

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 12,

Revelation 6-7: 6th Seal--Who can stand?

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Hey everyone, and welcome back for another deep dive with us. We're going to be looking at Chapters six and seven from the book of Revelation. Okay, and we've got a great expert with us today to help us Kind of unpack these two chapters.

Yeah, we've got an expert in biblical apocalyptic literature. Yeah, that's me. Awesome, I love Revelation.

It's a wild book. It's a wild book Yeah, and it's a in chapter six and seven are like right in the middle of it. Yeah, we're getting to the good stuff. Yeah, and we're kind of working through a lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson, and he kind of lays out some interesting points, and one of the things that we wanted to kind of focus on is this question that pops up at the end of chapter 6, which is: Who can stand? Right in the face of God's final judgment when the sky is falling. Yeah, and the Sun and the moon are darkened, right, and it's a question that I think feels really relevant even today, like what does it mean to be able to stand in the face of whatever challenges we're facing in our own lives? Yeah, so let's dive in. Chapter 6 kicks off with the dramatic opening of the sixth seal, and things get- wow, pretty intense. Pretty intense is a good way to put it.

Yeah. Yeah, the imagery there is, yeah, it's designed to shock you. Yeah, you know, the Sun turning black, the moon blood-red, stars falling from the sky like figs from a shaken tree. Oh, man, that image of stars falling like figs It's that always gets to me.

It's a great image. It's so vivid, it is, and unsettling. Yeah, and it's meant to be unsettling, right? You know, this is not a normal day. No, now is this all meant to be taken literally, or is there something more symbolic going on here? Yeah, it's the question, isn't it? And I think it's a question that a lot of people have when they come to the book of Revelation. And Dr.

Mathewson addresses that in his lecture. He points out that this kind of vivid Symbolic language is drawn from Old Testament prophecies, especially books like Isaiah and Joel Yeah, which often use similar imagery to describe the day of the Lord. Okay, so for listeners who might not be as familiar with the Old Testament, the day of the Lord is the day when God's judgment is poured out on the earth, that's right. It's not a typical Tuesday.

That's what your average Tuesday is, right? But the point is that John, the author of Revelation, is drawing on this rich tradition of prophetic imagery to convey the cataclysmic nature of what he's describing. Okay, so he's not necessarily saying that, like, literally the stars are going to fall to the earth like figs; I think he's using that image. It's a picture to convey the awesomeness and the terribleness of that day, right? The weight of it, the weight of it. Yeah, and it's not just about this kind of cosmic upheaval, right? There's a very human element to it as well.

Oh, absolutely. John describes everyone from Kings to slaves, high and low, rich and poor, all scrambling for cover, trying to hide from the wrath of God. So it really emphasizes the universality of judgment: no one is exempt, which brings us back to that question of who can stand. Yeah, it's like this big question mark that hangs at the end of chapter 6. Yeah, and it sets the stage perfectly for chapter 7, right, which feels like a kind of interlude. Yeah, pause before the drama of the seventh seal unfolds. Yeah, chapter 7 is going to kind of answer the question of who can stand by introducing us to two different groups of people. The first group is the 144,000 sealed Israelites- 144,000. That's a, yeah, a number that kind of jumps out at you when you read it. I know when I first read this passage.

I was like, okay, this is literally a hundred forty-four thousand people, or is this symbolic? What's going on with this number? Right, and that's a common reaction. Yeah, and Dr. Mathewson, in his lecture, he goes in all the different ways that this number has been interpreted, and he points out that some people see this as referring to literal ethnic Israel; others see it as a future salvation of Israel, kind of a mass conversion event, but Dr. Mathewson makes a compelling case for a symbolic understanding of the hundred and forty-four thousand. Okay, so how does he connect that to the church? Well, he draws on other New Testament writings to show that the term Israel is often used in a spiritual sense to refer to the church, the body of believers in Christ, regardless of their ethnic background. Okay, so he points to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. So what does Paul say in Ephesians that supports this idea? Well, Paul talks about a new spiritual Israel that includes both Jews and Gentiles who are united in Christ.

Okay, so it's not about your ethnicity anymore. It's about your relationship to Christ, gotcha. So it's this kind of broader understanding of Israel, right? That Dr. Mathewson thinks John is drawing on in Revelation. It's when he talks about the hundred and forty-four thousand. That's right. Okay, he's not talking about a literal ethnic group.

He's talking about the complete people of God who are now centered on Christ. That's fascinating. So you've got this Old Testament imagery. Yeah, this number that's clearly meant to evoke the twelve tribes of Israel, right, but he's actually talking about something much bigger, right? He's talking about the church in its fullness. Yes.

Okay, and even the number itself, right? One hundred and forty-four thousand. Yeah, which is twelve times twelve times one thousand, right? Emphasizes this idea of completeness. Yes, twelve, of course, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, but also the twelve Apostles, right, and by extension the foundation of the church. Wow, it's like there's a multi-layered symbol.

It is that it just packs in so much meaning. Yeah, and speaking of details, there's some interesting omissions. Yes, within that list of tribes.

You're right. Dan and Ephraim are missing. Oh, yeah, and Dr. Mathewson suggests this could be related to their historical association with idolatry. Interesting, so it's almost like John is sending a subtle message there, yeah, to his readers, warning them against compromising with the idolatrous Roman Empire. Yeah, and then you have Judah writing the list, which is significant because Judah was the tribe of King David, and of course Jesus was descended from the Lion of David, right? Emphasizing that the new covenant.

Yes, focused on Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, right? The Lion of the tribe of Judah. So it's this powerful statement. Yeah, about who belongs to this new Israel, exactly. Dr. Mathewson also has an interesting take on why John lists the tribes individually.

Yes, counting out 12,000, for me, he does. He points out that enumerating the tribes in this way mirrors Old Testament military censuses. So, in the book of Numbers, for example, they carefully counted the number of fighting men from each tribe. So, is he suggesting that John is portraying the church as a kind of army? That's exactly right. He sees the hundred and forty-four thousand as a symbolic representation of the church as a mighty force. Okay, but here's the twist. They don't conquer through violence or earthly power.

Okay, I'm intrigued How do they conquer that they conquer through faithful witness even in the face of death Wow And this actually connects to something we see later in Revelation chapter 14 where the hundred forty four thousand are described as pure and undefiled Those who have followed the Lamb wherever he goes Wow So we have this symbolic army the hundred forty four thousand sealed and protected from God's final judgment, right? But there's another group in chapter 7, isn't there? A massive multitude? That's also standing before the throne of God. Yes, there is the uncountable multitude, and that's what we'll pick up next time. So we left off with this idea of these two distinct groups: you've got the hundred and forty-four thousand, and then this vast, uncountable multitude. What makes this uncountable multitude distinct from the hundred and forty-four thousand? One of the most striking differences is their origin: while the hundred and forty-four thousand are specifically identified as Israelites, this Multitude comes from every nation, tribe, and language. Oh, that's right. Yeah, it's like this incredibly diverse group, all standing together before the throne of God, exactly, and their location is significant. They're not just in heaven; they're specifically described as being before the throne of God.

Mm-hmm. This indicates that they've come through the tribulation, emerging victorious. Their faith in the Lamb now. For listeners who might not be as familiar with the language of Revelation, the Lamb is a title used for Jesus, right? And it connects back to his sacrifice on the cross, which is often described as a lamb being led to slaughter, right? So it's a very powerful image. Yes, and the image of the Lamb is central to the book of Revelation. It represents Christ's victory over sin and death, and it's through faith in him that this multitude is able to stand before God. So it's a powerful reminder that salvation isn't limited to any one group or nation. Absolutely It's a universal message of hope and redemption and John paints such a vivid picture of this multitude Their clothes and white robes holding palm branches and there's this beautiful detail of God wiping away their tears Oh, those details are so powerful.

The white robes symbolize purity and victory. The palm branches are a classic symbol of celebration and triumph; you know, they've endured the worst, but now they're experiencing ultimate solace and vindication in God's presence. That image of God wiping away their tears always gets to me. It just speaks to the depth of God's compassion and the promise of ultimate healing and comfort for those who have suffered. It's a beautiful picture of grace and restoration, so we have these two groups: a symbolic army and A massive crowd of victors.

Does dr. Mathewson see them as totally separate entities or is there a deeper connection there? That's a great question. And I think it gets to the heart of what John is trying to convey in these chapters. He argues that both groups, despite their differences in description and imagery, ultimately represent the people of God, united in their faith in Christ and their perseverance through hardship.

So the answer to the question Who can stand Isn't about belonging to a particular group or having a certain lineage, precisely. It's not about external markers, but about an internal reality. It's about unwavering faith in Christ, even amid persecution and suffering, which reminds me of something. Dr. Mathewson said about the hundred and forty-four thousand being sealed for protection, but still facing the possibility of martyrdom.

Yes, He emphasizes that it's their steadfastness, their unwavering commitment to Christ, that defines their ability to stand, and I think that applies equally to the Uncountable multitude they've come out of great tribulation. They faced unimaginable hardships, but their faith has remained unshaken. So even though they're described differently, both groups point to the same core truth: salvation and steadfastness are found in Christ, regardless of your background, your ethnicity, or your life experiences. That's the beauty of Revelation. It offers this message of hope and resilience that transcends cultural and historical boundaries. You know, I think it's easy to get caught up in the apocalyptic imagery of Revelation and see it as this distant future event, but Dr. Mathewson makes the point that this book isn't just about some far-off apocalypse. It's about how we live right now I Completely agree Revelation was written to a community of believers who are facing real persecution and suffering It was a message of encouragement and hope for them in their present circumstances So what does it mean for us to stand firm in our everyday lives? Does it mean avoiding challenges? We're trying to create a safe bubble around ourselves. Not at all. Remember, both groups in Revelation 7 are described as having gone through immense hardship.

They're not passive bystanders. They're active participants in the struggle for good. So it's about remaining faithful even when things get tough, even when we're tempted to compromise or given to despair. It's about standing up for what's right, even when it's difficult. Yes, and I think that's where the image of the 144,000 as a symbolic army becomes particularly relevant. We may not be facing literal persecution like the early Christians, but there are still battles to be fought. There are battles against injustice, against apathy, against the forces that seek to divide and dehumanize, and those battles require courage, conviction, and, as you said, that unwavering faith and the power of good to overcome. Absolutely.

We're called to be a force for good in the world, to bring light and hope to those around us, which brings us back to Dr. Mathewson's challenge: if we, as the church, are part of this symbolic army, how do we wage war in a way that honors Christ? How do we conquer not through violence but through faithful witness? Yeah, that's a really powerful image, you know. Thinking about 144,000 as an army, it really kind of challenges the way we normally think about power and victory, right? It's not about military might, yeah, or political dominance. It's about something much deeper. Yeah, and it makes you wonder: what does that kind of warfare look like in our everyday lives? You know, how do we embody that kind of faithful witness in a way that honors Christ? Well, I think it starts with recognizing that

the battles we're fighting aren't always external. Sometimes the greatest battles are the ones we fight within ourselves. Oh, it's good.

Yeah, you know, the battles against our own selfishness, our own prejudices, our own fears. So it's about this kind of inner transformation, this process of becoming more like Christ, which then kind of spills out into our actions in the world, right? It's about cultivating those virtues that are at the heart of Christ's teachings: love, joy. Peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. It's funny.

You should mention that because I was thinking about what Dr. Mathewson said about the 144,000 being described as pure and undefiled, right? And it's not just about avoiding certain behaviors. It's about a purity of heart, a purity of intention. Yeah, so it's about aligning our hearts with God's will, allowing his love to kind of transform us from the inside out. Exactly, and I think that's where the rubber meets the road. It's not just about these abstract ideas. It's about how we treat the people around us, how we respond to injustice, how we use our time, talents, and resources to make a difference in the world. Yeah, it's about being the hands and feet of Christ in our communities, showing compassion to the marginalized, speaking up for those who are silenced, working for justice and reconciliation.

It's about recognizing the inherent dignity of every human being, regardless of their background, beliefs, or circumstances. It's about being a force for good, yeah, a source of light and hope in a world that often feels dark and divided- and that I believe is the ultimate victory. It's not about conquering others, but about conquering the darkness within ourselves and within our world. It's a powerful thought. Well, there's been a really insightful deep dive into Revelation.

I know I've learned a lot, and I hope our listeners have too. Thanks for joining us. It's been a pleasure.

We'll see you next time