

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 2, Literary Genres--Apocalyptic, Prophetic, Epistle

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Welcome back, everyone. We're diving deep into the book of Revelation today. Always a fascinating one.

It is, it's one that we get questions about all the time. Yeah. And, uh, we've gotten some really interesting excerpts actually from a lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson.

Oh yeah, Dr. Mathewson's great. Yeah. He's got some really insightful things to say about Revelation, especially when it comes to the, uh, the different genres.

Yeah. He talks about how understanding the genres is really like finding the Rosetta Stone for Revelation. Oh, that's a good way to put it.

Like it helps unlock a whole new level of meaning. It does. Because, like, you know, you read through Revelation and it's like all these crazy images, you know, beasts and dragons and numbers.

And yeah, you've got bowls of wrath and trumpets and all this stuff. Exactly. And if you don't understand, like, the literary context, it's like, what, what is going on here? It's easy to get lost in the weeds.

Right. Exactly. So Dr. Mathewson breaks it down into three main genres that are at play in Revelation.

It's okay. Let's hear it. So we've got apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle.

Okay. So apocalypse, that's the one that everyone kind of jumps to right away. Yeah.

Most people, when they hear apocalypse, they think end of the world, doom and gloom, fire and brimstone. Right. The Hollywood version.

Exactly. Yeah. But, uh, Dr. Mathewson points out that it's a bit more nuanced than that.

Okay. So what is it really about then? Well, in this context, apocalypse is actually a literary genre. A genre.

Okay. So it's like, think of it as a first-person narrative of a vision. Okay.

A vision. Yeah. Where, like, the veil between heaven and the future is kind of pulled back.

So it's about getting a glimpse behind the scenes kind of. Exactly. It's about revealing hidden realities and kind of giving you a glimpse into the spiritual forces that are at work.

So it's less about predicting the future and more about understanding the present. You got it. It's about giving you a new perspective on what's happening around you.

I like that. Dr. Mathewson actually uses a really interesting analogy. Okay.

He compares apocalypses to political cartoons. Political cartoons, huh? Yeah. Think about it.

Like how those cartoons use symbols and exaggeration to comment on current events. Right. They're making a point.

Exactly. Apocalypses do the same thing, but for spiritual truths. Oh, I see.

So they're using those vivid images to kind of help us understand the forces that are shaping our world. Exactly. They're giving us a new lens through which to view things.

So it's not just about predicting doom and gloom. It's about understanding the spiritual realities behind what we see happening around us. Exactly.

And Dr. Mathewson points out that most apocalypses were written during times of crisis and oppression. That makes sense. Yeah.

It was a way for people to find hope and meaning in the midst of really difficult circumstances. So for those early Christians living under Roman rule facing persecution, Revelation would have been a source of comfort and encouragement. Absolutely.

It would have given them a way to understand their situation and to find hope in the midst of their struggles. That's really powerful. It is.

And it speaks to us today, too. You know, we might not be facing Roman persecution. Right.

But we all have our own struggles. Exactly. We all face challenges to our faith and our values.

So Revelation can still offer us that same sense of hope and encouragement. It can. And it reminds us that no matter what we're going through, God is still in control.

That's a good reminder. It is. So we talked about apocalypse.

Now let's move on to the next genre, prophecy. Okay. So prophecy, does that mean we're about to predict the future? Well, not exactly prophecy in the biblical sense.

It's not so much about fortune telling as it is about covenant enforcement. Covenant enforcement. That's an interesting way to put it.

Yeah. Dr. Mathewson explains it as a way of reminding God's people of their commitments and the potential consequences of straying from those commitments. So it's less about predicting specific events and more about understanding the cause and effect of our choices within a larger spiritual framework.

Precisely. And what's fascinating is that prophets often used historical events in current situations to illustrate those consequences. So they're showing how individual choices play out on a larger scale.

Exactly. And that adds another layer of meaning to revelation. It does, because it's not just about what happened in the past or what might happen in the future.

It's about how our choices today are shaping the world around us. And that brings us to the final genre, epistle or letter. Okay.

A letter. So why is it significant that Revelation is framed as a letter? Well, think about it. Letters, they're personal.

Yeah. They're addressed to a specific audience. Exactly.

And they have a specific purpose. So by framing this powerful vision as a letter, John, the author of Revelation, is making it clear that this message is directly relevant to the lives of those early Christians. Absolutely.

It's not just a general message about the future. It's personal guidance and encouragement delivered in a way that would resonate with those early Christians facing real-world challenges. So it's like receiving a letter from a mentor offering wisdom and support.

Exactly. And by understanding that it's a letter, we can approach revelation with a different mindset. One that looks for practical application and personal relevance.

You got it. This is all starting to make a lot more sense. So we've got this multi-layered message: a vision of the unseen world and apocalypse, a call to faithfulness, prophecy, and it's all delivered in a personal letter and epistle.

And by recognizing these three genres, we're better equipped to delve into the specifics of revelation. That brings us to the next step of our deep dive. We've got the framework: these three genres.

Now let's start unpacking the symbols and imagery. What might these symbols have meant to those early Christians, and what might they mean for us today? All right. So we've got our three genres, apocalypse, prophecy, and letter, but now we've got to tackle the symbol.

Oh yeah. The symbols. Those are always fun.

Like what's the deal with the number 666? That's got to be like public enemy number one when it comes to scary symbols. It's definitely up there, and it's understandable why people get freaked out by it. But if we remember our political cartoon analogy, we know that those cartoons use symbols to make a point.

They get your attention. Exactly. And it's the same with revelation numbers.

They often held a lot of symbolic meaning in the ancient world. So it's not like a literal street address. No, no, no.

It's more like a code, a way of conveying a deeper message. Okay. So how do we crack the code on 666? What does Dr. Mathewson say about it? Well, he suggests we look at the context.

Where does the number appear in the book? So where does it pop up? In Revelation 13, it's associated with this beast that rises up from the sea. This beast demands worship and persecutes those who refuse. That's kind of familiar.

Yeah. And many scholars believe that this beast represents the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire.

Okay. That makes sense considering the pressure those early Christians were facing to conform to Roman practices. Exactly.

And Dr. Mathewson points out that in the ancient world, there was this practice called gematria. Gematria. What's that? It's where they assign numerical values to letters.

So you could calculate the numerical equivalent of a word. You got it. Interesting.

So are you saying that 666 could be the numerical value of something connected to the Roman Empire? That's what some scholars believe. One theory is that 666 represents the name Nero Caesar when you calculate it using Hebrew gematria. Nero Caesar was the Roman emperor known for persecuting Christians.

That's pretty chilling. It is. Of course, not everyone agrees on this interpretation, but it's fascinating how this number potentially connects to a specific historical figure who really embodied that oppressive power that early Christians were up against.

It's like John, the author of Revelation, was embedding a secret message, a warning about the dangers of conforming to this power that demanded ultimate allegiance. And that message still resonates today. You know, we may not be facing the Roman Empire.

True. But we all encounter those pressures to compromise our beliefs or bow down to false gods. It's like those things that we put before our faith.

Yeah. It could be social pressure, cultural trends, even our own ambitions. So 666, it's not just about a specific emperor from the past.

It's a warning against idolatry in all its forms. Exactly. A reminder to be discerning about the things we give our allegiance to.

That's a powerful takeaway. So we've talked about the beast in 666, but there's another big question I think we need to address. What about the end of the world? Does Revelation actually predict the apocalypse, like fire and brimstone, everything going up in flames? That's the million-dollar question, isn't it? And as with most things in Revelation, the answer isn't a simple yes or no.

So where does Dr. Mathewson land on this? Well, he reminds us that Revelation is primarily a message of hope and encouragement for those facing persecution. Those early Christians needed to know that God was in control, even when it felt like the world was falling apart. That's true.

But there are those vivid descriptions of judgment and destruction. Like, how do those fit into the message of hope? Yeah, those descriptions are definitely intense, you know, plagues, earthquakes, lake of fire. It's not exactly light reading.

But remember, we're dealing with apocalyptic literature here, where symbolism reigns supreme. So those events aren't necessarily meant to be taken literally. That's where interpretations differ.

Some people see Revelation as a literal roadmap of future events. You know, dates, times, places, the whole nine yards. And others? Others view it more symbolically as depicting the ultimate triumph of good over evil, a cosmic battle between God and the forces that oppose him.

So there's room for multiple interpretations. Does Dr. Mathewson suggest a specific way to approach these prophecies? He emphasizes approaching these passages with humility. Humility.

Okay. He encourages us to remember who the original audience was, to consider the historical context, and to be open to the possibility of multiple layers of meaning. So instead of getting caught up in trying to predict a precise timeline of events, we should focus on the core message.

Exactly. Which is that God is in control and that he will ultimately bring justice and righteousness to the world. That's reassuring.

But I have to admit, even with all this insightful context reading, Revelation can still feel overwhelming. Oh, I totally get it. It's a dense book.

It's packed with layers of meaning. It can feel like you're trying to read a book written in a different language sometimes. Oh yeah, definitely.

And you know, I think that's where a lot of people get tripped up. They try to read Revelation like it's a newspaper, you know, just looking for the facts and the headlines. Right.

But it's not like that. No, it's not. It's more like poetry.

Oh, that's good. You have to kind of let the images and the symbols wash over you and try to grasp the deeper meaning. So how do we do that? How do we avoid getting lost in those apocalyptic weeds? Well, Dr. Mathewson offers a few hopeful tips.

First, he stresses the importance of remembering the historical context. Right. We talked about that earlier.

Yeah, we did. But it's worth repeating because those early Christians were living in a very specific time and place, facing very specific challenges. Facing persecution from the Roman Empire.

Exactly. And those wild images that we see in Revelation, the beasts, the dragons, the falling stars. Yeah, they're not just random.

No. They would have a very real and immediate meaning for those readers. So to understand Revelation, we need to try to see the world through their eyes.

Exactly. We need to step back in time and understand the context in which those images were being used. It's like trying to understand a political cartoon from another era.

You need to know the historical background to get the joke. Exactly. And just like those cartoons, Revelation uses those symbols to make a point, to convey a message that would resonate with its original audience.

So it's not just about decoding the symbols themselves; it's about understanding the message they were meant to convey in that specific historical context. Precisely. And that leads to another point that Dr. Mathewson makes about the literary genres.

Oh, right. We've got the Big Three: Apocalypse, Prophecy, Epistle. Exactly.

But it goes even deeper than that. There are sub-genres at play as well. Sub-genres? Interesting.

Yeah. So, for example, some sections of Revelation read like hymns of praise. Oh.

Others are more like courtroom dramas. Still others are like epic poems. Recognizing these different styles can give us clues as to how we should interpret the text.

So it's like approaching Revelation as a work of art. We need to understand the artist's techniques to fully appreciate the beauty and the depth of what they've created. I love that analogy, because it really is about appreciating the artistry of the language, the way John uses those symbols and genres to create a powerful and multifaceted message.

Okay. So, historical context, literary genres. What else should we keep in mind as we journey through Revelation? Dr. Mathewson also emphasizes the importance of reading Revelation within the larger context of Scripture.

So, not just reading it in isolation. Right. It's not an isolated book.

It's part of a bigger story, a grand narrative that unfolds across the entire Bible. So we need to connect the dots, see how Revelation fits into the bigger picture of God's plan and purpose for humanity. Exactly.

He encourages us to look for echoes of earlier biblical themes to see how Revelation builds upon and culminates those themes. It's like the final chapter in a long and complex story. You need to have read the previous chapters to fully appreciate the climax.

Exactly. So, for example, Revelation picks up on themes of creation, fall, redemption, and judgment- themes that are woven throughout the Old and New Testaments. Right.

By recognizing those connections, we gain a deeper understanding of Revelation's message. This has been so helpful. But I think we need to address the big why question.

Why should we even bother to wrestle with this complex and often challenging book? That's a great question. And, you know, honestly, I think Dr. Mathewson would say that Revelation offers us a profound message of hope. Hope.

Okay. Yeah. It gives us a vision of God's ultimate victory over evil and a call to faithful living in the midst of trials.

So it's not just an ancient puzzle to be solved. It's a message for us today. Absolutely.

Revelation reminds us that despite the chaos and uncertainty of our world, God is in control. That's a good reminder. It is.

And it assures us that good will ultimately triumph over evil, that our faithfulness, even in the face of persecution, will be rewarded. That's a message we all need to hear. We do, especially in the world we live in today.

It is so, Revelation. It might have been written centuries ago, but its message is timeless. It's relevant to every generation that faces challenges to its faith and values.

It's a call to stand firm, to persevere, to trust in God's plan, even when we can't see the whole picture. Well said. This has been an incredible journey through Revelation.

Thank you so much for sharing your insights with us today. It's been my pleasure. And to all of you listening, thank you for joining us on this deep dive into the book of Revelation.

We hope this has helped to shed some light on this fascinating and often misunderstood book. Remember, it's not about predicting the future. It's about understanding the present, finding hope and encouragement amidst trials, and living faithfully knowing that God is ultimately in control.