

## **Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 13, Revelation 7, The Multitude, and 8, The Final Seal**

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 13, Revelation 7, The Multitude, and chapter 8, The Final Seal.

In Revelation 7, and starting with verse 9 that we read earlier, we are introduced to a second group.

We saw the first group being 144,000, probably military imagery from the Old Testament, imagery of taking a census to determine the number of eligible fighting members of each of the tribes of Israel. Now, that language applies to the new people of God, the church, portraying them as a mighty army that goes out and does battle. In the midst of the events in chapter 6, in answering the question of who can stand, this mighty army that has been sealed and protected for God's purpose goes out as a mighty army to do battle.

But ironically, they do so through their suffering faithful witness. Now, in contrast to that, in verse 9, we are introduced to another group, a great multitude that was so great that no one could number it. And again, we have to ask the same questions.

Who is this group, and what is their relationship to the first group? First of all, usually, the two groups are kept fairly distinct, if not completely separate. Note the contrast in the way they're described. The first group is clearly numbered, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes, ending up with 144,000.

So, the first group is clearly and explicitly numbered. The second group is explicitly said to be unnumbered; that is, no one could possibly number it. So, because of that, the two could not possibly be the same.

One is numbered; the other cannot be numbered. And one of them is limited to the nation of Israel, the other is people from every tribe and language and tongue. So, for that reason, most would keep them fairly, if not completely, distinct from one another as two separate groups.

The other thing to say is that the 144,000, as we said, the scene shifts. The 144,000 now stand before the Lamb and before God's throne and before the Lamb, evoking the same scene, the throne room scene, from back in chapters 4 and 5. Now, this innumerable multitude now stands in the presence of God, stands in the throne room from Revelation 4 and 5, so that now they are basically portrayed as having received their reward. They are portrayed as receiving their final salvation.

They stand rewarded; they stand vindicated in God's presence. So, in a sense, again, chapter 7 is beginning to answer the question of the saints, the souls under the altar who have been beheaded because of their faithfulness, who cry out, How long, O Lord? Now, in a sense, we see the final vindication of God's people. In this part of chapter 7, they seem to have reached their final destiny.

They seem to enter into the reward of standing vindicated before God and before His throne and before the Lamb in the heavenly court and in the heavenly throne room. And we'll talk a little bit more about that and what that might be referring to and what that might entail a little bit later on. But again, the question is, who are these? Are these completely distinct from the group in chapter 7? And again, at the first reading, it seems that that is indeed the case.

Again, one is numbered, one isn't. One is related to the tribe of Israel. The others are people from every tribe and tongue and language.

One is found on earth, apparently. This is a heavenly group standing before the throne. However, I think there are reasons for taking these as the same group, looked at from different perspectives.

The first reason is this. The first thing to draw attention to is this, which would seem to suggest identity. I think this is the most significant one.

Notice the contrast you find in this text between what John hears and what John sees. The same contrast that we were introduced to back in chapter 5. Now remember back, and what we said is often, and we'll see this a couple times throughout Revelation, John will hear something and then he'll turn around and see something and what he sees further interprets what it was he heard. And often, what he sees and hears are the same things, but just looked at from different perspectives.

Go back to chapter 5 again. What is it that John hears? When John is privileged to go into the heavenly throne room, he sees God seated on the throne. He sees then in chapter 5 God in his throne with a scroll in his right hand.

He goes all throughout the universe looking for someone, can't find anyone worthy, and begins to weep. And an angel interrupts the weeping and says to him, the lion of the tribe of Judah has overcome. So John hears that there has been someone found worthy, the lion of the tribe of Judah.

But what happens when John looks and sees? What does he see? He doesn't see a lion from the tribe of Judah; he sees a lamb as slain. Two very different figures and images, a lion and a slain lamb, yet clearly John is not seeing two different persons, two different messiahs. It's clear in the context he's seeing the same thing.

It's just that what he sees and hears interpret each other. What he sees is a lion who overcomes, or what he hears is a lion who overcomes, but what he sees is a slain lamb that helps interpret and helps us to understand how he is overcome. As the lion of the tribe of Judah, how does Christ overcome? He overcomes ironically like a slain lamb.

Which, again, is the same way that the mighty army in the beginning of chapter 7 overcomes. So what, again, the point is what John hears and sees refer to the exact same thing, yet in different images that mutually interpret each other. And I would suggest that that is exactly what is going on here.

In chapter 7, verses 1 through 8, this is what John hears. John says I heard their number, verse 4, I heard the number of those who were sealed, 144,000. Now notice in verse 9, after this, I looked, and there before me was a great throne.

Now, this is what John saw. So John hears about 144,000 sealed from the tribes of Israel, portraying the people of God as a mighty army. And especially if we take this as John using imagery from the Old Testament now sort of typologically to refer to the new people of God, then what John hears, a mighty army of 144,000, is now interpreted further by what he sees, an innumerable multitude standing before God's throne, victorious.

So, they are the same group of people but looked at from different perspectives. In the first case, they're looked at from an earthly perspective as a mighty army that does battle, ironically, through their faithful witness, even to the point of suffering and death, just as the Lamb did. And then verse 9 and following, now looking at the same group from a heavenly perspective, now from the perspective of an innumerable multitude who now stands victorious before God.

Now they have won their battle, and now they receive their reward, and now they stand victorious before God. So, the same group looked at it from different perspectives. And given the nature of the apocalyptic symbolism, there's no need to see a contradiction between a group that could be counted and a group that can't because, again, John's using different imagery to portray the same group from different perspectives.

A mighty army on earth who goes out and does battle, even in the face of hostility, even to the point of suffering and death. Now, he envisions the same group using different imagery. He views the same group as standing victorious before God's throne and now receiving their heavenly reward.

The second thing that would support this as well is to note that this innumerable multitude in verse 9 also ends up standing before the throne wearing white robes

and holding palm branches. We said the white robes can suggest purity and righteousness and probably also victory. And one of the things that palm branches could also signify was victory.

So given the fact that they wear white robes and hold palm branches, this then would add to the fact that now they stand victorious. The mighty army from 1 through 8 now has won the victory through their suffering faithful witness. They now stand victorious in God's presence.

So I again would suggest to you that rather than two separate groups, we have the same group of people. That is, God's people are made up of Jew and Gentile people from every tribe, and language and tongue are portrayed from two different perspectives. Now, one question is, why does John describe this group in verse 9 as an innumerable multitude, as a group of people from every tribe? Notice that phrase again occurs seven times throughout Revelation.

Every nation, tribe, people, and language, some version or variation of that, occurs seven times throughout the book of Revelation. But why does he describe them as an innumerable multitude, which again now stands victorious in heaven? Probably, one reason might be for, you can imagine almost psychologically for a group of people in the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, for a group of people trying to live out their faith in the Roman Empire, especially the two churches that are faithful for their suffering, often in situations of suffering and persecution, one can be tempted to think that they are simply an insignificant minority. And now, by portraying them as an innumerable multitude, the author wants to demonstrate that, no, they are not an insignificant minority.

They are not just a tiny conclave that is simply at the whim of the Roman Empire. But now he says, no, actually, you belong to a great multitude that cannot be numbered. That could be one function of the innumerable multitude.

But I think there's another more important one. In my opinion, this language of a great multitude that no one could number also resonates with Old Testament background. And if you think a little bit about the background about the Old Testament story, and again John assumes most of it, especially the prophetic literature, but John is not restricted to prophetic literature.

He goes all the way back to the Exodus. He assumes the Exodus story. He assumes the creation story.

And when you think about the Old Testament story, where do you find a group of people or a multitude of people that cannot be numbered? You find it several times in connection with the promises made to Abraham. Remember, over and over, Abraham, starting in chapter 12, when God promises that he will be a great nation,

from him will come a great nation, and eventually all the nations of the earth will be blessed. When that promise gets repeated in the covenant made with Abraham throughout Genesis, you find this idea stated several times that Abraham's seed and his offspring would one day become so numerous that it would be more numerous than the stars of the sky.

Or one day Abraham's offspring would become so numerous that it would be even more numerous than the sand on the seashore. For example, back in Genesis chapter 13 and verse 16 is one of the first iterations of that idea. And verse 16, to read 15, God promises him all the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.

Verse 16, I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. And the idea is who in the world could ever count specks of dust? The idea is no one. And that's how numerous Abraham's offspring is going to be.

Another example, chapter 15 and verse 15. You, however, Abraham, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation, your descendants will come back from here for the sin of the Amorites has not reached their full measure.

That's not the one I wanted. Actually, 15 verse 5. I'm sorry, I said 15. 15 verse 5. He took him outside.

God took Abraham outside and said, Look up at the heavens and count the stars. If indeed you can count them, then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. That is, Abraham's offspring would be uncountable.

No one could possibly number the offspring of Abraham. One final one in chapter 22. In a reiteration of the same theme.

Chapter 22. And in verse 17. I will surely bless you.

God speaking to Abraham. I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies.

So you have this theme throughout Genesis: God promises Abraham that his seed or his descendants would be innumerable. They would be so great that no one could count them. No more than you could count all the stars in the sky or, the sand on the seashore or all the specks of dust.

That's how numerous Abraham's offspring. I think that is the language that John is drawing on here. So both images come out of the Old Testament.

The imagery of the tribes of Israel and their numbering, as well as the multitude that no one could count, are both Old Testament images that apply to Israel. So it's not like the first one is Israelite and the second one isn't.

Both of them come right out of the Old Testament, and both apply to the nation of Israel. And here the innumerable multitude is. I find it interesting that John does not pick up, at least in this image; he does not explicitly pick up on the theme in Genesis 12 that Abraham would be a blessing to all the nations.

Intriguingly, instead, he picks up on the promise of Abraham's own physical seed that it would be more numerous than the star, that it would be so great no one could number. But now John reinterprets in a sense the promise made to ethnic Israel, Abraham's physical offspring, and now he applies it to a group made up of every nation, tribe, language, and people. So much like John did in the first eight verses and took the language of the 12 tribes of Israel and counting them to determine their military strength and applied that to the new people of God made of Jews and Gentiles, now he does the same with this language of a great multitude that no one could number.

In other words, in fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham that Abraham's physical seed would be more numerous than the stars of the sky and sand of the sea, so numerous that no one could count, John now takes that and finds its ultimate fulfillment in a great multitude that is not restricted only to physical Israel but is expanded to include people from every tribe and tongue and language and nation. So again, my point is, and I think it's important to understand, both of these images, the 144,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel and the innumerable multitude, both draw on Old Testament language referring to Old Testament Israel, now applying it to the new people of God, the church. So, in fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham of innumerable descendants, those descendants stand victorious.

And interestingly, notice a couple of the texts I read, especially the last one, connected it with their victory over their enemies, especially Genesis chapter 22. Now the innumerable multitude has been victorious over their enemies through their faithful suffering witness. Now in fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham, his descendants stand victorious over their enemies in God's presence and receive their reward.

But again, the descendants consist of people from every language, tribe, and nation, including but not exclusively Israel. Two other features to draw your attention to. One of them we've already mentioned, the fact that they hold white robes and palm branches, which we suggested probably portrays military victory.

Some have suggested that these also were features of the Feast of Tabernacles and that is being portrayed here that this scene is the ultimate fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, which we find celebrated in the book of Leviticus and which demonstrated, for example, God's protection of his people when he led them out of Egypt. And that's certainly possible here. Now, the people have reached the goal of their Exodus, and that is celebrating the feast, now celebrating God's presence.

That's possible, although again, most of that is based simply on the white robes and the palm branches, which it's not certain if that's enough to evoke the Feast of Tabernacles. It's possible, but that's not certain, so I'll drop that right there. The second is to notice this reference to the Great Tribulation in verse 9, the first verse of the description of the great multitude.

After this, I looked, and before me was a great multitude, no one could number, standing there with white robes. Actually, to move down in the text where John begins to ask the angel who these persons were, the angel finally tells him that these are those who have come out of the great tribulation. They've washed their robes, made them white in the blood of the Lamb, again signifying purity and righteousness and now perhaps also victory.

But what is this Great Tribulation? Well, look at this elsewhere. I think this idea gets unpacked throughout Revelation, but probably the Great Tribulation, though many Christian interpreters of Revelation are prone to see this as a specific period at the very end of history, somewhat associated with an actual seven-year period, but many would take this as the Great Tribulation is a specific period right at the very end of history as a prelude to the second coming of Christ. In my opinion, however, when you put the rest of the book together, I think the Great Tribulation probably describes the entire period of the existence of God's people leading up until the second coming of Christ.

A period described as one of tribulation, of trouble. It's a period, as we've already seen, of suffering and even persecution at the hands of dominant empires like Rome, at the hands of the beast, which ultimately has its impetus in Satan's attempt to destroy God and his people in Revelation chapter 12, so that probably the Great Tribulation refers to the entire period of the existence of God's people, the entire period of the church's existence until Christ comes back. So, already, the people in the first century were living in the period of the Great Tribulation.

The tribulation had already been inaugurated. God's people had already begun to suffer tribulation at the hands of the Roman Empire, at the hands of those who would persecute them and who would resist them. People like Antipas, for example, suffered at the hands of Rome, and many more that John was convinced would suffer because of the faithful witness in the face of a hostile Roman Empire.

So the Great Tribulation probably should not be limited to one final period, although one might want to hold to that this period will continue to escalate into a final outpouring of tribulation that then will be cut off when Christ returns at his second coming to bring judgment and salvation. But at the same time, to realize the Great Tribulation probably spans the whole period starting with the first century, starting with the outbreak of persecution under the Roman Empire, maybe even before Domitian. If this book is written under Domitian, maybe even beginning back with Nero, maybe even all the way back with the death and martyrdom of Jesus Christ under Roman rule.

This whole period now starting with Jesus' death and the outbreak of persecution under Rome now inaugurates this period of tribulation that will only culminate at the second coming of Jesus Christ. And this whole period is the period of the Great Tribulation. And now these people have emerged victorious out of this period of tribulation and they stand in heaven receiving their reward.

Now, one other question related to this chapter is when this event occurs. Interestingly, two possibilities and maybe they're not exclusive, but one is this could be a scene that occurs immediately upon the death of the faithful sufferers. Those who suffer because of their faithful witness to the point of death then immediately enter into their inheritance. They stand victorious before the throne.

And so you have a heavenly throne scene with all of God's faithful people dressed now in white robes as they have been promised back, for example, in the Letters to the Second Churches. So now they stand before the heavenly throne. But another possibility is noticed at the very end, at the very last two or three verses, three verses, you have a song that is sung in a sense, or at least you have a series of lines put in the poetic or hymnic form in most English translations.

And let me read them again. And therefore, they are before the throne of God, this innumerable multitude from every tribe, language, and tongue. They are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple.

He who sits on the throne will dwell over them or tent or tabernacle over them spread his tent over them. Never again will they be hungry; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb will be at the center of the throne and will be their shepherd.

He will lead them to springs of living water. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Now, two things.

First of all, it's interesting that it's described as an innumerable multitude, which seems to suggest finality or seems to suggest the final complete group. But second,



some of these texts I just read, intriguingly, when you get to Revelation 21, this is sort of a pastiche of Old Testament texts. When you get to Revelation 21, these same texts occur again.

Everyone remembers and recalls God will wipe away the tears from their eyes. And the language of the Lamb tenting or tabernacling over them recalls chapter 21, verse 3, that God will, in a new covenant relationship, will set up his dwelling or his dwelling will be with them. His tent and tabernacling presence will be with his people.

They will never hunger and thirst again. Leading them to springs of living water occurs in chapter 21. So I wonder if this is simply not sort of a glimpse or snapshot of the new creation in chapters 21 and 22 that already, in anticipation of the fuller description that takes place, where heaven actually comes down to earth in chapters 21 and 22.

Here we find kind of a snapshot, a glimpse of God's people entering into their final inheritance. This would not be primarily, if at all, a vision of what happens immediately upon their death and saints going to heaven, but this would be a consummated scene of all of God's people who have been faithful and now receiving their reward, standing before God, this innumerable multitude, and now they enter into their inheritance, the new creation that will get picked up and described in more detail when we get to Revelation chapter 21 and 22. So it's kind of a fast-forward glimpse of what gets unpacked in more detail then.

So, to summarize, the point of chapter 7 then is to demonstrate that during the period of tribulation and during the period of God's judgment upon the earth, upon the wicked Roman Empire, and presumably then any other empire that would play that role leading up to the final judgment, who is able to stand against that? John answers that question then in chapter 6. Those who can stand are those who belong to the new people of God, the church, who are sealed and protected, who are portrayed as a mighty army in fulfillment of the imagery of Israel going out and defeating its enemies. Now, God's people go out to engage in battle and warfare, but they do so through their suffering witness. Almost ironically, not through weapons, but through their suffering faithful witness.

And then, if they do so, they will stand victorious in God's presence in fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars of the sky and sand of the sea and that they would defeat their enemies. Now they stand victorious in God's presence, and in sort of a fast-forward glimpse into the future, they now receive their inheritance, that is, life in the new creation. Life in God's presence.

So they stand rewarded and vindicated. Now again, Revelation could stop here. You've had the scene of judgment, and now you have a scene of final salvation.

But we said Revelation; this is a good example of how Revelation is cyclical. Now, John is going to back up and narrate similar events and similar situations by simply using different images and from a different perspective. So we have a long way to go yet to get to the very end, but John has already reached it.

Now, only to back up and kind of take another run at the end by describing God's judgment in the present on the Roman Empire and on wicked humanity by describing what God's people are to be doing, by describing the nature of their suffering witness, leading then up to God's vindication of his people, his reward of his people and his judgment of their enemies. The other thing you should look at in chapter 7 is how it relates to the churches in chapters 2 and 3. For at least two of the churches, but also some of the others who may have those who are wavering, remember some of the churches Jesus Christ speaking through John did have something positive to say about them even though there were still areas that Christ was concerned about their spiritual status or their lack of witness. To those churches and to those persons, this chapter would be a source of encouragement to persevere.

That even in the face of suffering, they actually are accomplishing a victory. This is God's means of them becoming victorious and establishing his kingdom through their faithful witness even to the point of suffering. And it would also remind them that if they persevere, the result is they will one day stand rewarded and they will stand faithful.

As part of a great multitude, not an insignificant small minority, however much that may appear in the eyes of the Roman Empire, they will actually emerge as a great multitude and stand victorious and receive their reward if they persevere. However, many churches, many of which John addressed, may fall on the opposite side. They may find themselves as those who are subject to God's plagues, as those who do not stand victorious, as those who actually side with those who harm the people of God and persecute the people of God.

The only option is to repent and to maintain their faithful witness in Christ, even if it means their suffering and death. Chapter 8, then, following chapter 7, being sort of an interlude between seal number 6 and seal number 7, chapter 8 will now resume the seal sequence. The other thing to mention, the other thing that an interlude or an interlude might do, the other thing an interlude might do is when you read the seals and all the evil taking place and all the chaos and the visions of judgments, sometimes the seals almost function literally as a brief reprieve and kind of slows the action down and almost a way of helping you get your breath before the next onslaught of seals.

Again, that's not the only thing they do. We said the interlude in chapter 7 functions has an important theological function to interpret the events and what's going on in chapter 6 to answer the question, who can stand in the midst of what's going on in chapter 6? What is the relationship of the people of God to what's going on in chapter 6? So it has an important theological role, but at the same time, it sort of provides almost a reprieve or a brief break in the midst of the calamitous and evil plagues that are poured out upon the earth. This brings us to chapter 8, where the seal sequence is resumed.

And we said that chapter 7 answers the question, who can stand? That may also apply to chapter 8 as well. Who is able to stand against what is going on in chapter 8? We'll see in chapter 8 that the trumpet plagues narrated in chapters 8 and 9 are aimed only at those who have not been sealed and have not received the seal from chapter 7. Again, this section will then resume God's judgments upon the earth. Having answered the question of what is the relationship of God's people to the plagues that are going on, we now find that the plague sequence is going to be resumed, but only after the seventh seal is opened in the first few verses of chapter 8. So here's the last seal, the seventh seal.

And again, after it, this will lead into the sequence of seven trumpets, which we'll see likewise will get broken off between the sixth and the seventh, but we'll look at that later. But what is interesting about this seventh seal in chapter 8, as we'll see, is apparently nothing happens when the seal finally gets opened. But before we look at that, I want to read chapters 8 and 9. We'll read chapter 8 first, and then we'll go back and answer what is the seventh seal? Because, again, apparently, nothing happens.

Instead, it says there's a half hour of silence in heaven. That's very different from the other six seals that have been opened. But let's begin by reading chapter 8. Then, the seven angels, who had the seven trumpets, prepared to sound them.

The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood. And it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up as well.

The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. And as I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair, calling out in a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blast about to be sounded by the other three angels.

And I'll stop there, but chapter 9 then, probably we should not have a chapter break here, because chapter 9 continues the trumpet sequence. But interestingly, as we'll see, the next three trumpets are set off from the first four, much like the first four horses, the first four seals, were set off from the remaining three. And we find that same pattern here.

So, the first four trumpets in chapter 8 sort of form a unit, and then, chapter 9 begins to narrate the final three trumpets. As we've said before, much like the seals, the sixth and seventh trumpet will be separated by an interlude that, again, is not just a digression, but we'll see actual functions to interpret further what's going on in chapters 8 and 9. It plays a very important theological role in the narration of the vision. But trumpet chapter 7 and chapter 9 will end with the sixth trumpet.

Trumpet chapter 7 will actually occur later on in chapter 11, verses 15 through 19. We'll find that the seventh trumpet finally gets sounded. But interestingly, the seventh seal is finally unsealed at the very beginning of chapter 8. And as I said, what is strange about it is apparently nothing happens.

As the seventh seal is opened, all it says is that there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And hopefully, as you've picked up by now, we probably shouldn't take that half an hour as a literal half an hour, that if you had your watch on, you could watch the minute hand go halfway around the face of the clock, and then this time would be up. But half an hour, probably again suggesting something significant, but something limited, something that doesn't last forever.

Now, the question is, why this silence for a half an hour? Which to me at first glance does not appear really to be much of the content of the seal. When you read the other 6 seals, something very specific happens. Except for Seal 5, which is a vision of the souls under the altar who cry out, all the others are active judgments of God upon the Roman Empire and upon evil, godless, idolatrous humanity that refuses to acknowledge him and instead persecutes the saints.

But now all of a sudden you have a seal gets open and there's simply silence. And nothing really happens. Because of that, many suggest that seal number 7 actually, like we said, like a telescope that you keep pulling out, each section contains the other sections inside of it.

Some would suggest seal number 7 actually contains all the next seven trumpets inside of them. That's entirely possible. However, I wonder again if the silence doesn't play a different role and perhaps plays a role in light of its Old Testament background.

There are 3 possible ways, I think, to look at the silence as part of the seal. The first one is, and commentaries have suggested these 3, and there are some others, but I'm simply focusing on what might be the 3 most likely solutions or the 3 most common. One of them is the silence simply provides a dramatic pause in the action.

Sort of like we said with the interlude, you go back to the seals so far, and there's just been one judgment after another, and it ends with this cataclysmic scene of the dismantling of the universe as a symbolic portrayal of the final judgment of God and the day of God's wrath and the wrath of the Lamb. Now, the silence sort of provides a reprieve or a pause in the action before the next round of judgments, which are about to take place in 8 and 9. So, it's kind of a chance again to catch your breath and get ready for what's going to come next. That's entirely possible and certainly makes sense here.

However, two other possible functions. Number 1 is, or number 2, number 1 being a dramatic pause in the action, number 2 is the silence may be the silence so that the prayers of the saints can be heard, which is exactly what happens next after the silence we're introduced to the angels who stand before God and have seven trumpets, but they don't blow the trumpets for a couple more verses. Instead, you have this image of an angel going up to the altar and filling his laver, his censer, with the coals from the altar, or I'm sorry, incense from the altar, which also contains the prayers of the saints, which are offered up to God.

Again, we've seen that theme already that the idea is the judgments that are about to follow are to be seen as in response to the prayers of the saints. We read that, remember the text we read from 1st Enoch and especially from 4th Ezra, that the prayers of the saints, the prayers always being offered on behalf of the saints who are suffering, so that here, the prayers of the saints probably go back and recall chapter 6, the cry of the martyrs, how long O Lord. And so, this silence may be so that the prayer of the saints can be heard, indicating that the rest of the judgments now in chapters 8 and 9 especially are a response to the prayer of the saints.

A third possibility, too, is that in the Old Testament, silence is often a silence that is in anticipation of the judgment to come. The judgment of God and the intervention of God come in the form of judgment. A silence is sort of a response of awe in light of the imminent judgment that is to come.

And that would certainly make sense. The seventh seal then is silence because of the judgment that is to come, which could be chapters 8 and 9, these trumpet

judgments. But I also notice that it appears to me that we have another judgment already in chapter 8, in which we said each of the series of seals, trumpets, and bowls bring you up to the very end.

In chapter 8, I'm sorry, in chapter 6, the very last seal, we saw the image of the dissolution of the universe and people saying, hide us because the great day of the wrath of God is present. In chapter 8, the seventh seal might now bring us into the very day of the Lord because notice what happens in verse 5. Then the angel, after he takes a censer and fills it with the incense, which is the prayer of the saints, and it goes up to God, probably the cry of vindication, the prayer that the saints would be avenged, their blood would be avenged, they would be vindicated.

Now, the angel goes to the altar and fills his censer with fire and throws it on the earth, a symbolic act of judgment. And now notice, again, the language of judgment that, again, the author picks up from the Old Testament. And there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

In other words, all of this together may be the content of the seventh seal. As the seventh seal is open, there's judgment, yes, for kind of a break in the scene, but also so the saints' prayers can be heard and also as an anticipation of God's judgment. And then that judgment, that final judgment, comes in the form of fire hurled upon the earth and rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

And so here, again, we have sort of a summary. Here we're brought to the very end. Here we are finally, again, brought to the day of the Lord and to the final judgment.

To just mention a couple of other things about verses 3 and 4 of chapter 8, actually two things that I want to emphasize. First of all, notice, again, all the temple imagery that the heavenly throne room portrayed as a temple. Here, apparently, the scene shifts again, with John back up into heaven or perhaps John still in heaven from chapter 7. Chapter 7 ended with John seeing the multitude before the throne in heaven.

Now, from his heavenly perspective, he sees the angel in the context of heaven as a temple. Notice the altar, which seems here to reflect also the altar of incense in the Old Testament. The censer that was one of the utensils in the temple and the language of the fire and the coal.

So here we clearly have a picture of heaven portrayed as a temple and perhaps the angels functioning as priests. But the primary goal here is they are involved in not only mediating the prayers of the saints to God, the prayers that probably cry out for justice and avenge or vindication but also in the final judgment of the seventh seal that is poured out in verse 5. Again, along with the silence, verse 5 then is the judgment of the seal number 7. So you have this picture of a heavenly courtroom

continued in verses 3-4. The other thing is notice, and this is what makes Revelation at times so tricky to outline if that's indeed what we're supposed to do.

And it's interesting when you look at outlines of the book of Revelation, they really struggle at these types of places. It's interesting that 8, 1-5 actually ends up overlapping the seventh seal and the seven trumpets. Because notice, if verse 5 is part of the content of the seventh seal, notice in verse 2 you're already introduced, I saw seven angels who stand before God and they were given seven trumpets.

But then verses 3-5 seem to return to the content of seal number 7, where the angel offers up the prayers of the saints and then prepares to pour out God's judgment in the form of the coals from the altar. So intriguingly, the seven angels are introduced in chapter 2, yet they don't do anything. They do nothing until verse 6. So you kind of have this interlocking; scholars often call this an interlocking feature, and there are other things they call it, but whatever the case, you have sections that interlock and overlap where one section ends while at the same time, another one is just getting started that will continue.

That makes it very difficult, including the interludes that interrupt Seal 6 and Seal 7 and, later on, trumpets 6 and 7. These interludes, these interlocking features of Revelation, make it very difficult to come up with an easy, precise outline of the book of Revelation because things kind of interlock, or as we've said, there are interludes that interrupt sequences as we find with the seals and the trumpets. So starting in chapter 6, now that the seven seal has been opened, which probably the content is silence and also the judgment of verse 5, the author has brought us to the end with verse 5, the day of the Lord, he's going to back up and narrate another series of judgments in the form of trumpets. In chapter 6, I'm Sorry, in chapter 8, starting with verse 6 through the end of the chapter and then again into chapter 9, we are introduced to the seven trumpets, and as each trumpet is blown, something happens on the earth or the sea.

And also something's going to happen in the heavens as well in one of these trumpets. We also said that chapter 9 continues the trumpet sequence but we find three things going on. The first, chapter 8, introduces us to the four trumpets that are closely related to each other like the first four seals were.

Then, the next three trumpets seem to be related to each other and seem to have a character of their own because they are introduced in verse 13 by a three-fold woe uttered by an angelic being or by an eagle. So, in verse 13, we're introduced to an eagle, and he issues a three-fold woe, which he tells us corresponds to the next three trumpets. Two of those trumpets will be narrated in some detail in chapter 9. That would be trumpets 5 and 6. Then, the seventh one, as we've already said, is the seventh trumpet, which presumably corresponds to the third woe.

So, if you're following this, chapter 8 begins by introducing us to three woes that correspond to the last three trumpets. So trumpets 5 and 6 should be woes 1 and 2. And then trumpet seven will be woe 3. But again, trumpet number 7 is separated from 6 by an interlude consisting of chapter 10 and also much of chapter 11. And then, in chapter 11, verses 15-19, we finally hear the blowing of trumpet number 7, which presumably then is the third woe that the eagle introduces us to here.

One of the most significant issues for understanding this is just as a general comment before we look at the trumpets in a little bit more detail or as much detail as we can. I think when you read through this, it becomes a little bit tricky trying to figure out exactly, given the symbolic nature of what's going on and given the language that is used, it's a little tricky to determine precisely exactly what these trumpets entail. But clearly, they are God's judgment on the earth.

But an important point to bring out at the very beginning is when you read these, as I just have, when you read these trumpet plagues carefully, you cannot help but note, as numerous commentaries have pointed out, and if you look at some commentaries, they'll even set it out in chart form so you can see it easily, is once again we have to go back to the Old Testament to understand these, and that is by going back to the Exodus plagues. When you read these plagues, these trumpet plagues in chapters 8 and 9 as well, the parallels with the Exodus, though not in the same order as the ten plagues in the Exodus, and again John uses the number 7 to indicate completeness, fullness, perfection, the complete, the perfect number of God's judgments at this time on the earth. Other than the different numbers, again, John is using the number 7, and in different order; most of these resemble one of the plagues that was poured out on Egypt.

For example, when you read through this, the first plague is a plague of hail corresponding to one of the Egyptian plagues. Another one is turning the water into blood and making it so it could not be; it was unsuitable to drink, so even some died from drinking it. Another one is darkening the constellations, so the third of the day was dark, resembling one of the Egyptian plagues.

Later on in chapter 9, we will be introduced to a plague of locusts that has more than one Old Testament background, but at least one of them is one of the Egyptian plagues. So John, I think, is carefully modeling, and we'll also see that this is not new with John. Other apocalypses often drew on Exodus plague imagery to portray end-time judgments.

However, John clearly draws on the plagues from Exodus to portray his own judgments, so what John wants to do is demonstrate, I think, the theological significance of God's judgment. In other words, the main point of this is not so much to predict a precise series of judgments. In fact, I think the fact that John draws on



the Exodus is using the plagues symbolically now to describe God's judgments on Rome and on a wicked world leading up to a second coming.

That very fact makes it tricky to identify precisely what these are. Again, John's main concern is to use the Exodus plagues symbolically to describe God's judgment. So that's why I said I think more important than identifying precisely what are these and what do they look like or what will they look like is to realize the theological point John is making and that's not just to predict a series of specific future judgments but theologically to say something about God's judgment.

And that is, in the same way, that God judged a wicked, idolatrous, oppressive nation that is the nation of Egypt in the past as a prelude to rescuing and redeeming His people and bringing them into the land in the same way God is judging a wicked, evil, idolatrous nation Rome and any other nation that cares to follow in their steps in anticipation of and as a prelude for God once again rescuing His people and leading them into their inheritance which ends up being the new creation of Revelation 21 and 22. So the main point of this is to evoke the Exodus motif not to get us to speculate exactly what will these look like what will they look like certainly not to add up all these thirds and say well we have this many people alive now so exactly one third will be harmed or so much of the earth's surface is covered by water and trees and here's exactly how much will that's not John's point again his point is to evoke the Exodus to say something about God's judgment to emphasize the theological significance by helping us recall the Exodus by getting us to draw connections with and draw our attention back to the Exodus in the same way God judged an oppressive evil empire in the past so God again is judging an oppressive, idolatrous wicked, godless empire now as a prelude to and in anticipation of redeeming His people which we've already seen they have already using another Exodus theme already God has created a people a kingdom of priests which is why God led Israel out of Egypt now once again God has created a kingdom of priests and is redeeming them out of this oppressive wicked empire and will bring them to their inheritance which again we said will be the new creation of Revelation 21 and 22 now in the next session we will make a couple of other comments about the significance of the Exodus connection and then try to make sense of what these trumpet plagues might be suggesting in chapter 8 but also in chapter 9 as well.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 13, Revelation 7, The Multitude, and chapter 8, The Final Seal.