

Weekly Bible Study group – February 3, 2010

This week's reading: Revelation 8:2 – 11:19

Reflection by Bob Zurinsky (bob@spu.edu)

This week we have arrived at a difficult passage. We read about the “seven trumpets of judgment,” which include a series of plagues loosed upon the world, including horrors like “locusts with scorpion tails,” a falling star that poisons 1/3 of the water on earth, and a strange rain of blood and hail that burns up the trees and the grass. It’s a scene of terrible destruction, and it’s difficult to make sense of all the graphic and disturbing images that we find here. So much so, in fact, that some church leaders (like John Calvin) refused to write a commentary on this book. Others (like Martin Luther) openly questioned whether this text should be a part of the Christian Bible. As far back as the 300s, church leaders like Gregory of Nazianzus and other major figures argued against including Revelation in the New Testament, because its images can be so easily abused and misunderstood. So we need to make sure we understand the big-picture view of God’s plan for this world, or else we could misuse this text in a destructive way.

So now, think with me...What is the purpose of JUDGMENT, anyway? Is it the same thing as *punishment*? No, it’s not. Those are two different ideas. And what we’re talking about in Revelation is *judgment*. “Judgment” means deciding, choosing between two alternatives. In the case of a legal judge and courtroom, it means *establishing justice* in a given situation - setting things right. And that is the message of Revelation. It’s not vindictive; it’s not about paying a price or a penalty. It’s about God, the Lord of Creation, finally stepping into history to make all things right, just as he promised to do ever since the prophets of ancient Israel. Revelation is the “Gospel of the Final Judgment.” It’s the *Good News* that God has decided to step in himself and become the decider, the judge, of what this earth will look like. And the scenes of judgment are NOT the last word in Revelation. They are merely the prelude, the necessary correction. They are the place where *good* is called *good*, and *bad* is called *bad*. But THEN comes NEW:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Revelation 21:3-4