

Revelation: Session 4 (Revelation 1)

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Dave Mathewson analyzes Revelation 1 as an essential introduction establishing divine authority, Trinitarian framing, and literary structure for the entire book. He divides the chapter into two main components: an epistolary greeting (verses 1–8) framing the book as an apocalypse, testimony, prophecy, and letter, followed by an inaugural vision of the exalted Christ (verses 9–20) who commissions John. Grounding John's vision in Old Testament imagery—especially Daniel 7, Exodus, and Isaiah—Mathewson presents Jesus as the sovereign Lord of history who walks among the seven lampstands. Ultimately, the text functions as a counter-imperial proclamation, asserting that absolute sovereignty belongs exclusively to God and Christ rather than Roman imperial rule.

Outline

I. Introduction and Methodological Approach (Revelation 1:1–2)

A. Twofold interpretive method for Revelation 1

1. Establish the overall contextual function and visionary meaning of each section
2. Examine significant linguistic, visionary, and Old Testament symbolic details

B. Two primary structural divisions of Revelation 1

1. Epistolary introduction and greeting (Revelation 1:1–8)
2. Inaugural vision and commissioning of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:9–20)

II. Epistolary Introduction and Major Themes (Revelation 1:1–8)

A. Literary nature and chain of communication (Rev 1:1–3)

1. Identification as an "Apocalypse" (Revelation)
 - a. Sets expectation of divine unveiling of God's will and ultimate reality
 - b. Subjective genitive: Revelation originating from and given by Jesus Christ
2. Identification as "Testimony" or "Witness" (Martyria)
 - a. Jesus acts as the supreme witness confirming divine authority
 - b. Term precedes technical definition of martyrdom, though witness often leads to death
 - c. Example of Antipas as a faithful witness who suffered death
3. Identification as "Prophecy"

- a. Pronounces a blessing on the public reader and obedient hearers
 - b. Demands ethical response and covenantal fidelity rather than mere future prediction
- B. Letter format and Trinitarian greeting (Rev 1:4–6)**
 - 1. Direct address to seven historical churches in Asia Minor
 - 2. Explicit Trinitarian foundation
 - a. God the Father: "Him who is and who was and who is to come"
 - b. Holy Spirit: "The seven spirits before his throne" (symbolizing fullness and perfection)
 - c. Jesus Christ: "The faithful witness, firstborn from the dead, ruler of earth's kings"
- C. Counter-imperial claims and redemptive purpose (Rev 1:4–6)**
 - 1. The divine "Throne" as an explicit counterclaim against Caesar and Roman power
 - 2. Jesus proclaimed as true "Ruler of the Kings of the Earth"
 - 3. New Exodus redemption and kingdom formation
 - a. Redemptive blood echoing Israel's deliverance from bondage
 - b. Formation of a "Kingdom and Priests" fulfilling Exodus 19:6
 - c. Believers function as God's earthly representatives through endurance and suffering
- D. Imminent return and divine self-designation (Rev 1:7–8)**
 - 1. Expectation of Christ's return on the clouds (Daniel 7:13; Zechariah 12:10)
 - 2. Grounding in divine titles
 - a. "Alpha and Omega" (Isaiah 41:4; 44:6): Asserts absolute uniqueness over pagan idols
 - b. "One who is, was, and is to come" (Exodus 3:14): Denotes divine eternity and active presence
 - c. "The Almighty": Affirmation of total sovereignty over human history

III. Inaugural Vision and Commissioning of Christ (Revelation 1:9–20)

- A. John's identification and setting (Rev 1:9–11)**
 - 1. Self-identification as "brother and companion in suffering, kingdom, and endurance"
 - 2. Paradox of kingdom participation bringing earthly tribulation
 - 3. Setting on the island of Patmos during exile
- B. The exalted Christ among the lampstands (Rev 1:12–16)**
 - 1. Seven Golden Lampstands
 - a. Tabernacle and Temple background (Exodus 25, 1 Kings 7, Zechariah 4)
 - b. Portrays a heavenly temple setting where Christ serves as priest
 - 2. Christ walking in the midst of the lampstands
 - a. Assures churches of Christ's immediate, intimate presence
 - b. Brings comfort to the suffering and solemn warning/judgment to the compromised
- C. Old Testament characterization of the exalted Son of Man (Rev 1:13–18)**
 - 1. Title "Son of Man" drawn directly from Daniel 7:13

2. Head and hair white like wool/snow transferring attributes of the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9) to Jesus

3. High Christology asserting Christ's full deity on the divine side of reality

4. Possession of the "keys of Death and Hades" following resurrection victory

D. Commission command and interpretive model (Rev 1:19–20)

1. Command to "write what you see" (Rev 1:19)

a. Refers to the comprehensive scope of the prophecy (past, present, and future)

b. Reflects God's eternal sovereignty across all historical eras

2. Explicit decoding of apocalyptic symbols (Rev 1:20)

a. Seven stars = angels of the seven churches

b. Seven lampstands = seven churches

c. Establishes apocalyptic paradigm: metaphoric symbols representing historical realities