

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

Having spent the last three chapters examining the current political situation on earth which was causing enormous suffering to both Christians and Jews, and explaining the Devil's strategy in carrying on his war with God through Rome and its Emperors, John took us back to what he saw in heaven. As before in chapters 4,5, and 7 he was showing us timelessness upon which we can draw now, our eternal lives which equip us to face the horrors of earth. Chapter 10 illustrated the secret of how we do this with the little book John was to eat before he spoke; the suggestion was that this represented the little we know of the word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ upon which we can feed and which enables us to make sense to others.

Chapter 14 contains two contrasting pictures of Jesus; first there was the Lamb (14:1,4) whom we have met before in 5:6, who redeemed us by His blood shed on the cross. The second picture was of Him as King and Judge(14:14), but more of that later. Mount Zion in Jerusalem was the site of the temple and of Calvary. The 144,000 we have seen in 7:4 were a symbolic number of the twelve tribes of Israel indicating that God's purpose among them would be completed. The name of God on their foreheads was presumably the same as the seal on the foreheads in 9:4 contrasting with the mark of the beast on the unbeliever in 13:16. In each case we have concluded that the main point was not so much whether there was a physical mark but whether there was a certainty in the mind as to whom we belong. In times of persecution especially, certainty about our position with God is all important.(14:1)

Singing and music have a vital place in the Christian life and fellowship, which become even more important when times are tough. Music stirs emotion, and the words of a song keep God's word in our heads, and can be shared together. Negro spirituals from the days of slavery were the main means by which an illiterate people kept their faith alive and encouraged one another.(14:2,3) As they sang they recognised that God, not the Emperor, was King and that the content of their songs was the message they had received through the 4 living creatures and the elders, in other words those who had taught them the scriptures.

As followers of Jesus, knowing with certainty that they belonged to Him had resulted in a purity of sexual behaviour, faithfulness not celibacy, and a transparent honesty in their words.(14:4,5)

Six angels now delivered their message in turn in two groups of three. Between them they reminded us of the message about which we need to be certain if we are to persevere in troubled times. The first angel encouraged us that even when we are struggling, the gospel still needs to be preached to the whole world, that a response was urgent and that the gospel began with God as creator of all things. (14:6,7)

The second angel reminded us that despite appearances to the contrary on earth, the enemy was defeated.(Jn.16:33) Babylon was here a code name for Rome.(I Pet.5:13) From the time of Babel when men tried to see the future without God, (Gen.11) Babylon was a cause of trouble for Israel. The Old Testament captivity in Babylon was not just a political reverse but another time when the kings of Babylon tried to force other gods on Israel.(Dan.1-3) Rome, which seemed all powerful, was defeated from the standpoint of eternity, just like her master, the Devil.(14:8)

The third angel warned that the followers of the Devil face God's judgement, condemnation and hell forever. The implication here was that by the end, everyone of us will know for certain to whom we belong and the eternal choice we have made of heaven or hell.(14:9-11) Knowing this now does much to motivate us to persevere in our faith in the Lord and His word even if it costs us our lives.(14:12,13)

John presented us first with the other view of Jesus, the Lamb. But He was also the King with power to judge which He was finally now to exercise. The cloud we have seen to be a picture of His presence, and 'son of man' a frequent title used to remind us that His judgement will be based on the fact that He took human form on Himself, and therefore knows exactly what we face in life.(Heb.2:18) He gave the order to begin the harvest and initiated it Himself.(14:14-16) The harvest was good news and bad news. There were two kinds of harvest. In Matthew 9:37,38 Jesus wanted missionaries as harvesters. This was presumably the wheat harvest of 14:14-16.

On the other hand in Matthew 13:39-43, it was the children of the Devil who would be harvested as tares for judgement. This would appear to be the grape harvest of 14:17-20 which the next three angels completed. Whereas a wheat harvest is done so that the wheat can be re-sown and multiply, a grape harvest is gathered so that the grapes can be crushed.

As Christians it helps us in difficult times to know that God will eventually deal with those who reject Him and persecute us. Getting justice is not our problem, but God's. Being free from anger and resentment at injustice allows us to persevere in the task that God has given us.

15:1 Q.1 Another seven angels were about to play their part. What previous groups of 7 angels have we met?(1:20; 8:2) What were their functions? What was the previous sign?(12:1) How might this one continue the message of the last one? Why did God use plagues in the Old Testament?(Exod.7-11; Lev.26:21)

15:2-4 Q.2 Before hearing of the plagues we were reminded of those who would not experience them. Who were they? What characterised them? Why was 'the song of Moses' so appropriate at this point?(Exod.15:1-18) The second half of the song is from Ps.86:9. Why was this also so fitting?

15:5-8 Q.3 Where did the seven angels come from? What had happened to the temple on earth in chapter 11? What therefore was the significance of the temple in 11:19 and now 15:5-8? How would this help the people of John's day who had seen what occurred in Jerusalem? How can it also help us to survive when our society is facing threats to its survival and happiness?

16:1 Q.4 Where had the idea of God's wrath being poured out as from a bowl been used before?(Ps.79:6; Jer.10:25; Ezek.22:31; Zeph.3:8) What idea was in common on previous occasions?

16:2 Q.5 What was the result of the first angel pouring out his bowl? When had a similar thing happened before?(Exod.9:9-11) Does this mean that sickness is normally about punishment from God on an unbeliever?(Job 2:7) If not, how do we tell the difference?

16:3 Q.6 What was the effect of the second angel pouring out his bowl? When had this sort of thing happened before?(Exod.7:17-21) Again is such a natural disaster normally God's punishment on men?

16:4-7 Q.7 What was the difference in practical effect between the third plague and the one before? Compare both also with Rev.8:8-11. How were they similar and how were they different? Why does judgement show that God is righteous? Why were these judgements so appropriate?

16:8,9 Q.8 What is the fourth plague? Where else is a similar event described?(II Pet.3:10) How was fire used in a picture sense in the Bible?(I Cor.3:13-15) What does this passage show us about the hearts of those who deserve judgment?

16:10,11 Q.9 What was the fifth plague? Where had a similar thing happened before?(Exod.10:21) What was the target of this plague? Why would darkness cause pain? Again how did those who suffered this plague respond?

16:12-16 Q.10 What was the sixth plague? What did it attack? Where did the spirits like frogs appear from?(Exod.8:2-15) What does this tell us about the means the Devil uses to destroy men? Is this World War III? What should our response be as Christians to such threats to our world? Who would these armies eventually meet in battle?(19:19)

16:17-21 Q.11 What two things happened in the final plague? When had similar things happened before?(Mt.27:51; Acts 16:26; Exod.9:18-20) What aspect of human life was being attacked this time?

16 Q.12 Looking back on this chapter as a whole, what is it saying about how God will judge the earth? Again what is His reason for doing so? Is all this good news or bad news as far as you are concerned?