

Dr. David L. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 2, Literary Genres--Apocalyptic, Prophetic, Epistle 6-Min. Video Overview

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Alright, let's dive into one of the most mysterious and, let's be honest, misunderstood books ever written. The Book of Revelation. Now most people try to read it by matching its wild imagery with today's headlines.

But what if I told you the real key to unlocking it isn't in our future, but in its literary past? Let's find out. Okay, so when you hear the word apocalypse, what's the first thing that pops into your head? For most of us, it's probably total chaos, right? Disaster, the end of the world as we know it, we've all seen the movies. But what if I told you that back in the first century, when Revelation was actually written, that word meant something completely different? And this difference right here is at the very heart of what we're talking about today.

On the one hand, you've got our modern idea, which is all about global catastrophe. But the original Greek word, *apocalypsis*, literally means an unveiling or an uncovering. So it's not about an ending; it's about a revealing.

And that one little shift in meaning, it changes everything. To really get a grip on Revelation, you need what I like to call three literary keys. The first, and maybe the most important one, is understanding its main genre.

It is an apocalypse. And this was actually a super popular and well-understood type of writing back in the ancient world. So what exactly is an *apocalypsis* unveiling? Well, think of it like this.

It's pulling back the curtain on a reality that's normally hidden from our everyday view. It's a heavenly perspective on what's happening right here on Earth. It's all about revealing a deeper, divine truth, not just predicting some far-off destruction.

So what does this kind of writing actually look like? Well, first off, it's almost always a personal story. Like I had this incredible vision. It uses tons of symbolic and metaphorical language to show us what's going on in the heavenly realm.

And by doing that, it gives the original readers a totally new way to see their own lives. You see, its goal wasn't to create some detailed roadmap of the future, but to encourage and to warn people right in their present moment. Okay, to make this a little more concrete, let's use an analogy.

And this one, it might seem a little strange at first. I want you to think of Revelation's apocalyptic style as being kind of like a political cartoon. It sounds weird, I know, but the logic behind it is actually pretty powerful.

I mean, think about it. A political cartoon isn't just some random fantasy drawing, right? It's about real people and actual events. But it uses these symbolic, sometimes really exaggerated images, like an elephant representing a whole political party, to make a sharp point about what's really going on.

In that same way, Revelation uses all these bizarre symbols to comment on the real-life historical situations and empires of its day. Alright, here's another way to think about it. A second analogy that helps explain the purpose of this whole unveiling.

If the political cartoon explains the how, this one explains the why. So imagine you're sitting in a huge theater, watching a play unfold on the stage. You know, when you're sitting out there in the audience, all you see are the actors on stage, saying their lines.

But in Apocalypse, it yanks that curtain back. It takes you backstage, where you can see the director, the stagehands, all the machinery that's making the whole show work. It reveals the heavenly reality that is influencing and shaping the events you're watching on the world stage.

Okay, let's grab our second key, because this is where it all starts to build. See, the author, John, he didn't just call his book an apocalypse. He also explicitly identified it as a prophecy.

I mean, look at this. Right at the very beginning of the book. The text itself tells us exactly how we're supposed to read it.

By calling it a prophecy, John is tapping into a long and respected tradition. But the role of a prophet, well, it might not be what you think. And this is a really, really crucial point.

A biblical prophet was not a fortune teller with a crystal ball. They were more like a covenant enforcer. Their main job wasn't just to predict the future.

It was to call people back to being faithful to God in the present, warning them about the consequences if they went astray and encouraging them to hang in there. And that leads us right into our third and final key. And honestly, this is the one that people miss all the time.

This entire sprawling, epic, apocalyptic prophecy is framed as something incredibly simple and familiar. A letter. I mean, just look at how the book opens.

It has an author, John. It has specific recipients, these seven churches in Asia. And it has a greeting.

This is the standard boilerplate format of a first-century letter or epistle. And that fact right there is a massive clue. See, letters back then were what scholars call occasional.

Now, that doesn't mean they wrote them every now and then. It means they were written for a specific occasion to address the real-world problems, the specific circumstances, and questions of a particular group of people. This tells us Revelation wasn't some generic blueprint for the distant future.

It was a timely message meant to be understood by its very first readers. Okay, so we've got our three keys: apocalypse, prophecy, and letter. Now what? How do we actually put all of

this together? How does this create a whole new way of looking at the book? Well, here's how it all clicks into place.

Revelation is an apocalypse. That's the symbolic unveiling of heavenly reality. It's a prophecy, a powerful call to faithfulness for God's people.

And it's a letter written to address the specific real-life struggles of seven actual communities living in the Roman Empire. So what does this mean for you when you go to read it? It gives us a whole new game plan. First, always, always start with the original first-century context.

Second, remember that you're juggling three different literary styles at the same time. And third, before we even begin to ask what it means for us today, we have to first listen for what it meant to them. You see, when we stop trying to read Revelation like it's a secret code for the 21st century and start seeing it for what it is, a powerful, masterfully crafted piece of literature for the first century, that's when we can finally begin to hear its true message of hope and challenge.

Which really leaves us with a bigger question, doesn't it? What other truths might be hiding in plain sight, just waiting for us to find the right key?