

## INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION - PART EIGHTEEN

Whereas the dragon was easily recognisable as the Devil, and the beast and the false prophet as Rome as she was under various emperors in the 1st century, his vision of the harlot puzzled John. Persecution generally divided Christians into those who remained faithful and often suffered terribly for it, and those who caved in under pressure. There were some individuals who thought they could have it both ways. As such they were unfaithful by trying to have a relationship with Christ and the world at the same time. In John's time it had not yet happened to the church as an institution but it would always be a very seductive temptation into which churches would repeatedly fall through the centuries. When the church became allied with the Roman Empire in the 4th century AD, this would be the first time but by no means the last.

Chapter 18 now explored the problem further. What form would compromise take? Why would it be so attractive? How should Christians respond? What will be the eventual outcome?

By the late 4th century, the alliance of the Roman church and the Roman state must have seemed to be the supreme authority. But the next angel announced that God was still in charge, and that 'Babylon' was already defeated.(18:1,2) Impressive though she looked on the outside, the inside was headquarters to every devilish idea and godless practice.(18:2; Matt.23:27,28) The harlot was attractive to the nations who made up the Roman Empire for 2 reasons; she was a route to power for political leaders, and a way to vast wealth for businessmen.(18:3)

The Christian response was to be very simple, 'come out!'(18:4), and so escape her sin and its consequence in God's judgement. Christians have debated for centuries whether 'come out' means leave the institution which compromises, or have nothing to do with the way of thinking on which it is based. If we apply the illustration of the choice between the seal of God, His thinking, or the mark of the beast, the world's thinking, then obviously what we believe is the key to 'coming out'. Whether or not we stay in the compromising organisation, God will show us in each situation. Compromise will have terrible consequences one day in judgement, the plagues of chapter 16.(18:4-6)

The reason God is so angry when His church compromises is that compromise is at heart a form of false teaching which glorifies the church instead of the Lord. The church which compromises no longer has a bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, but is 'a widow' on her own. Look up Isa.47:7-9 and Zeph.2:15 where God had warned both the Babylon of the Old Testament and Ninevah, an earlier 'Babylon', of the consequence of exalting themselves as they dominated God's people.(18:7,8)

The politicians who saw advantage to themselves in being allied with the church would find they were in great difficulty when the whole structure collapsed. Right wing South American regimes have demonstrated this very clearly in recent years. South Africa under apartheid has provided a powerful illustration of the same outcome.(18:9,10)

Equally great would be the fall of the businessmen who bought the church's approval for their operations and made the church rich in the process. Notice that most of the goods they dealt in were luxuries for the wealthy rather than the basic needs of ordinary people. See too how they traded in people as well as things. There could be warnings here not just about slavery but about the abuse of the poor in terms of wages and conditions.(18:11-14)

When such regimes collapse, they often do so with dramatic suddenness in which both church and business leaders scramble to leave the country and save their lives, and what is left of their

fortunes. As economies crumble the value of money and the luxuries it once bought evaporate almost overnight.(18:15-19)

At such times in history, God is delighted and the church can celebrate - unless of course we have become caught up in the whole corrupt system which values things above God's truth and the lives of common people.(18:20)

For the third time in Revelation a strong angel appeared. The last two carried books,(5:2; 10:1) this one carried a millstone which he threw into the sea as a warning of the fate of 'Babylon'. Jesus had used a similar picture to warn of the terrible consequence of leading children astray by false teaching.(Lk.17:2) All the side tracks to the task of the gospel in which a compromising church becomes absorbed whether music, art works, ceremonies or business ventures will disappear with her.(18:21-23) It will finally become apparent just how many of God's faithful people have suffered at the hands of what claimed to be His church.(18:24)

19:1-2 Q.1 A series of voices spoke from heaven. From whom does the first voice come? In what terms did they praise God? And for what reason? Of what great characteristic of God were they reminding us? Look up the two references in verse 2 from the Old Testament.(Ps.19:9; Deut.32:43) What was the context of each? Just what damage had the harlot done?

19:3-4 Q.2 In the next part of their praise of God, they quoted another Psalm.(Ps.104:35) How did the theme of this Psalm also fit into the promised fate of the harlot? Who gave agreement this time? What significance had these two groups already had in Revelation, chapter 4?

19::5 Q.3 Whose was the next voice John heard?(5:2) What were people urged to do this time? Why is praising God important in the life of a Christian? What does it do for God and for us?

19:6-8 Q.4 How could the sound of a multitude shouting be described as 'the voice'? What did this tell us about that group of people? Last time,(18:1,2) they were praising God for His justice, what was their message this time? Why would this be so significant? When had a white horse been mentioned before? (6:2; Zech.1:8; 6:3) What was its significance? Who was previously described as 'faithful and true'?(3:14) What would be the point of linking these two ideas together? How can they be an encouragement to us now?

19:9,10 Q.5 What special event was now promised? How had the same picture been used previously in the New Testament?(Matt.22:2-14) Who was to be invited to the wedding? Who were the bridegroom and the bride? Why did John get told off for worshipping the messenger? How do we make the same mistake?

19:11-16 Q.5 How was the figure on the white horse described? Where had similar images been used before?(Rev.1:5; 17:14) What would be the meaning of each part of His description? Assuming this was the same person John saw back in chapter 1, what was His role then and in chapter 19? What extra aspects of His work were mentioned on this second occasion? Why were they important to those suffering persecution from a compromising church?

19:17,18 Q.6 Who was going to eat the flesh of the defeated? What would be the point of such a gruesome picture? What usually happens to those who are killed in battle? What would be different this time? When will this happen?

19:19-21 Q.7 Who were leading this army which would face total defeat? Think again what was the significance of these two figures earlier in the book?(13 and 14) Who would share defeat with them? Why was it so important to John's first readers to be sure of this outcome? Why is it important to us? With what weapon would they be defeated? How does this encourage us as to the best way of handling opposition today?