

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 10

Revelation 5 and 6

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 10, Revelation 5 and 6, the Lamb and the Introduction to the Seals of the Scroll.

The Lamb and the Introduction to the Seals of the Scroll. So, Christ has taken the scroll from the right hand of the one seated on the throne, the scroll that contains God's plan for establishing his kingdom.

And the point of chapter 5, as we've seen, is that Jesus is worthy, the only one worthy to take the scroll. And that is because he is the slaughtered lamb, the one who is slain. He is the one who has purchased people from all of humanity to be a kingdom of priests, as we'll see.

And it's based on his death, his sacrificial death on the cross, as the Passover lamb, perhaps also as the suffering servant lamb in Isaiah 53, that Jesus now is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, meaning that he will now set its contents into motion. The rest of chapter 5, then, is actually a response to what happens in verse 7, starting with verse 8, where we begin to see heaven's response to this act. So, 8 through the rest of chapter 5 will be the response of all of heaven.

We've already been introduced to the 24 elders and the four living creatures, but we will be introduced to other angelic beings that inhabit the heavenly throne room. The rest of chapter 5 will articulate their response to what happened in verse 7, with the lamb taking the scroll. Notice how often the word take or receive, depending on your translation, occurs in verses 8 to the end of chapter 5 because the remainder of this section is actually a section of hymns.

We were introduced to a couple of hymns that were sung by the 24 elders and four living creatures in chapter 4, but now we'll see more and more extensive singing and hymns by angelic beings as they celebrate this event in verse 7 of the lamb taking the scroll. And all of these hymns, I think, function then to interpret verse 7 or to interpret the scene in verses 1 through 7 of what has just happened. Now, one important text to keep in mind that lies behind chapter 5 especially, and we've said chapters 4 and 5 belong together.

One of the things that suggests that is that not only does similar imagery occur, such as the throne and the one seated on the throne, and the 24 elders and four living creatures, and some of the similar characters and features, but also the fact that the same Old Testament texts lie behind both of them. That is Ezekiel chapters 1 and 2, as well as Isaiah chapter 6. Both throne room visions by the prophets now provide

the model for John's vision. There's another important text that particularly comes into play in chapter 5, and that is a text that we've already seen play a role back in chapter 1, where Jesus appears to John in an inaugural vision to commission him to address the seven churches, where Jesus is portrayed as the Son of Man, exalted Son of Man in fulfillment of Daniel chapter 7. And in Daniel chapter 7, especially verses 13 and 14, this is what we read: In my vision, at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven.

He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. So, Jesus here in chapter 5, approaching the one seated on the throne. And now, in verse 14, He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power.

All peoples, nations, and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. So, Daniel chapter 7, which portrays the Son of Man approaching the throne, the Ancient of Days, seated on the throne, now receives authority and power, now receives a kingdom from him and enters into his kingly rule.

That now gets fulfilled with the Lamb entering into his rule by receiving the scroll from the one seated on the throne, and receiving power and authority. In fact, we'll see that's exactly what the hymns celebrate. The hymns celebrate the reception of power, and authority, and might, and wisdom, and glory, and honor.

The very things that we find anticipated in Daniel chapter 7. So, this act in chapter 5 is the fulfillment of Daniel chapter 7, where now Jesus receives his kingly authority. What this means is when we read chapter 5, we probably should not read this so much as, or just as, an enthronement scene, as if Jesus now is led to the throne and now sits on the throne, as much as seeing it as what David Aune, in his commentary, calls an investiture scene. That is, Jesus is now invested with authority and power, and this is what question 3 was all about.

In fact, who is worthy to receive, take this scroll, and open it? Who has the authority? Who is worthy to do so? And now, Christ is celebrated, this event is celebrated, as Christ is now invested with the power and the authority to take the scroll, that is, to receive the kingdom of God, and now to enact the contents of the scroll. What I want to do then is, as we've done in other texts, simply highlight some of the more important features of this section, especially verses 8 through 12, which, again, is sort of the hymnic celebration of what happens in verse 7, and that is Christ now receiving the authority to take the scroll and to open it. First of all, notice the significance, once again, that the temple imagery plays in chapter 5, and we've already seen a couple of features in chapters 4 and 5 that suggest that this is not just a picture of heaven, but heaven is being conceived of God's temple, a heavenly temple where God dwells, and one of those is the presence of the golden bulls.

Notice verse 8, and when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb; each one had a harp, and they were holding golden bulls full of incense. The golden bulls probably suggest those bulls that were on the table of the presence in the Tabernacle in Exodus chapter 25, for example. It's interesting the golden bulls occur no less than twelve times throughout the book of Revelation, and here, again, they function to indicate that this is to be seen as a heavenly temple.

Perhaps the angels are meant to, the four creatures, and the twenty-four elders are meant to be portrayed as having a priestly function by the fact that they hold these golden bulls, but what is important is they contain incense, which the author identifies as the prayer of the saints in verse 8. Now, this will become important because later on, especially in chapter 6, in the fifth seal, the incense, and later on in Revelation, the incense will be identified as the prayer of the saints, which God responds to. That is God, the prayer of the saints to vindicate them, to show that their suffering was not in vain, to bring about vindication, that is portrayed as the prayer of the saints. So, what that means is we are to see the rest of chapters 6 through 20 in a sense as a response to the prayer of the saints, which are identified with the bulls full of incense.

So, we'll look at that as we work through Revelation and see the golden bulls crop up and see how they function at times. The second thing to notice about this section is note how in verses 8 through the end of the chapter 5, heaven breaks out in worship. In response to verse 7, heaven breaks out in worship in ever-widening concentric circles.

So, again, you have this picture where the throne is at the center of all things, and then the heavenly response moves outward in ever-broadening concentric circles. So, note in verse 8, it's the 24 elders and the four living creatures who, in verse 9, sing this song. You are worthy to take the scroll, and notice that to take the scroll, linking it right back to verse 7, and to open its seals.

The reason is that you were slain, and with your blood, you purchased people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. So, beginning with the 24 elders and the four living creatures that we were introduced to in chapter 4, now they are the first surrounding the throne to sing a song of praise celebrating what happened in verse 7, the taking of the scroll by the Lamb.

They give the reason here clearly because he was slain, and through his death, he purchased salvation for humanity. But notice, second, in verse 11, John says, Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and elders.

So, now you have another layer, the myriads of angels, or thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand upon thousands, encircling the throne, and they also sing, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power, and wealth, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and praise. But then, finally, in verse 13, John says, Then I heard every creature in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all that is in them. So, now you have a circle that encompasses basically all of creation, singing, To him who sits on the throne, in verse 13, and to the Lamb, be praise, and honor, and glory, and power, forever and ever.

So, heaven bursts out in worship in ever-widening, concentric circles centered around the throne, where eventually, all things, all of creation, focus on the center. Again, everything flows from the center. God's rule and everything that's going to happen in chapters 4 through 22, actually 6 through 22, after chapter 5, all flow from the center, from the throne, and eventually all creation joins in worshipping.

Perhaps what we see here is an anticipation of the final scene in chapters 21 and 22, where all of creation then comes under God's rule and acknowledges God's sovereignty. Number three, the third thing to say is the point of this chapter then, especially in that first hymn that the 24 elders and four living creatures sing, and also the vision of Christ back in chapter 5, verses 5 and 6, is that the Lamb is worthy precisely because through his death on the cross, he has accomplished redemption for humanity. One interesting thing that we've already seen is the author forges an interesting concept of overcoming or conquering.

And remember, we said the scene began with John hearing that there was someone who was worthy to open the scroll, one who had overcome and had done so because he was the lion of the tribe of Judah. When John turns around to see this person, what he sees is not a lion but he sees a slain lamb. Interestingly too, this lamb is described back in verses 5 and 6 as having seven horns with seven eyes, which again seems to connote a very militaristic image and connotes power and strength.

In fact, this image of a seven-horned lamb occurs elsewhere in Jewish apocalyptic literature, for example. This is a text from one of the early apocalypses that are not found in the Old or New Testament, but a very common one in an influential apocalypse called the book of 1 Enoch. In one of his visions using animals to symbolize different persons and nations, he envisions a lamb that grows horns and has strength and great military power.

And this is 1 Enoch chapter 90. The author says, Then behold, lambs were born from the snow-white sheep, and they began to open their eyes and see, and they cried out to the sheep. But as for the sheep, they cried out aloud to them, yet they did not listen to what the lambs were telling them.

But they became exceedingly deafened, and their eyes became exceedingly dim-sighted. Then I saw in a vision of ravens flying above the lambs, and they seized one of those lambs, and then smashing the sheep, they ate them. I kept seeing until those lambs grew horns, but the ravens crushed their horns.

Then I kept seeing till one great horn sprouted on one of the sheep, and he opened their eyes. They had a vision in them, and their eyes were opened. And he cried aloud to the sheep, and all the rams saw him, and they ran unto him. I'll stop right there, but the point is, note the image of a sheep with horns suggesting power and might.

But once again, John reinterprets that by demonstrating, at least initially, the lamb comes to conquer, the horned lamb comes to conquer, but he does so as a slain lamb, as one who purchases, who is worthy to open the scroll, because he was slain, and through his blood, he's purchased and redeemed humanity unto himself. The next point to note is that in this section, we've already seen hints of this, in that the lamb seems to be a unique feature, a unique person. That is, John has already sought all through the earth, and under the earth, and all through the heavens, and has found no one worthy.

So, the lamb, now that the lamb has been found to be worthy and can simply walk up and take the scroll out of the right hand of the one on the throne, the question is raised: what kind of person is this? What kind of lamb is this? This is unlike any other person on earth, under the earth, or even in the heavens. But now, in the rest of this section, in this hymnic section, I think we find one of the strongest statements for Christ's deity anywhere in the New Testament. Notice that Christ receives some of the same worship as God does back in chapter 4. For example, notice in verse, especially in verse 12, worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power, and wealth, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and praise.

Go back to verse 11 of chapter 4, the hymn sung to God. You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory, and honor, and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created, and have their being. So, Jesus Christ actually receives, even in identical wording, power, and glory, and might, and honor, receives the exact same worship of God as God did in chapter 4. Now, Jesus Christ receives in chapter 5. And what is significant about that is that he receives this praise in the context of strict, monotheistic worship.

That is, if you go back to chapter 4, the scene in chapter 4 would not have been unusual or anything new, with God seated on his throne, and sovereign over all creation, and receiving the worship of all of heaven. That would not have been strange or startling to any Jewish reader. But chapter 5 introduces a twist.

In such a monotheistic context, in chapter 4, where God, as the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, is the only one worthy of worship, and to worship any other thing in creation is pure idolatry. Now, the author places, not only has Jesus Christ receiving the same worship as God did in chapter 4 by the same persons, but now also does so by placing Jesus on the exact same throne. Look at, for example, look at verse 13.

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in heaven singing to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. So, now, this last hymn worships both God on the throne and the Lamb in the same breath. What is more interesting is that twice in Revelation, we see this very interesting event.

It occurs in chapter 19, and it also occurs back in chapter 22, right at the very end of the book. And I'll read the one from chapter 22 at the end of the book. At the very end of his vision, where an angelic being has taken kind of John on a tour, he showed him the new Jerusalem, and now at the very end of his vision he addresses John and here's what happens in verse 8. I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things, and when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing me these things.

But the angel said to me, Do not do this. I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and of all who keep the words of this book, worship God. And that happens twice.

In other words, even this angelic being refused worship because only God is worthy of worship. So, in this sort of a context where only God is worthy of worship and no other being, however, exalted an angelic being, is worthy of worship, how can one have Jesus Christ on the same throne as God and receive the same worship as God? Elsewhere, it's interesting that the author will portray, we saw this already back in one of the letters to the churches, that the saints themselves will sit on the throne and rule with Christ. But something very different is going on here.

The saints are not worshipped as the creator of all and as worthy of worship. Only the Lamb is portrayed as worthy of worship and on the of God, but in a context that is strictly monotheistic. In other words, what the author is doing is that, in some sense, Jesus Christ then participates in the very being and essence of God.

How can Jesus be worshipped without violating strict monotheism, that there is only one God who is worthy of worship? And to worship anything else is idolatry unless somehow Jesus participates in the very being of God. So, this is the kind of thing that resulted in later Nicene creeds and Chalcedonian Christology that affirmed the deity of Christ and that Jesus Christ was the second person of the Godhead and shared in the very essence and being of God. Without using that kind of language, we find that

idea here already in having Jesus Christ as the object of worship, the same worship that God receives, without in any sense violating strict monotheism.

Another point to emphasize in verse 9 is that it is interesting that the song that the living creatures and the 24 elders sing is called a new song. This word new or newness is significant because it reflects an important idea that God through Jesus Christ is going to establish a new creation, which happens in chapter 21 and verse 22. But already by singing a new song, it's as if Christ has already inaugurated the new creation through his death on the cross and through establishing a kingdom of priests, which again in chapter 22 of Revelation ends with God's people functioning as kings and priests.

They function as priests in God's presence, and they reign forever and ever. But already that new creation has been inaugurated through Jesus Christ's death and by purchasing humanity to become his kingdom of priests. Already the new creation has been inaugurated and this text celebrates that, but it also anticipates the consummated new creation in Revelation 21 and 22, where 21 verse 1 is, I saw a new heavens and a new earth.

Another significant element of this section is one that we've already seen, and that is the salvation that God provides for his people. The establishment of his kingdom that issues from the throne and from this scene is to be understood as a new Exodus. That is the verse I just read again.

Jesus is worthy to take the scroll because he was slain, and by his blood, he purchased men for God or people for God from every tribe, language, and people, and he's made them to be a kingdom of priests. We saw this back in chapters 1, 5, and 6 in the epistolary introduction to Revelation, and now it's repeated here. In other words, the slaughtered lamb, the slain lamb, which we said probably recalls both Isaiah 53 and verse 7, the slaughtered lamb in the suffering servant passage, but also the Passover lamb.

By Jesus' blood, he ransoms humanity, he frees them as he did his people in the Exodus, and then he frees them from bondage and leads them to become a kingdom of priests. He establishes them and creates them to function as a kingdom of priests. This language of the kingdom of priests indicates a connection with Exodus 19, 6, where God leads his people out of Egypt and establishes them to be his kingdom of priests, which itself goes all the way back to Genesis 1 and 2. Adam and Eve were to function as kings and priests.

They were to rule over all creation as God's representatives. They were to be priests in God's presence and to worship him, and now Israel was called in Exodus 19, 6 to do the same thing, and now God's people, his universal transcultural people from every tribe and tongue and language, are now meant to function as kings and priests

in fulfillment of God's intention for the Exodus. Now, this note, at the very end of verse 10, says that this kingdom of priests is to serve God, and they will reign on the earth.

Now, interestingly, as hopefully most of you know, the New Testament comes down to us in a number of manuscripts. We don't have the original copies of the New Testament text. We don't have the original copy that John wrote, but we have copies of copies of copies.

In fact, we have a number of copies. Sometimes, those manuscripts differ slightly, and through a process called textual criticism, scholars have been able to, with a high degree of confidence, restore what most likely was what John wrote. Most of the differences are rather minor anyway, but some manuscripts actually have the present tense; that is, they reign on the earth.

Others have the future; they will reign on the earth. So, the question is, is this an anticipation of a future reign, or is this an anticipation of a present reign? Whatever the case, again, throughout Revelation, I think it makes it clear that it's probably a both-and because already, God's people are a kingdom of priests. Already God has created a kingdom of priests that represent his rule on earth.

However, this text perhaps may focus more on the future fulfillment of that, especially in texts like Revelation 20 and verses 4 and 6. In that passage on the millennial kingdom where they come to life, those who have suffered and been beheaded now they are raised to life, and they reign with Christ for a thousand years, presenting the fulfillment of this text. We also see chapter 22 in the new creation, the fact that chapter 22 verse 5 ends by saying, And They will reign forever and ever. So, this section, this last line of verse 10, they will reign on the earth, maybe an anticipation of chapters 20 and also 21 and 22, where in the future, God's people will reign with Christ on this earth.

And in chapter 22, on a new creation forever and ever. But it's important to realize that Revelation elsewhere does suggest that God's people reign because Christ has already created through his death on the cross, has purchased people, and created a kingdom of priests. This verse, creating a kingdom of priests and suggesting they will reign in the earth, probably also reflects Daniel chapter 7, when Daniel interprets that vision that he had of the son of man coming to the ancient of days to receive a kingdom, to receive authority, glory, and power, and all people bowing before him.

Interestingly, in verse 22, in verse 22, he, starting in verse 21, he says, as I watched this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them until the ancient of days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints and the most high, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. So even Daniel 7 includes the saints also possessing the kingdom. Now we see that not only does Christ have the

authority and possess the kingdom and fulfillment of the son of man prophecy in Daniel 7, but his people will also reign in fulfillment of Daniel 7. They also will possess the kingdom and will reign on the earth, which we said ultimately gets fulfilled in Revelation 20, in the millennial kingdom text, and then even beyond that in the new creation in 21 and 22.

Another important feature is this language still found in verses 9 and 10, this language of people from every tribe and language and people and nation. This is also language that seems to primarily come out of the book of Daniel. In fact, you find this, you find a similar list of words that refer to people, not just Jewish nation, but people generally Gentile in the nations.

You find that sort of language in several places in Daniel, for example, starting in chapter 3 and verses 4 and 7. In chapter 3, he says, therefore, as soon as he backed up and read 4, that was 7, then the herald loudly proclaimed, this is what you are commanded to do. This is in the context of Nebuchadnezzar, who requires everyone to bow down to an image. This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations, and men of every language.

As soon as you hear the sound, then you bow down. And then later on in verse 7, therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, scyther, lyre, and harp, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations, and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image. And then, for example, in chapter 7 and verse 14, which is significant because John is drawing on Daniel 7 in this text, Daniel 7 says, he was given authority, the Son of Man who comes of the ancient of days to receive a kingdom, he was given authority, glory, sovereign power, all peoples, nations, and men of every language worshiped him.

Interestingly, you'll note that those had three categories. If you read the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Daniel, it actually includes four, just like Revelation does. Again, Revelation has a fourfold: every tribe, language, people, and nation.

And the Greek translation, the Septuagint, the LXX of Daniel, also includes a fourfold division. What is interesting about that is what John does then, and this introduces an important theme throughout the rest of the chapter that has a twofold significance. First of all, is the people of God now that Christ will redeem and fulfill his promises through and make a kingdom of priests is no longer restricted to national Israel, but now is an inter-trans-cultural universal people of God consisting of every tribe and language and people and tongue, including Israel, but not limited to Israel any longer.

Now, faith in Jesus Christ is the criteria for which one becomes a member of the true people of God. So, all throughout Revelation, we're going to see this happen over and over again, where promises given to Israel in the Old Testament now are

fulfilled, not solely through national Israel, but through a universal trans-cultural people of God, people from every tribe and language and tongue. And we see that here in the fact that Exodus 19.6, making a now is fulfilled by a people of every language, tribe, and tongue.

The second reason why that is significant is that in order for God to establish his kingdom, we said that part of Revelation is to show how God's sovereignty and his rule that is acknowledged perfectly in heaven and realized in heaven, how that finally gets worked out on earth? What that means is there must be a taking away or a transfer of the kingdom of Satan and of this world and of the human rulers and authorities, such as the Roman Empire, and transferred to God and to the Lamb, Jesus Christ. That also means, though, that God must also rescue those who are under the rule of Satan and under the rule of the wicked empire, such as Rome, and now he must transfer them into his kingdom. So, what that means is all the nations now, an important theme throughout Revelation, all the nations who find themselves under the bondage of Satan and under the oppressive regime of Rome and human kingdoms, now are rescued from that and transferred under the rulership of God and the Lamb.

And that's what's going on here in verses 9 and 10. God has purchased people through Jesus Christ and now has made them his kingdom and priests for himself to represent his rule, to represent his presence on the earth. So, this transfer of the kingdom from Satan, from the beast to God and the Lamb, also entails transference of its subjects, of the people of all the nations, under the rule of Satan and the beast, now to become a kingdom of priests for God and for the Lamb.

It's interesting, too, that some form of this phrase, nations, people, tribes, languages, etc., some form of this phrase occurs seven times throughout Revelation. So, this is probably deliberate, not coincidental. John has probably deliberately repeated this phrase seven times.

You find it here in chapter 5 and verse 9. We'll find it in chapter 7 and verse 9, in chapter 10 and verse 11, in chapter 11 and verse 9, and chapter 13 and verse 7 in the context of the beast's rule over the earth, then chapter 14, verse 6, and finally chapter 17 and verse 15. So, those seven times, you find some version of this fourfold phrase that we find here in chapter 5 and verse 9, people from every tribe and language and people and nation. Finally, the last thing I want to say is, interestingly, in chapters 5, 11, and 12, especially verse 12, which constitutes the hymn that was sung in praise and honor of Jesus Christ, celebrating the fact that He is worthy, along with God Himself, He is worthy to be worshipped by all of creation, and He's worthy to take the scroll and open it and set its contents in motion.

Notice the ascriptions given to Him, to Him who sits on the throne, and I'm sorry, worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and

strength and honor and glory and praise. Note, interestingly, that this is sevenfold. Note that there are seven elements that are mentioned: praise and honor, glory and power, and I'm on verse 13, power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.

There are seven elements given, again, probably to indicate the fullness or perfection of the worship and praise given to Christ and the praise that He deserves. It's intriguing. You can find numerous parallels to this in the Old Testament.

One of the more intriguing ones is the prayer of David in 1 Chronicles chapter 29 and verse 11. I'll read verse 10 as well. David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, Praise to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, for everlasting to everlasting.

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. You can find other similar praises, but intriguingly, you have, I think, not coincidentally, but intentionally, not only allusions back to the Old Testament, praise given to God and now given to Christ, but it's intriguing that it is sevenfold. Again, it is probably playing off the number seven as indicating perfection and completeness.

Now, interestingly, to contrast that with the next and last hymn that is sung in verse 13, where all of the creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth come, and they now sing to the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, and here's what they say, is praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever. Amen. It's interesting that this praise is only fourfold.

There are only four items mentioned, although they overlap with what has been said to the Lamb before. However, it's intriguing that only four are mentioned. I would suggest that, again, perhaps this is intentional. Four is the number that suggests the entire earth, such as the four corners of the earth.

We talked a little bit about that, with four being symbolic of all creation. That would be fitting here because in the beginning of verse 13, it's all of creation that gives praise to God. So, it's natural that the number four would play a role, and there will be four elements corresponding to all of creation, the entirety of creation now worshiping God.

Again, this probably anticipates the universal worship and praise that is obvious and present in the new creation in chapters 21 and 22. So, chapter 5 has demonstrated that God is the creator of all things, and because of that, God is a sovereign creator of all things and sovereign over all his creation. For that reason, he is worthy of worship. And therefore, all of heaven surrounds the throne of God, the symbol of his

power and authority and sovereignty. All of creation surrounds God, recognizing his holiness and sovereignty over all of the created order.

But it's important to realize God has not abandoned his creation. The assumption, in a sense, the assumption between chapters 4 and 5 is that sin has somehow tainted and marred his created order. So, chapter 5, assuming sin and assuming evil, assuming that Satan is now the ruler of the world, assuming that the beast now controls things that in the first century, in the form of the Roman Empire, evil, wicked, oppressive regimes rule this earth with Satan the main impetus behind that.

But chapter 5 tells us God has not abandoned his creation, but instead God has now acted to reclaim and redeem his creation, primarily focused on his people. But we're going to see in chapter 21 and eventually the physical earth as well. So God has not abandoned his creation, but through the sacrificial death of his son, who has overcome, God has set in plan, set in motion a plan to reclaim his creation, to set right, to rescue it from the oppressive powers of Satan and evil and the beast, and to restore it to its intended goal in a new creative act that we find consummated in chapter 21 and 22 of Revelation.

So then, having looked at chapter 5, the scene is now set by having someone who is worthy to take the scroll and open it, Jesus Christ, through his sacrificial death, finding someone who is worthy now to take the scroll and open it, the scroll that contains God's plan for judgment and salvation and establishing his kingdom. The stage is now set for Revelation chapter 6. And again, chapter 6 we should understand as a continuation of chapter 5. That is because what happens now in chapter 6 is that the seals that are sealing the scroll from chapter 5 are now opened. And as each of the seven seals is taken off the scroll, something will happen in chapter 6. The other interesting thing about chapter 6 is that the scene is now going to shift.

In chapters 4 and 5, the scene was a heavenly one, where John, as we saw at the beginning of chapter 4, John is summoned up to heaven and permitted to have a glimpse of God's sovereignty, to see something of the unfolding of God's plan for redemption and salvation and reclaiming his creation and his people for himself. John has been privileged to see that in a vision. Now the scene shifts back to earth as this scroll that he saw in heaven begins to get unsealed by the Lamb, who is worthy to do so.

The scroll begins to be unsealed, and we begin to see how both judgment and salvation, especially judgment, will now be issued from the throne and from the seal, again as Christ holds it and begins to open its seals as a result of his death and resurrection and his authority and ability to do so. Now, what is unique about chapter 6, which narrates the opening of the seven seals from the scroll in chapter 5? What is unique is in chapter 6, and we'll see this happening elsewhere, but in chapter 6, only six of the seals get unleashed. The seventh seal actually does not get opened

until chapter 8. In between, there is a chapter, chapter 7, that functions. Most commentaries say it functions as an interlude, and there's probably some truth to that.

Although I would not want to say it's a digression that has nothing to do with the seals, that would be incorrect as well. We'll look at Chapter 7 and talk a little bit about its function when we get there. But when we read chapter 6, as we will in a moment, the first thing you note is that only six of the seals actually get opened or unsealed, and the seventh one does not get taken off until the beginning of chapter 8. And then there's that intervening chapter, chapter 7, that we'll talk about later.

Another interesting feature of the seals in chapter 6 is that the last one, seal number 6 in verses 12 through 17, seems to bring us to the end of history. It seems to bring us right up to the final judgment, which theologians call the second coming of Christ. And we talked a little bit about this in the introduction to Revelation.

The book, in a sense, could stop here temporally. It would be a very unsatisfying ending because it says nothing about the salvation of God's people. Chapter 6 ends in a judgment scene.

But it seems to bring us to the very end of the world, to the second coming of Christ. Although, as you know, we still have several more chapters to go, 18 more chapters in Revelation. But as we said, Revelation temporarily seems to cycle.

That is, it gives you different images and gives you different perspectives of John's day culminating in the wrap-up of history, seeing that in light of the backdrop of God's intention for the end of history and for his final consummation of history and his plan for ultimate judgment and salvation. And we find that already taking place here. We'll look more at that in just a moment.

Another important feature to understand is the first four seals seem to go together, as most people recognize. They're united from two perspectives. Number one is the fact that only the first four seals are identified as horses.

And we'll look at why that's the case. So, literally, the first four seals are joined together because all four are represented by four horses. And then second, logically, they seem to go together, as we'll see in just a moment.

That is, logically, the first four seals seem to be intertwined. They seem to result from or be related to each other as well. And we'll look at that.

Before we look at chapter 6 in some more detail and read, again, I want to read chapter 6, but I want to raise briefly a question that we might deal with a little bit in more detail when we get to chapters 8 and 9, and also chapter 16. And that is one

thing that you note when you read Revelation. A prominent feature of the book is that it seems, at least in the center of chapters 4 through 22, sort of in the center of this section one of the predominant features is the three-fold repetition of seven plagues in the form of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls.

The seven seals found here in chapter 6 and chapter 8, and then chapters 8 and 9 recount the seven trumpets. Seven trumpets are blown, and more plagues take place. And then, finally, in chapter 16, we find seven bowls poured out.

So, this three-fold series of sevens in the form of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls seems to play a crucial role in this section of Revelation. And one of the questions that rises is, what do these refer to? What do these three series of sevens refer to? And how do they relate to each other? Since they're all in the series of seven, they're all plagues, judgment plagues that take place on earth and strike the earth and humanity. And especially when we get to chapters 8, 9, and 16, we'll see that there's a little bit of overlap with the judgments that take place in those two sections.

So, the question is, what are these, and how do they relate to each other? One possibility in explaining their relationship is to see these three sets of seven. Again, we're talking about the seals, trumpets, and bowls in chapters 6 through 16. One way to look at it is that these series of judgments happen in chronological sequence.

That is, first of all, the seals happen when they are finished, the trumpets then take place, and when the trumpets are finished, then the bowls take place. So, there is a progression between the three groups of seven. And some would even say they could even function in a telescoping manner.

Remember we said the seventh seal does not get unleashed until chapter 8, but chapters 8 and 9 then contain the trumpets. So, some have suggested the seventh seal actually contains the trumpets. Then you'll note the seventh trumpet does not get opened until later on in chapter 11.

Some have suggested that the seventh trumpet actually contains seven bowls. So, it's sort of like a telescope, and each one contains the rest of the sections as you pull it out. So, many have seen the seals, trumpets, and bowls as indicating a chronological sequence.

First of all, the seals take place, followed by the trumpets, followed by the bowls. Another important view and the common view that depends on seeing Revelation as a sort of a cycle that repeats itself are what is known as the recapitulation view. That is, all three of these series of seven, the seals, trumpets, and bowls, are referring to roughly the same events during the same time period.

Greg Beale, in his commentary on Revelation, holds this approach, and he argues that when you look at them carefully, especially the trumpets and bowls, the reason why many of them are similar is because they're referring to the same events. And he would say the same is true with the seals in chapter 6. So, the seals, trumpets, and bowls do not refer to different events, judgments, and time periods. This is part of the cyclical nature or recapitulation of Revelation.

That is, it's simply three different perspectives on what Beal argues is the whole sweep of Church history. All of Church history, starting in the first century and leading up to the second coming of Christ, can be characterized by these judgments that God pours out on the earth. So, what we're to understand is that these are not in chronological sequence but as repeating.

Again, there are different perspectives and different ways of looking at the same event. One might compare it to looking at a play in a football game, baseball game, basketball game, soccer, or whatever from different perspectives. You see the event in real-time, but then the camera crew will slow down in an instant replay, and they'll give you another picture of that.

Then, maybe from a different angle and zoomed up, they'll give you another view. It's all the same event in the same play but from different perspectives. That may be one way to understand this way of looking at the trumpets or the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls.

Another way of looking at it, and one that I will prefer, but we'll look at this in more detail when we get to chapters 8, 9, and 16, is what could be called a progressive view. That is, it kind of combines one and two. There is some overlap between the three, but there is also a progression temporally and in intensity.

That is, probably, the seals in chapter 6 represent events that will characterize the entirety of church history starting in the first century. I'm going to argue that in a moment when we look at chapter 6 and the seals. We'll see that these things are already characterizing God's judgment on the Roman Empire.

So, already, the seals are taking place and probably will do so until the coming of Christ. However, the trumpets then would portray events that overlap to some extent with the seals, but probably more intense and a little more close from a closer perspective to the end, the second coming of Christ. Then, finally, the bowls in chapter 16 are to be portrayed as primarily taking place even more intensely and from a closer perspective to the end of the second coming of Christ, characterizing the judgments that will be poured out leading up to the day of the Lord and to the end.

So, understanding it that way, there may be some progression or overlap as far as time and judgments, but there is an intensification and a progression temporally. So, it's as if the author starts with the seals and looks at God's judgment leading to the end, then he backs up, but from a closer, more intense perspective, describes God's judgments that will lead to the end and then once more backs up, but from an even more intense final perspective, looks at God's final judgments that he pours out right before he consummates history at the very end. A couple of things that might suggest this is that number one when you read the trumpets or the seals, trumpets, and bowls, note that they all seem to take you to the very end.

Notice that Revelation chapter 6, the final seal, seal number 6, as we said, and as we'll see when we look more closely at this section, takes you to the end, to the day of the Lord, the day of God's wrath and the wrath of the Lamb. So, you're already at the very end, and the same is true with the trumpets in chapters 8 and 9. The seventh trumpet gets blown in chapter 11, and it uses language that seems to suggest you are at the end. God's kingdom, Christ's kingdom, has finally arrived, and then chapter 16 obviously brings you up until the end as well.

So, in other words, all three series bring you to an end, but each one is from a more intense and closer perspective, a little bit closer to the very end, the consummation of history, the final judgment of God upon the earth. The second thing is to notice the fractions that are used. The seals in one place, the seals end up harming a fourth of humanity, whereas the trumpets end up harming a third of the earth and a third of humanity, a slightly larger number.

When you look at the bowls in chapter 16, there's no limit to their judgment. So, again, there seems to be a progression both temporally and in intensity as well. Again, the fourth and one-third are not to be taken with strict mathematical precision. As we said, fractions suggest intensity, but there is a limitation in what they can do.

And so, we don't need to add up how big the population is today and envision exactly one-fourth of them, and then what's left over than one-third from the trumpets. That's not the point. The one-fourth and one-third suggest intensity but limitation.

But the limitation becomes less so that the bowl judgments have no limits at all. And God's final pouring out of his judgments before the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. One other item to say about these is that the number seven probably suggests that we should not take these as seven literal judgments that take place in that order.

First, this one happens, and then this one. But again, seven is the number of perfection and completeness, the perfect and complete judgment of God expressed

in the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. So, the seven again suggests not necessarily seven sequential judgments but seven playing its typical symbolic function and role.

All of the seals, then, in chapter six, will prepare for and function as sort of a prelude to the final time of judgment. And I want to talk about that again later. But all of these are simply sort of warning shots, sort of anticipations, warnings of the final judgment that is yet to come.

We will read about that in chapters 19 and 20.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 10, Revelation 5 and 6, the Lamb and the Introduction to the Seals of the Scroll.