

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 36, Excursus: Revelation 1 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 36, Excursus: Revelation 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture introduces the Book of Revelation, a challenging text due to its lack of modern analogies. He explores two common but problematic approaches: ignoring it or becoming obsessed with decoding it in light of contemporary events. **Mathewson advocates for understanding Revelation within its original historical context,** asking about its intended audience, author, and the situation it addressed. **He identifies key features such as symbolism and Old Testament allusions,** emphasizing that Revelation responds to Roman domination and emperor worship, urging Christians to resist compromise. **The lecture identifies Revelation as a blend of apocalypse, prophecy, and letter,** advocating for symbolic interpretation while considering the original audience's understanding. **Finally, it reviews four major approaches to interpreting Revelation throughout history:** preterist, historicist, idealist, and futurist, suggesting that a combination of approaches is best.

2. 25 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 36 – 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_Session36.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 36, Excursus: Revelation 1

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on Revelation:

Briefing Document: Dr. Dave Mathewson on Revelation 1

Overall Theme: This lecture introduces the Book of Revelation, emphasizing the importance of understanding its historical context and literary type to avoid common pitfalls in interpretation. Mathewson cautions against ignoring the book entirely or becoming overly obsessed with decoding it as a direct prediction of modern events. He advocates for interpreting Revelation within its original first-century context while acknowledging its symbolic and prophetic nature.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Challenges of Interpreting Revelation:**
 - Revelation presents unique challenges because it lacks modern-day analogies. *"And the book of Revelation presents a number of challenges for the interpreter and the reader, mainly because we really have no modern-day analogies or close analogies as to what Revelation is."*
 - Many Christians either ignore it because it is too confusing or become obsessed with figuring out how it matches up with modern-day events. *"First of all, many have chosen to ignore it...The opposite extreme is to become so obsessed and infatuated with it, that all we do is focus on the book of Revelation and try to figure out exactly how it's going to be fulfilled..."*
 - Instead, Mathewson argues for placing Revelation within its original historical context. *"So, I would suggest the starting point is, like any other New Testament book, we need to first of all put Revelation back in its original context."*
- **Authorship and Date:**
 - The author is named John, but there is uncertainty about his identity. *"When it comes to the authorship of Revelation, there's some uncertainty. We know that the author's name is John."* The primary option is that he was the Apostle John, author of the fourth gospel, but there are other possibilities.

- Regardless of his specific identity, John was well-known to the churches. *"Whoever this John was, whether he's the Apostle or another well-known John, a prophet in the first century, he was well known to the churches."*
- John writes with prophetic authority, drawing on Old Testament prophetic traditions, even if he doesn't claim apostolic authority. *"Instead, he claims the authority of an Old Testament prophet. He writes as one who comes at the conclusion of the Old Testament prophetic tradition. And over and over, he draws on Old Testament prophetic forms in his work."*
- The book was likely written either during the reign of Nero in the mid-60s AD or, more commonly believed, during the reign of Domitian towards the end of the first century (around 95-96 AD). *"However, probably the most common approach to the dating of Revelation is to date it towards the very end of the first century...that Revelation was written during the reign of the emperor Domitian towards the end of the first century."*
- **Characteristic Features:**
 - Revelation is highly symbolic, with nearly every verse packed with strange and bizarre symbols. *"One of them is, probably the most characteristic feature of Revelation, its symbolism. Nearly every verse of the book is packed with rather strange, at times, bizarre symbols."*
 - It heavily utilizes the Old Testament, weaving images and language from prophetic books into its visions. *"Most of these symbols, even if John sometimes puts his own spin on them, and even if at times he may draw on the broader Greco-Roman world for some of his symbols, is a lot of John's symbols come right out of the Old Testament."*
- **Purpose of Revelation:**
 - Revelation is not primarily about predicting the future; that is a minor feature. *"In fact, I would suggest that is a rather minor feature in the book, or at least not the most important feature of the book of Revelation. It's not primarily to predict and forecast the future."*
 - It was written in response to Roman domination and emperor worship. *"Revelation was a response to Roman domination and imperial or emperor worship."*

- The main problem Revelation is addressing is the temptation for Christians to compromise with Roman ideology and emperor worship, not just persecution. *"It appears that a far more serious problem than persecution is that most Christians were tempted to go ahead and compromise."*
- A central theme is the question of who is worthy of worship, Jesus Christ or the Roman Empire. *"But it seems to me, that one of the themes that could lay claim to being the primary theme of Revelation is the question, who is worthy of our worship? Who is truly worthy of our worship?"*
- It seeks to unmask the true nature of Roman rule, exposing its arrogance and pretension. *"Revelation needs to be seen too as, again I've already said Revelation is not primarily a prediction of the future, but needs to be seen more as an unmasking or an unveiling of the true nature of Roman rule."*
- **Literary Genre:**
- Revelation is a combination of three literary forms: apocalypse, prophecy, and letter. *"Actually, Revelation is a combination of at least three types of literary forms."*
- As an "apocalypse," it unveils the true nature of reality, revealing a heavenly world and a future behind the empirical world. *"An apocalypse is basically a work that reveals or exposes the true nature of what is going on in the situation of the readers."*
- As a "prophecy," it critiques the evil world system and exposes the pretension of those who oppose God. *"As a prophecy, it's primarily a prophetic word. It's a word of encouragement and warning to the people."*
- As a "letter," it addresses specific problems faced by first-century Christians. *"As a letter, Revelation is communicating information that the first-century readers must have understood and John must have intended."*
- **Interpretation Guidelines:**
- Interpret Revelation symbolically, not literally. *"Revelation should be interpreted symbolically and not literally."*
- Any interpretation must be something that resonates with the first-century context of the readers and the author. *"Any interpretation that John could not have intended and his readers could not have understood is probably suspect."*

- Don't get so obsessed with the details that you miss the main message. *"Don't lose sight of the forest for the trees. In other words, don't get so obsessed with figuring out all the little details and symbols that you miss the main message and the overall focus of the book of Revelation and the various chapters and the various parts of the vision."*
- Don't miss the main purpose: it's an exhortation to live holy lives amidst a pagan empire. *"Don't miss the main purpose. Again, Revelation is not primarily about the future. It's not primarily a prediction of the future. It's an exhortation to God's people to live holy lives in the midst of a pagan empire."*
- Approach the book with humility. *"A good dose of humility is a prerequisite for reading the book of Revelation."*
- **Approaches to Reading Revelation:**
- **Preterist:** All or most of Revelation was fulfilled in the first century.
- **Historical:** Revelation is a history of the church written in advance.
- **Idealist:** Revelation is a symbolic portrayal of the battle between good and evil.
- **Futurist:** Revelation is primarily a prediction of future events.
- Mathewson suggests that a combination of the preterist, idealist, and futurist approaches likely does the most justice to the text. *"So, in my opinion, probably a combination of two or three of those approaches does the most justice to the kind of literature Revelation is and what kind of book John is writing."*

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 36, Excursus: Revelation 1

Revelation: Unveiling the Truth

Study Guide Outline

I. Introduction to Revelation

- Challenges in interpreting Revelation
- Common approaches to Revelation: ignoring it vs. obsession
- A balanced approach: historical context, authorial intent, and original audience understanding

II. Historical Background

- Authorship: John (Apostle John or another John?)
- Authority: Prophetic authority vs. apostolic authority
- Dating: Nero (mid-60s AD) vs. Domitian (late 90s AD)
- Characteristic Features:
- Symbolism
- Use of the Old Testament

III. Purpose of Revelation

- Not primarily a prediction of the future
- Response to Roman domination and emperor worship
- Persecution vs. Compromise: local and sporadic persecution, but primarily addressing complacency and compromise

IV. Main Themes of Revelation

- Who is worthy of our worship? (Jesus Christ vs. Roman Empire)
- Unmasking the true nature of Roman rule

V. Literary Genre of Revelation

- A combination of three literary forms:

- Apocalypse: unveiling of reality
- Prophecy: word of encouragement and warning
- Letter: addressing specific problems of first-century Christians

VI. Principles for Interpreting Revelation

- Interpret symbolically, not literally
- Interpretation should be understandable to the original audience
- Don't lose sight of the forest for the trees
- Don't miss the main purpose
- Humility is essential

VII. Approaches to Interpreting Revelation (Temporally)

- Preterist: primarily fulfilled in the first century
- Historical: forecast of church history
- Idealist: symbolic portrayal of the battle between God and evil
- Futurist: primarily a prediction of the future
- A combined approach: incorporating elements of multiple views

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Why is the book of Revelation difficult to interpret?
2. What are the two extreme approaches that people often take when studying Revelation, and what are the problems associated with each?
3. What kind of authority does John claim to write with in the book of Revelation?
4. What are the two most common proposed dates for the writing of Revelation, and what emperors are associated with each?
5. What are the two primary characteristic features of Revelation that were discussed in the lecture?
6. What was the main problem that Revelation was addressing?
7. What is the main theme of Revelation?

8. How does Revelation function as an apocalypse?
9. Besides an apocalypse, what other literary forms does Revelation embody, and what does this mean for interpreting the text?
10. What are some possible interpretations of Revelation?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The book of Revelation is difficult to interpret because it is a combination of at least three literary forms, primarily apocalypse. Because it is apocalyptic, Revelation is symbolic and therefore hard to understand. Also, there are no modern-day analogies or close analogies that present any kind of inroad for the modern reader.
2. One extreme is to ignore Revelation because it is too mysterious and confusing. The opposite extreme is to become obsessed with it and try to decode its prophecies in light of modern-day events. The problem with the former is that it rejects God's Word, while the problem with the latter is that it can lead to fanciful interpretations that the original author and audience could not have grasped.
3. John claims the authority of an Old Testament prophet. He writes as one who comes at the conclusion of the Old Testament prophetic tradition, drawing on Old Testament prophetic forms and claiming to have experiences similar to prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel.
4. The two most common proposed dates are during the reign of Nero (mid-60s AD) and during the reign of Domitian (late 90s AD). The Nero dating is associated with his persecution of Christians, while the Domitian dating is supported by early church fathers.
5. The two primary characteristic features of Revelation are its symbolism and its use of the Old Testament. Nearly every verse is packed with strange symbols, and the author weaves the images and language of the Old Testament into his vision.
6. The main problem that Revelation was addressing was the temptation for Christians to compromise with Roman rule and emperor worship. Many Christians were willing to give in to Roman ideology for the sake of retaining their place in society or avoiding persecution.
7. The main theme of Revelation is the question of who is worthy of our worship: Jesus Christ or the Roman Empire. The book attempts to convince readers that

only Jesus Christ is worthy of their worship and allegiance, and that worshipping any other human being or institution is idolatry.

8. Revelation functions as an apocalypse by unveiling or uncovering the true nature of reality. It strips away the veil behind the scenes of history, allowing readers to see the heavenly world and the future that lie behind and beyond their first-century world.
9. Besides being an apocalypse, Revelation is also a prophecy and a letter. As a prophecy, it exposes the evil world system and warns God's people about coming judgment, similar to Old Testament prophets. As a letter, it addresses the specific needs of first-century Christians living in the context of imperial Roman rule.
10. The Preterist approach says all of Revelation was basically fulfilled in the first century. The historical view says Revelation is sort of a history written in advance, like John was forecasting the entire history of the church. The idealist approach says Revelation is simply a symbolic portrayal of the battle between God and evil and the futurist approach says revelation is primarily a prediction or prophecy of the future.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the challenges of interpreting the book of Revelation, and explain why it is essential to consider the historical context when approaching this text.
2. Compare and contrast the different views on when Revelation was written and how this affects our interpretation of the book's meaning.
3. Analyze the ways in which Revelation functions as an apocalypse, prophecy, and letter. How does understanding these different literary forms contribute to a more comprehensive interpretation of the text?
4. Explain the different approaches to interpreting Revelation (Preterist, Historical, Idealist, Futurist), highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each.
5. Describe the significance of emperor worship in the first century and its implications for Christians living under Roman rule. How does the book of Revelation address the issue of compromise and allegiance to earthly powers?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalypse:** A literary genre characterized by visions, symbolism, and the unveiling of hidden realities, often revealing a transcendent, heavenly world and a future that influences the present.
- **Emperor Worship:** The practice of offering religious veneration to the Roman emperor, often tied to commerce, trade, and displays of allegiance to the Roman Empire.
- **Domitian:** Roman emperor who ruled towards the end of the first century, during whose reign many scholars believe the book of Revelation was written.
- **Nero:** Roman emperor who ruled in the mid-60s AD, known for his persecution of Christians, and during whose reign some suggest the book of Revelation was written.
- **Preterist:** An approach to interpreting Revelation that views most or all of its prophecies as having been fulfilled in the first century.
- **Futurist:** An approach to interpreting Revelation that views most of its prophecies as relating to future events that will occur when Jesus Christ returns.
- **Idealist:** An approach to interpreting Revelation that views it as a symbolic portrayal of the ongoing battle between good and evil, not tied to specific historical events or time periods.
- **Historical Approach:** An approach to interpreting Revelation that views the book as a forecast of church history, with its symbols corresponding to specific events throughout the history of Christianity.
- **Symbolism:** The use of images, objects, or concepts to represent deeper meanings or ideas, a prominent feature of the book of Revelation.
- **Compromise:** The willingness to give in to Roman ideology and emperor worship for the sake of retaining one's place in society or avoiding persecution.
- **Persecution:** Suffering or mistreatment experienced by Christians due to their faith, primarily local and sporadic in the first century rather than an officially sanctioned empire-wide campaign.
- **Unmasking:** Revealing the true nature of something, particularly the arrogance and pretension of Roman rule, a key purpose of the book of Revelation.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 36, Excursus: Revelation 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Revelation FAQ

Here's an FAQ based on the provided text, aiming to capture the main themes and ideas discussed:

Questions

- **What makes the Book of Revelation challenging to interpret?**
- The Book of Revelation is challenging to interpret because it lacks modern-day analogies. We're familiar with letters, narratives, and poetry, but Revelation, with its unique combination of apocalypse, prophecy, and letter, presents a literary form that's difficult for modern readers to grasp without understanding its historical and literary context.
- **What are the two extreme approaches people often take when dealing with Revelation, and what approach does the lecturer suggest?**
- The two extremes are: (1) Ignoring Revelation entirely, finding it too mysterious and confusing, and retreating to more familiar parts of the Bible like the Gospels or Paul's letters. (2) Becoming obsessed with Revelation, trying to decode it and match its prophecies with current events, treating it like a crystal ball to predict the future. The lecturer suggests avoiding both extremes. Instead, he advocates understanding Revelation in its original historical context, asking what it meant to its original audience.
- **Who is the author of Revelation, and what kind of authority does he claim?**
- The author is named John, though there's some debate about which John he is (possibly the Apostle John). Regardless of his specific identity, he was well-known to the churches he addressed. Importantly, he doesn't claim apostolic authority like Paul does in his letters. Instead, John writes with the authority of an Old Testament prophet, drawing on prophetic forms and claiming similar experiences.
- **When was Revelation likely written, and what is the significance of this dating?**
- The most common dating is towards the end of the first century AD, during the reign of Emperor Domitian (around 95-96 AD). While some propose an earlier date during Nero's reign, the Domitian dating places Revelation potentially as the

last book written in the New Testament. This is significant because it situates the book within the context of Roman imperial rule and emperor worship, which are key themes.

- **What are the two most characteristic features of the book of Revelation?**
- The two most characteristic features are its pervasive symbolism and its extensive use of the Old Testament. Nearly every verse is filled with strange and bizarre symbols. The language and imagery of the Old Testament, especially the prophetic books, is woven throughout the text, giving context to the symbols.
- **What was the primary reason Revelation was written, and how does this relate to the situation of Christians in Asia Minor?**
- Revelation was primarily written as a response to Roman domination and emperor worship. Christians in Asia Minor were facing pressure to show allegiance to the Roman Empire and even participate in emperor worship. This created a conflict of loyalty, as they also believed that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, and Christians struggled with compromising their faith in the face of social and economic pressure.
- **What is the main theme of Revelation, and what is the book trying to convince its readers?**
- The main theme of Revelation centers on the question of who is worthy of worship. The book aims to convince readers that only Jesus Christ is worthy of their worship, allegiance, and devotion. It exposes the pretension and arrogance of the Roman Empire, portraying it as a bloodthirsty beast that opposes God and His people.
- **What kind of book is Revelation, and what does this mean for how we should interpret it?**
- Revelation is a combination of three literary forms: an apocalypse, a prophecy, and a letter. As an apocalypse, it unveils the true nature of reality, revealing the heavenly world and the future that lies behind the present. As a prophecy, it critiques worldly empires and warns God's people against compromise. As a letter, it addresses specific problems in first-century churches. This means Revelation should be interpreted symbolically, with an understanding of its historical context and the messages it was intended to communicate to its original audience. We should avoid overly literal interpretations that disregard the symbolic nature of the text.