

St. Matthew's Church
Thursday Night Bible Study
Revelation
Bp. Stephen Scarlett and Fr. Hayden Butler

Session VIII | 29 November 2018 | Chapter 8-9

I. The Covenant Nature of Revelation

- A. Consider Deuteronomy 28, which concerns the blessings and curses attending Israel's faithfulness or disobedience to the Covenant:

"And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out...But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out."

- B. The foundational way to read Revelation is as a book detailing the judgment of God on His own people for their covenant disobedience informing the summary rejection of His Anointed Messiah.
- C. The curses in Deuteronomy 28 inform and give context to the process of curses being poured out on the earth in Revelation 8.

II. Four Significant Liturgical Reversals in Revelation:

- A. From the mercy-seat of the Ark comes the wrath of God
- B. The incense of the altar--described in the OT as the soothing aroma before God--becomes an instrument of death.
- C. The trumpets that call Israel to worship become the heralds of destruction
- D. The life-giving liturgy that secured Israel's blessing becomes the implement of their destruction and dissolution.

III. Textual Notes | Chapter 8

- A. The Seals of the Scroll are being broken so that the covenant document judgments can be pronounced, blessings for the faithful and curses for the unfaithful.
- B. The trumpeters are reminiscent of the destruction of Jericho in Joshua.
- C. The angel and the incense recall Psalm 141:8 (“Let my prayer be counted in your sight as the incense...”) which imagistically links the prayers of the faithful to the incense of the Temple. This is confirmed by Revelation 5:8. The prayers of the saints are about to be poured on the earth.
- D. The earthquake in response to the incense cast on the earth recalls the effect of the active justice of God on the earth, depicted as in Psalm 18:7-8, “*Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him.*”
- E. Hail, Fire, and Blood: this is a complex image that reflects an answer to the prayers of the saints and the attending judgment that the martyrs under the altar requested and for which they have waited. The passage constructs a dense image recalling more OT reference combining several verses:
 - 1. Exodus 9:23-24 | *Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.*
 - 2. Psalm 18:13 | *The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire.*
 - 3. Ezekiel 38:22 | *With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him, and I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many peoples who are with him torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur.*
 - 4. Joel 2:30 | “*And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke.*”
 - 5. It is significant to note that these judgments are answers to the prayers of the people of God in response to their continual, faithful intercessions and petitions, which have already been represented symbolically in chapter 5.
- F. The role of the earth in the covenant blessing or curse: since the Fall in Genesis 3, there is a connection between the state surrounding the fidelity of humanity and the condition of the Creation. The earth is cursed because of the sin of Adam, and we will recall from Deuteronomy 28 the record of blessings attending the land should Israel be faithful and the infertility of the land should they prove disobedient.

- G. The partial judgment of the curses here in Revelation 8 (typically $\frac{1}{3}$ of the affected part of the earth) reveals a mercy attending the justice of God that does not entirely blot out at this stage but signals the total judgment to come while yet making it clear that all things are heading to the judgment.

IV. Textual Notes | Chapter 9

- A. Up until this point, the first four trumpets have unleashed judgments on the earth itself; the remaining three will invoke judgments on those who dwell on the earth.
- B. There is the release of a demonic power on the earth to hurt the dwellers of the earth; but it is significant that this power is always under the command of God as to what it may hurt and what it must leave alone. Noticeably, the earth and sea are reserved from this judgment after they were afflicted in the prior judgments.
- C. The locust curse is a reference to Joel 1-2, which give us all of the depictions featured here.
- D. There is a torment upon those who are not sealed with the mark of God. It is resonant with the image of Passover, in which the sealed doorways are spared the judgment of the death of the firstborn.
- E. Consider the relevance of Matthew 12 to inform this passage:
1. *“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.”*
 2. As it is spoken to the Pharisees, it reads best as a commentary on Israel’s own state, which can be seen as summative of Israel’s history as the people of God, having been redeemed and yet rejecting of their vocation and the return of the devils to their land in the fifth trumpet judgment.
- F. The significance of the Euphrates--it was a natural landmark that offered protection to Israel from attack on the eastern front. The call of the four angels at the Euphrates is an undoing of the protection of the land of Israel from destruction that is coming.