

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 21, Revelation 14-16 Grain First Fruits, Grapes Judgment and the Seven Bowl Judgments

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 21, Revelation 14-16, Grain First Fruits, Grapes Judgment, and the Seven Bowl Judgments.

We've been looking at the two, actually, a series of images that the author uses in chapter 14 to describe the final judgment as it relates to the people of God who persevered and endured in their battle with the beast in chapters 12 and 13.

And also the fate of those who gave in or the fate of those who followed and identified with and gave worship and allegiance to the beast. There are two texts that I misread in earlier sections that I want to draw your attention back to. In the language, we said that the 144,000 are called first fruits, but it seems that the first fruit imagery applies to the whole people of God, not a group and anticipation of more to come, and I suggested in the Old Testament that we find that.

The places we find that most clearly are Jeremiah 2, verses 2 and 3. And Jeremiah 2, verses 2 and 3 is, the word of the Lord came to me, Jeremiah the prophet, go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, though through a land not sown, Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest. So now you find, I think, imagery used in the same way in chapter 14. The 144,000 are first fruits devoted to the Lord, referring to the entirety of God's people at the end of history, not a group and anticipation of a further group.

The other text to draw your attention to is to turn our attention back to 17 through 20 of Revelation 14. We said this; here, the author uses the image of a grape harvest to describe and depict the judgment of unbelieving humanity, those who have followed the beast rather than the lamb, and the author uses the image of a grape harvest as a symbol of God's judgment. The text I wanted to draw your attention to is actually not Isaiah 62, but Isaiah chapter 63, in the context of end-time judgment.

In Isaiah chapter 63 and verses 2 and 3. I'll back up to verse 1 and read part of verse 1. Who is this robed in splendor, striding forth in the greatness of his strength? It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save. Why are your garments red like those of one treading the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone. From the nations, no one was with me.

I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath. Their blood splattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing with the blood. So here you clearly have, I think, the background for this language of the grape harvest in 17 through 20.

That is, God depicted as treading the winepress of his wrath. That is, the nations are seen in the winepress and what results is the blood that comes from them. Interestingly, this text will crop up again in chapter 19 where the rider and the white horse comes with the robes stained with blood.

Stained with the blood from the winepress, I take it. So this is kind of an anticipation of what gets divulged in more detail in chapter 19. So Isaiah chapter 63 and texts like Joel chapter 3 and elsewhere in the Old Testament provide the background for this imagery of a winepress and a harvest of grapes and trampling the winepress as an image or symbol of God's judgment on humanity.

But, as we said, what flows from the winepress in Isaiah 63, as well as here in Revelation 14, is not wine from the grapes, but instead, what flows from it is the blood of God's enemies. And it's described very interestingly as the blood reaching or going up as high as the horse's bridles, recalling, I think, military imagery. The horses are not just horses out there kind of cavorting in the pasture, but this is an image of a cavalry, horses that have gone out to do battle.

So now the blood flows up as high as the bridle of the horses and the distance of 1600 stadia. We'll talk more about stadia when we get to Revelation 21 and 22, but it's enough to know that this is a rather large and rather significant distance. So you kind of have this rather gruesome language of a complete bloodbath as the result of God's judgment.

Now what I think though is going on is, again, John is simply drawing on stock language and imagery. This time it appears specifically from apocalyptic text to describe the nature and meaning of God's judgment. So we probably should not take this literally, as if at some point in history, one could go out and find blood going up to the horse's bridle sometime in the future judgment.

In fact, I couldn't even imagine that an army would choose to fight, especially in the 21st century or beyond, using horses anyway. So John is simply borrowing common imagery from the Old Testament to depict God trampling the winepress and the blood of the enemies flowing. But now he's added apocalyptic imagery, images from apocalyptic literature to further heighten the impression this makes on the reader of the severity and the extent and awesomeness of God's judgment upon those who have followed the beast.

For example, this text is from 1st Enoch. We've read from 1st Enoch a couple times, an important apocalypse, and also 4th Ezra. I want to read two more passages out of those apocalypses.

One of them is 1st Enoch chapter 100, which is an image of the final judgment of sinners, the final judgment of the ungodly. Beginning with verse 1, In those days, the father will be beaten together with his sons in one place, and the brother shall fall together with their friends in death until a stream shall flow with their blood. For a man will not be able to withhold his hands from his sons, nor from his sons' sons in order to kill them.

Let me skip down to verse 3, so this image of death in judgment and bloodshed. Now, in verse 3, The horse shall walk through the blood of the sinners up to his chest, and the chariot shall sink down up to its top. Clearly, the horses are horses of warfare.

So notice the imagery in 1st Enoch of the blood going all the way up. Here, it's only to the chest of the horses. But if you turn over also to 4th Ezra, another important apocalypse that we've seen, and one that John appears to draw motifs that come out of 4th Ezra, whether he read 4th Ezra or not, he still seems to draw from motifs that can be found in that book.

Chapter 15 of 4th Ezra, again in the context of end-time judgment. Behold clouds, this is 4th Ezra 15 verses 30, I'll read 33 through 36, 34 through 36. Behold clouds from the East and from the north to the south, and their appearance is very threatening, full of wrath and storms.

So the image of end-time judgment and God pouring out his wrath. They shall dash against one another and shall pour out a heavy tempest upon the earth, and their own tempest, and there shall be blood from the sword as high as the horse's belly, and a man's thigh and a camel's back. So notice, although the language is a little bit different and John depicts the blood going up to the bridle of the horses, you clearly have this notion in the apocalyptic text of the final judgment being so severe and so widespread that it can be, and the bloodshed so great it can be depicted as blood flowing up to the belly or the chest of the horse, and then John takes it up to the bridle of the horse.

So what John is doing, I think, is simply drawing on a common apocalyptic motif from apocalyptic texts such as 1st Enoch and 4th Ezra and others, not to depict a literal scene that, as if one were present at this time in history, you'd actually see blood flowing through the bellies or the bridles of horses, but using imagery, stock imagery from apocalyptic texts to try to play on the emotions and the response of the readers to get them to see the horror and the awfulness and the extent and severity of God's judgment at the end of time. So, the imagery then says something from both Isaiah

63, the language of treading the winepress, and the language from apocalyptic texts that John has brought together to depict the end time judgment. These images function to explore the meaning and the extent and nature of God's judgment, not necessarily literally how it's going to take place.

So, in chapters 14 through 20, I've suggested to you that we see two scenes of end-time judgment. One of them is positive; that is, the scene of the harvest of the grain is a positive scene of reaping the harvest of God's people as a first fruit, probably referring back to chapter 14, verse 4, and now chapter 17 through 20, using the harvest of grapes as a negative image of the judgment of the wicked or judgment of evil. And so verses 14 through 16 correspond to chapter 14, 1 through 5, and that the grain harvest, that is, corresponds to 14, 1 through 5, the 144,000 standing victorious in Zion with the lamb, victorious in their battle with sin and evil and Satan and the beast, and now presented as a first fruit harvest to God.

Now, that harvest is depicted in verses 14 through 16. And then the three messages of the angels, especially angels 2 and 3, proclaiming the message of judgment now for those who follow the beast, for those who had the mark of the beast, worshipped his image, indicating allegiance and worship and identifying with the beast, this idolatrous godless empire. Now, their situation of judgment is depicted in verses 17 through 20 in the form of a grape harvest.

So all in all then, chapter 14, rather than just being an unconnected indiscriminate series of images, chapter 14 uses different images such as 144 standing victorious in Mount Zion, the first fruits, Babylon's fall, the language of judgment in the form of the cup of God's wrath being poured out and smoke going up forever and ever, smoke and sulfur setting forever and ever, the scenes of harvest, the harvest of wheat or grain, the harvest of grapes. John uses different imagery to explore the fate of those in chapters 12 and 13. Those in chapters 12 and 13 then who refused to compromise, who resisted even to the point of suffering and death, those who responded to the battle that Satan wages on the Saints, those who refused to compromise, who instead endured and maintained their faithful witness, now they are described with the images of the 144,000 standing of Mount Zion and also the grain harvest and the first fruits.

But those in chapters 12 and 13 who compromised in the church and in the world, so we're not to read this as exclusively the positive images for the church and the negative for the world. No, the negative images are also for those in the church who compromise and refuse to maintain their faithful witness. For those, the images of God's wrath poured out in judgment, the destruction of Babylon, God's wrath poured out in terms of a cup of wine unmixed, the smoke and sulfur going up forever, the treading of the wine press of God's wrath, all of those images now depict and portrayed the fate of those who compromise with the beast in chapters 12 and 13.

So now, chapter 14 leads into one final vision of judgment, or, I'm sorry, one final vision of actually both judgment and salvation and that is in chapters 15 and 16. Chapter 15 introduces us to what will be unpacked in more detail in chapter 16, and that is the seven last plagues, and we'll see how these images connect. But the seven last plagues will be the seven last judgments of God, but in the midst of that, in chapter 15, verses 1 through 4, we find another vision of end-time salvation.

So we're going to find another mixture alternation of a vision of salvation followed by a vision of judgment and we'll talk a little bit about the connection of that. But chapter 15, chapter 15 seems to have a twofold function when we think about chapter 15 and 16. First of all chapter 15 functions to introduce the seven, the bowl sequence, the sequence of seven bowls of God's wrath that get poured out in chapter 16.

So, on the one hand, chapter 15 functions as an introduction to chapter 16. However, it also depicts God's people praising the Lamb because of the victory that he has given them in chapters 15 and 2 through 4. So, once more, we find this sort of interlocking going on. Note how verse 15 begins: I saw in heaven another angel, a great and marvelous sign, seven angels with the seven last plagues.

Last, because with them, God's wrath is completed. Now, you could skip down to verse 5, and I look in heaven at the temple and the Tabernacle of testimony, and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven last plagues. So in verse 1 he sees the seven angels with the seven last plagues.

Now in verses 5 and following he describes the seven angels coming out with the seven last plagues in the form of bowls about to pour them out in the earth. So you could remove verses 2 and 4, 2 through 4 and the narrative would flow very nicely. But here we find another example of sort of that interlocking that we've seen elsewhere in Revelation.

Verse 1 begins the narrative of the seven angels with the seven last plagues, but then it's interrupted by a scene that seems to, in a sense, belong to chapter 14, another scene of final salvation but in different imagery where once again we find God's people standing and singing with the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. So, chapter 15, at one level, seems to connect back to chapter 14, another image of salvation, but it also connects with and provides an introduction to chapter 16 that follows. So you have this interlocking feature that the seven angels and their plagues are introduced in verse 1. It's cut off by a scene of God's people standing beside a sea singing the song of Moses, singing by the Lamb, and it records that song, and then the scene in verse 1 is picked up again with the angels coming out of the temple about ready to pour out their bowls, and then chapter 16 narrates the pouring out of each of the seven bowls.

Now let me read chapter 15 to you, which is a very short chapter. I saw in heaven and noticed the word I saw again, marking off another segment of the vision. I saw in heaven another great marvelous sign, seven angels with the seven last plagues last because with them God's wrath is now completed, and I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and standing beside the sea those who had been victorious over the beast and his image again connecting you back to chapter 13 and chapter 14.

Now, I think this is the same group as the 144,000 those who have been victorious over the beast and his image from chapter 13 and chapter 14 and over the number of his name in chapter 13, verse 18. They held harps given them by God, and they sang a song of Moses the servant of God and the song, and they sang the song of the Lamb, and here it is great and marvelous are your deeds Lord God Almighty just and true are your ways kings of the ages king of the ages who will not fear you O Lord and bring glory to your name for you alone are holy all nations will come and worship before you for your righteous acts have been revealed. After this, I looked, and in heaven and in the temple that is in the Tabernacle of the testimony, it was opened, and out of the temple came seven angels with the seven plagues.

They were dressed in clean, shining linen, and they wore gold sashes around their chest. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls, filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

Now, just briefly, in chapter 15, what I think is going on is this. The author is about ready to narrate the seven last plagues. This is the third cycle of plagues, starting with the seven seals, then seven trumpets, and now seven bowls are about ready to be poured out.

But before he does that, the author gives us one more image, connecting back to chapters 14 and 13, an image of those who are victorious. But now I want you to notice how the image of those people is portrayed in 2 through 4, and I think this is the key to seeing that this is not just some indiscriminate insertion of verses 2 and 3 into this. In other words, chapter 15 begins the seven last plagues, but you have 2 and 4, this picture of the saints standing by the sea, singing the song of the Lamb.

This is not just kind of an interruption. Instead, I think there's a purpose as the author is about ready to link or narrate the last final judgments of God before and leading up to the final outpouring of God's judgments in chapter 17 and following.

Now, before he begins to narrate the pouring out of God's wrath in terms of the final seven judgments in the form of the bowl judgments, the author, in one final image,

wants to depict the people of God standing before the sea, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, still connecting back to 13 or 14, but now he's looking at it from a different picture. He's using a different image. Chapter 15 describes the same scenes we saw in 14.

The 144,000 in Mount Zion, the grain harvest of the first fruits. Now, we see the same scene in different imagery, but what is John doing? The key to connecting these is the language of the Exodus. John wants to portray the final judgment of God as an Exodus.

That is, in terms of the Exodus plagues, which he will discuss in chapter 16; but before he does that, he wants to remind us again that in the midst of this, God's people will emerge victorious. So, verses 2 and 4 do not happen chronologically.

In other words, in chapter 15, verses 2 and 4, this vision of the saints before the sea of glass, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, does not happen first, and then the bowls get poured out. I think it's probably the opposite. But what John is doing is before he narrates the pouring out of the final Exodus plagues, he wants to show you the outcome for the saints in the same way that in the Old Testament, the people of God went to the Red Sea, emerged victorious, and sang the song of Moses.

That's what will happen after these plagues are poured out. God's people, again, will not be harmed by these plagues and will not suffer the wrath of God. But instead, in Exodus language, as part of this Exodus story in 15 and 6, chapters 15 and 16, the author, right out front, before he ever narrates the Exodus plague judgments in the form of the seven bowls in chapter 16, he wants to portray God's people that after that time, they will emerge as victorious and standing by the sea, having crossed the Red Sea, standing by the sea and singing the song of Moses.

Now, it's interesting that in 2-4, the author draws on a number of images that refer to, I think, clearly recall the Exodus, but two things are interesting about this account. Number one is the sea is described as the sea of glass. Apparently, it was the same sea back in Revelation chapter 4, the sea of glass that stood before the throne.

Interestingly, though, in some Jewish literature, the Red Sea is described as a sea of glass. There are a couple of Jewish texts outside of the Old Testament where the Red Sea was described in some rabbinic literature as a sea of glass. Also, we've already noted that in a text like Isaiah 51 and verse 9, the Red Sea was depicted as a sea of chaos, the home of the sea monster, so what you might have here then is a picture of the sea of chaos, the home of the sea monster, that which threatens God's people starting in the first Exodus.

That sea has now been calmed by God's sovereignty. Now, we find that it is a sea of glass, God showing His sovereignty over the sea of chaos and evil, the Red Sea of chaos and evil. So now, the people of God are described as having emerged through that.

Now, they stand victorious. The sea of chaos and evil probably reflects the events of chapters 12 and 13. Satan's attempt to pour out his torrent of water on the woman, his attempt to kill her offspring, that sea has now been calmed with God's sovereignty.

Now, they have emerged through that period of tribulation, and they stand beside the sea like the ancient Israelites did, and they sing the song of Moses. The other interesting thing about this psalm is that the author, the song of Moses that was sung in Exodus chapter 15 after they emerged from the Red Sea. There's another song of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy as well.

But this song doesn't resemble those, especially the song in Exodus chapter 15. What John has apparently done is in hearing this song and also recording this song, he has drawn in a number of other Old Testament texts from Isaiah chapter 60 and elsewhere that all celebrate God's holiness and his mighty just acts on behalf of his people in judging evil but also in providing his salvation for his people. So, the song of Moses here does not really closely resemble the song in Exodus 15 if you go back and compare it.

And that's because John, in a sense, by calling it also the song of the Lamb, John is constructing a new song. He hears a new song being sung, and so he brings in other Old Testament texts that celebrate God's victory in providing salvation for his people and in judging, also in judging the kings of the earth and displaying his glory and his name. So, what this also does then is it indicates the reason for God's judgment.

God's judgment is to vindicate not only his people but also his name and his holy character. Interestingly, this song also anticipates what is going to be developed in more detail in chapter 21. So, we're seeing snapshots of the end that will lead up to a fuller disclosure in chapter 21.

When this hymn ends, and nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed, we'll see that nations will come to the new Jerusalem to worship in chapter 21. So, this is kind of looking forward to the fuller disclosure in chapter 21. So, this scene then sets the scene for the further development of the plague sequence, which the author returns to in verse 5. And here now, instead of seals or trumpets, we did see that trumpets could be used as an anticipation of judgment in the Old Testament called the judgment.

The bulls here primarily, at one level, indicate priestly service. The bulls are another feature of the Tabernacle or temple language. And let me back up.

What is interesting is that verse 5 begins. After this, I looked at the temple in heaven, that is, the Tabernacle of the Testimony. That is intriguing because the Tabernacle of the testimony was used in Exodus, especially in Exodus, but Exodus through Deuteronomy, to refer to the Tabernacle that was set up in the wilderness. So, this reference to the temple as the Tabernacle of testimony, I think, is the author's way of further continuing the Exodus motif by identifying the temple as the Tabernacle of testimony, the tent of the testimony that accompanied Israel in the wilderness.

Now, the plagues that are about to be poured out in correspondence with the Exodus plagues are identified as bulls. In Isaiah chapter 51, I think we find the language of bulls in terms of the cup of God's wrath. So, if that's part of the background, bulls being associated with the cup of God's wrath, pouring out the bulls as instruments of God's wrath would be a fitting instrument for pouring out God's wrath on the earth.

Now, this is associated with two other interesting terms. One of them is smoke filling the temple, and the other is the fact that no one can enter until the judgments are complete. Probably, the language of smoke filling the temple recalls not only Exodus language but also Isaiah chapter 6, verses 1 and verse 4 as well.

Isaiah 6 is an important scene, a throne room vision that has influenced John's depiction of the throne room back in Revelation chapter 4. But now, in Isaiah chapter 6, we read, In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on the throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Now skip down to verse 4. At the sound of their voices, the sound of the winged creatures in verses 2 and 3, at the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. Most likely, and especially in view of Exodus 40 as well where this seems to indicate God's presence filling the Tabernacle, the image here is of God's glorious presence and power filling the heavenly temple now to issue judgments on the earth.

And why is it that no one can enter? Probably just a description of the fact that the judgment is so, God's presence is so all-encompassing, so awesome and terrible in pouring out judgment that no one could withstand, no one could enter until this act of judgment takes place. So now the people of God are seen as having, before the plagues are poured out, in Exodus imagery, kind of jumping ahead after the time of the plagues, God's people are first depicted as having crossed through the sea, the sea calmed by God's sovereignty, standing beside the sea, emerging victorious, singing the song of Moses, worshiping God and praising God because of the salvation he has provided. This then prepares for the opening of the Tabernacle in an Exodus-

like event where smoke now fills it, and we are prepared to be introduced to the seven Exodus-like plagues that follow in chapter 16.

And chapter 16 now is going to narrate those seven plagues and all of them, even more so than chapters 8 and 9. Back in chapters 8 and 9, we saw that most of the plagues were modeled after the Exodus; now, even more clearly, all seven of these plagues that are narrated are modeled after one or more of the ten Exodus plagues from the original Exodus event. Once more, we should read the number seven not as a series of seven exact plagues that will occur in this order, but seven indicating perfection, indicating completion, and the whole point of this is that the Exodus plagues are meant or the plagues here are meant to recall the Exodus. So once more, we see that John is using language that is not so much meant to help us identify the precise nature of the plagues and what they look like, but more to help us explore the meaning, significance, and certainty of God's judgment.

It's as if John is saying in the same way that God judged wicked, idolatrous, and oppressive people. Certainly, he will once again judge another and any other idolatrous, oppressive people who oppose him and set themselves up over God. The other thing to recall is I think here we now are at an even more close-up perspective of the Day of the Lord. Remember I said that it appears what's going on, each of the sequence, plagues, trumpets, and bulls, each of them end with the Day of the Lord or bringing you right up to it only to back up and narrate more material.

But what I think is happening when you compare the seals, trumpets, and bulls while there appears to be some overlap, especially between the trumpets and bulls in reference to the Exodus plague, while there's some overlap at the same time, there appears to be a progression, especially of intensity. The plagues became more severe and more intense. They affected a fourth of the earth in the seals, and the trumpets affected a third, and now, with the bulls, there is no limit. They are all-encompassing and affect all people and the entire earth.

So I take it that with the trumpets, or I'm sorry, with the bulls, you are now at a closer perspective. You are now looking at the judgments that will lead immediately into the final Day of the Lord and up to the final judgment. In fact, the author says these are the last judgments.

These are the final judgments of God before unleashing his end-time judgment that again gets narrated in chapter 17 through chapter 20 of Revelation. So here we're brought to the end. Let me read chapter 16.

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying, I want you to notice the connection with the Exodus plagues from the book of Exodus. Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, go pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth. So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the

land, and ugly and painful sores broke out in the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died. The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the water say, you are just in these judgments, oh Lord, you who are and who were the holy one because you have so judged for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.

Then I heard the altar respond, yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments. Then, the fourth angel poured out his bowl into the sun, and the sun was given the power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by its intense heat, and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and give God glory.

Just as Pharaoh refused to repent in the original Exodus. The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony, and they cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent for what they had done.

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings of the East. Then I saw the evil spirits that looked like frogs. They came out, three evil spirits that look like frogs.

They came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of a false prophet. A very strange image indeed. There were only three frogs, but they were somehow coming out of the three mouths at the same time.

A clear indication of the symbolic nature of this. They are the spirits of demons, performing miraculous signs so that they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come like a thief.

Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed. Then they gathered the kings together in the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. The seventh angel then poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a voice from the throne saying, it is finished, it is done.

Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunders, and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has occurred since man has been on earth. So tremendous was the quake.

The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled, and the mountains could not be found.

From the sky, huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men, and they cursed God and accounted the plagues of hell because the plague was so terrible." And that brings us to the end of the bull plague sequence. Hopefully, you picked up some of the connections with Exodus. One interesting thing to mention before that note is that there is no interlude between seals six and seven.

Again, this is the final outpouring of God's judgment that will lead immediately into the day of the Lord and into the end-time judgment. But for example, bull number one, the Bull of Sores, resembles the Plague of Sores in Exodus chapter nine. Bulls two and three resemble Exodus seven, turning water into blood.

In bull number four, sun scorches people. Exodus chapter nine. Bull chapter five, there is darkness over the kingdom of Egypt.

Exodus chapter ten is where there is darkness over the kingdom of Egypt. Here the beast kingdom is darkened. Notice, unlike in chapter eight, where there was partial darkness, the entire kingdom of Satan is now darkened.

Bull number six contains three frogs resembling the frog plague in Exodus chapter eight. Bull number seven, thunder, lightning, hail, and earthquake resemble Exodus 9 verse 23. Like the Pharaoh, the people still refuse to repent in chapter 16, verse 11.

So clearly, the author wants us to recall the Exodus plagues. And to repeat, I'm not sure I can identify exactly what these plagues might look like and exactly what John has in mind. Once more, as I've said, John may be more interested that we explore the theological significance of the plagues and the meaning of God's judgment by drawing us back to the Exodus.

Altogether, though, overall, this chapter may, much like chapters eight and nine, be God's judgment upon idolatry, upon evil, upon a godless, wicked empire. The suffering could be both spiritual and physical. But here clearly is; this may be another way of demonstrating the complete futility of relying on the world's resources and the complete darkness into which humanity is plunged when they give in to and follow the worship and the allegiance of a pagan, godless, idolatrous empire.

But the point is now there's no more warning. This is the final pouring out of judgment before the final judgment, the end time judgment. This is the final expression of God's wrath in this threefold seals, trumpets, and bowls that now there will be no more delay.

Now the end will come very quickly. So, the seventh bowl brings us right to the end. A bowl number seven is clearly the final judgment and clearly brings us to the end.

I want to simply focus on a couple of unique features instead of going through all of these in detail, all of the seven bowls because we've mentioned some of them in connection with chapters eight and nine. But what I want to focus on is a couple of interesting features, three or four interesting features, and five interesting features of this plague sequence in the bowls. Number one is intriguing; you find a hymn situated and introduced into the third bowl.

The third angel pours out his bowl, but before you get to the fourth one you have a hymn. We've seen in Revelation the hymns throughout the book often function to interpret the scenes that John sees in his vision. Now, this hymn includes a hymn sung in response to verse five.

I think what it mainly does is affirm the justice of God. It affirms the justice of God in pouring out these plagues. Maybe it's not only just this one, but all the plagues it's meant to encompass in demonstrating as even the altar chimes in and responds, yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.

It's interesting the altar chimes in. I don't know if this is maybe another reference to the two or three witnesses needed to establish a testimony, but not only does the angel say true and just are your judgments, but now a second witness, the throne, chimes in and says, yes, Lord, true and just are your judgments. Whether that's intentional or not, drawing on that theme of two or three witnesses, the Old Testament theme, I'm not sure.

But the function of this hymn is to draw attention to the justice of God's judgment. Note particularly, the connection with the third plague of water turning into blood. Now, verse six says, for they have shed the blood of saints, now you give them blood to drink.

So, this hymn is modeled specifically to vindicate God and demonstrate the justice and righteousness of the judgment, the blood judgment he is pouring out. And here again, we see the principle that the judgment fits the crime. The wicked evil empire, the beast, shed the blood of the saints.

Now, in return, God gives them blood in the form of this bowl, this plague of blood on the earth. Verse 12 another interesting feature is found in verses 12 and following in the sixth angel. The rest of my comments will relate to the sixth and seventh bowls.

Once more, the author finds or mentions the Euphrates River. We saw a reference to that back earlier in chapter nine in connection with the plagues of locusts or the plagues of the end-time army. So, there might be a connection.

John may be envisioning the same thing here. But the mention of the Euphrates we suggested recalls the sort of the northern boundary of Rome itself from which their attackers, such as the Parthians, would come. But also, we find the Old Testament idea of an army from the north coming that this John is now drawing on that language to recall or to bring to mind an invading army.

So, we shouldn't take John suggesting that there's a literal Euphrates River that is going to literally be dried up. In fact, who would need that with today's modern army? You don't need to dry up a river to get across. You fly over it.

But, John draws on stock imagery from the Greco-Roman background and the Old Testament to evoke the notion of an invading army. So, when he says he pours out his bowl in the Euphrates, the readers are going to think, here comes an invading army. And what John sees, though, what John sees are the kings of the East.

In other words, the waters dried up to prepare the way for kings of the East. And I don't think we're to try to identify specifically who these armies are. It's simply evoking the notion of an invading army.

So, now you have the kings of the earth who cross the Euphrates, but then you are also introduced to three evil spirits in the form of frogs. And the reason they're identified with frogs, there may be a number of reasons, but one of them is to evoke the Exodus plague of frogs. But now you have three frogs and the author could not be any more clear as to what these frogs signify.

He calls them demonic beings, but he says they also come out of the mouth of the dragon, beast number one, and beast number two, whom he calls the false prophet. So, it couldn't be any more clear that this is a scenario of a demonic onslaught. But interestingly, what these three frogs is they are able to deceive the nations and gather them for battle.

Now, that's interrupted by verse 15, which we'll look at in a moment, and then the battle is resumed in verse 16. Now, the question is, what is the relationship between these kings of the earth and the nations that are, or the kings of the whole world? So, you have the kings of the east crossing the Euphrates, then the kings of the whole world at the end of verse 14. What's the relationship between the two? Some conceive of them fighting together, but I wonder if, instead, this is simply an image of an end time, evoking the notion of all the kings of the earth but also evoking the notion of the invading forces from the East.

The author is constructing a picture of all the world gathered together for an end-time battle, that is, to do battle against God himself and his people, as I think we see later. So, the point is not to depict some battle between kings of the earth and kings of the East, but to draw on images to depict the collaboration of the kings of the earth and the kings of the East in an all-out end time assault, an end time battle that the author calls the battle of Armageddon. Now, before I mention that, let me say something about the term Armageddon, but also to say something about this battle.

First of all, the difficulty with the term Armageddon is trying to identify precisely what John has in mind. Some have tried, as Grant Osborne in his commentary suggests, many commentaries have tried to identify this by dividing it up into two possible categories of explanation. Some have tried to interpret this geographically, often quite literally, as to suggest somewhere, and the problem is Armageddon comes from two words, Hebrew words, Har for mountain and Megiddo, which refers to a place, an expanse, or a place that you find playing a key role in Old Testament battles, such as in Judges chapter 5 and 1 Kings 18, 2 Kings 23, 2 Chronicles 35. Also, Zechariah chapter 12 mentions this end-time battle.

You find Megiddo, the place of Megiddo, as a place of warfare in the Old Testament. So, some have tried to literally describe Armageddon, the mountain of Megiddo. The problem is there doesn't appear to be a mountain right there at the place of Megiddo.

So, scholars have struggled to describe geographically where this might take place. So, that's a geographical explanation. The second set of explanations that Osborne highlights are etymological interpretations, such as seeing Armageddon, actually the Mount of Assembly, and not referring to some geographical location in relationship to Megiddo.

I wonder, though, if Armageddon, the mountain of Megiddo, is John's own construction using mountain imagery but also drawing on Megiddo from the Old Testament as a place of well-known battles. It'd be a little bit like us using the Waterloo or Vietnam to refer to a struggle or a battle or a war. You might refer to someone's personal Vietnam or something like that.

This does not refer to a battle in a literal location, but rather, it takes a well-known battle as a symbol or image of another conflict. So, I wonder if John is not using Megiddo, a place of famous battles in the Old Testament, and now adding the term mountain of Megiddo as a place, a symbol for an end-time battle. And now all the nations of the earth gather at Armageddon, symbolically at the mountain of Megiddo, in preparation for an end-time battle.

The problem here is there's no battle narrated. We're not told that any fighting takes place. We're not told what happened.

In my opinion, this text prepares us for the end-time battle that will be narrated later on in Revelation. And that is Revelation chapter 19 and the rider on the white horse. Then, there is also Revelation chapter 20 at the very end.

At the very end of chapter 20, you find Satan being released from the abyss, deceiving all the nations of the earth, and gathering together for battle. They surround the camp of the saints, and God himself destroys them from fire that comes out of heaven. So, you find references to several battles.

You have an end-time battle here called the battle of Armageddon. You have a battle in chapter 19 where the son of man comes out in the white horse to defeat the enemies. And then you have another battle at the end of chapter 20 in Revelation where Satan gathers together the armies and they go out and do battle against the saints, yet they are devoured.

I would suggest to you that all of these battles probably refer to the same one. In other words, we do not have three separate battles; instead, we have the exact same battle. It's interesting in all three of them, you have the language of the armies being gathered for warfare in all three of these.

Also, in chapter 20 and chapter 19, we're going to draw on the same imagery from Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39, Agog and Magog. But I take it, and we'll look at this in more detail when we get to the actual battles themselves in chapters 19 and 20, that these battles, all three of these battles, are different ways of referring to the same one. And so, we don't have a battle narrated here because we only see the preparation for it.

The final battle is going to come in chapter 19 and in chapter 20, where Jesus Christ and God simply come and defeat their enemies. Now, when we get there, we need to ask, what is being portrayed in those battles? How are we to take those and understand them as some literal battle, some spiritual battle, or something else? But the last thing I want to say then, in verse 15, notice another kind of interruption in the plague sequence. Behold, I come like a thief.

Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed. What I think is going on here is, once more, this is an indication that chapter 16 is not for the purpose of trying to determine a sequence of events in the end times, or charting the end times, or simply to satisfy our curiosity as to what's going to take place in the end. In the middle of all this, John inserts a call for his readers to respond, his readers in chapters 2 and 3. And I want you to notice that what I think is happening is, because of the gravity of the situation, in view of this final battle that's going to come upon the earth, John is calling his

readers to vigilance by drawing on chapters 3 and 4. Notice the language of, Behold, I come like a thief.

So, before the battle is going to break out, John wants to warn his readers to be prepared. That is, I think the call here, once more, is to be faithful and refuse to compromise. That's how they prepare.

But notice the language of coming like a thief. That comes right out of chapters 2 and 3, where Christ warned the church at Sardis that he would come like a thief if they did not repent. Chapter 3 and verse 3, I believe it was.

Also, Sardis is told to stay awake and to remain vigilant. And do you remember the church that was told not to go about naked but to clothe themselves with true white clothes? The church of Laodicea. So, this language, recalling the language from chapters 2 and 3, is simply John's way of saying, I think, due to the significance and gravity of the battle, the end-time judgment of God, that demands vigilance on the part of the people to refuse to compromise, to maintain their faithful witness, lest this battle ends up being like Christ coming as a thief.

Lest this battle catches them unprepared and catches them unaware; instead, they should be vigilant and faithful and wake up, and they should clothe themselves so that they will not be found naked and ashamed on the day of judgment. So, verse 15 is an insertion that reminds us that chapter 16 has a hortatory function to get the readers in chapters 2 and 3 to maintain faithfulness, to refuse to compromise, to resist compromise with pagan Rome, and to maintain a faithful witness no matter what the cost.

Now, the next section of Revelation is chapters 17 and 18, the detailed description of Babylon and its destruction, but what I simply want to note in ending chapter 16 is notice that it is already prepared for in the seventh and last bowl that brings you to the final day of the judgment. Note the language of islands being removed, etc., but note Babylon the Great. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her a cup filled with the wine of his wrath. Chapters 17 and 18 will be a further expansion of that seal, I'm sorry, that bowl, that final plague of God remembering Babylon the Great.

Now, chapters 17 and 18 are going to develop that in more detail with a further description of Babylon, her true nature, and a description of her final judgment.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 21, Revelation 14-16, Grain First Fruits, Grapes Judgment, and the Seven Bowl Judgments.