

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

After two chapters in which John was given the opportunity of opening a door in the imagination of struggling Christians into eternity - the glory of God as king and creator on the one hand, and His loving sacrifice of Himself as lion and lamb on the other - his vision returned in chapter 6 to the horror of life on earth as they were already experiencing it. Six of the seven seals on the book were broken in this chapter. All but the last described disasters they were already suffering - conquest by a foreign power, Rome,(6:2) war,(6:4) economic injustice,(6:5,6) death when order in society broke down,(6:8) and the killing of Christians for their faith.(6:9-11)

The first four are some of the commonest reasons for which whole communities ask the question, 'Why does a loving God allow this?' or 'What have we done to deserve this?' They were the very questions the people of John's day would be asking their Christian neighbours. Before each new glimpse of human suffering there was the invitation, 'Come' - Come and find out how a loving God sees these human tragedies. Social injustice is meant to be a real concern of Christians, according to books like Amos. All too often we try to duck these tough questions and concentrate on heaven.

Each messenger of disaster was riding a horse of a different colour. The horse of those days was a military weapon comparable to today's tank, and as such a means of oppression. The same four horses have already been introduced to us in Zechariah, chapters 1 and 6. The horses then could remind us of the power of God in judgement and salvation. It is a source of enormous comfort when we live under oppression to know of the greatness of God's power even if He has not yet chosen to exercise it to remove our oppressor.

The breaking of the fifth seal opened the issue of persecution of Christians in particular. Many had already died for their faith but many more martyrs would soon follow. Perhaps an unbelieving society deserved to be oppressed but why did God allow His people to suffer so terribly? And when was He going to act to judge those who were behaving in this way? It is interesting that this was the fifth seal not the first one. The Lord wanted His people to recognise how tough it was for their heathen neighbours before they started feeling sorry for themselves.

While all the things accompanying the breaking of the first five seals were already going on, the sixth seal breaking foreshadowed an event yet to come. To some extent it had been fulfilled on the day of the crucifixion when there was an earthquake and the sun was turned to darkness, as Joel had promised would happen before the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost.(Joel 2:10, 31) Similar disasters often on a huge scale have continued to happen in different parts of the world and at different times since the crucifixion. Always they cause some people to ask 'Why?' Who should we blame, God, the Devil or ourselves? But these are only a foretaste of something much bigger at the end of history when God would finally act in judgment. The big question for suffering Christians was 'When?'

7:1 Q.1 Reading chapter seven, what was about to happen before the final seal on the book was broken? In what sense were these four angels protecting God's people from something even worse than they were already experiencing? The earth has four prevailing winds, two in the northern hemisphere and two in the southern. What was so remarkable about verse one in the light of Biblical inspiration?

7:2,3 Q.2 What was this next angel about to do? What did it represent? How does what we have already seen about the purpose of a seal help in our understanding?(5:1) Why was it particularly important to know that the seal would be applied to the head rather than some other

part of our bodies? What is the most important function of your head? How does this help in times of persecution?

7:4-8 Q.3 How many people were described as being sealed in this section? One sect for a long time taught that this was the total number of believers who would make it into heaven? Why is this obviously not correct? Who were this particular group?

7:4-8 Q.4 How were the 144,000 divided up? Why was this a puzzle in the light of what happened in the Old Testament to the northern kingdom of ten tribes, Israel, and the southern kingdom, Judah (and Benjamin)? Would it help to relate this to the explanation we decided on for half of the 24 elders back in chapter 4? What does this section tell us about the fate of believers in Old Testament times, or even since, who have never heard the name of Jesus?

7:9 Q.5 If you were worrying about not making it into the 144,000 how is this verse a reassurance? What does this section tell about what must be accomplished in missionary work before Jesus will return? What therefore should be our priority as we wonder about the time and details of the Lord's return?

7:10-12 Q.6 What were the two parts to the worship of God in this passage? What were they praising the Lord for this time? Why did the multitude begin and the others reply? How was this a continuation of the worship of chapter 5? Why does God want us to worship Him when we are suffering? Is it for His benefit?

7:13-17 Q.7 What question was John obviously asking himself when the elder spoke to him? What are the two distinguishing features of both groups in this chapter? What have we already seen back in chapters 2 and 3 is meant by a white robe? What does this tell us will really matter about our standing in heaven when we get there? How do we get to have that standing according to the elder's answer?

7:13-17 Q.8 What has the Lord done which guarantees our place in eternity? What will be the conditions of eternity? How does it help to know this when times are tough? What will the Lord be to us in eternity? According to John 10 how is this already happening?