

Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 20, Apocalyptic Literary Genre Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 20, Apocalyptic Literary Genre, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. Mathewson's hermeneutics course examines the interpretation of New Testament epistles, focusing on genre and authorship. It explores various subgenres of letters, such as letters of recommendation and testaments, and discusses the possibility of pseudonymous authorship. The lecture then **shifts to the Book of Revelation**, analyzing its unique literary features as a combination of **epistle, prophecy, and apocalypse**. Finally, it emphasizes the importance of understanding **Revelation's symbolic language** and its historical context to avoid misinterpretations.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 20 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series → Hermeneutics).



**Mathewson_Herme
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3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Mathewson_Herm_EN_Lecture20_Apocalyptic.pdf":

Briefing Document: Understanding New Testament Letters and Apocalyptic Literature

Introduction:

This document summarizes a lecture on hermeneutics, specifically focusing on the interpretation of New Testament letters and apocalyptic literature. The lecture emphasizes the importance of understanding genre and historical context in order to accurately interpret biblical texts. It particularly addresses the sub-genres within New Testament letters, the unique features of apocalyptic writing, and the dangers of misinterpreting the Book of Revelation.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Subtypes within New Testament Letters:

- **Main Idea:** Not all letters in the New Testament are the same. Just as in modern times, different types of letters served different purposes.
- **Examples: Letters of Recommendation/Introduction:** The letter to Philemon serves as a letter of introduction and recommendation for Onesimus, a runaway slave, asking for a favor (his acceptance back) and implied reciprocity from Paul.
- **Family Letter:** Philippians has been identified as having some of the characteristics of a family letter.
- **Testament:** 2 Peter and 2 Timothy appear to be testamentary in nature. These were often "the last words of a dying hero", which included exhortation and eschatological predictions.
- **Quote:** "...the final instructions to the followers of these individuals right before they die."

2. Authorship and Pseudonymity:

- **Main Idea:** While most New Testament letters are assumed to be written by the person named, there has been a discussion about whether some are pseudonymous (written in the name of someone else).

- **Explanation:** Testaments in ancient literature were often pseudonymous. This raises questions whether certain New Testament letters, like 2 Peter and 2 Timothy, might have also been written by someone else but under the name of an earlier figure.
- The lecture emphasizes while some scholars have questioned the authorship of some books, that the idea of pseudonymity being an acceptable device in the forming of the biblical canon is unclear.
- **Scribal Assistance:** Even if the named author did not physically write every word, it was common for them to use a scribe or "Emanuensis." This could account for differences in style or language within a letter.
- **Quote:** "...it's not necessary to hold that the authors physically wrote every last word found in the Emanuensis."
- **Quote:** "At times, some of them may have been given slightly more freedom, so that they perhaps would have composed much of the letter, but the author still would have signed off on that letter."
- **Personal Touch:** Authors, like Paul in Galatians, may have added personal greetings or closing remarks by hand.
- **Quote:** "...the author would often take up the pen and sign it in his own name or produce the greeting in his own name."

3. Rhetorical Approaches to Letters:

- **Main Idea:** The lecture cautions against over-reliance on rhetorical models for interpreting New Testament letters, particularly Paul's letters.
- **Explanation:** It suggests that it is more appropriate to understand letters within the genre of typical first century letters.
- **Quote:** "...it appears that New Testament authors are writing what is nothing less, however different, they are writing nothing less than a typical first century letter..."

4. Principles for Interpreting Letters:

- * **Reconstruct Historical Setting:** New Testament letters were highly occasional, meaning that they were written as responses to specific problems and situations within the early church.
- * **Follow the Argument:** Interpret by tracing the development of thought from sentence to clause to paragraph. The author utilizes questions to anticipate possible objections or to advance their own argument.
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Recognize Section: Be aware of the different sections of a letter (thanksgiving, body, exhortation) and what difference that might make to interpretation. * **Identify Sub-Genre:** Look for whether the letter might belong to a subgenre of letters that may give further insight to the letter's interpretation.

5. The Three Genres of Revelation: * **Main Idea:** The Book of Revelation combines three literary genres: letter, prophecy, and apocalypse. Understanding all three is crucial to its interpretation. * **Letter:** Revelation begins and ends like a typical New Testament letter, with a salutation and a closing. * **Prophecy:** The author identifies the work as a prophecy, aligning it with the Old Testament prophetic tradition. * **Apocalypse:** Much of the book (chapters 4-22) displays features typical of ancient apocalypses. * **Quote:** "The Book of Revelation seems to be able to be identified... but three literary types that seem to emerge from the text of Revelation is what is known as Apocalypse and Prophecy and a Letter."

6. Understanding Apocalyptic Literature:

- **Definition:** An apocalypse is a "genre of revelatory literature within a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being, usually an angel, to a human recipient disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal insofar as it envisions eschatological salvation and which is spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world."
- **Quote:** "...an apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature within a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being...to a human recipient disclosing a transcendent reality..."
- **Key Features: Visionary Experience:** Apocalypses record a human recipient's visionary experience, often of the heavenly world or the end times.
- **Transcendental Perspective:** It conveys a perspective that goes beyond the present, physical, and earthly world to reveal a heavenly reality.
- **Symbolic Language:** Apocalypses use highly symbolic and graphic language, often involving bizarre imagery. Examples given include the locusts with human faces and lion's teeth in Revelation.
- **Dual Purpose:** Apocalypses function both to console the suffering and exhort God's people to obedience.
- **Quote:** "The function of apocalypses seems to be to both console and exhort God's people based on this transcendent perspective."

- **Purpose:** To provide a new perspective that helps readers understand and respond to the present world in light of the transcendent reality, not merely to predict the future.
- **Quote:** "It's not meant to be a means of escape, but it's meant to open their physical world up to be understood in light of this transcendent reality..."
- **Quote:** "Apocalypse does that in a sense. It lifts the curtain behind history and earthly reality to expose you to a heavenly reality and to a future that makes sense of what's going on in the present."

7. Interpretation of Revelation: * **Symbolism:** Revelation should be interpreted symbolically rather than literally, unless there is compelling reason to believe otherwise.

* **Quote:** "...we should interpret revelation symbolically, unless there's really good reason not to."

* **Political Cartoons as Analogy:** Revelation is compared to a political cartoon, which uses graphic symbols and exaggeration to comment on actual historical events. * **Quote:** "Revelation, like a political cartoon, is a commentary on historical events, things going on in the reader's day and things that will transpire in the future, but depicting them in highly graphic, symbolic language..."

* **Historical Context:** Revelation needs to be read with an understanding of its historical and cultural context. It's an occasional letter, addressing specific issues of its time. * **Quote:** "We must read it in light of the specific problems that it was addressing, and we must see Revelation as a response to very specific situations and circumstances and problems in the first century..."

Conclusion:

This lecture stresses the importance of understanding literary genres when interpreting biblical texts. Misinterpreting the nature of New Testament letters or the complex symbolism of apocalyptic literature, especially Revelation, can lead to serious misunderstandings. This briefing document provides a guide to these complexities to allow for a better interpretation of biblical text. The lecture emphasizes the need for careful attention to historical context, structure, and literary form to accurately discern the message of each text.

4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 20, Apocalyptic Literary Genre

New Testament Literary Genres and Apocalyptic Literature: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is a letter of recommendation, and how does the book of Philemon relate to this genre?
2. How does the concept of a "testament" function in the context of New Testament letters, and which books exemplify it?
3. What is pseudonymity, and how does it relate to the authorship of New Testament letters?
4. What role did an "Emanuensis" play in the writing of ancient letters?
5. What is a key difference between a rhetorical speech and a typical first-century letter, and which approach to understanding the epistles does the lecture favor?
6. Why is reconstructing the historical setting and occasion of a New Testament letter important for its interpretation?
7. What is the significance of tracing the argument within a New Testament letter, and how does Romans 6:1-11 exemplify this?
8. What are the three literary types identified in the Book of Revelation, and what is the significance of this categorization?
9. What is an apocalypse as defined by John Collins, and what are its key characteristics?
10. How does apocalyptic literature utilize symbolic language, and what is the intended function of this symbolism?

Answer Key

1. A letter of recommendation was used to introduce or recommend a person to someone else, often requesting a favor. The letter to Philemon is a good example, as Paul introduces Onesimus to Philemon and asks for him to be treated kindly.

2. A testament was the final instructions of a dying hero to their followers, including both exhortation and eschatological prediction. 2 Peter and 2 Timothy demonstrate elements of a testament because they contain the final instructions of Peter and Paul prior to their deaths.
3. Pseudonymity is when a later figure writes in the name of an earlier figure, as if the earlier figure wrote the text. Some have suggested that a few New Testament letters might be pseudonymous, but this is debated.
4. An Emanuensis was a scribe or secretary who physically wrote down the letter as dictated by the author. They might have had some leeway in how a letter was composed, though the author would still have the final say.
5. A rhetorical speech is a formal argument, while a first-century letter had a typical structure like salutation, thanksgiving, body, and greetings. The lecture favors the latter approach, that New Testament authors were writing standard letters, not rhetorical speeches.
6. Reconstructing the historical setting and occasion is vital because New Testament letters are highly occasional, and understanding the specific issues they address is key to proper interpretation.
7. Tracing the argument of a letter is important to understand how the author develops their point. Romans 6:1-11 shows this through Paul's question-answer format and the explanation of a believer's union with Christ.
8. The Book of Revelation can be identified as an Apocalypse, a prophecy, and a letter. This categorization helps avoid misunderstandings of the text and highlights its diverse literary functions.
9. An apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature in a narrative framework where a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient and it discloses a transcendent reality. This reality is both temporal (eschatological) and spatial (supernatural world).
10. Apocalyptic literature uses graphic symbolism and imagery to communicate transcendent truths and to move the reader beyond just an intellectual understanding of an issue. It also serves to console and exhort the readers.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each question in a well-structured essay format.

1. Compare and contrast the literary characteristics of New Testament letters, considering different subtypes (e.g., letters of recommendation, family letters, testaments), and analyze how recognizing these subtypes impacts interpretation.
2. Discuss the debate surrounding pseudonymity in the New Testament and evaluate arguments for and against the idea that some letters may have been written by authors other than those traditionally named.
3. Analyze how the concept of a "transcendent perspective" functions in apocalyptic literature, using examples from either Daniel or Revelation, to demonstrate how this perspective affects the reader's understanding of their historical context.
4. Explain the significance of literary genre in the interpretation of the Book of Revelation, exploring how understanding it as a letter, a prophecy, and an apocalypse impacts different approaches to the text.
5. Evaluate the claim that Revelation should be read symbolically and not literally, using examples from the text and arguments from the lecture to justify your position on the interpretation of its images and language.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalypse:** A genre of revelatory literature within a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being, usually an angel, to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality.
- **Emanuensis:** A scribe or secretary in the ancient world who was hired to physically write down a letter as it was dictated by an author.
- **Epistolary Literature:** Literature in the form of letters; in this case, referring to the New Testament epistles or letters.
- **Eschatological:** Relating to the end times, the last days, or the final destiny of humanity and the world.
- **Letter of Recommendation:** A subtype of letter common in the first century used to introduce or recommend someone to another person, often including a request or favor.
- **Pseudonymity:** The practice of writing in someone else's name, typically an earlier and more well-known figure.
- **Rhetorical Speech:** A formal speech or argument designed to persuade an audience.
- **Testament:** A literary genre that contains the final words or instructions of a dying hero to their followers, often including eschatological predictions.
- **Transcendent Perspective:** A viewpoint that exceeds the limits of ordinary human experience and the physical world, often revealing a heavenly or spiritual reality.
- **Symbolism:** The use of graphic and often metaphorical imagery to represent ideas, events, or concepts.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 20, Apocalyptic Literary Genre, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Interpreting New Testament Letters and Apocalyptic Literature

- **What are some different subtypes of letters that might be found in the New Testament, and what are their characteristics?**
- New Testament letters can be categorized into subtypes, just like modern letters. For example, the letter to Philemon resembles a letter of recommendation, where Paul introduces Onesimus and asks a favor, expecting a reciprocal response. Philippians can be seen as a family letter. Some letters like 2 Peter and 2 Timothy might align with testaments, which are final instructions from a dying figure, often including exhortation and eschatological predictions. These subtypes influence how we interpret the letters.
- **What is the significance of understanding authorship when reading New Testament letters?**
- Authorship is crucial, and the question of whether some letters were pseudonymous (written in someone else's name) has been raised. While most letters are believed to be written by the person named, 2 Peter presents challenges. Pseudonymity may not have been an acceptable practice, as it could undermine the authority of the texts. The use of an *amanuensis*, a scribe, could account for variations in language or style, but the final content was still approved by the named author. Understanding the use of *amanuensis* helps to explain some variations.
- **How should the historical setting of a New Testament letter influence its interpretation?**
- New Testament letters are highly occasional, meaning they are responses to specific situations in the early church. To interpret a letter, one must reconstruct the historical context, including the problems or issues the author addressed. Understanding the occasion helps us understand the purpose of the letter and the meaning of its content. We should consider both the clues within the letter and any historical background we can ascertain.

- **What does it mean to "follow the argument" of a New Testament letter?**
- "Following the argument" means tracing how the author's thoughts develop throughout the letter. This includes understanding how sentences, verses, and paragraphs connect to form a coherent argument. For example, Romans 6:1 begins with a question based on something said in the previous chapter, and the rest of the chapter answers this question. Understanding how the argument progresses helps us to see how the author unfolds their main point and supports their position.
- **What is the literary genre of an "apocalypse" and what are its key features?**
- An apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature that features a narrative framework in which a transcendent reality is disclosed to a human recipient via an otherworldly being. Key features include a narrative account of a visionary or revelatory experience, often involving visions of the heavenly world and eschatological (end-time) events. Apocalypses use symbolic language and are intended to provide a transcendent perspective, encouraging obedience and comforting God's people, not just to speculate on the future.
- **What are the three literary genres that combine in the book of Revelation, and why are they important?**
- The book of Revelation combines three literary genres: an apocalypse, prophecy, and letter. As an apocalypse, it records a visionary experience and uses symbolic language to reveal a heavenly and eschatological reality. As a prophecy, it proclaims a message from God to guide readers in their situation, calling for obedience and highlighting God's control in the midst of struggles. As a letter, it is addressed to specific churches in the first century and must be understood in its historical context as responding to specific challenges that they faced.

- **How does the symbolic language of apocalyptic literature, particularly in Revelation, influence its interpretation?**
- Apocalyptic literature uses symbolic language, not literal descriptions, to communicate its message. Revelation should not be read as a news report of future events, but rather like a political cartoon, where real historical events and people are represented using graphic symbols and images. Interpreting Revelation requires recognizing the symbolism and interpreting it in light of the historical and cultural context to understand the deeper meaning and the author's point. The primary goal is to understand what the symbolic language would have meant to its original audience.
- **What is the purpose and function of an apocalypse, and how should it inform our reading of the Book of Revelation?**
- The purpose of an apocalypse is not just to predict the future, but to provide a transcendent perspective on reality. It aims to console and exhort God's people by showing them a heavenly perspective that should influence how they see and respond to their present circumstances. In the context of Revelation, the goal is to help readers in the first-century Roman empire see the situation in a new light, understanding that the Roman empire and their situation are not the whole picture. Knowing this allows readers to be motivated to follow Christ, no matter the cost, and be comforted that God is in control.