's people in the Old Testament to God's saving activity in Christ in the New Testament. It has implications for understanding the sea imagery.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Revelation, Session 9, Revelation 4 Continued, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Revelation Chapters 4 and 5

1. Who are the 24 elders described in Revelation 4, and what is their significance?

The 24 elders are a complex image. They are likely angelic beings who function as the heavenly representatives of God's people on earth. This imagery may draw from both Old Testament concepts, such as the 24 courses of priests in 1 Chronicles, and Greco-Roman imperial court scenes, where emperors were often surrounded by attendants. They are part of God's heavenly court and their primary role is to worship and acknowledge God's sovereignty, as representatives of God's people. They also serve as a contrast to earthly rulers who seek to emulate divine authority.

2. How does the depiction of God's throne room in Revelation 4 contrast with the Roman imperial court?

Revelation 4 presents God's throne as a counter-image to the Roman imperial court. While emperors like Domitian were surrounded by lictors and priests wearing golden crowns, God is surrounded by angelic beings, the 24 elders, and four living creatures who worship and acknowledge his sovereignty. The Roman court is depicted as a pale imitation or a parody of God's true and ultimate rule, highlighting the conflict between God and earthly authorities, and God's true sovereignty. The praise given to God is meant to contrast the praise and acclamation offered to the Roman emperor.

3. What is the significance of the "sea of glass" in front of God's throne in Revelation 4?

The sea of glass likely has multiple symbolic meanings. It is reminiscent of the basin in Solomon's temple, which furthers the temple imagery. It also echoes the sparkling expanse described in Ezekiel's throne vision, and is meant to represent the Red Sea. However, within Revelation, the sea is often depicted as a source of evil and chaos. Its presence in front of God's throne, calm and subdued, symbolizes that God has already conquered evil, thus offering reassurance to God's people and an anticipation of a new creation where evil is no more.

4. **What is the role and symbolic importance of the four living creatures in Revelation 4?** The four living creatures, each with unique animalistic and human features, are inspired by Ezekiel's and Isaiah's prophetic visions. They represent all of creation, particularly the animate order, offering ceaseless praise and worship to God. Their diversity (lion, ox, man, eagle) highlights the totality of life, with their continuous worship anticipated the universal worship that is yet to transpire. Like the 24 elders, they are angelic beings focused on acknowledging God's sovereignty.
5. **What is the central problem or question raised at the beginning of Revelation 5?** The central question is, "Who is worthy to open the scroll?" This scroll, held by God, symbolizes his plan for establishing his kingdom, bringing about salvation and judgment. The question is not just about someone who can read the scroll but someone with the authority to enact its contents and bring about God's will on earth. No one is found worthy in all of creation, leading John to weep in despair, symbolizing a lack of hope for God's people and for salvation, justice and vindication for their suffering.
6. **How does the Lamb overcome to become worthy to open the scroll in Revelation 5?** The Lamb, representing Jesus, overcomes through his suffering, death, and resurrection. This stands in stark contrast to the Roman concept of conquest through military might. While John is told to look for a Lion from the tribe of Judah, symbolic of power, instead he sees a Lamb who looks as if he has been slain, who is actually alive. Jesus's sacrifice and death is how he is vindicated and becomes worthy to open the scroll. This serves as a model for his followers to overcome through their faithful witness and sacrifice. The Lamb does not simply read the scroll, but his taking it sets God's plan into motion.
7. **Why does John weep when no one is found worthy to open the scroll, and what does this reveal?** John's weeping expresses the deep despair of God's people. If no one is worthy to open the scroll, then God's plan cannot be enacted. There is no salvation, justice, or vindication for the suffering church, and no fulfillment of God's will on earth. John's emotional response emphasizes the gravity of the situation and the significance of finding one who is worthy to enact God's purposes.

8. **How do chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation anticipate the new creation in chapters 21 and 22?** Chapters 4 and 5 establish God's sovereignty in heaven, a reality that is not fully realized on earth. These chapters provide a vision of heavenly worship, where God is acknowledged as the creator. This sets the stage for the new creation, and the complete subduing of evil in chapters 21 and 22. In these later chapters, what is pictured in the heavens is fulfilled on earth with God's will being done and the new Jerusalem. The constant worship in chapter 4 and 5 anticipates the universal worship of the new creation, emphasizing the power of the creator to bring about new things and a new reality.