

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 14,

Revelation 7-8 Trumpets

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Buckle up, everyone, because today we're diving into some seriously wild imagery in the book of Revelation. Chapters eight and nine, to be exact, where things get pretty apocalyptic. It's going to be a wild ride.

We're talking plagues, bizarre creatures, and a whole lot of symbolism to unpack. A whole lot of symbolism. And luckily, we have a fantastic guide for this deep dive, Dr. Dave Mathewson.

He's great. His lecture notes on Revelation are just packed with insights. Yeah, you know what's so fascinating about this section? Is how John, the author of Revelation, right, how he uses these super vivid images to warn against idolatry.

Interesting. He draws a lot on the Exodus story, but there's a twist. But with a twist.

So it's not just a retelling. Not just the plagues of Egypt. No.

There's something more nuanced going on here. Exactly. He blends those familiar plague images with prophecies from Isaiah.

Oh, wow. Isaiah, who used the Exodus as a metaphor for a future deliverance of God's people. So it's like he's layering these historical and prophetic elements to create this really powerful message for his audience.

I see. Okay. So we've got this blend of Exodus and Isaiah going on.

But how does that connect to idolatry? Well, Dr. Mathewson points out that the plagues in Revelation, much like the ones in Exodus, can be seen as judgments against false gods. Oh, interesting. So think about it.

Yeah. The Exodus plagues were directed at the Egyptian gods, exposing their powerlessness against the one true God. John seems to be doing something really similar here.

He's challenging the Roman Empire's idolatry. So you're saying those trumpet plagues are like God's mic drop moment, showing everyone that worldly power is just fleeting. It's a powerful interpretation, isn't it? Especially for John's original audience.

They were facing all this pressure to conform to Roman ways and beliefs. John is offering them hope, a different perspective that's rooted in God's power, not in the fleeting might of the Roman Empire. I like that.

Okay. I'm starting to see how this all ties together. But let's get into the specifics.

The first four trumpets bring some really intense imagery: hail and fire, a burning mountain thrown into the sea, a star poisoning the waters, and darkness covering the sky. Wow. It's like a scene straight out of a disaster movie.

Oh, it definitely grabs your attention. For sure. And while these descriptions are so vivid, we need to remember that John is speaking symbolically.

Of course. He's not talking about literal mountains falling from the sky or anything. Right.

So what do these symbols represent then? What is John trying to tell us with all of this? Well, Dr. Mathewson suggests that these first four trumpets demonstrate the futility of idolatry. They target the earth, the sea, and the heavens. Wow.

Showing how relying on worldly powers ultimately leads to chaos and despair. It's a pretty bleak picture. It's like John is saying, look, you can put your faith in emperors or armies or material wealth, but in the end it all crumbles.

Precisely. And that message would have resonated so deeply with John's audience. Right.

I mean, they were facing persecution for their faith. So he's offering them a different kind of hope, one that transcends the instability of the Roman Empire. Yeah.

That makes sense. Now things get even weirder with trumpets five and six. Oh, yeah.

We're talking locusts with scorpion tails, horses with lion heads, breathing fire and smoke. Crazy. It's like John just rated a creature feature film for inspiration.

Well, and remember, he's building on those Old Testament descriptions of locust plagues, right? Yeah. But he's taking them to a whole new level of terrifying. Oh, for sure.

Combining insects, animals, even human features. It's wild. To create something truly nightmarish.

Okay. Someone needs to turn that into a movie. Right.

But seriously, what is the significance of these creatures? Yeah. What do they represent? That's a great question. And Dr. Mathewson suggests they likely represent demonic forces.

Oh, wow. Unleashed from the abyss. The abyss.

That place is associated with evil and chaos in apocalyptic literature. Wow. So we're talking about a full-on spiritual attack here, but why locusts? It's interesting, isn't it? Yeah.

They were a well-known symbol of destruction in the ancient world, capable of devouring crops and causing famine. But John adds this chilling twist. These locusts don't harm vegetation.

Really? They specifically torment people. Hold on. So they're not just causing physical destruction.

Are they inflicting some kind of spiritual or psychological torment? That's right. And Dr. Mathewson points out that they target those without God's seal, suggesting a spiritual dimension to their attack. And he even sees a possible connection between the locusts and the army of horsemen described in the Sixth Trumpet, both emerging from places associated with evil, the abyss, and the Euphrates River.

Wait, are you suggesting that these demonic forces might be working together, like some kind of coordinated assault? It's a chilling thought, isn't it? And it really underscores John's warning about the dangers of idolatry. Because ultimately, those false gods, those things people choose to worship, turn on them, revealing their true demonic nature. Exactly.

And it raises a crucial question for us. What's that? What role do we play in this cosmic battle? Are we just passive bystanders, or are we called to actively resist these demonic forces? Yeah. And if we are called to resist, how do we even begin to fight against something that seems so overwhelming and terrifying? That's where John's message about idolatry becomes even more crucial.

He's essentially saying that by aligning ourselves with false gods, by prioritizing worldly things above God, we're actually making ourselves vulnerable to these demonic attacks. So it's like we're opening the door and inviting them in. In a sense, yes.

We're giving them a foothold in our lives, making ourselves susceptible to their influence and their torment. It's a question we're thinking about, isn't it? It's easy to think about idolatry in terms of ancient statues or temples, you know? Right. But what does it look like in our modern world? Right.

It's not just about bowing down to literal idols anymore. You know, you bring up a great point. Dr. Mathewson suggests that anything we prioritize above God can become a false god in our lives.

So we could be talking about things like money, power, success, even ideologies. Absolutely. Those things can so easily become idols if we allow them to, you know, control our thoughts, our actions, and ultimately our allegiance.

Now, going back to those demonic forces, I can't get over the imagery John uses. Oh yeah. He describes these armies of horsemen, 200 million strong.

That's a lot. With lion heads and tails like serpents breathing fire and smoke. Wild.

It's a truly apocalyptic vision. It is. And Dr. Mathewson believes John is intentionally using, you know, those overwhelming numbers and bizarre descriptions to create a sense of awe and terror.

Like he's trying to shake us out of our complacency and say, hey, this is serious. Yeah. There's a cosmic battle going on, and the stakes are incredibly high.

Exactly. It's not just some like minor conflict, you know? John is depicting an epic showdown between good and evil. Wow.

A battle for the very souls of humanity. And you mentioned earlier that these forces emerged from places associated with evil. Right.

The abyss in the Euphrates River. For John's audience, the Euphrates would have held a lot of historical baggage, right? Absolutely. In biblical prophecy, the Euphrates was often linked with foreign invaders, you know, and threats from the East.

I see. So hearing about armies coming from the Euphrates would have triggered some serious anxieties for those living under Roman rule. So it's tapping into those historical fears of invasion and conquest, but also pointing to something deeper.

Yes. Spiritual invasion. Precisely.

And it begs the question: what role do we play in this cosmic battle? That's a good question. Are we just passive bystanders, or are we called to actively resist these demonic forces? And if we are called to resist, how do we even begin to fight against something that seems so overwhelming and terrifying? That's where John's message about idolatry becomes even more crucial. He's essentially saying that by aligning ourselves with false gods, by prioritizing worldly things above God, we're actually making ourselves vulnerable to these demonic attacks.

So it's like we're opening the door and inviting them in. In a sense, yes. We're giving them a foothold in our lives, making ourselves susceptible to their influence and their torment.

But Dr. Mathewson also talks about those who are sealed by God. Right. Those who are protected from these plagues.

What does that tell us about God's role in all of this? It's a powerful reminder that even in the midst of this cosmic battle, even when it seems like evil is winning, God is still present. He's still offering protection to those who remain faithful to him. So it's not a hopeless situation.

No. There's still a way to find safety and security, even in the face of these demonic forces. Exactly.

And that security comes from placing our trust in God, from aligning our lives with his will, and from resisting those temptations to worship false gods. Okay. I'm starting to see how this all ties together.

Good. John is painting a pretty bleak picture of what happens when we choose idolatry. Right.

But he's also offering a way out. Yeah. It's about making a conscious choice to align ourselves with God and to resist those forces that would seek to destroy us.

That's a great way to put it. It's a choice we're all faced with every day. Wow.

And the stakes are high, as John so vividly illustrates in these chapters. You know, as we're talking about this, I keep thinking about how relevant this message is today. Oh, absolutely.

We might not be facing literal locusts with scorpion tails, but the temptation to idolize things is still so prevalent. Oh, absolutely. Think about the pressure we face to achieve success, to accumulate wealth, to gain status and recognition.

Right. Those things can easily become idols if we're not careful. And the consequences can be just as devastating as those John describes.

Even if they manifest in different ways, we might not experience physical torment. Right. But we can certainly experience emotional, psychological, and spiritual torment when we choose to chase after those false gods.

You know, it's interesting how Dr. Mathewson also points out the sense of urgency in John's writing. Oh, really? It's not just some abstract warning about a distant future event. He's speaking to his audience in their present reality, urging them to wake up and see the spiritual battle raging around them.

So it's a call to action. Absolutely. It's a call to recognize the dangers of idolatry, to make a conscious choice to follow God, and to actively resist those forces that would seek to lead us astray.

And that call to action isn't just for John's original audience. It's for us today as well. Yeah, we're facing our own set of challenges and temptations, our own version of those false gods that John warns against.

Right. And John's vision gives us a framework for understanding those challenges, for recognizing those temptations, and for finding the strength to resist them. It's like he's giving us a roadmap for navigating the spiritual battlefield, showing us how to find victory, even when surrounded by forces that seem overwhelming.

And that's a message of hope that we desperately need in our world today. Absolutely. It's one thing to talk about these demonic forces and the dangers of idolatry, you know, in a theoretical sense.

But when you really stop and think about the implications, it can be pretty unsettling. It definitely makes you take a closer look at your own life, doesn't it? Yeah. At the things you might be prioritizing without even realizing it.

Exactly. But what really struck me is how Dr. Mathewson points out that even amidst all this judgment and destruction, there's a sense of restraint. Oh, definitely.

He mentions how the plagues often have a limited scope, you know, affecting only a third of the earth or the sea. That's an important detail, isn't it? Yeah. It suggests that God's judgment isn't arbitrary or indiscriminate.

Okay. You know, there's a purpose behind it. Right.

A measured response to the rebellion and idolatry he sees. So it's not like he's just unleashing his wrath and wiping everything out in a fit of anger. No, not at all.

Dr. Mathewson even suggests that this limited judgment could be seen as an act of mercy. Oh, wow. A way of giving people a chance to see the error of their ways and turn back to God.

It's like a wake-up call, a final warning before things escalate further. Precisely. And that brings us to another fascinating point Dr. Mathewson makes.

Okay. He believes these trumpet plagues might be foreshadowing a final judgment to come, a more comprehensive and decisive reckoning. So these plagues are just a taste of what's ultimately in store for those who refuse to repent and turn away from those false gods.

That's one way to interpret it, yes. And it raises some profound questions about the nature of God's justice and mercy, doesn't it? It does. How do those two attributes coexist? Right.

How can a loving God also be a God of judgment? That's a question that's puzzled theologians for centuries. It really has. It's hard to wrap your head around those seemingly conflicting ideas.

Absolutely. And I don't think there are any easy answers. But the book of Revelation doesn't shy away from those difficult questions.

You know? Right. It invites us to wrestle with them, to dig deeper, and to allow those questions to shape our understanding of God and our relationship with him. You know, it would be so much easier to just ignore those difficult questions, to pretend they don't exist.

Right. But that's not what Revelation is about, is it? No. It's not about sugarcoating reality or offering simplistic answers.

Right. It's about confronting the truth, even when it's uncomfortable. And ultimately finding hope in the midst of that truth.

Because even amidst all this talk of judgment and plagues, there's also this glimmer of hope woven throughout Revelation, isn't there? Oh, absolutely. John's vision isn't just about doom and gloom. Right.

It points toward a future where God's justice and mercy will be fully realized, where evil is defeated, and a new creation is established. That's the ultimate hope. It is.

It's the promise of a world where things are made right, where suffering and pain are no more. Exactly. And it's that hope that sustains us.

That gives us the strength to face the challenges of our world, knowing that ultimately God is in control. So as we wrap up this deep dive into Revelation, what are some key takeaways you think our listeners should hold on to? Well, I think it's crucial to remember that John's message, while written centuries ago, is still incredibly relevant today. Yeah.

The temptation to worship false gods, to prioritize worldly things above our relationship with God, is just as strong now as it was back then. And the consequences can be just as devastating. They can.

Even if they manifest in different ways, we might not face literal plagues, but we can certainly experience emotional, spiritual, and even physical consequences when we choose to follow those false gods. But there's also hope. Yeah.

John reminds us that God is still in control, that he offers protection and guidance to those who remain faithful to him, and that ultimately he is working to redeem this broken world. It's a powerful message, isn't it? It is. And a timely reminder for all of us to examine our own hearts, to identify those things we might be tempted to idolize, and to make a conscious choice to align ourselves with God's purposes.

Absolutely. Because ultimately, that's where we find true freedom, purpose, and lasting peace. Well said.

So, to all our listeners out there, we encourage you to continue exploring the Book of Revelation. It's a challenging and thought-provoking book. It is.

But it's also a book filled with hope and promise. Absolutely. Until next time, keep seeking truth, and may your deep dives be insightful and engaging.