

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 34, Revelation Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 34, Revelation, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on Revelation introduces the book as the final one in the New Testament, and part of what will be on the upcoming exam. He discusses common reactions to Revelation, which range from rejection to obsession, and then suggests that the book should be approached like any other text in the Bible, one that was addressing specific problems in the first century. He notes the symbolism inherent in the book's apocalyptic literary style, as well as it being written as a letter, suggesting that the book must have contained information that the readers could grasp and would help them respond to the crisis that they were facing. Mathewson then discusses the political context of the book as well as the four general approaches to its interpretation, ending with a note on political cartoons and their role as analogs of Revelation, designed to provide symbolic, often exaggerated ways of making a point.

**2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 34 – Double click icon
to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).**



**Mathewson_NTLit_S
ession34.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 34, Revelation

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided lecture excerpt on the Book of Revelation.

Briefing Document: Dr. Dave Mathewson's Lecture on Revelation

Main Themes:

- **Approaches to Revelation:** Mathewson identifies two common but problematic approaches to Revelation: rejecting/ignoring it due to its strangeness, or becoming obsessed with it and trying to force it into contemporary events. He advocates for a more balanced approach. He also discusses the Preterist, Historicist, Idealist, and Futurist approaches to interpreting Revelation.
- **Contextual Interpretation:** The lecture emphasizes the importance of interpreting Revelation in its first-century context, understanding the author's (John's) intended message to his original audience. He cautions against immediately applying it to modern events without first understanding its historical roots.
- **Symbolism:** Mathewson stresses that Revelation is characterized by its heavy use of symbolism. Interpretation should respect this symbolic nature rather than seeking a strict literal reading.
- **The Problem of Compromise:** The lecture argues that the primary problem Revelation addresses is not widespread persecution, but rather the temptation for Christians in Asia Minor to compromise their faith by participating in emperor worship and showing allegiance to Rome.
- **Exhortation to Holy Living:** The ultimate goal of Revelation is to encourage faithful living and obedience to Jesus Christ, even at the cost of suffering.
- **Literary Genre:** Revelation is a unique blend of apocalypse and letter. It is essential to consider this combination to appropriately understand the text.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Exam Information:** The lecture begins with announcements about the upcoming exam covering Hebrews through Revelation.

- **Author and Date:** While the author identifies himself as John, his specific identity (whether he is John the Apostle or another John) is debated. The book was most likely written around 95-96 AD during the reign of Emperor Domitian.
- **Revelation as Scripture:** Mathewson believes the author of Revelation (unlike some other New Testament writers) was aware that he was writing something that carried the authority of scripture, similar to the Old Testament prophets.
- **Emperor Worship:** Temples dedicated to emperors were becoming increasingly common in the first century, especially in cities of Asia Minor. Christians were expected to show loyalty and gratitude to Rome, creating a conflict with their faith.
- **Limited Persecution:** While some Christians faced harassment and persecution at a local level, there was no widespread, officially sanctioned persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire during Domitian's reign. "Most of the persecution came at the local level. It wasn't necessarily Domitian that was doing this. Most of the persecution, mistreatment, and harassment would have come at a local level from those authorities who wanted to make sure that Christians and everyone showed proper respect and loyalty to Rome."
- **Central Message:** The central message of Revelation is to persuade readers that Jesus Christ alone is worthy of worship, even if it leads to suffering. "At the heart of John's message is an attempt to convince his readers that only Jesus Christ is worthy of worship even if it means suffering."
- **Apocalyptic Literature:** Apocalypse unveils, it lifts the curtain so that you can see behind the scenes to see that there's more than just what meets the eye."
- **Interpreting Revelation:** "Revelation is symbolic and not literal." One should interpret everything symbolically unless there's really, really good reason not to. The meaning must be something John intended and his readers would have understood.

Quotes:

- "Revelation is such a strange book to us, and we'll ask why that's the case. But because it's such an odd and peculiar book, because it's full of symbolism and images that simply sometimes don't resonate with us at all, we have nothing to relate them to, almost no way to identify with some of them."

- "We need to treat Revelation like any other book in the New Testament. That is, we need to ask the main question, what in the world was the author trying to communicate, and what situation was the author most likely addressing?"
- "So, it appears that the main problem behind Revelation is not persecution... The primary problem Revelation addresses is complacency and compromise among the Christians living in these cities within the context of imperial Roman rule."
- "The main theme of Revelation is not end times. It's not primarily about the end times. It's primarily about the first-century readers trying to get them to understand that they have everything to lose if they throw their lot in with Rome."
- "What an apocalypse does is an apocalypse basically, the main thing an apocalypse does is not so much predict the future, though it does that partially, but it's an attempt to help the readers understand and make sense of their present situation."
- "Revelation is actually kind of a unique hybrid form. It actually consists of three different fairly distinct literary types blended into one book. And I want to focus on two of them...Revelation is clearly what is known as an apocalypse"
- "In my opinion, the political cartoon is one of the closest literary analogies to Revelation that we have today."

Implications for Understanding Revelation:

- Approach the book with humility, recognizing the historical and cultural distance between the first-century audience and modern readers.
- Focus on the ethical and theological message of Revelation, rather than simply trying to decode it as a prediction of future events.
- Understand the historical context of Roman rule and emperor worship to appreciate the challenges faced by early Christians.
- Recognize the symbolic nature of the book and avoid overly literal interpretations.
- Consider the preterist, historicist, idealist, and futurist approaches to interpreting Revelation.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 34, Revelation

Revelation: A Study Guide

Review of Key Concepts

- **Author and Date:** Identify the author of Revelation and the most likely timeframe in which it was written (including the name of the Roman emperor at the time). Understand the arguments for and against the traditional authorship.
- **Literary Genre:** Define what an "apocalypse" is and explain how it functions. How does understanding Revelation as a letter influence its interpretation?
- **Symbolism:** Recognize that Revelation is characterized by symbolism, and describe how this affects the interpretation of the text.
- **First-Century Context:** Reconstruct the socio-political and religious context of the first-century churches in Asia Minor. What was the role of emperor worship? How did Rome influence the area?
- **Problem Addressed:** Identify the primary problem(s) that Revelation addresses in its original context. What is the difference between persecution and temptation toward compromise?
- **Major Theme:** State the main message or theme of Revelation. How does this contrast with popular understandings of the book?
- **Interpreting Revelation:** Summarize the principles for interpreting Revelation provided in the lecture.
- **Historical Approaches to Interpretation:** Briefly describe the four main historical approaches to interpreting Revelation: Preterist, Historical, Idealist, and Futurist. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?
- **Political Cartoon Analogy:** How does the concept of a political cartoon provide insight into understanding Revelation?

Quiz: Short-Answer Questions

1. Who is traditionally believed to be the author of Revelation, and what other New Testament books are attributed to him? What is the evidence for and against this traditional attribution?

2. Explain why understanding the historical context of Revelation is crucial for proper interpretation. Give at least one example of how the first-century context illuminates the meaning of a specific symbol or event in the book.
3. What was the primary temptation faced by Christians in the cities of Asia Minor, according to the lecture? How did this challenge their faith?
4. Describe the key characteristics of the apocalyptic genre, and explain how these characteristics influence the way Revelation should be interpreted.
5. Explain why it is important to interpret Revelation symbolically rather than literally. What dangers arise from a strictly literal interpretation?
6. Summarize the main theme of Revelation, as presented in the lecture. How does this theme challenge the common perception of Revelation as a book primarily about the end times?
7. What is the Preterist approach to interpreting Revelation, and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
8. What is the futurist approach to interpreting Revelation, and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
9. What is the Idealist approach to interpreting Revelation, and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
10. Explain how understanding Revelation as a letter to a specific group of first-century readers influences its interpretation.

Quiz Answer Key

1. Traditionally, John, the apostle of Jesus Christ, is believed to be the author of Revelation, as well as the Gospel of John and the three Johannine epistles (1, 2, and 3 John). Strong tradition supports this. However, the author of Revelation never claims apostolic authority, and some scholars note differences in style and vocabulary between Revelation and the other Johannine works.
2. Understanding the historical context helps us grasp the original meaning of the text and avoid imposing modern interpretations that would have been foreign to the author and his audience. For example, the emphasis on resisting emperor worship becomes clearer when we understand the pressure Christians faced to participate in rituals honoring Rome.

3. The primary temptation was compromising with Roman rule and imperial worship. Some Christians believed they could worship both Jesus Christ and Caesar, blurring the lines between their faith and allegiance to the Roman Empire, a false peace and well-being.
4. Apocalypses unveil hidden realities through symbolic visions, often revealing a divine perspective on earthly events and future outcomes. This genre requires a symbolic interpretation that seeks to understand the intended message rather than a literal reading of the imagery.
5. A symbolic interpretation respects the nature of the apocalyptic genre and allows for a deeper understanding of the messages conveyed through vivid imagery. A strictly literal interpretation can lead to misinterpretations and a focus on irrelevant details.
6. The main theme of Revelation is to encourage readers to follow Jesus Christ and resist the temptation to compromise with the pagan Roman empire. The author attempts to show readers how everything may be lost by giving worship to the Roman empire rather than Jesus Christ. This theme encourages people to worship Jesus Christ, even if it requires suffering on the part of the people. This challenges the common perception by focusing on obedience to Jesus.
7. The Preterist approach interprets Revelation as primarily referring to events in the first century. It does not predict future events, but describes events that took place in the first century. A strength is its focus on the original historical context and the struggles of the first-century church. A weakness is the tendency to ignore the predictive prophecies.
8. The Futurist approach sees most of Revelation as predicting events that will occur in the future, leading up to and including the Second Coming of Christ. A strength lies in recognizing the predictive elements. A weakness is the potential to ignore the relevance to the first-century audience.
9. The Idealist approach views Revelation as a symbolic portrayal of the ongoing battle between good and evil, applicable throughout church history. A strength is its ability to resonate with believers in various times and places. A weakness is that it neglects specific historical contexts.

10. Recognizing that Revelation is a letter emphasizes that John wrote to address the needs and understanding of his specific audience. This requires seeking an interpretation that would have been meaningful and relevant to them in their specific historical and cultural context.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of interpreting Revelation symbolically rather than literally. Provide examples of how a symbolic interpretation can illuminate the meaning of key passages in the book.
2. Analyze the socio-political and religious context of the first-century churches in Asia Minor, and explain how this context shaped the message and purpose of Revelation.
3. Compare and contrast two of the four main historical approaches to interpreting Revelation (Preterist, Historical, Idealist, Futurist), highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each.
4. Evaluate the argument that the primary purpose of Revelation is to encourage holy living and obedience to Jesus Christ, rather than to predict future events. Provide evidence from the text to support your position.
5. Explain how the concept of a political cartoon provides a useful analogy for understanding the function and message of Revelation.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalypse:** A literary genre that reveals hidden realities and divine perspectives through symbolic visions, often focused on the struggle between good and evil and the ultimate triumph of God.
- **Domitian:** The Roman emperor reigning in the late first century AD (c. 81-96 AD), during whose reign Revelation is commonly believed to have been written.
- **Emperor Worship:** The practice of deifying and offering worship to Roman emperors, which became increasingly prominent in the first century and posed a challenge to Christians.
- **First-Century Context:** The socio-political, religious, and cultural environment in which Revelation was originally written and received, including Roman rule, emperor worship, and the challenges faced by early Christians.
- **Futurist Interpretation:** An approach to interpreting Revelation that sees most of the book as predicting events that will occur in the future, leading up to and including the Second Coming of Christ.
- **Idealist Interpretation:** An approach to interpreting Revelation that views the book as a symbolic portrayal of the ongoing battle between good and evil, applicable throughout church history.
- **Preterist Interpretation:** An approach to interpreting Revelation that sees the book as primarily referring to events that took place in the first century AD.
- **Symbolism:** The use of symbolic imagery, colors, numbers, and figures in Revelation to convey deeper meanings and messages beyond the literal level.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 34, Revelation, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Revelation FAQ

1. What are the two extreme approaches people often take when interpreting the Book of Revelation?

One extreme is to reject or ignore Revelation due to its strange symbolism and the uncertainty surrounding its interpretation. Many find the imagery too difficult to relate to and the variety of interpretations off-putting, leading them to avoid the book altogether. The other extreme is to become obsessed with Revelation, trying to fit it into the mold of current events and seeing it as a script for the 21st century. This approach often involves trying to match events in the Middle East, Europe, or the United States with specific passages in Revelation.

2. What is the speaker's proposed approach to understanding the Book of Revelation, and why is this important?

The speaker suggests treating Revelation like any other New Testament book. This means trying to understand what the author was trying to communicate and what specific situation the author was addressing in the first century. This approach emphasizes reconstructing the original circumstances behind the writing of Revelation, similar to how scholars approach understanding the context of books like Galatians or 1 Peter. Understanding the original context first is crucial before asking how the book applies to contemporary situations.

3. Who is the author of Revelation, and when was it likely written?

The author of Revelation identifies himself as John, but it is debated whether this is John the Apostle, the same author of the Gospel of John and 1-3 John, or another John from the early church. Regardless, the author claims the authority of an Old Testament prophet, indicating he believed he was writing scripture. The most common suggestion for the date of Revelation is around 95-96 AD, during the reign of Emperor Domitian. This dating is supported by early church testimony and indications within the text itself.

4. What is the most characteristic feature of Revelation, and how should this influence its interpretation?

The most characteristic feature of Revelation is its extensive symbolism. The book is filled with unique and graphic imagery, including seven-headed dragons, beasts, and locusts with human heads. This symbolism means that Revelation should not be interpreted with strict literalness. Instead, interpreters should respect the symbolic value of the imagery and ask what these symbols are trying to communicate, rather than interpreting them as literal scientific or news reports.

5. What was the primary problem facing the churches addressed in Revelation, and how did this influence John's message?

While persecution was present in some of the addressed churches, the primary problem was complacency and compromise with Roman rule and emperor worship. Many Christians were tempted to worship both Caesar and Jesus Christ, believing they could remain faithful to both. This situation influenced John's message, which aimed to convince his readers that only Jesus Christ is worthy of worship, even if it means suffering. John encourages resistance to the temptation to show allegiance and worship to the pagan Roman empire.

6. What is the major theme of Revelation, and what is it *not* primarily about?

The major theme of Revelation is to encourage readers to follow Jesus Christ and obey Him no matter the cost, demonstrating that only Jesus Christ is worthy of their worship, even if it requires suffering. Therefore, the book aims at obedience and a holy life despite the world. The main theme of Revelation is *not* primarily about the end times or predicting the future, but instead about addressing the first-century readers' temptations to compromise with Roman rule.

7. What two literary forms blend together in Revelation, and how do they impact our reading of the text?

Revelation blends the literary forms of an apocalypse and a letter. As an apocalypse, it lifts the curtain to reveal a heavenly perspective, showing that God and Jesus Christ are ultimately in control, helping readers understand their present situation in a new light. As a letter, it addresses a very specific problem and communicates a message understood by its first-century readers. Recognizing Revelation as a letter emphasizes the importance of understanding its original context and the specific issues it addresses.

8. What are the four general approaches to interpreting Revelation that have been used throughout history, and does the speaker advocate for choosing just one?

The four general approaches to interpreting Revelation are: * **Preterist:** Revelation only referred to events in the first century and has already been fulfilled. * **Historical:** Revelation is a forecast of history, mapping events throughout history onto specific passages in Revelation. * **Idealist:** Revelation is a grand symbolic portrayal of the battle between God and evil, not tied to specific events or times. * **Futurist:** Almost everything in Revelation after chapters 4 and 5 refers to a period of time in the future. The speaker suggests that a combination of these three, particularly the preterist, idealist, and futurist views, may be the most accurate approach, recognizing that Revelation addresses the first century, points to a future end, and uses trans-temporal symbols.