

# Dr. David Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 5, Delay of the Parousia in Revelation, Pastoral Implications Resources from NotebookLM

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

## 1. Abstract of Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 5, Delay of the Parousia in Revelation, Pastoral Implications, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David Mathewson's lecture, "Where Is His Coming? Session 5," explores the apparent contradiction in the Book of Revelation regarding the timing of Christ's return, examining both the emphasis on its nearness and the indications of its delay. He argues that John intentionally includes both themes, not due to error, but because the actual timing was unknown. **Mathewson analyzes specific passages, such as the fifth seal, and the structural elements of Revelation to demonstrate this tension between imminence and delay.** He then discusses the theological implications, particularly the trustworthiness of Scripture and God's sovereignty, and the pastoral implications, emphasizing the avoidance of date-setting and the call to holy living regardless of the timing of the Parousia. **Ultimately, the lecture posits that the New Testament's treatment of Christ's return serves to encourage faithfulness and responsible living in light of an uncertain future.**

## 2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 5 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Where is His Coming).



### 3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, Where is His Coming?

#### Session 5, Delay of the Parousia in Revelation, Pastoral Implications

##### **Briefing Document: Delay of the Parousia in Revelation and its Implications**

**Main Theme:** This session explores the tension within the Book of Revelation between the emphasis on the soon return of Jesus Christ ("imminence") and the indications of a potential delay ("delay") in this coming. Dr. Mathewson argues that John intentionally includes both themes, not as a contradiction or a failed prediction, but to reflect the reality that the timing of Christ's return was unknown and to call believers to faithful living regardless of when it occurs. The briefing will outline the textual basis for the theme of delay in Revelation, its theological implications regarding the trustworthiness of Scripture and God's sovereignty, and its pastoral implications for avoiding date-setting and fostering holy living.

##### **Key Ideas and Facts:**

##### **1. The Apparent Contradiction and Mathewson's Thesis:**

- Revelation contains numerous references suggesting the soon return of Christ, particularly in the opening and closing chapters (Revelation 1:1, 22:6-7, 22:12, 22:20).
- However, Mathewson identifies another "strand in Revelation that is usually missed," which emphasizes delay.
- He posits that John was intentional in highlighting both imminence and delay because he "simply did not know when Christ was going to come back."
- This dual emphasis serves to prepare believers for either a near return or a period of waiting.

##### **2. Textual Evidence for Delay in Revelation:**

- **The Fifth Seal (Revelation 6:9-11):** This passage depicts the souls of martyred believers crying out, "How long, until you judge those who live in the earth and avenge our blood?" (Revelation 6:10). They are given white robes and told to "rest a little while longer until the number would be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters who were going to be killed for their faith, just as they had" (Revelation 6:11).

- Mathewson notes that the "how long" cry echoes Old Testament lamentations.
- This cry indicates a "delay" and that things have gone on "longer than they expected."
- The instruction to "rest a little while longer" and the concept of a "predetermined number" to be fulfilled before the end further emphasize delay.
- While indicating delay, the phrase "a little while longer" also retains an element of imminence, suggesting it won't last forever.
- **The Literary Structure of Revelation:** Revelation's structure is not linear but "almost progresses cyclically," repeatedly bringing the reader to "an end or heighten the expectation of the end only to back off and kind of start over."
- Examples include:
  - The sixth seal in Chapter 6 seemingly depicts the day of the Lord, yet another seal and many more chapters follow. "Revelation raises your expectation of here's the end... But then it backs off, and there's more material."
  - The seventh seal is delayed until Chapter 8.
  - While the first four trumpets occur rapidly, the following trumpets are described in more detail, and the seventh trumpet is delayed until the end of Chapter 11.
  - Revelation 10:7 states, "There will be no more delay," yet significant events still unfold in the subsequent chapters.
  - Chapter 16 culminates in the gathering for Armageddon, but the battle itself is not immediately described, with chapters 17 and 18 focusing on Babylon's judgment.
  - This structural pattern mirrors the theological tension between imminence and delay.

### 3. Theological Implications:

- **Trustworthiness of Scripture:** The apparent delay of the Parousia has caused some to question the reliability of the New Testament and Jesus' teachings.
- Mathewson argues that understanding the New Testament's teaching on the coming of Christ as an emphasis on potential nearness and possible delay, rather than a specific prediction, removes the basis for this crisis of faith. "It's not

necessary to conclude that the New Testament authors or Jesus were predicting the end and then they were mistaken."

- He suggests that statements about the kingdom being near refer to its inauguration, not necessarily the immediate end of the world.
- The emphasis on imminence served to instill vigilance, not to predict a specific timeline.
- **God's Sovereignty:** The tension between imminence and delay reflects the broader tension in Scripture between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.
- While God knows the timing of Christ's return (Matthew 24:36), He may choose to "delay his coming to give humanity a chance to repent."
- This tension serves a purpose: imminence reminds us that time is finite, while delay cautions against rash actions based on an immediate expectation of Christ's return. "This tension between imminency and delay reminds us that we need to be prepared for either scenario."

#### 4. Pastoral and Practical Implications:

- **Confidence in Jesus' Teaching and Scripture:** If the themes of imminence and delay are understood correctly, believers can maintain confidence in the reliability of Jesus and the New Testament.
- **Avoid All Date Setting:** The emphasis on delay, alongside the consistent failure of past predictions, should warn against attempting to predict the timing of Christ's return based on current events or interpretations of prophecy. "The fact that there have been so many failed predictions throughout history should not blind us to the fact that we need to recapture that sense of imminency. Christ could come back at any time and we need to live life with that expectancy. However, the problem is when that perspective is taken... to predict even set a date."
- **Need for Holy Living:** The consistent purpose behind both the emphasis on the soon return and the possibility of delay in the New Testament is to motivate believers to live holy and responsible lives in the present. "Without exception, starting with the teaching of Jesus in the gospel all the way to chapter 22 of Revelation, there's one persistent and consistent theme, and that is the emphasis on the soon return of Christ, and even the possibility of delay is always for the

purpose of instilling urgency in the people of God—the urgency to live responsibly in the present."

- Revelation's primary goal was not to provide a future timeline but to urge believers to remain faithful to Christ and avoid compromise with the ungodly world.
- Believers are called to reflect the values of the future, consummated kingdom of God in their present lives. "People should be able to look at their lives and see in the present a reflection of what life will be like in the future: a perfected, consummated kingdom of God."

### Quotes:

- "From the very beginning, especially the book ends, in chapters 1 and 22, where there's a reference to these things happening soon, or these things are near, to the very end of the book in chapter 22, where Christ promises himself that he's coming soon."
- "And that is why Revelation also emphasizes delay."
- "I, in fact, think that John is being intentional, that since he simply did not know when Christ was going to come back, he emphasizes both the themes of nearness or soonness and delay..."
- "They cried out with a loud voice, Lord, the one who is holy and true, how long until you judge those who live in the earth and avenge our blood?" (Revelation 6:10)
- "...they were told to rest a little while longer until the number would be completed..." (Revelation 6:11)
- "So, the literary structure of Revelation corresponds to the theological tension between imminence and delay."
- "Yet two things to notice. Number one, we're only at chapter six. We still have a number of chapters left to go before we get to the end of the book. Second, you'll notice we're only at Seal Six. And seal seven actually gets delayed. You don't get to seal seven until you get to chapter eight."
- "There will be no more delay." (Revelation 10:7)

- "I think John intentionally builds delay into his narrative because, again, the literary delay corresponds to the theological tension between imminency and delay."
- "Again, John does not see 2,000 years of delay. He doesn't tell you how long that's going to delay, but neither does he predict that Christ will come back in the first century."
- "...we simply don't know when Christ will return to wrap up history. And we need to be prepared for either imminency... or delay."
- "But I've suggested throughout this entire series of lectures one of the implications is that if we approach the text in the way I've suggested... is it's not necessary to conclude that the New Testament authors or Jesus were predicting the end and then they were mistaken."
- "The emphasis, especially on delay in the New Testament, reminds us to avoid all date settings..."
- "Without exception... there's one persistent and consistent theme, and that is the emphasis on the soon return of Christ, and even the possibility of delay is always for the purpose of instilling urgency in the people of God—the urgency to live responsibly in the present."

## 4. Study Guide: Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 5, Delay of the Parousia in Revelation, Pastoral Implications

### Study Guide: Delay of the Parousia in Revelation

#### Key Concepts:

- **Parousia:** The second coming or arrival of Jesus Christ.
- **Imminence:** The belief that Jesus Christ could return at any moment.
- **Delay:** The concept that the return of Jesus Christ might not happen immediately and could be postponed.
- **Fifth Seal (Revelation 6:9-11):** A passage depicting martyred saints crying out for vindication, told to rest a little longer until the full number of martyrs is reached, indicating a period of delay.
- **Literary Structure of Revelation:** The cyclical or non-linear progression of Revelation's narrative, which repeatedly raises expectations of the end and then backs off, creating a sense of delay.
- **Trustworthiness of Scripture:** The reliability and accuracy of the Bible, particularly concerning the predictions about the return of Christ.
- **God's Sovereignty:** God's ultimate authority and control over all things, including the timing of Christ's return.
- **Human Responsibility:** The obligation of believers to live faithfully and obediently while awaiting Christ's return, regardless of perceived imminence or delay.
- **Date Setting:** The act of attempting to predict the specific time of Christ's return, which has historically proven to be inaccurate.
- **Holy Living:** The conduct of life in a manner that is morally and spiritually pure and reflects the values of God's kingdom.

#### Quiz:

1. According to Dr. Mathewson, what are the two seemingly contradictory themes regarding the Parousia found in the book of Revelation?
2. Describe the events of the fifth seal in Revelation 6:9-11 and explain how this passage illustrates the theme of delay.

3. What does Dr. Mathewson suggest is the reason behind the non-linear, cyclical structure of the book of Revelation? How does this relate to the theme of delay?
4. Explain the theological challenge posed by the apparent delay of the Parousia for the trustworthiness of Scripture. How does Dr. Mathewson address this challenge?
5. How does the tension between imminence and delay relate to the theological concept of God's sovereignty?
6. Why does Dr. Mathewson caution against date setting for the return of Christ? What historical examples does he provide?
7. According to the lecture, what should be the primary practical outcome of the New Testament emphasis on both the imminence and potential delay of Christ's return for believers?
8. How does the vision of the new creation in Revelation 21-22 relate to the present lives of believers, according to Dr. Mathewson?
9. What does Dr. Mathewson suggest is the main purpose of the book of Revelation, beyond providing a timeline of future events?
10. How should believers respond to the possibility of both the soon return of Christ and a potential delay in his coming?

**Answer Key:**

1. The two seemingly contradictory themes regarding the Parousia in Revelation are **soonness/imminence** (the belief that Jesus Christ was coming back immediately) and **delay** (the idea that there might be a postponement before his return).
2. In the fifth seal, John sees the souls of martyred saints under the altar crying out, "How long until you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?" They are given white robes and told to rest a little while longer **until the number of their fellow servants to be killed is completed**, clearly indicating a period of delay before their vindication.
3. Dr. Mathewson suggests that the non-linear, cyclical structure of Revelation, where expectations of the end are raised and then deferred, is **intentional and reflects the theological tension between imminence and delay**. Just as the narrative progresses with stops and starts, so too does the anticipation of Christ's return coexist with the possibility of it being delayed.



4. The apparent delay of the Parousia can lead some to question the trustworthiness of Scripture if the New Testament authors, and even Jesus himself, seemed to predict an immediate return that did not happen. Dr. Mathewson argues that these statements should be understood as **expressions of imminence and calls to vigilance**, rather than failed predictions of a specific immediate timeline, thus preserving the reliability of Scripture.
5. The tension between imminence and delay mirrors the broader tension between **God's sovereignty and human responsibility**. While God ultimately knows the timing of Christ's return (sovereignty), the possibility of delay can be seen as allowing time for human repentance and response (responsibility), highlighting a complex interplay rather than a contradiction.
6. Dr. Mathewson cautions against date setting because **all such attempts throughout history have failed**, leading to disappointment and potentially undermining faith. He provides examples from the late 1980s and the early 1990s related to specific years and the First Gulf War as instances of misinterpreted signs and inaccurate predictions.
7. The primary practical outcome should be **holy living and faithful witness**. The emphasis on imminence calls for constant readiness and the urgency to fulfill the Christian mission, while the possibility of delay demands patient endurance and responsible living in the present.
8. Dr. Mathewson argues that since Revelation 1:5 reminds us that believers are already a kingdom of priests, the future glory of the new creation should **inspire and motivate them to reflect the values of that perfected kingdom in their present lives**, including pursuing justice, living holy lives, and worshipping God faithfully.
9. Dr. Mathewson suggests that the main purpose of Revelation is **not to provide a detailed timeline of future events but to warn God's people against compromise with the ungodly world** and to encourage them to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, regardless of the consequences.

10. Believers should respond to the possibility of both by **living in constant readiness and vigilance due to the imminence, while also living responsibly and patiently, understanding that there might be a delay**. This involves faithfulness, obedience, and avoiding rash decisions based on a perceived immediate return.

### Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the significance of Revelation 6:9-11 (the fifth seal) in understanding the concept of the delay of the Parousia. How does this passage contribute to a balanced understanding of Christ's return alongside the theme of imminence?
2. Discuss how the literary structure of the book of Revelation, as described by Dr. Mathewson, reinforces the theological tension between the imminence and delay of Christ's coming. Provide specific examples from the text to support your analysis.
3. Evaluate Dr. Mathewson's argument that the New Testament emphasis on the nearness of Christ's return should be understood as a call to vigilance rather than a failed prediction of an immediate event. What are the implications of this perspective for the trustworthiness of Scripture?
4. Explore the pastoral implications of the delay of the Parousia for the church today. How should the understanding of both imminence and delay shape the way believers live, make decisions, and engage with the world around them?
5. Critically assess the dangers of date setting for the Parousia in light of the New Testament's teaching on imminence and delay. How can believers maintain a sense of hopeful anticipation for Christ's return without falling into the trap of predicting a specific time?

## Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Apocalypse:** A literary genre characterized by symbolic visions, often revealing divine secrets about the end times or heavenly realities. The Book of Revelation is an example of this genre.
- **Eschatology:** The branch of theology concerned with the end times, including topics such as the second coming of Christ, resurrection, judgment, and the final state of the world.
- **Vindication:** The act of being cleared of blame or suspicion; in the context of Revelation, the righteous will be vindicated and their oppressors judged at Christ's return.
- **Redemption:** The act of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil. In Revelation, the scroll contains God's plan for the ultimate redemption of creation.
- **Sovereignty (of God):** God's absolute power and authority over all creation and history, including the timing and nature of future events.
- **Immanency (of Christ's return):** The belief that Jesus Christ could return at any moment without further necessary precursors or delays.
- **Tribulation:** A period of great distress, suffering, or hardship; often refers to a specific period of intense trials before Christ's return in eschatological discussions.
- **Kingdom of God:** God's reign or rule, which is understood in the New Testament as both present (inaugurated through Jesus) and future (to be fully consummated at Christ's return).
- **Second Coming (Parousia):** The future return of Jesus Christ to earth, often associated with judgment, the resurrection of the dead, and the establishment of his eternal kingdom.
- **Witness:** To bear testimony to one's faith and experiences, particularly regarding Jesus Christ. Revelation calls believers to be faithful witnesses even in the face of persecution.

## **5. FAQs on Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 5, Delay of the Parousia in Revelation, Pastoral Implications, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions on the Delay of the Parousia in Revelation**

**1. In the book of Revelation, there seems to be a tension between the idea that Jesus is coming soon and the apparent delay of that coming. How does Dr. Mathewson address this tension?**

Dr. Mathewson argues that John intentionally includes both the theme of the soon return of Christ (imminence) and the theme of delay in Revelation. He suggests that John did not know when Christ would return and therefore emphasized both possibilities. This approach avoids the conclusion that John made a failed prediction. The emphasis on imminence serves to encourage vigilance, while the recognition of potential delay calls for patience and responsible living among believers.

**2. Dr. Mathewson points to Revelation 6:9-11 (the fifth seal) as a key passage illustrating the theme of delay. How does this passage highlight this concept?**

In Revelation 6:9-11, John sees the souls of martyred believers crying out, "How long, O Lord, until you judge...and avenge our blood?" They are given white robes and told to rest a little while longer "until the number would be completed of their fellow servants...who were going to be killed just as they had." This cry of "how long" indicates an expectation of sooner vindication that has not yet occurred, signifying a delay. The instruction to wait until a predetermined number of martyrs is reached further reinforces the idea of a necessary period of delay before the final judgment and vindication.

**3. Besides specific passages, how does the literary structure of Revelation contribute to the theme of delay, according to Dr. Mathewson?**

Dr. Mathewson explains that the structure of Revelation is not a straightforward linear progression to the end. Instead, it frequently brings the reader to the brink of the end or heightens that expectation, only to then back off and introduce more events. This cyclical pattern, with "stops and starts," creates a sense of delay built into the very narrative of the book. Examples include the sixth seal seemingly depicting the day of the Lord, yet the seventh seal is delayed until chapter eight, and the sixth trumpet in chapter nine precedes the seventh trumpet appearing much later in chapter eleven.

**4. Some critics argue that the "soon" statements in the New Testament, including Revelation, were failed prophecies because Jesus did not return in the first century. How does Dr. Mathewson counter this argument?**

Dr. Mathewson contends that these "soon" statements should not necessarily be interpreted as precise chronological predictions. Instead, they indicate that with the inauguration of the end times through Christ's first coming, the final consummation could occur at any moment. Jesus and the New Testament authors used this language to instill a sense of vigilance and watchfulness in their followers, urging them to be prepared for Christ's return without specifying a timeframe. The inclusion of the theme of delay further balances this perspective, acknowledging the possibility of a longer waiting period.

**5. What are the two main theological implications of the delay of the Parousia that Dr. Mathewson discusses?**

Dr. Mathewson highlights two key theological implications: \* **The trustworthiness of Scripture:** If the "soon" passages were taken as failed predictions, it would undermine the reliability of the New Testament and Jesus' teachings. Understanding these texts in light of both imminence and potential delay removes this barrier to trusting Scripture. \* **God's sovereignty:** The tension between the expectation of Christ's imminent return and the reality of delay raises questions about God's control over time. Dr. Mathewson suggests this reflects the broader tension in Scripture between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. God, in his sovereignty, may choose to delay his coming, possibly to allow more time for repentance, without negating his ultimate plan.

**6. Dr. Mathewson outlines three pastoral and practical implications related to the delay of the Parousia. What are they?**

The three pastoral and practical implications Dr. Mathewson discusses are: \*

**Trustworthiness and confidence in Jesus' teaching and Scripture:** Recognizing that the New Testament authors were not making failed predictions allows believers to have greater confidence in their teachings on this and other matters. \* **Avoidance of date-setting:** The historical reality of prolonged delay and the New Testament's emphasis on both imminence and delay should serve as a strong warning against attempting to predict the specific time of Christ's return. While maintaining a sense of imminence is important, it should not lead to speculative date-setting. \* **The need for holy living:** The emphasis on both the soon return of Christ and the possibility of delay is consistently used in the New Testament to motivate believers to live responsibly and holy lives in the

present. This expectation should inspire urgency in obedience and faithfulness, reflecting the values of the coming kingdom.

**7. How does the concept of "already but not yet" relate to the New Testament's teaching on the coming of Christ and the implications of delay?**

The "already but not yet" framework aligns with Dr. Mathewson's explanation. The kingdom of God has already been inaugurated through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (the "already"). However, the full manifestation and consummation of this kingdom, including the return of Christ in glory and the establishment of the new creation, has not yet fully occurred (the "not yet"). This perspective helps to understand the tension between the nearness of the kingdom and the apparent delay of Christ's final return. Believers are called to live in light of the inaugurated kingdom, reflecting its values now while patiently waiting for its complete fulfillment in the future.

**8. What should be the primary purpose of understanding the New Testament's teaching on the return of Christ, according to Dr. Mathewson?**

According to Dr. Mathewson, the primary purpose of understanding the New Testament's teaching on the return of Christ, including the themes of both imminence and delay, is not to satisfy curiosity about future timelines or to engage in date-setting. Instead, it is to motivate the people of God to live holy and responsible lives in the present. The expectation of Christ's return, whether soon or after a period of delay, should serve as a constant impetus for faithfulness, obedience, and a refusal to compromise with ungodly influences, as believers reflect the values of the kingdom that is both present and coming.