

The Apocalypse of St. John

Chapter Nine

Last class we left off in the midst of the blowing of the seven trumpets. The first four trumpets had sounded and the three woes to the inhabitants of the earth had been announced. So now we are in the midst of the three woes and the final trumpet blasts.

As we listen to these wild prophecies about God's judgment it might be helpful to think about this:

St. Paul said, "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love them." Tonight we can say the same thing about what God has prepared for those who don't love Him: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what things God has prepared for those who do not love Him." Tonight we will get a little glimpse into such things.

Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB) Note 9:1-12a. Overview: The fifth trumpet unlocks the abyss, releasing volcanic smoke and swarms of warrior locusts. These are demonic forces let loose to torture and terrorize the earth. Four restrictions are placed on this first woe: (1) vegetation is to be left unharmed (2) only the wicked are to be targeted for torment; (3) victims are not to be killed; and (4) the plague is to end in five months; Limitations such as these suggest that God is administering remedial or corrective punishment that is aimed at bringing about repentance (9:20-21).

-The Prophet St. Joel had a vision similar in theme to this. There is a clear Biblical pattern both in the Old and New Testaments of God allowing plagues upon the earth to bring people back to their senses.

Read 9:1-2

Orthodox Bible Study (OBS) On the fallen star / angel: The fifth angel trumpeted (unleashing the first woe), and John saw in response a star from heaven fallen into the earth. This star was a spirit, an angel (cf. 1:20 for stars representing angels). It would seem that this fallen (or shooting) star

was a fallen angel, and in Enoch 21:6, the fallen angels are described as "stars of heaven which have transgressed the commandment of the Lord." It is possible that this angel is just another (unfallen) one of God's messengers who executes His judgments (as in 20:1). But the falling of the star from heaven to earth is portrayed here as a part of the judgment itself, as something evil and disastrous (like the falling star in 8:10), and so it is more likely that the falling of the star is here also a part of the judgment. That is, the judgment is that the malevolent angel was given the key of the shaft of the abyss to unleash the next plague on the earth. -Pg. 108

ICSB On the Abyss (or Pit): This corresponds to the Hebrew Sheol and the Greek Hades. In the cosmology of Israel, this is the gloomy underworld where the spirits of men sink down after death to await the final judgment (20:13, Ps 9:17; Wis 16:13-14). It is also the dwelling of internal spirits that crawl up to bring death, destruction, and deception into the world of the living. Christ has authority over this realm because He holds the "keys" to the abyss and can order angels and demons to lock and unlock it at his discretion.

Orthodox Study Bible (OSB) Note 9:1,2

Read 9:3-4

OSB Note 9:3, 4

Cf. My notes on Rev 7:2, 3 & 4 on being sealed (and perhaps the 144,000) A seal is a mark of ownership and protection (9:4).

OBS Note 7:3 What is this seal? In Ezekiel 9 angels were to slay all in Jerusalem that rebelled idolatrously against Yahweh. But before they began their dreadful task, one angel went through the city and, at the divine command, put a 'mark' (in Hebrew a 'tau') on all who were faithful (Ezek 9:4). Thus to be marked on the forehead is to enjoy the protection of God and an immunity from coming judgment. The letter 'tau' in Hebrew is shaped like a cross. The destroying angels were not to touch anyone on whom was the 'tau' or mark.

For the Christians [for whom Revelation was written] this was a clear prophecy of their baptism and chrismation. In the baptismal ritual of their time one was immersed thrice in water and then marked with a cross in holy oil on the forehead. This passage [in Revelation] recalls their baptismal rite and reveals its significance: as faithful regenerated believers,

they are forgiven their sins and protected from the coming wrath of God. Even the mark on their foreheads, given in Chrismation, was called the "seal" and the rite itself, was called "Sealing" (mention practice of Antiochians).

Read 9:5-6

OSB Notes 9:5,6

Read 9:7-8

Read 9:9-10

OSB Notes 9:7-10

OBS: On the locusts: Locusts are a bad enough plague but these locusts were supernatural and demonic. Authority (or power) to hurt was given to them even as the scorpions on the earth have such dreaded power. The unnatural behavior of this locust plague is stressed. Locusts usually confine themselves to eating the grass of the earth and its vegetation, but it was told to these locusts not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any greenery, nor any tree –that is, not to do what locusts usually do. With supernatural perversity, they were to do what locusts never do –to hurt only the men of the earth, everyone who does not have divine immunity from them, the seal of God upon their foreheads. @ bottom of -Pg. 108-109

OBS: On the symbolism of the locusts: We are meant to recoil at the freakish combination of aspects of features: the locusts were like mall horses [symbolizing swiftness], but they had crowns like gold (as victorious [conquerors] and agents of judgment) on their heads. The faces were horribly like the faces of men (full of intelligence and cruelty), but they had long hair as the hair of women (an image of vitality) and the teeth of lion [symbolizing ferociousness]. They had breastplates of iron, (invincibility), and tails like scorpions (inflictors of pain). Their wings roar as the sound of chariots as they go into battle. -Pg. 109

Read 9:11-12

OSB Note 9:11

OBS on Abaddon: Normal locusts have no leader, no king over them, but these do: their king is Destruction itself, in Hebrew, Abaddon, the pit of death. -Pg. 109

OBS Summary of 1st Woe: The first woe is past but behold they cannot breathe easy yet. No sooner does this woe pass than two more woes are coming hard on their heels. What are these demonic locusts, and how will this woe be fulfilled? We can only surmise that it is an image of plague, disease, pain and pestilence unleashed upon the world. -Pg. 110

Read 9:13-14

Read 9:15-16

ICSB 9:13 The golden altar is the heavenly altar of incense, where the prayers of the saints ascend before God (8:3). Like its earthly counterpart, it has four horns protruding from its four corners (Ex 37:25-28).

ADD: Remember our earthly liturgy, worship and temple is patterned on the heavenly liturgy, worship and temple as revealed in the Scriptures.
ICBS: Here the golden altar represents the place of prayer from which judgment comes forth on the earth (cf. Rev 8:3-5 where the prayers of the saints ascend before the throne and, as a result of God hearing their outcry, judgment comes forth upon the earth).

OSB Note 9:13-16a.

OBS On the importance of the Euphrates: It is difficult for us today to appreciate what the great river Euphrates was to those in the Roman Empire. For us, it is now simply a river, another body of water. But for those in the Roman Empire, it was a border, a bulwark, and it marked the dividing line between civilization and barbarism, between order and chaos, between law and the carnage of anarchy. That is, between Rome and the Parthian Empire. The Parthians were the only people Rome could not conquer, and they stood beyond the Euphrates like a standing threat to Roman existence. Romans lived in fear of them, and it was said by some of St. John's day that after his death, Nero would return again leading an army of Parthians to conquer the city of Rome and regain his crown. For the Romans, the Euphrates held at bay a mighty foe. Thus, the loosing of the four angels who have been bound at the Euphrates was the signal for catastrophe. Like the angel who fell to the earth and unleashed the locusts (9:1-12), so these four angels unleashed a devastating invasion from beyond. -Pg. 111, 2nd par.

ADD: Though the invading force is not the Parthian army, this foreign empire simply forms the psychological background to this prophecy. This invasion does not come from Parthia but from hell.

OSB Note 9:13-16b.

In Greek is its: doo-ah mooria-des muriadon = two times myriads of myriads

9:16 καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς στρατευμάτων τοῦ ἵππικοῦ δύο μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ ἦκουσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν αὐτῶν

ADD: In Rev 5:11 “Thousands and thousands” minister at the Holy Throne & Altar of God in heaven. John uses this number to show twice this amount is unleashed on earth. A number so vast it was useless to try to count.

Read 9:17

Read 9:18-19

OSB Note 9:17-19

OBS Woe 2 Summary: This is a grotesque and revolting picture, with a countless hellish cavalry riding atop demonic horses, each horse freakish with the head of a fire-spewing lion on its neck and the lethal head of a serpent on its tail, and able to deal out death from both. The spectacle is meant to revolt and terrify, as the forces of hell are let loose upon the earth. Through the three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur they breathe forth, a third of men were killed.

Read 9:20

OSB Note 9:20, 21

Read 9:21

ADD: At the very end it mentions, "They did not repent..." from murders, sorceries (pharmakaei), sexual immorality or their thefts."

The book of Revelation teaches us repeatedly that judgment is coming upon the world because of evil in the world. Here is an instance where the writer, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tells us specifically what some of those evils are. These can be broken down in the following way:

Murder: The taking of an innocent life. Whereas killing is the taking of a life, murder is the taking of an innocent life. Besides the obvious cases of murder as took place with our local party store owner, Basil (or Bassim), we can also think of the millions of unborn children each year being killed before they ever have a chance to be born and live.

Sorceries (*Pharmakeia*): Relates to (1) the use of recreational drugs and includes (2) the practice of occultism and (3) the seeking of drug induced spiritual experiences.

Sexual Immorality (*Porneia*): Literally Fornication. Sex outside of marriage, which includes (1) extra marital sex, (2) pre-marital sex (which is rampant), (3) homosexuality, (4) adultery and (of course!) the abuse of children. It's important to note we don't condemn people with these temptations, but we must speak out against these sins.

Thefts: Include Fraud, cheating, lying, taking advantage of people's trust.

These sins are what the Book of Revelation specifically points to concerning God's coming judgment upon the world. As St. Paul said about such issues of sexual immorality, these people "not only do them... but approve those who practice them" (Rom 1:32). So the idea that morality and sin doesn't matter flies directly in the face of the clear testimony of the Scriptures.

ADD: (1) False worship and (2) false morality (like the above mentioned sorcery and immoralities) can only be "overcome" (or conquered = *nika*) by (1) True worship and true morality. This is exactly what the word "Orthodox" means: true worship & right belief. This is an important word in our Byzantine Tradition because everywhere in our Liturgy that "true faith" is mentioned, in Greek the word is "orthodox." True orthodox worship and belief are things God's Church must always boldly affirm -despite all that is going around us!

OBS Conclusion: We too, in the secular West, have a culture characterized by murders (especially of the unborn) and sorceries (Gr. *Pharmakeia*; compare our English word "pharmacy"), with our drugs to induce abortion and drugs to induce synthetic "highs." We too multiply fornications (Gr. *Porneia*) with our rampant sexual immorality and

multibillion-dollar porn industry. We too have rampant thefts, with dishonesty and corruption everywhere, [in schools, in businesses], in high levels of government [and even in the Church]. This is all because we do not turn to and worship the living God.