

Rev 26-01-14b

We're ready now to pick up our study here and we're going to be moving into chapter 8. Chapter 8. And here we have the opening of the seventh seal and there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then we have seven angels standing before God and to them are given seven trumpets. These seven angels who stand before God, I believe, are the same seven angels that we have already seen, the seven angels that are a part of the greeting, the seven flaming angels that we saw earlier on.

But we are now transitioning and it seems as though the seventh seal is simply the means of instigating the trumpets. I don't think that is the case. And we need to once again look at the connection we saw earlier between the feasts of Israel and these seven seals.

So we've seen the four plus three with an interlude in between the spring feasts, then you have the summer and the time of harvest that follows Pentecost after first fruits and you have the barley harvest and all that. Then you have the summer time and then it's not until the fall that you have the Yom Kippur, the head of the year, and ten days later you have the Day of Atonement. And then you have four days later the Feast of Booths or Sukkot.

And of course that's a 14 day, a double seven. There's all kinds of connections we don't have time to explore. But let's think about the spring feasts and the four horsemen.

Actually it's the four horses. I'm all hung up now that there's four horses and five horsemen. But I'll let that slide.

If I say four horsemen it's just out of recognition of the tradition. But death and Hades, that's two horsemen so there's a total of five. Having noted that, you have in the spring feasts Passover, which is death as a means of redemption.

The slaying of the Passover lamb is the beginning of redemption. And so you have the opening of the first seal where there is this pseudo-righteousness, righteousness without redemption. This rider on the white horse is going to go out with the crown and the bow and he's going to conquer and he's going to try to accomplish without sacrifice the righteousness represented by the color white, the white robes that have been washed in the blood of the lamb.

This rider on the white horse can't sacrifice himself to purge sin and to achieve righteousness. So he's going to ride and try to do it some other way. So Passover as the first feast and the white horse at the breaking of the first seal correspond.

The second feast is the feast of unleavened bread. And the idea here is purge the leaven out of the house, eat unleavened bread. It is a recognition of the haste with which Israel left Egypt and so on.

This corresponds to the black horse where there is scarcity, there is imbalance, there are scales,

but it's not just. And it reminds you of a lot of the legislation and a lot of the effort that is made by people in the political world and in the philosophical world who want to solve the world's problems by imposing regulations, by dominating others, by coming out and weighing with their scales and their weights and deciding what justice is. And it isn't justice at all.

And it doesn't purge corruption. It doubles corruption. And this, we think that it's getting worse in the present day.

If you study history, this has been going on a long time, even in this country. But the feast of unleavened bread, this is God's means of purging out the leaven, purging out what corrupts and what defiles and what metastasizes and grows and spreads as a malignancy. Get that out of your house.

Get that out of your life. When the human effort is made to do that in the first part of the 70th week, instead there is scarcity, there is famine, there is imbalance. There are those who can afford oil and wine and others who can't.

And people are barely getting by subsistence-wise because human ingenuity cannot solve the world's problems. You can't feed everyone, even though there is enough food on the planet that if it were properly distributed, nobody would go hungry. This is a well-known truth.

There is enough food production on the planet that if it were properly distributed by human government, nobody would go hungry. But because of the fallenness and the corruption of human nature, greed, power, imbalances, it doesn't happen. And you have people dying with famine and disease and so on.

But that's the correspondence of the second seal and the second feast. The third feast is the feast of firstfruits. Firstfruits.

From the death that has happened across the wintertime comes new life. New seeds are planted. New crops are cultivated.

And here is the firstfruits. It is life out of death. Paul talks about the generation in Israel, the generation of Jews that believed in Christ.

The church begins in Jerusalem and it's all Jewish and they are the firstfruits. And then the Gentiles come to bring in the fullness. But the feast of firstfruits, this is life out of death.

It is renewal. But the third seal, the pale horse, there is death, but it's not total. And notice these are not a perfect alignment.

Passover, you can have both the white and the red horse, an attempt at righteousness that fails, followed by bloodshed. But this bloodshed doesn't achieve atonement or redemption. And so by the time you get to the feast of unleavened bread, these spring feasts that represent God's work, God's provision, God's supernatural ability to heal us of our wounds and to bring

life where there was death, this pale imitation represented by the first beast, the man of sin, the antichrist, trying to accomplish these things apart from God, echoing the five I wills of Satan.

I will ascend. I will do what God does. I will be like the most high and creatures can't do what only God does.

So then at Pentecost, after the 40 days, you come to Pentecost and there is this harvest and this fullness. And Pentecost, of course, is the harbinger of the harvest of the Gentiles. The church age begins on the day of Pentecost, but instead at the end of the four seals and the four horses with the five horsemen, you have global upheaval.

And the result is not redemption and deliverance and salvation. It is the destruction. You have the martyrs under the altar at the fifth seal and there is injustice and there is criminal murder taking place.

So then there is this pattern of interlude. And after the horsemen ride forth, the souls under the altar and the sealing of the witnesses who are alive and remain, again, all on the earth. But this is kind of an interlude, the plea of the souls under the altar and the sealing of the 144,000.

There's no judgment taking place actively during that time. The judgment all seems to be reflected in those first four seals. And the fifth and the sixth are actually the beginning of sort of an interlude, a pause.

And we're going to see this effect later on with the trumpets and the bowl judgments, that as the trumpets are blown, as the bowls are poured out, there is a pause, there's an interruption, there's an interlude. And you see it first in the feast schedule of Israel. And this tells us to watch for a pause, for a time of evaluation, a time of separation.

You're going to separate the wheat from the chaff. You're going to separate that which is productive and fruitful from that which is unproductive. The ground which has the rain falling many times upon it, as it says in Hebrews, and doesn't produce.

It's only thorns and briars. It is fit for burning and near to a curse. But there is the opportunity for repentance during this time of judgment.

It is only going to be specifically mentioned when we get to the trumpets. You notice in our account in Revelation chapter six of the seals, it doesn't say anything about repentance. It doesn't say they looked and realized that something was wrong.

And what you have in the sixth seal, the kings of the earth in verse 15, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, slaves and free, hid themselves in the caves and rocks of the mountains and said, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb. For the great day of his wrath has come, and who is able to stand? And you know that in the 70th week, the day of God's wrath is at the end of that period, not the beginning, not even at the middle. The day of the Lord, the day of the pouring out of his wrath

and judgment is at the end.

And so really at the sixth seal, we seem to have come to the end of that seven year period, just prior to the consummation and the ending of this period. But before that final outpouring of judgment, you have the sealing of these servants. Some have died, their souls are under the altar, these are still alive.

When you come now to chapter eight, it says when he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. It is my suggestion that we have the same basic sequence of events detailed in the revelation in four presentations. The seals, the trumpets, the thunders, and the bowls.

And in each case where we have enough granularity to see, we can't tell much about the thunders, but with the seals and the trumpets and the bowls, you have activity, then an interlude, and then a culmination. So what this is called, and it's not unique to me, this idea goes all the way back as far as Augustine or Augustine, depending on who you talk to. But I'm not saying that the seals numerically correspond to the trumpets numerically, seal one is trumpet one, seal two is trumpet two, or bowl one and bowl two.

I think that they are perspectives on the general sequence of events. And this is why you can't line them up in a spreadsheet with cells of rows and columns, but the progress of what unfolds is the same. So I'm not proposing an equivalence, but I'm also not saying that therefore they are unrelated and that it's all sequential.

This is a chronologically overlapping account. And we are now moving from the presentation of the seals to the presentation of the trumpets. And there is a great rewind.

There's a great reset here. And each time we change perspectives, we're moving up. The seals represent the earth, human on human violence, crime, injustice.

But as we ascend from the earth to the air, to the clouds where thunder occurs, to the heavens where the bowls are pulled forth, we are going to have clarity that you get when you've got a higher perspective and things are going to be more clear, not less so as we move forward. There's a little bit of uncertainty about why things are happening as they are with the seals. But as we move through the trumpets and the bowls with their details and with the corresponding interludes where it is going to become clear and the explanation is for us, for us now, how should we then live? So there are signposts at the end of each of these passes, if you will, through this seven-year period.

And we saw this when we went through Revelation years ago, that at the end of each of these, there is the great earthquake, not a great earthquake. It's the great earthquake. So when you get to the sixth seal, as we have seen, there is the dissolution of the heavens.

There is cosmic upheaval that is inconsistent with what you see at the beginning of the trumpets or the beginning of the bowls. If this kind of cosmic disturbance has happened,

there's no place left to blow the trumpets or pour out the bowls. And we saw this in verses 12 through 17 of chapter 6, because the sun becomes black as sackcloth of hair.

The moon becomes like blood. The stars fall to the earth like figs dropped from a tree shaken by a mighty wind. The sky rolls up like a scroll.

Mountains and islands are moved out of their place. Everybody is crying for the rocks to fall on them. At this point, the trumpets, if they follow this, would be somewhat anticlimactic.

How can you come back and talk about fractional portions of something being judged when the whole earth has come under this kind of judgment? So it is clear that we are moving back in time to revisit this same sequence of events that will culminate in this awful status of the earth, dark sun, blood moon, and so on. That's our clue. So at the sixth seal, you have this cosmic dissolution.

But then the seventh seal, all you have in this seal is silence in heaven for half an hour. Half an hour is a long time. I was thinking about this as I was studying.

I thought, you know what? Let me just experience silence for half an hour. I'm going to stop what I'm doing. I'm going to stop looking at what I'm looking at.

I'm going to check the clock, and I'm just going to listen to nothing for 30 minutes. 30 minutes is a long time when nothing is happening. There's just dead silence.

Half an hour of absolute nothing. My suggestion in explanation is this. From an earthly perspective, there are actually things going on that John is not cleared to see or hear.

He is in heaven. Come up here. I will show you what's going to take place.

The lamb opens the seventh seal, and John sees nothing, hears nothing, observes nothing, is aware of nothing. There is a half hour of nothing. After that half hour, in other words, I suggest this is similar to the seven thunders.

This is just something John is not allowed to even be aware that anything is happening. The seventh seal is hidden from John. The silence is not a thing.

It is the absence of awareness of a thing. So, as we begin chapter 8, there's silence in heaven for about half an hour. Now, after the half hour, suddenly, the visionary experience of John resumes.

After this strange interlude, John sees seven angels. The word, and, there in verse 2, is just as often translated, but or now. And I would translate this now.

Silence in heaven for half an hour. Now, I saw the seven angels who stand before God. When he says, these seven angels who stand before God, we only have one place to go, and that is the seven spirits before the throne that we've seen referenced twice previously.

To them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne.

And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Notice, trumpets are handed out before the prayers are processed. Angels are going to blow trumpets.

And these trumpets are signals, in the same way that the four living creatures called out. These trumpets, trumpets are used. I was, I was tuning piano in another church, and they were getting ready for a funeral.

And they are a church that's big on connections to Old Testament Israel, that have kind of been ignored by the church. They had a shofar, and a guy went up there, and they said, blow that shofar. And so the guy picked it up and went into the center of the, what they call the sanctuary, the auditorium.

I don't think it's any more sanctified than any other room. But anyway, he went to the middle of the room, and he blew that shofar. Those things are loud.

That sound really carries. I think God designed rams to produce these horns with that particular curvature, and that particular thickness, so that they could serve as trumpets. These are shofar trumpets.

These are not brass, you know, Roman trumpets. These are shofar, shofarim, translated here as trumpets, but they are handed out. But before they do anything, they're handed the trumpets, and they stand there.

And these shofarim are in their hands, but they don't do anything with them yet. This is preparation. But before they blow them, before they give a signal, the prayers of the sanctified ones are processed.

This is your prayers. This is my prayers. Lord, I don't understand why things are happening as they are.

Lord, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me. Lord, I don't understand this suffering. I don't understand this bereavement.

I don't understand this betrayal. I don't understand the loss of this relationship. I don't understand why you have allowed these things in my life, why I am enmeshed, I am caught up in things not of my own choice.

And our prayers go to heaven, similar to those souls under the altar in a previous seal. So, this angel, having a golden censer, stands at the altar, and he's given much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints. Notice our prayers themselves are not the incense.

It takes a lot of incense to make these prayers acceptable in God's sight. Many times our prayers are selfish, ill-informed, not well thought out. We're not praying back what we know and what we've learned.

And our prayers need perfuming before they can be brought before the throne of God. We want to try to not be praying in a way that requires much incense. This is why there are traditionally flowers at funerals.

There was the necessity in earlier days, without embalming and so on, to do the service quick and have plenty of flowers. Much incense, to offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which is before the throne. The smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints.

Notice the distinction. The smoke accompanies the prayers because they need help. Thank the Lord.

His grace makes our prayers discernible. They ascend before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth.

The response to these prayers is fire from God's altar. Notice the same means by which the prayers ascend brings the answer. This is God's answer, and it is the fire of judgment.

Now, I think this judgment takes two forms. I think, first of all, it is the righteous judgment of God on those who have unrighteously, unfairly, unjustly persecuted God's people. I think that's the primary meaning.

But I think there is also a message here, a symbolic message that we need to be careful with our prayers. Not be casual, not be familiar, not talk to God like he's our buddy or he's our genie of the lamp, and promiscuously pray to gratify our own desires because the censer that takes the prayers and the incense up brings fire back. And I think this is specifically talking about prayers for vindication and for justice.

But there is hidden here as well a message that the prayers will be processed and there will be a response from God. And I don't want this fire coming back on me because I was sloppy, I was selfish, I was myopic, I was sinful in my prayers. I brought strange fire before the Lord like some of the priests do in the Old Testament.

Because these prayers are heard, they come up before God and there is a response and the response is fire from the altar. So there are noises, thunderings, lightnings, and the earthquake. This is what occurs when the seventh seal is open.

This consequence on earth viewed from the earth ends with the earthquake. Now the seven angels who have the seven trumpets prepare themselves to sound. Prepare themselves to sound.

This is from John's viewpoint, John's perspective. But as with the end of the trumpets in Revelation chapter 11 and the end of the bowls, Revelation 16, there is a culmination, there is a consummation at the end of each of these presentations. Each time we have a fresh presentation, we are getting a different perspective.

So the seals, the lamb opens them. He is the lamb that was slain on the earth. He came to earth.

His presence and visibility as the lamb of God was announced by John the Baptist and culminates here with the opening of the seals. The lamb is not said to be involved with the blowing of the trumpets or the pouring of the bowls. This is earthly effects and in the same way that there will be vindication for the work of the Lord Jesus and the injustice that they will see Him, even they who pierced Him on the earth.

There are earthly effects, earth facing effects. When we get to the trumpets, they are blown by angels. There are heavenly intermediaries involved throughout.

When we get to the bowls, the bowls will be poured from the temple and those bowls are handed out by one of the four living creatures. And this is direct divine judgment. But if you think about it, the seals are at the earth, the trumpets blow in the air, which is one level up.

Thunder occurs above the air where you hear trumpets. It is louder and it is of divine origin. Trumpets are blown by creatures.

Shofarim do not blow themselves. So there is human involvement in the first perspective of the seals. There is angelic involvement at the second level.

Angels who are pictured as flying through the air with wings. Wings don't work unless you have air. These trumpets do not sound unless the angels blow them, the shofarim.

Then you have the thunder which is God's voice. This is at the cosmic level beyond human or even angelic participation. And then finally from the throne room and from the third heaven, you have these bowls dispersed and dispensed.

So the seals emphasize our human experience, social collapse, political collapse, economic imbalance and collapse, and mortality. Death pertains among human beings and death is heavily involved in these seals. What you don't see in the seals is any divine explanation of why these horsemen are riding forth or why these swords and scales are being employed.

You do not see angelic mediation. Angels don't ride the horses and you don't see any calls to repent or any notion of repentance in the seals. So this is God's judgment in the 70th week in a historical perspective, a human perspective.

In the trumpet cycle that we are about to see, there is angels who are identified. There are actions that are involved in worship, in response and in appreciation to God himself. These

judgments are measured out by divine behest, divine instruction.

So you have thirds and they are under the control of these angelic mediators and there are explicit warnings involved in these trumpets. So there is heavy angelic mediation and interpretation to John. Watch for it as we go through these trumpets.

And what we're going to see is that with this mediation by angels and with this clear involvement, mankind does not repent. It is explicitly said in Revelation 9, 20 and 21 that after these supernatural interventions, they do not repent. This commentary isn't found in the seals.

And so the interpretation of the purpose and the demonstration involved in these judgments from the trumpet perspective is, look, we did this and humanity did not repent. The rest of mankind did not repent. So there is a re-presentation and a re-framing.

You may have heard today that the gentleman who was responsible for the Dilbert cartoon strip, his name is Scott Adams, passed away today from cancer. He's from my generation, born the same year, 1957. And but he was honored and celebrated by those who knew him.

And one of his exceptional gifts, and he wrote a book about this, was giving advice on how to approach life, not so much from a divine perspective, but he said the way to cope with adversity or difficulty is to reframe it, see it from a different perspective, view it from a different angle. And if you lose your job, instead of bemoaning the unfairness of it all or the surprise, the economic effect, look at it as an opportunity, reframe it. This is very difficult to do without divine enablement, without the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to give us a fresh perspective.

But this guy's idea is sound. You can learn and you can profit from adversity, hardship, setback, just developments that were unexpected in life, if you learn to view it from a different perspective. Our challenge is to look at it from God's perspective as it is revealed to us in His Word.

That's what's going on in Revelation. This judgment, if all we had were the seals, we would think, wow, that is just really harsh. But God is going to reframe it.

He is going to show us from a different perspective. And that's why in the trumpets, we're going to have angelic interpretation as well as angelic involvement and mediation. There is an interpretive layer here that helps us see it.

We will be in heaven watching these things unfold, but will we understand it? Just because you have a white robe and a new name and you're standing before the throne, as these events unfold and these judgments are poured out on the earth, will we understand it or will we be confused? That's why we have this now to see this chronology of judgments reframed. It's not going to be a precise one-for-one correspondence of the fourth trumpet and the fourth seal, but they will unfold in sequence in a similar way. But there will be a different emphasis and a different explanation and a different perspective.

This is what we want to absorb because this takes place in our own life and it takes place now. We all fail. Those around us fail, both in the immediate environment of our relationships and in the larger context of our culture, our society, our government, the world at large.

There is a lot of sin and human good and evil. And we tend to see it from one perspective. It's like the opening of the seals and these horsemen have ridden forth and there's bows and there's swords and there's scales and there is bloodshed and there's injustice and there is death, there is plague, there is uncontrollable violence, the wild beasts.

And bad things happen and people end up dead with their blood under the altar and they're saying, Lord, what about this? They are told to be patient. More is coming. You're not the full number of martyrs.

You're not those who have suffered under these things that God allows, that God calls forth and says, come on out. Do your worst. Show me what you're going to do.

Come. Show me how your white horse is going to produce righteousness apart from Christ. Show me how your red horse is going to contain violence and limit injustice using the sword to impose your will.

And it isn't going to work. And show me how when you come forth, your economy is going to fall apart, your scales will not weigh justly, and there's going to be famine and hardship. Show me how this isn't going to result in the chloroform horse, the chlorous horse, the pale horse of death and disease and plague, and that your best efforts, just like sin itself and evil itself, are going to result in this cancerous spread of that which is not life and cannot be life, because it is disconnected from the living God, the God of life.

That can be very discouraging. So God now lifts us up and says, let's look at it one level up. Here are the angels in the air with a bit of a higher perspective.

So the seven angels who have the seven trumpets prepare themselves to sound in verse 6. And beginning in chapter 8, verse 7, the first angel is going to sound. He's going to blow his shofar. Hail and fire follow, mingled with blood, and they are thrown to the earth.

And a third of the earth is burned up, and a third of the trees are burned up, and all green grass is burned up. One third, not the entirety. Do not harm the oil and the wine, the voice from the midst of the throne says.

And there is a limit. This will not be strictly chronological. This is more theological.

And we are going to see the perpetration of these judgments with limits and with explanation. It doesn't look limited when all you're doing is watching the seals unfold. God is showing us something new as we see the same events unfold on the earth, but notice that it is mediated, it is mitigated, it is limited.

And this is something for us to remember. And we'll go through these trumpets in coming sessions. This coming Sunday, we'll see more of these trumpets.

But in the meantime, we tend to feel the insult, we feel the pain, we endure the suffering of what happens in our lives, and it doesn't make sense to us at the human level, at the earthly level. Why does God let this happen? One of the first things we're going to see as we move up a level, the lesson we learned from the trumpets is you need to be aware. You need to reframe this and know that this has been calibrated.

It is limited by God's command. And you will not be tested above what you are able to bear. And it will have a divine purpose that is benefit.

God is acting for our good, not for our ill, if and when we meet the conditions for grace, for God's beneficial intervention in our lives. And we always come back to, where am I with regard to faith and obedience? I do not want to be on the wrong side of God's interaction with history. I want to be one of those who by faith and patience inherits the promises.

That's why this was all set up with Revelation chapter 2 and 3 and the overcomers versus those who are going to be thrown in the bed with Jezebel. There's a choice. And this is a choice we make every day.

When you think about Revelation, think about the great harshness that is to come in that period. But there is harshness now. And this account is designed to equip us to deal with what doesn't go well now, what challenges us and sets us back and tends to discourage us and depress us and make us grabby and cranky.

Reframe it. Think of it in terms of God's framing. That's what the trumpets especially are going to begin to do for us.

The seals set the groundwork. Here's hardship and injustice up to the martyrdom, Smyrna, be faithful unto death, if you want that crown of life. The seals set the earthly stage.

Now the trumpets are going to show us here's something to keep in mind as you watch these judgments unfold. Look how harsh this is when hail and fire mingled with blood are thrown to the earth. And a third, remember we saw the sealing of the 144,000 before the earth and the sea and the trees are harmed.

Here in the very first trumpet, you have trees and green grass. You don't see the sea being harmed, but you see the beginning. This is a different take.

It's a different view. But what do we take from it? We'll see this as these trumpets unfold. Trust that God knows what he's doing.

And to the extent that we endure hardship or setback or trial and injustice at the hands of our fellow man, God is in his heaven. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved. And even if we

need to be faithful unto death, we have our eye on the prize, the crown of life, the opportunity to wear that blood-washed robe and to celebrate the sevenfold virtues of God and the lamb, to stand in the midst of the 24 elders and the four living creatures and the angelic hosts in the presence of God.

And God is going to make his dwelling with us. And he is going to wipe the tears from our eyes, not all eyes, those who qualify. And we want that to be us.

So we've got to reframe our perspective on the daily events of life. Take a step back, take a deep breath and say, you know, I think I hear a shofar blowing here. This is not just man riding horses and trampling all over me.

There are signals in heaven. There are things going on in the plan and purpose of God that are not visible. But I think I hear that shofar.

We have more to come this and we'll see it Sunday, but we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you that your word in the hands of your Holy Spirit and by his power and grace lifts us up and enables us to see our lives from beyond the mere mortality and the immediacy of this life that would cause one to cry out with Solomon, it's just all vanity. But we know that by virtue of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are living an eternal life and entering into it day by day as we come to appreciate the benefits that come from being united with him and having him as our Lord and Savior, our good shepherd who has given his life for us.

We pray that as we reflect on these things, our strength will be renewed. The Holy Spirit will fully equip us with the full armor that enables us not just to stand, but to prevail in the time that remains to us in this life. We pray it in Jesus name.

Amen.