

Bible Study #22

3/8/22

Revelation 5

Revelation 5

- **Revelation 5:8** *“And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints: and they sang a new song saying:”*
 - Incense represent the prayers of the saints (Christians)
 - This is a reference to **Psalm 141:2** which says to let my prayers rise like incense
 - The idea of the “saints” goes back to **Daniel 7:25** (where it says that the saints are going to be persecuted)

Revelation 5

From Father Sebastian's Parish Presentation

Revelation 5

- **Revelation 5:1-4** *“And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne...and I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look into it”*
 - The seven seals on this document should remind us of the two stone tablets given to *Moses*, as well as the images from **Ezekiel** and **Daniel**
 - These seven seals are related to the fact that there were seven letters to the churches
 - Father Sebastian said that this is all grounded in the historical context
 - Each seal will be opened to reveal more about what was happening within the historical context, and what was to take place here after (it makes sense if we read it slowly and carefully)

Revelation 5 (Cont)

- **Revelation 5:5-7** “Then one of the elders said to me,...of him who was seated on the throne”
 - The lion of the tribe of *Judah* was Jesus
 - This statement concerning the “Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” is an unusual translation from the Greek
 - It refers to Jesus who had died and was risen from the dead (the one who conquered death)
 - This is similar imagery to what we have seen earlier
 - The reference to 24 elders represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles (we will see this again at the end of the book)

Revelation 5 (Cont)

- Most scholars agree that these two groups represent the saints of old and new covenants (or of the Kingdom of God)
- They refer to God's people
- Father pointed out that some people will ask when did the church begin
 - Many respond that it was born from the side of Christ on the cross
 - But, the word *Ekklesia* was borrowed from the Greek Septuagint and used to describe God's people who began from Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden

Revelation 5 (Cont)

- Some of the Fathers of the Church suggested that it was before creation in the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)
- This means that the 24 elders equal the 12 tribes of Israel of the Old Testament and the 12 Apostles of the New Testament
- At the end of **Revelation**, we will see the 12 tribes of Israel named right next to the 12 Apostles
- The 24 elders are those who have gone before us, as the saints of the kingdom of God

Revelation 5 (Cont)

- **Revelation 5:8-10** *“And when he had taken the scroll,...and they shall reign on earth”*
 - Incense was seen as the prayers of the saints (Christians)
 - **Psalm 140:1** says: *“Let my prayer, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!”*
 - In ancient Israel, incense was associated with prayers arising to God
 - **Daniel 9:21** depicts the prayers of Daniel arising at the hour of incense

Revelation 5 (Cont)

- In the New Testament, we see *Zechariah* (the husband of Elizabeth) going into the temple (**Luke 1:8-23**) to offer incense, and the angel says that his prayers had risen to God
- It is believed that the early Church used incense in this way from the beginning
- The apostolic church of today continues to use incense as the image of the prayers of the faithful rising to God

Revelation 5 (Cont)

- **Revelation 5:11** *“Then I looked,... numbering myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands”*
 - Father suggested that this should remind us of **Daniel 7:10*** and the ancient of days

Revelation 6-11

Revelation 6-11

- Father pointed out that due to the time constraints of this New Testament overview, we only have time to touch on the highlights of the events of **Revelation 6 and 7**
- In **Revelation 7**, we hear that before the persecutions come, God will mark His own on their foreheads
- **Revelation 7:3** should remind us of **Ezekiel 9** where we hear about the coming persecution of Jerusalem (by the Babylonians) with some righteous peoples remaining behind in the city
- Those were the people who had been sealed by God on their forehead who survived the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem

Revelation 6-11 (Cont)

- A number of people were killed, others taken into exile, and a small remnant were left in Jerusalem
- These were the poor who moaned and groaned about the abominations that were taking place in the city before the Babylonians came
- The context of **Ezekiel 8** and **9** is monotheism vs. polytheism (were the people of God going to fall into pagan idolatry?)
- Those who remained faithful to Yahweh received the mark on their foreheads and were protected

Revelation 6-11 (Cont)

- We can hear about this in **Jeremiah 40** as well
- Father pointed out that John was reminding his listeners of these Old Testaments readings
- A massive persecution was coming, causing a crisis moment in which many were going to die; others left behind and remained alive
- Once again, according to John, they would be those with the mark of God on their foreheads
- These were the people who chose to rely on the one true God, who protected them as a father
- They are the children of the Father

Revelation 6-11 (Cont)

- Unfortunately, when many hear about the mark on their forehead, they think about the mark of the beast that will be discussed in **Revelation 13**
- To understand this passage, we must remember **Ezekiel**, which was provided to remind us of **Exodus 13** and **Deuteronomy 6** (where the Law of Moses was to be identified with a mark on the forehead and hand)
- This was calling them to their internal and external perfect integrity

Revelation 6-11 (Cont)

- Father pointed out that for those who know the Old Testament, they understood the need to love God and your neighbor as yourself
- You were to worship the one true God
- Today, may hear “love God,” in the modern monotheistic way of the Christian culture
- At the time, John was presenting the **Book of Revelation** and the Christians were living in a polytheist culture
- The Jews were taught to love Yahweh with all their heart, mind, and soul, and not worship other gods

Revelation 6-11 (Cont)

- This was the Law and the prophets
- Thus, if one kept the Law of God, it served as a mark on your forehead and hand (**Exodus 23** and **Deuteronomy 6**)
- In this passage, John is hoping that we understand this in light of the Old Testament background
- The people of God (Christians) are being persecuted by the Romans; some have apostatized and are worshiping false gods, but others have not
- They are like the Jews who held true in Jerusalem before the Babylonian captivity discussed in **Ezekiel**

Revelation 6

From Father Sebastian's Parish Presentation

Revelation 6

- **Revelation 6:1-8** *“Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals,...to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth”*
 - Here, we are introduced to the four horses bringing war
 - White –victory
 - Red – violence
 - Black – death
 - Green – pestilence
 - Father said that this meant that there were going to be wars, famines, postulants, and death
 - This meant that life was not going to be easy for the Christians of Asia Minor in the near future

Revelation 6 (Cont)

- Even though things were not going well at present, they were going to get worse
- But, in the end, (as we will see in **Revelation 7**) God would protect His faithful

Revelation 7

From Father Sebastian's Parish Presentation

Revelation 7

- **Revelation 7:1-3** *“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth,...till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads”*
 - The earth does not have four corners
 - The *Hebrew* and *Greek* words for earth means the land (the stuff under our feet), not the big blue ball
 - Geography was usually described in the four directions (North, East, South, and West)
 - Thus, the four corners of the earth are the cardinal directions

Revelation 7 (Cont)

- We just witnessed in **Revelation 6** that everything was going very badly (war, pestilence, famine); yet, suddenly we hear that God will protect His people
- Just as this massive tragedy is about to unfold, God sends His angels
- This passage is calling on the members of the churches to stop; to pause

Revelation 7 (Cont)

- The language about the “seal on the forehead of the servants of God” should, once again, remind us of **Ezekiel 9:3-6 (Ezekiel 8 sets the stage)***
- We will see this discussed in more detail in **Revelation 13:16-17**
- Father pointed out that 99% of Christians have never read the **Book of Ezekiel** or **Revelation 1, 2, or 7**
- If someone has heard anything about the **Book of Revelation**, it most likely will be from **Revelation 13**, where we hear about the number 666 as the number of the beast

The Prophet Ezekiel

1-33

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 8:1-4**

- In this section, Ezekiel is told by God why He is going to destroy Jerusalem and why those already in Exile are not going to have a chance to return
- This is happening in 599 BC, one year after the 5th year of the second Exile (605 BC)
- In this vision **Ezekiel falls in a trance** while in the **presence** of the **Jewish elders in Babylon**
- He sees a hand reach forth and grab him by his hair and transport him to the temple precinct in Jerusalem

Ezekiel (Cont)

- His body is still in Babylon, while in his vision he sees himself in Jerusalem
- The first thing he sees is a pagan statue of an image of jealousy after he was dropped by the front gate of the temple facing north
- Then he sees the Glory of God within the temple area

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 8:5-18**

- Ezekiel recognizes one of the priests in the temple who is offering incense to a pagan image
- He also sees 25 men worshiping the sun
- Tammuz is the winter/spring goddess
- When he looked inside the temple, the people in Jerusalem were committing idolatry and performing violence against the poor and oppressed
- This same topic will come up in **Jeremiah** and **2nd Kings**
- The next question is what will God do in response to these evils?

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 9: 1-2**

- In almost every instance war in Jerusalem and Juda came from the North
 - The Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans came from the north over the Fertile Crescent
 - The only exceptions were the incursions from Egypt
- Thus, “north” is often seen as a symbol of judgment
- The **priests** were **clothed in linen**

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 9: 3-6**

- The vision begins in the temple as these angels work their way into the city of Jerusalem
- These are images of angelic judgement, but at the same time it depicts the Babylonian attacks on the city
- This shows that it is not just the attacking Babylonians but the attack is being helped by angelic forces
- As we know, God provided Israel with angelic help to chastise the Amorites, Canaanites and the people in the Promised Land
- Again, God sends the Babylonians against the people of Jerusalem and he provides them with angelic help
- **Jerusalem** has become **the enemy of God!**

Ezekiel (Cont)

- The problem is that many of the people were committing idolatry by worshiping pagan gods
- An angel is called to go through the city and put a ***mark on the foreheads of the men who “sighed” and “groaned” over all the abominations that were being committed***
- These were the “poor of the land” of Judah and city of Jerusalem who had remained faithful to Yahweh but could do nothing to stop the abominations

Ezekiel (Cont)

- What is the meaning of this “**mark upon the forehead**”?
- It may remind you of the image in **Revelation 13:16** concerning the “mark, that is the name of the beast”
- But to properly understand the image of the beast we must look at **Revelation 7:3-4**
 - This passage deals with those who had **refused to participate in the Roman idolatry** and were identified by a mark (seal) on their foreheads

Ezekiel (Cont)

- When writing the **Book of Revelation** John assumes that his audience knows this story of **Ezekiel 9** concerning the protective mark on the forehead of the righteous in Jerusalem
- This is also a payoff of the image from **Exodus 13:16** where we are told that Israel must offer their firstborn males to God and place a mark on their hands or frontlets between their eyes to memorialize that God, using His strong hand, brought them out of Egypt

Ezekiel (Cont)

- A mark on their hand reflects their outward (physical) action
- A mark on their forehead or on a frontlet hanging between their eyes is a mark of inward (intellectual) action
- Those who kept the law wore a frontlet hanging between their eyes and a phylactery on tied to their hands
- Those who do not have the law of God as a mark on their forehead are those who have not kept the law of God

Ezekiel (Cont)

- As a result, only the wicked were destroyed or taken off into captivity
- The righteous, marked with the law of God on their foreheads, were be left behind
- The next issue Ezekiel will deal with is what is going to happen to the Glory cloud of God

Revelation 7 (Cont)

- Father asked who would open a book at chapter 13 without reading any of the previous 12 chapters
- John is expecting us (and his 1st Century audience) to know the total context in which he is writing, and to be very familiar with **Ezekiel**
- He suggested that we turn off our TVs and spend some time learning Salvation History
- As we saw earlier, Jerusalem at the time of ***Ezekiel's vision***, was filled with Jews who were worshiping pagan gods even within the Temple precincts
- This reflects the imagery we are now hearing about in **Revelation 7**

Revelation 7 (Cont)

- **Revelation 7 :4** *“And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel”*
 - This can be seen as a play on the 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament (12 times 12,000 = 144,000)
 - Next, in **Revelation 7:9**, we will see “a great multitude which no man could number from every nation”
 - This should remind us of **Exodus 12:37*** where it says: “And the people of Israel journeyed from Ramesses to Succoth about six hundred thousand men on foot beside women and children. A mixed multitude also went up with them”

Revelation 7 (Cont)

- This meant that a great many Gentiles were being saved during the Exodus
- Here, John is saying that God will save Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ and walk in His ways
- Father said that what we have seen in **Revelation 7** is very similar to what we saw in **Revelation 1, 2, and 3** concerning the historical context of the message
- There is a great tribulation coming upon the people in the Churches of Asia Minor and this language should remind them of what happened in the Old Testament and Salvation History

Revelation 7 (Cont)

- They should remember how God saved His people in Egypt, and brought them out with His strong right arm on eagle's wings
- How, as in the Babylon Exile, He destroyed Jerusalem while saving those who were faithful to Him
- The same is happening to those in Asia Minor for those who stay faithful
- Father said this is also important for us to remember that He will save those today who remain faithful