

Group Time Sharing Questions

QUESTION 1:

In 66 A.D., Roman army under the command of Cestius invaded Palestine. They were garrisoned near the Euphrates. This Roman invasion was the background of Revelation 9. However, John describes the events of Revelation 9, not in terms of politics but in terms of spiritual reality. Thus, the invading army is unleashed, not by political unrest, but by the unbinding of the four angels who were bound at the River Euphrates (9:14). Likewise, the invading army is seen to be led, not by Cestius or Caesar, but by the destroying angel Abaddon or Apollyon (Rev 9:11). In antiquity, both Christians and Jews saw angelic powers as having charge over a great deal of life. How is this view different than the modern outlook? What have we lost in losing this view?

QUESTION 2:

Compare Deuteronomy 20:19-20 and Revelation 9:4. What similarities do you find? What is the reason for the similarities?

QUESTION 3:

Hebrews 8:13 teaches (and, for the early Church, the destruction of the Temple confirmed) that the new covenant made the Mosaic covenant “obsolete.” Yet, *Nostra Aetate*, or the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions from Vatican II, says: “God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues – such is the witness of the Apostle (Rom 11:28-29).” How do we as Catholics reconcile the Catholic belief in the “obsolescence” of the old covenant with the Catholic teaching that God has not repented of his gifts and call to the Jewish people?

Web links

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_INDEX.HTM

<http://www.catholic.org.tw/bible/index.htm>

<http://www.cathlinks.org/ccc-toc.htm>

<http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/ccc.html>

Q1	In 66 A.D., Roman army under the command of Cestius invaded Palestine. They were garrisoned near the Euphrates (幼發拉). This Roman invasion was the background of Revelation 9. However, John describes the events of Revelation 9, not in terms of politics but in terms of spiritual reality. Thus, the invading army is unleashed, not by political unrest, but by the unbinding of the four angels who were bound at the River Euphrates (9:14). Likewise, the invading army is seen to be led, not by Cestius or Caesar, but by the destroying angel Abaddon (阿巴冬) or Apollyon (阿頗隆)(Rev 9:11). In antiquity (古代) both Christians and Jews saw angelic powers as having charge over a great deal of life. How is this view different than the modern outlook? What have we lost in losing this view?
Rev 9:14	<i>Note:</i> [14-15] The four angels: they are symbolic of the destructive activity that will be extended throughout the universe.
Rev 9:11	<i>Note:</i> [11] Abaddon: Hebrew (more precisely, Aramaic) for destruction or ruin. Apollyon: Greek for the "Destroyer."

GOALS: (1) To provide the historical background underlying Revelation 9. (2) To help you appreciate the scriptural authors' belief that through the angels God plays an active role in everything we do without at the same time jeopardizing our freewill.

FACILITATORS: Discussion of this question can go in many different directions. Try to help your group to focus on the following points:

- Understand the historical background underlying Revelation 9 using historical information given in the question.
- Due to the influence of science in the last 4-5 centuries, the modern world tends to see only the visible things and accept only empirical evidences and scientific explanations.
- It is important to understand that underlying the visible reality, invisible forces are at work.
- From our humdrum and ordinary daily routines to the Roman invasion of the Palestine in 66 A.D. and the war in Iraq today, God's invisible hand, which we call "divine providence", is actively guiding us, leading his creation toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained (cf. CCC 302).
- God often does so through invisible, heavenly beings that we call "angels". He also does so through our prayers and worship, i.e. the concept of Church Militant.
- Almighty that God is, he alone knows how to guide his creatures without at the same time jeopardizing their freedom.
- In respecting our freedom, he will not interfere even if the exercising of our freewill results in moral evil, e.g. the war in Iraq. "He permits (moral evil), however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it." (CCC 311)

CCC 302	Creation has its own goodness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created "in a state of journeying" (in statu viae) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it. We call "divine providence" the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward this perfection:	受造界有其本身的長處和美善，但從造物主手中出來時，並非全部完成的。它「在過程中」(in statu viae)受造，邁向天主為它指定的、仍須達成的最後的完美。天主引導受造物邁向這種完美的各項措施，我們稱之為天主的眷顧。
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Q2	Compare Deuteronomy 20:19-20 and Revelation 9:4. What similarities do you find? What is the reason for the similarities?	
Deut. 申命紀 20:19-20	¹⁹ "When you are at war with a city and have to lay siege to it for a long time before you capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them. You may eat their fruit, but you must not cut down the trees. After all, are the trees of the field men, that they should be included in your siege? ²⁰ However, those trees which you know are not fruit trees you may destroy, cutting them down to build siegeworks with which to reduce the city that is resisting you.	¹⁹ 若你圍攻一座城，需要多日纔能攻取佔領，你不可用斧頭砍伐那裏的樹木；你可以吃樹上的果子，卻不可砍倒樹；難道田間的樹可當作你圍攻的敵人看待？ ²⁰ 只是那些你知道不結實的樹木，你可毀壞砍伐，用來建築圍攻的設備，為進攻與你交戰的城市，直到將城攻下。
Rev 9:4	⁴ They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or any tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.	⁴ 且吩咐牠們不可傷害地上的草：凡青物，凡樹木都不可傷害，只可傷害那些在額上沒有天主印號的人；

GOAL: To help you understand the O.T. background for a strange and puzzling Revelation passage.

FACILITATORS: Help your group members understand the following points:

- Revelation 9:4 is rooted in Deuteronomy 20:19-20.
- Similarities include: Both passages are concerned with the invasion of an army – the army of Israel and the army of Rome; both passages require that certain natural growth of nature, i.e. trees, grass, etc., be exempted from military destruction.
- In Deuteronomy 20:19-20, the trees are not to be destroyed because, unlike the residents of the city being invaded who oppose God, they've done no evil. In Revelation, the same idea is upheld but the protection is extended to those men who had the seal of God on their foreheads.
- This is an allusion to the importance of baptism, which is rooted in Ezekiel 9.

Q3	Hebrews 8:13 teaches (and, for the early Church, the destruction of the Temple confirmed) that the new covenant made the Mosaic covenant “obsolete.” Yet, Nostra Aetate, or the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions from Vatican II, says: “God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues – such is the witness of the Apostle (Rom 11:28-29).” How do we as Catholics reconcile the Catholic belief in the “obsolescence” of the old covenant with the Catholic teaching that God has not repented of his gifts and call to the Jewish people?	
Hebrews 希伯來書 8:13	¹³ When he speaks of a "new" covenant, he declares the first one obsolete. And what has become obsolete and has grown old is close to disappearing. <i>Note:</i> [13]Close to disappearing: from the prophet's perspective, not that of the author of Hebrews.	¹³ 一說「新的，」就把先前的，宣佈為舊的了；但凡是舊的和老的，都已臨近了滅亡。
Romans 羅馬人書 11:28-29	²⁸ In respect to the gospel, they are enemies on your account; but in respect to election, they are beloved because of the patriarchs. ²⁹ For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. <i>Note:</i> [25-29] In God's design, Israel's unbelief is being used to grant the light of faith to the Gentiles. Meanwhile, Israel remains dear to God (cf Romans 9:13), still the object of special providence, the mystery of which will one day be revealed.	²⁸ 照福音來說，他們由於你們的緣故，成了天主的仇人；但照召選來說，由於他們祖先的緣故，他們仍是可愛的， ²⁹ 因為天主的恩賜和召選是決不會撤回的。

GOAL: To achieve a proper understanding of the key theological concept underlying the Book of Revelation: the Old Order, as represented by the city of Jerusalem, must be destroyed; to be replaced by the New Order, i.e. the New Jerusalem, the Church.

FACILITATORS: Explain to your group members that this is how they should approach this question:

- Understand that this is a quite difficult theological concept.
- Although it is difficult, it is also one of the most important concepts that must be properly understood in order to understand the bible well.
- Important concepts such as this are to be understood gradually and not to be ignored just because they are difficult. Introducing and explaining this concept many times using different biblical passages and from different perspectives is the best way to build our understanding.
- There are many good bible passages that support the Vatican II position referred to in the question. Due to time constraint and to avoid any risk of “work overload”, we suggest that your group reflect on only Romans 11:11-18 this time.
- According to Romans 11:11-18, is the Old Order, i.e. the O.T. people, the old covenant, the O.T. Law, etc., “useless”? Is it to be discarded?
- No, there is a strong continuity and inter-relatedness between the Old and the New.
- Understand that “obsolescence” doesn’t mean the Old Order is useless, unnecessary, or harmful. It’s just that the time has come for the Old Order to be transformed into the New. Without the Old Order, there is no New Order.
- It is, therefore, silly – it’s a lack of understanding of the Scripture – for some TV evangelists to use all their political might to raise funds to “rebuild” the City of Jerusalem, thinking that the “New Jerusalem” is to be achieved this way. Therefore, the bloodshed in the Middle East, in as far as laying claim to the ownership of Jerusalem, is equally foolhardy from a theological perspective.

<p>Romans 羅馬人書 11:11-18</p>	<p>¹¹ Hence I ask, did they stumble so as to fall? Of course not! But through their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make them jealous. ¹² Now if their transgression is enrichment for the world, and if their diminished number is enrichment for the Gentiles, how much more their full number. ¹³ Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I glory in my ministry ¹⁴ in order to make my race jealous and thus save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole batch of dough; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place and have come to share in the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not boast against the branches. If you do boast, consider that you do not support the root; the root supports you.</p> <p><u>Note:</u> [11-15] The unbelief of the Jews has paved the way for the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles and for their easier acceptance of it outside the context of Jewish culture. Through his mission to the Gentiles Paul also hopes to fill his fellow Jews with jealousy. Hence he hastens to fill the entire Mediterranean world with the gospel. Once all the Gentile nations have heard the gospel, Israel as a whole is expected to embrace it. This will be tantamount to resurrection of the dead, that is, the reappearance of Jesus Christ with all the believers at the end of time. [16-24] Israel remains holy in the eyes of God and stands as a witness to the faith described in the Old Testament because of the firstfruits (or the first piece baked) (Romans 11:16), that is, the converted remnant, and the root that is holy, that is, the patriarchs (Romans 11:16). The Jews' failure to believe in Christ is a warning to Gentile Christians to be on guard against any semblance of anti-Jewish arrogance, that is, failure to recognize their total dependence on divine grace.</p>	<p>猶太人被棄不是永久的</p> <p>¹¹那麼我再問：他們失足，是要他們永久跌倒嗎？絕對不是！而是藉著他們的過犯，使救恩臨到外邦人，為刺激他們發憤。¹²如果因他們的過犯，世界得以致富；因他們的墮落，外邦人得以致富；他們全體歸正，更將怎樣呢？¹³我對你們外邦人說：我既然是外邦人的宗徒，我必要光榮我的職務；¹⁴這樣，或許可激動我的同胞發憤，因而能拯救他們幾個人。¹⁵如果因他們被遺棄，世界與天主和好了；那麼，他們如果蒙收納，豈不是死而復生嗎？¹⁶如果所獻的初熟的麥麵是聖的，全麵團也成為聖的；如果樹根是聖的，樹枝也是聖的。¹⁷假如有幾條橄欖樹枝被折下來，而你這枝野橄欖樹枝被接上去，同沾橄欖樹根的肥脂，¹⁸就不可向舊樹枝自誇。如果你想自誇，就該想不是你托著樹根，而是樹根托著你。</p>
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