

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 4, Revelation 1

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson and his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 4 on Revelation chapter one.

Now that we've provided the historical framework and literary framework for reading and interpreting Revelation, what I want to do now is begin to work through the book itself, starting with the first chapter.

The way we're going to look at it, and the method we'll sort of follow, is twofold. Number one, I want to begin each section by sort of giving you a sense of the overall function in its context, the overall meaning of the vision, or the section we're dealing with. And then second is, in light of that, examine some of, though not all of, the details, some of the detailed language, the vision, the symbols, looking at their background and their meaning and how they function as well.

Again, I don't want to look at every single detail. I don't want to simply repeat what you can find in other commentaries, but I do want to spend time exploring and examining some of the more significant details in each of the sections. So we'll start with chapter one.

Chapter one actually can be divided into two separate sections, chapter one and the first eight verses, which we've already seen. Starting with verse four through verse eight, this is sort of the epistolary section, the introduction to the book as a letter or as an epistle, though it's expanded and contains a lot more than you're used to seeing in one of Paul's letters, for example, in his introductions. And then chapter one, nine through 20, which sort of functions as the inaugural vision of Jesus Christ.

So, chapter one, verses one through eight then sort of function as an introduction to sort of the nature and character of the book. It almost tells us how it's meant to be read and how we are to approach it. It also seems to introduce us to some of the major ideas and some of the major themes that will get picked up and developed in the rest of the book.

And then as we said, chapter one, nine through 20, the rest of chapter one is an inaugural vision of Christ who comes to now commission John to bring a message to the seven churches that will get further developed in chapters two and three. The other thing is verses nine through 20 in the second section also function to provide legitimacy or authenticity to the revelation that John and the messages that he is going to bring to the churches in chapters two and three. I'm not sure if it's quite a prophetic calling.

I don't see in chapter one a lot of evidence that it's exactly like the prophetic call narratives that you find in some of the prophetic literature in the Old Testament, but it's clearly a commissioning. John is now being commissioned to address the seven churches and also it functions to provide authentication and legitimization for the rest of the book of Revelation as well in chapters four through 20. And it does so by grounding John's vision in no one less than the exalted resurrected Christ who now reveals himself to John and commissions him to bring the authoritative messages to the seven churches in chapters two and three.

In chapter one, we actually find, and we won't look at all of these, but we'll try to highlight the most important ones. In chapter one, we find John weaving together language and images, especially from the Old Testament, especially the Old Testament prophets such as Daniel. Daniel chapter seven, where Daniel has a vision of the son of man, plays a very crucial role in John's vision of Jesus Christ in this inaugural vision in chapter one.

And again, we'll look at some of these. So, let's look at those two sections in a little bit more detail. Chapter one, verses one through eight, sort of introduces the character of the book, what kind of book it is, and how it is to be read, introduces some of the major themes that will get developed in the rest of the book and kind of provides the framework for reading the rest of the book of Revelation.

As we've already said, Revelation begins by identifying itself or John begins work by identifying it as a revelation or an apocalypse of Jesus Christ. We've already said, and so I don't want to spend a lot more time on it. We've already said that at this point, the title apocalypse or the word apocalypse, or that most of your English translations will translate it as Revelation, but the title or the word apocalypse was not yet a title of a type of literature or literary genre.

However, by labeling his work as a revelation, John does expect us to read this book within the context of other revelatory texts, other texts that provide a divine revelation, and his will, especially in the form of a vision. So, we should expect to find in the book of Revelation, an unveiling, a disclosing, an uncovering of God's will and God's intention and God's word for his people, revealing and unveiling of the true nature of the situation in which the readers find themselves. It's interesting that we find this term, the revelation or sort of a title to this book, the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Most English translations translated the revelation of Jesus Christ, which is rather ambiguous. Most commentaries debate over what, is this a revelation about Christ? That is, is Jesus Christ the content of what is revealed, or is Jesus Christ the one who is doing the revealing? It could go either way. And some who don't want to decide to opt for both and say, well, it's both a revelation about Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the content of the revelation, but he's also the one who is the subject of the revelation. He's the doing the revealing. However, in my opinion, as you read the text carefully, again, look at verses one and two, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show his servants, what must soon take place.

He made it known by sending his angel to his servant, John. Notice this sort of chain of revelation or chain of communication begins with God, then Jesus Christ, then to the angel, to the servants, to John. In light of that, I think we should take this as Jesus Christ is the one who is doing the revealing.

He's the subject, not the content. Although I wouldn't want to say that's not true, especially in chapter one, Jesus indeed is what is revealed. But when you read the whole book of Revelation, it reveals more than just the person of Christ.

There are images of judgment. There are images of salvation. Revelation reveals the true nature of the Roman empire, et cetera, et cetera.

So, the focus is not so much on Jesus as the content of the revelation, what is revealed, although that's true. But in one verse, this revelation of Jesus Christ, I think should be understood as the revelation of Jesus Christ. That is the revelation that Jesus Christ himself gives.

Jesus is the agent of this revelation that is now given to John. The second feature of this introduction, chapter one, verses one through eight, is notice the phrase, the testimony or the witness of Jesus Christ. So, John says, this is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

He made it known by sending to his angel, his servant, John, who testified to everything he saw. That is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Here, I think the emphasis is on Jesus himself as the one who testifies to the content of the book.

Jesus, again, provides authenticity to and authority to the book, Jesus Christ is the one who witnesses to the content and the information that is now revealed to John. In fact, this phrase introduces a very important concept for the rest of the book of Revelation. That is the term witness or testimony.

And it's important to understand at this point, first of all, it's tempting to read the term witness or testimony, which is what you find, I think, in most English translations. I haven't checked other translations in some other languages, but this Greek word, which is translated as witness or testimony is the word from which we get our English word martyr. And so, it's tempting to read this as when we find the word testimony or witness throughout the book of Revelation in terms of a martyr.

That is, most times we use the word martyr, at least in Christian circles, in terms of someone who has died for their faith, someone who has been put to death for their faith in Jesus Christ. At this point in church history, and at this point during the writing of the New Testament, the word does not quite mean that yet. The word simply means to witness or testify to something.

But Revelation does make it clear already that witnessing and testifying to something often results in the death of the one witnessing or the suffering of the one witnessing. Later on, it did come to mean one who dies because of or in the face of that witness. But at this point, the word witness or testimony does not quite mean what we mean by martyr.

Although again, I do want to make clear John is convinced that the witness or testimony that Jesus gives, that John gives to what he saw and which Christians are supposed to give throughout Revelation, that witness or testifying to the person of Jesus Christ does often and can be expected often to result in the suffering and death of the one who witnesses. We saw that John is aware of one person who has already died, his witness, the faithful witness Antipas, who clearly has died for his testimony or his witness. So, the book of Revelation is a testimony or witness of Jesus.

Jesus is testifying and witnessing what now John writes. John himself, and especially the other Christians, are also called upon to be a witness or to testify to the truth and the reality of Jesus Christ throughout the book, which often results in their death. Now, the third thing to say about this introductory section in chapter one, verses one through eight, as we've already seen, is where John also clearly identifies his work as a prophecy.

And in verse three, this is where we find John saying, blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written. It's interesting John distinguishes between the one who reads it and the one who hears it. This probably simply reflects the way Revelation would have been communicated to the churches.

Someone would have read it and the rest would have heard it read, most likely in one setting perhaps. But what is interesting here is the blessing is pronounced on the one who hears it and who keeps or takes to heart what is read and what they hear. That is, Revelation as a prophecy is clearly meant to be taken seriously and therefore to obey, to be obeyed.

So again, Revelation is not primarily a book about predicting the future, but already John is telling us there's a blessing for the one who hears it and who actually responds in obedience to what John is going to say. And again, in this situation, the first-century readers who are tempted to compromise with the pagan Roman rule

and perhaps to compromise their faithfulness and exclusive allegiance to Christ for allegiance to the emperor, to maybe for some of them to attempt to avoid persecution by thinking they can combine emperor worship with the worship of Jesus Christ. Revelation is a book meant to be kept and observed and obeyed, not just for information that it tells us about the future.

Fourth, Revelation also, as we've already seen, is clearly a letter. In chapter one, verses four through eight, John addresses his work in epistolary format, using the format of a typical first-century letter. Although he's unique in how he expands the introduction, John uses this to address seven specific churches.

So, in other words, John is meant, Revelation is meant to communicate to and address the specific situations of seven historical churches in Asia Minor or Western Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey, seven churches that John names and can be identified as churches existing in the center of imperial Roman rule. What is unique about this introduction though is interestingly, John also tells us that he wants us to read the rest of the book in Trinitarian fashion. Notice the references to, first of all, in this greeting, this epistolary greeting, he begins grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come.

We'll talk about that in a little bit. Clear reference to the sovereign God, God the Father who is sovereign over all things. And then, and from the seven spirits.

Probably the number seven here should be taken not literally as if there are seven separate spirits, but seven as a symbol of fullness and perfection and completion. This is seen as the fullness of God's spirit. So, I don't think it's referring to seven separate spirits, but a reference to the Holy Spirit himself who is before the throne.

And then verse five, and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness. There's that term witness again, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. So, at the very beginning, John tells us that he wants us to read the book in Trinitarian fashion, that God, the Father, God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all will be involved in this book and in the process of revelation and in the outworking of God's purposes and intention for humanity and for the world.

A second feature of this letter introduction in verses four through eight is the mention of the in verse four. Notice God is described as the one who was, let's see, the one who was and is and is to come and from the seven spirits before his throne. This term throne already introduces an important theme or concept that gets developed, not only throughout the rest of Revelation, but is crucial for understanding it.

That is, Revelation will deal with the issue and the question of who is truly in control? Who is truly sovereign over the universe? Who is truly in control of the destiny of

humanity? Who is truly the sovereign ruler over all the affairs of the world and of the universe? And the mention of the word throne brings revelation already in direct conflict with the claims of the Roman Empire. It's Caesar who is seated on the throne. And according to the Roman way of viewing things, Caesar was on his throne.

Caesar was the sovereign ruler of the world. Caesar was the one in charge of the destiny of humanity. Caesar was the one who claimed sovereignty and claimed to be divine.

And now by using the word throne, I'm convinced, John intended this probably, but any first-century reader reading this would have understood that this was a direct counterclaim to Caesar. No one else's throne is important but Jesus Christ. I'm also convinced too, and we'll maybe mention this elsewhere.

There's a common understanding that one of the reasons why John wrote the way he did in symbols and images was to hide the information should it get into the wrong hands. If Caesar had seen this or if someone, one of the local authorities in the towns had read, all this, they would have been confused by the symbolism and images. So, it was sort of meant to hide its message from the unbelieving world should they have received it.

However, I'm convinced that's not the case. I mean, I don't think John is trying to write for them, but neither is he trying to hide anything. I cannot imagine that anybody outside of the church in one of the seven cities, not to mention Rome they would have picked this up and read that there is a throne, the immediate question that would have been raised in their minds was, there's another throne but Caesar's? So, I understand this as, in a sense, already John is being very counter-imperial.

He's laying claim to sovereignty and a throne and rulership that is not of this world, that does not belong to Caesar but belongs solely to God and to the Holy Spirit and to the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Also, notice the fact that Jesus himself is called the ruler of the kings of the earth. Again, this would be something that most people would associate with Caesar.

And now John is claiming this for Jesus Christ. Do you see already what John's doing? He's introducing the way he wants this book to be read. It's addressing the specific situation of the readers, but already John is being sort of counter-imperial.

He's already introducing the only one who has a right to the throne, the only one who has a right to the claim of authority, the only one who has the right to the true worship of the people of God, and that is only God and the Lamb, Jesus Christ. In verses 5-8 then, verses 5-8 we find more specifically what Christ and God and the Holy Spirit have done for the people. So, the first verse, verses 4 and also 5 have

introduced exactly who it is that is providing the revelation for John, who it is who is truly sovereign.

Now verses 5-8 go on and describe exactly what the sovereign God has done for his people, exactly what the Holy Spirit has, and exactly what Jesus Christ has done for the seven churches. Notice about halfway through verse 5, to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priest to serve as God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

So, first of all, in these two verses, verses 5 and 6, what Jesus has done is described in language that is full of Exodus imagery. Notice this language of redeeming us by his blood, which recalls what God did for his people in redeeming them and freeing them from bondage. Now it is as if John wants to say a new Exodus has now been achieved by God through the person of Jesus Christ who has now redeemed a people for himself. We talked about five principles for interpreting revelation.

Perhaps we could add another one. I didn't want to add one because I didn't want to have six. You have to have seven.

I couldn't come up with another one. Anyway, another principle that could be added that kind of falls under the principle of symbolism, but would be to read the New Testament in connection with and in light, in constant interaction with the Old Testament. In my opinion, we've hinted at this already, but I don't think you can fully understand revelation apart from understanding its constant relationship to and constant interaction with Old Testament texts.

And here's one of them. This is full of Old Testament Exodus language. But notice too, it's almost as if John is assuming a narrative.

Not only was Israel redeemed and freed from Egypt, but God redeemed and freed them according to the book of Exodus. So, in chapter 19 and verse 6 of Exodus, so that they would be a kingdom of priests for God, which is exactly what you find here. John reiterates the language of the Exodus and says, God has freed us in a new Exodus.

God has freed and redeemed his people in a new Exodus out of Rome. And now they are to function like the ancient Israelites were there to function as a kingdom and a priest to serve God and father to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

In other words, God's intention for Israel has now been fulfilled in a new community. That is the church, which is made up of Jews and Gentiles. Go back and read Ephesians 2 sometimes, especially verses 11 through 22, to see at least Paul's understanding of the basis for this.

So now, God's intention for Israel to redeem them and to create a kingdom of priests has now been achieved by God redeeming people from every tribe and tongue and nation out from the oppression of the Roman empire. Now to be a kingdom and priest for God, a community that is now centered around the person of Jesus Christ. So, it's interesting already John conceives in the first chapter, John conceives of a community that will already represent the person of Jesus Christ that will represent God and his kingdom as a kingdom of priests.

John already recognizes that Christ is creating a community of people that will represent his rule over all the earth. Incidentally, what Adam and Eve were supposed to do in the garden and what Israel was to do and what God's Messiah was to do, what God's King was to do in the Old Testament. Now through Jesus Christ, humanity finally achieves a new community that Christ creates that will represent his rule and his kingdom as sort of an anticipation and an outpost of the new creation in Revelation 21 and 22.

Already God is creating that community to be his faithful witness, to function as his kingdom and priest. The rest of Revelation will be how this works out and how the church is to do this. They will be his kingdom and priest though.

It's interesting that Revelation is going to make clear, and you already find this in chapter 1, but they will do this through suffering and, almost ironically, they will be a kingdom and priest. They will represent God's rule, but they will do so through suffering and conflict and for some of them ultimately their death. But these words already provide comfort in the midst of all this.

Christ is already creating a people. Christ already has a kingdom of priests who will function as God's representatives of his rule and of his presence in the world. And again, Revelation 21 and 22 show us the climax of that.

But already God's intention is for humanity to form a community of kingdom and priests who will be his faithful witnesses even in the midst of suffering and conflict. God has already established that through creating a people. Now, already too, I cannot help but think that John may have intended this and his readers would not have seen this as, again, anti-Roman rhetoric.

That is, God's people already represent a kingdom and a priesthood. That is, there is already a kingdom that challenges the kingdom and rule of Rome, consisting of God's people themselves. Now, to move this story, so first God has redeemed and released a people through the blood of Jesus Christ.

He's done that in order to create a community of kingdom and priests and fulfillment of the Old Testament. God's intention in the Exodus is now achieved through his new

people, made of Jews and Gentiles of the church, who are to be his kingdom and priest. Chapter 1 and verse 7 then anticipate the future.

Using language from Daniel chapter 7 and Zechariah chapter 12, John says, look, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him, those who have pierced him, and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him, so shall it be. Amen. So, God's kings and priests live in anticipation and live out their lives.

They maintain their faithful witness in anticipation of the day when Christ will come to consummate history, when he will bring judgment and salvation. So, the point in verse 7 is Christ's coming is imminent. Christ coming to bring history to its conclusion as promised in the Old Testament prophets is imminent.

Therefore, this kingdom and priesthood should live in light of this. The coming of Christ should motivate and sustain this new people, his kingdom of priests, to carry out their mission of being faithful witnesses found in verses 5 and 6. All of this then is grounded in verse 8, in two titles particularly used to refer to God. Notice verse 8. After this, verse 7, demonstrates, already anticipates the future in light of which God's kingdom and priests should live.

Verse 8 grounds all of this in the character of God himself in two titles. Number one, I am the Alpha and the Omega. Actually, there are three.

The last one is the title Almighty, but I want to focus on the first two. The first one is, I am the Alpha and the Omega. The second is, God is described as the one who is, who was, and who is to come.

The first one, I am the Alpha and the Omega. This is probably the Alpha and the Omega being the first and last letters of the alphabet. Even today, you think about it and you can deduce exactly why John would choose the Alpha and the Omega or the A and the Z to use the American alphabet.

The Alpha and the Omega probably here is interpreting a saying that one finds, or a title applied to God from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. And that is the title, the first and the last. If you go back to Isaiah chapter 41 and verse 4, interestingly too, much of Isaiah 40, especially 40 through 66, describes God's future salvation of his people Israel in terms of a new Exodus.

And we've already seen John applying Exodus language to the people of God as redeeming them by the blood of the Lamb and making them kingdom of priests, what God intended for Israel, now for his new people, the church. But now notice in chapter, Isaiah chapter 41 and verse 4, who has done this and carried it through calling forth the generations from the beginning, the Lord with the first of them and with the last, I am he. Also, let me skip ahead to 44, 43 verse 10, you also find this,

but 44 verse 6, this is what the Lord says, Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty, I am the first and I am the last.

Apart from me, there is no God. The Alpha and the Omega, we'll see later on in Revelation, John will use Alpha and Omega again with the terms first and last. Alpha and Omega then I think is meant to recall Isaiah chapter 41, 4 and Isaiah 44, 6, the title applied to God in the Old Testament, the first and the last.

Obviously, when one thinks about it, this probably refers to God as standing at the beginning and the end of history and everywhere in between, that is, this is a title demonstrating that God is a sovereign ruler over all of history. But there is something else significant about it. In the context of Isaiah 41, 43, and 44 where it occurs, it occurs in the context of God being the exclusive God over against other idols.

And so, by claiming God is the Alpha and the Omega, that is the first and the last from Isaiah 41 and 44 for example, John is claiming in the context of the Roman Empire where you have other gods and you have Caesar clamoring for attention and clamoring for authority and the exclusive worship and allegiance that belongs only to God. Now by using this title, John has taken a text from the Old Testament from the context where God's absolute authority and sovereignty, his absolute uniqueness over against every other god, his exclusive right to worship and sovereignty in the face of other gods and idols. Now John uses that to demonstrate once again the exclusive sovereignty of God and the exclusive worship that belongs to God over all of Rome's idols.

The second title is God is described as the one who is, the one who was and the one who is coming. As most have realized, this probably also expands on and draws on an Old Testament text, God's words in Exodus chapter 3 verse 14 when God tells Moses that he is the I am. But the was and the is coming are the ones that are absent in that formula.

When you add these all up though, probably when John describes God as the one who was, the one who is, and the one who is coming, this probably is a formula that expresses God's eternity. He is the one who stands at the beginning of history, he is the one who stands at the end of history and beyond and he's everywhere in between as well. Therefore, God not only stands at the beginning of history as the creator and originator as we'll see in chapter 4 of Revelation, but he also stands in the midst of history, he is with his people, and he is present with his people.

So, this is not just a title of God's exalted status far beyond his creation, it's also indicating not only God's eternity as the one who stands before creation but the one who is in creation, who is present with his people, but then he is the one who is to come. That is, God is the one who will consummate history. The coming of God is one of the main themes of Revelation.

It anticipates God's coming through his son Jesus Christ to bring history to a close. So already these titles anticipate important themes and an important perspective for reading Revelation, as God is the one who is at the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, he's the one who was and is to come, he's sovereign over history, he is present with his people, he will bring it to its consummation, and in the meantime, to worship anything or anyone else is simply idolatry, to fail to recognize the Alpha and the Omega, the sovereign God who is the exclusive Lord of the universe and the only one worthy of our worship. So, I think already the seven churches are meant to take comfort in this, that again God stands at the beginning of history, he is now present with his seven churches, and he assures them of the future, that he will bring things, he will bring history to its consummation.

So, what have they to fear in the hostile world? What have they to fear from the Roman Empire? Why would they want to give their allegiance to anyone or anything else? And as kings and priests then, they have no other option and every motivation and reason to maintain their faithful witness in the hostile Roman world in which they find themselves. So already chapter 1:1-8 has provided an important perspective for reading the rest of the book of Revelation, has introduced us to important themes, the way that God is to be understood, the role that God in Jesus Christ and the Spirit will play throughout the rest of the Revelation, and a reminder of the exclusive allegiance that they owe to God and to Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ and God are the ones who will bring history to their consummation. Verses 9-20 then move on to the inauguration or inaugural vision that John has of Jesus Christ who comes to commission him to address the seven churches of Revelation chapters 2 and 3. And as we said, these verses serve to authenticate John's vision, to make it, in a sense we might say, make it more likely that his readers will receive and accept what it is he says in the rest of the book and to respond in the way that John calls.

It also demonstrates, and we'll see, that chapter 1 really can't be separated from chapters 2 and 3. Let me say at this point too, as kind of another excursus, and we'll see this and draw attention to this elsewhere, this is the kind of thing that really makes it difficult to outline Revelation and divide it. So many parts of it kind of mesh together. We'll see some sections actually function as a conclusion to something before it, and at the same time function as an introduction to what comes after.

And so often you find, and then you'll find sections with intervening sections. So, Revelation is very difficult to come up with a precise outline. So, I'm not going to assume any specific outline, but at this point, just to recognize that chapter 1 clearly provides an introduction to, and clearly is related to chapters 2 and 3, where John then does, with the words of the risen Christ, does address the seven churches that are introduced in chapter 1. Again, I want to say a handful of just a few things about this chapter.

First of all, in this section, John already reminds us that he writes, not as one who stands over his readers, but as one who actually identifies with their plight. Notice, and notice also the paradoxical phrase in verse 9. This is where we find, I, John, your brother and companion. So, John writes as one who actually identifies with the plight of his readers.

It's interesting, some have suggested, I'm not certain about this, some have suggested that John, in fact, that he was in exile when Patmos, rather than executed, shows something about his status, that he would have been more elite and wealthy in society. Now he chooses to stoop, to identify with his suffering companions in their faith in Jesus Christ. Whatever the case, though, John does write as one who does not stand over his readers, but one who identifies with them.

And note the paradoxical phrase when he says he identifies with their suffering and kingdom. That's not the kind of combination that you would expect that a kingdom or rule would bring about suffering. But that's the exact type of kingdom that John portrays Christians as belonging to.

The fact that they belong to God's rule and kingdom brings them in conflict with the evil empire of the day, the Roman Empire. And that will inevitably mean suffering. In fact, John is also convinced that that is exactly the way that Jesus Christ went.

Jesus Christ came as the king, but he came and suffered and died. And now his followers follow suit. Yes, they represent and are part of God's kingdom and rule in the present, but that still entails suffering and endurance on the part of God's people.

The next thing I want to draw your attention to then is the vision that John has of the exalted Christ. Finally, John has a vision of the exalted Christ who appears to John to commission him, basically with his authority to address the seven churches. And once more, we find that in John's inaugural vision of Jesus Christ, it is Old Testament texts that dominate.

Almost every description given in verses, especially 12 and following, almost every description, descriptive phrase, or word given to Jesus Christ describing John's vision of Christ comes right out of the Old Testament. Again, what I think is probably going on is, yes, John actually has this vision. He's describing what he saw.

But John draws on the Old Testament to make clear exactly what it was he saw and to help his readers understand the meaning of exactly what it was John experienced. So John draws on all kinds of Old Testament texts. For example, he begins by describing the seven golden lampstands, which clearly describe the lampstands, for example, in the holy place of the Tabernacle in Exodus chapter 5, and then in the temple in 1 Kings chapter 7, and then interestingly in Zechariah chapter 4, one of the

prophets in Zechariah's vision, like John's, in Zechariah's vision of a heavenly temple, we find the lampstands.

So already, John is not only drawing on the Old Testament but already in chapter 1, he's creating a scene, a picture of a heavenly temple. He's understanding heaven and he understands Jesus Christ, I think here in very priestly terms, as now dwelling in or residing in the heavenly temple. Part of that is communicated through using Old Testament temple language such as lampstands, which later on John will interpret those for us.

It's also intriguing that John tells us Christ is actually in the midst of these lampstands. Later on in verse 20, as we've already seen in talking about the imagery and symbolism of Revelation, John is going to describe or identify the lampstands as the seven churches. Already he describes Christ in the midst of these lampstands.

That is, Christ is already portrayed as present with his people. So that later on in the seven messages of the churches in chapters 2 and 3, he can tell them things like, I know what you go through, I know what you experience, or I know where your shortcomings are, I know where your faults are. Why? Because Christ is already portrayed not as some distant deity far above his people with no concern of what's going on, but as one who actually is in the midst of and walks in the presence of his church and therefore knows intimately what they are going through and what they are lacking or what they are suffering.

So, this, in a sense, is setting us up for chapters 2 and 3 where Jesus will begin to diagnose the seven churches and the issues they face and provide both comfort and warning. So, what that means, interestingly then, is Jesus' presence among the lampstands, the churches then, Jesus' presence will mean different things for the churches. For those who are suffering, Jesus' presence means comfort and encouragement.

For those who are compromising or become complacent, Jesus' presence means something else. It means he comes as a judge. Remember, Jesus is portrayed as having a sword coming out of his mouth, another Old Testament image.

So, for those who are compromising and complacent, Jesus comes to them as a judge, one who has a sword coming out of his mouth. Jesus is further described as one like a son of man, language taken right out of Daniel chapter 7, where following four beastly-type kingdoms, Daniel saw a son of man. Contrast with the beast, now you have a son of man, a human-like figure who now receives, who is vindicated and receives a kingdom.

And now John sees Jesus as that exalted Son of Man from Daniel chapter 7. Already, Jesus has received his kingdom. Already, Jesus has inaugurated his rule through his

death, and through his resurrection and exaltation, the son of man has already been vindicated and entered into his kingly rule. And now he will inspect his churches in chapters 2 and 3. One intriguing feature of this description of the son of man though, is in verse 14, where he describes the son of man as having a head and hair which was white like wool and as white as snow.

If you go back to Daniel 7, there are actually two figures, one of them is a son of man, and the other is God himself, the Ancient of Days seated on the throne. And what is interesting in Daniel 7, it is the Ancient of Days on the throne who is described with white hair, as white as wool and white as snow. Now that language gets applied to Jesus as the son of man.

And we are going to see this all throughout Revelation where you find language in the Old Testament that was applied to God, now applied to Jesus Christ. Because already, I think John is saying this exalted son of man is none other than God himself. This is one of the strongest statements for the deity of Christ found in the whole Bible and especially in the New Testament.

Where you have Jesus described in language that is reserved for God himself. Especially when you add that Revelation, part of what Revelation is doing is asking who is truly in control? It's idolatry to worship and give allegiance or to have any other throne than that which belongs to God himself. Remember, he is the Alpha and the Omega.

There can be no other God before him. Revelation is a book about the exclusive worship that belongs only to God. How then can you have John applying Old Testament texts, celebrating the uniqueness of God over against every other God, which is idolatry, and now applying that to the person of Jesus Christ? John seems to suggest that the son of man is a unique figure.

He is none other than God himself. Further, if you go on and read verse 17, when I saw him when John sees the son of man, he falls at his feet, a typical reaction found in apocalyptic language. When a seer sees a vision, they become weak or fall down to their feet, and John falls to his feet.

Then he, the son of man, placed his right hand on me and said, Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. Well, that's language again.

Here is language resembling Alpha and the Omega from chapter 1 in verse 8. Now we find language once again that was applied to God in chapter 1 verse 8, now applied to Jesus Christ. Moreover, we've already seen the context for this language is Isaiah chapters 41, 43, and 44, where first and last was language not just referring to the eternal God, though it did, that he was at the beginning and end of history. He is

a sovereign over all of creation and all of history, but it was used to refer to God as the exclusive God over against all other gods, which were idols.

Now that language gets applied to Jesus Christ. And to apply this language to anyone but God would be outright idolatry. Yet John applies it to Jesus Christ, suggesting that Jesus Christ stands with God on the God side of the God creation divide.

Or the God who stands at the beginning and end of history is also the same as Jesus Christ. Jesus is the sovereign Lord over history. Because of his resurrection now, he holds the keys of death.

So, in the rest of Revelation, when we find God's people suffering or wondering if they should suffer when we read chapters 2 and 3 in the message of the seven churches, we find that two are suffering persecution because of the faithful witness, but others think it's okay to compromise. Already Revelation then chapter 1 provides a message. This son of man is the sovereign Lord of the universe.

He stands over all of creation and furthermore, because of his resurrection, he has now conquered death. He now holds the keys of death. So, what do the readers have to fear? Those who are suffering persecution, what do they have to fear at the hands of Rome or anyone else? And those who are compromising have every means and every reason then to take a stand for Jesus Christ no matter what the consequences.

Because Jesus has already won the victory over death. So, if their faithful witness should result in persecution at the point of death, as it did for at least one person, what have they to fear? In fact, his resurrection then means not only has he overcome death, but he is the one who gives life. So later on in chapter 20 and chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation, we find the book resulting in a new creation where God now finally vindicates his people by giving them life.

So, what have they to fear if their faithful witness should cost them their life? God's presence in the church then will either provide a message of comfort or a message of warning to the people of God depending on their spiritual condition. But now Jesus is prepared to address through John to address and evaluate the situation of the seven churches existing in Asia Minor. Before we do that, two other points that I want to draw your attention to in this section are two additional features.

One of them is found in verse 19 where Jesus speaks to John and commands him to write, it's interesting several times throughout Revelation, John is commanded to write what he saw, write therefore, this is chapter one verse 19, write therefore what you have seen or what you saw, what is now and what is to take place later. It's been very popular to interpret this threefold phrase, what you have seen, what is, and what is about to happen or what is to come depending on your translation. It's been common to see this as sort of a rough outline of the entire book of Revelation

where each of these, what you've seen, what is, and what is to come, correspond to certain sections of Revelation.

The most common one is chapter one refers to what John has seen, and chapters two and three refer to what is, that is the present day of John and his readers. And then chapters four through 22 are what is to come, this is all future that has yet to take place. And often this is associated with certain ways of reading the book of Revelation.

So, chapter one, verse 19 is often taken as kind of a rough temporal outline for when the different events of Revelation occurred. The only difficulty is that first of all, well to summarize it doesn't work, it doesn't fit what one actually finds in the text of Revelation. For example, in chapters two and three especially, well chapter one, starting with chapter one, in chapter one and verse seven John already moves to the future, already anticipates the future.

And furthermore, in chapters two and three the seven messages of the churches, yes are about the seven churches in the first century in John's present day. He is addressing them in their situation and trying to make sense of their present situation. But interestingly we'll see when we look at the seven churches, they all end with a future promise.

They all end with a promise to the church what will happen if it endures if it overcomes, and if it conquers and retains its faithful witness. All the messages end with the promise of the future. And then chapters four through 22, we've already seen that chapter 12 refers to a past event, that is the death of Jesus Christ.

And I'm going to argue that again chapters 4 through 22 cycles through references to present events going on in the reader's day as well as to the future. So, it seems to me that it's too limited to use this as an outline that is associated with restricted sections of Revelation. Instead, another possibility is, is it possible that the word when John is told, write what you have seen, I think that could actually be translated, write what you see.

That is a reference of the whole book. The whole book is what he sees. Then the next two elements, what is and what is to come, simply describe in more detail what it is he's to see with the content of the book.

And that would certainly make sense. Write what you see, that is the entire book. And the entire book contains both what is, making sense of their present, but also what is to come.

Another way of looking at it too is, what you have seen, what is, and what is to come, simply reflects the title used of God, the one who is, the one who was, and the one

who is to come. Or the one who was, the one who is, and the one who is to come. That is the whole book contains, again, making sense of the past, present, and future.

The point of either of these is that again, Revelation will include references to past, present, and future, especially present and future throughout the entire book. And that we can't limit this phrase to specific, discrete sections of Revelation. But the whole entire phrase, however we take it, probably describes the character of the entire book.

The second thing I want to mention very briefly is in verse 20. I'll go over this very briefly because we've already talked about it. Verse 20 provides, in a sense, a model, whether John intended it that way.

Verse 20 does provide a model for interpreting the rest of the book of Revelation. And we see that this is actually only one of two places where John actually has something interpreted for him. The other is chapter 17.

But here, the risen Christ speaking to John and addressing John tells him that the angels, the seven stars represent the angels of the seven churches. And the seven lampstands actually represent or symbolize the seven churches of Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3. We'll talk a little bit about the significance of that. In other words, we see in true apocalyptic fashion, that we find symbols referring to actual persons and events, but those persons and events are described not literally, but metaphorically.

And this is how we should interpret the rest of the book of Revelation. Now, in the next section, we'll begin, now that John has been commissioned by the risen Christ, now that he's told us a little bit about the character of his book and how it is to be read, we will begin and we are prepared to examine how Christ addresses and how he evaluates the seven churches in Asia Minor and how the churches then were to respond and to read the rest of the book of Revelation.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson and his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 4 on Revelation chapter one.