

INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION - PART THIRTEEN

Chapter 11 concluded with a reminder that God is still in His temple, in heaven and in us, and that central to His temple is His word, contained in the ark of the covenant. And so He is still speaking today.

The next chapter really belongs with 11:19 because the sign of 12:1 is the message contained in His word. The idea of a message written across the heavens is familiar in the Old Testament where it appears that God revealed the gospel to ancient peoples step by step in the story of the star groups.(Ps.19:1-6; Gen.15:5,6) The Devil corrupted that message in the stars into astrology by replacing the future coming of Jesus with our supposed futures. The reading of the star groups traditionally began with Virgo, the virgin who would conceive and bear a son,(Isa.7:14) The reference was obviously to the birth of Jesus from Mary.(12:1,2)

Another well known star group was Serpens, the fleeing serpent. The dragon was unmistakably identified in 12:9 as being the Devil. His conflict with Eve in Gen.3 that led to the fall of man would be fought again in the future according to Gen.3:15. The Lord warned him that what he would suppose would be his victory when Jesus was nailed to the cross would actually be his defeat. The Devil used every means available to him to try to destroy Jesus before and after His birth.(12:3,4)

The dragon was described as having 7 heads, the significance of which would immediately be apparent to John's readers. We have already seen how Rome was a city built on 7 hills. Equally important would be the mention of 10 horns, an image often used to represent rulers.(Dan.7:24) Vespasian, the general who commanded the Roman army which began to put down the Jewish rebellion of 66AD became Emperor in 68AD. It was he who gave the order to attack and destroy Jerusalem and its temple, finally achieved in 70AD. He was the tenth Caesar, and father of the next two, Titus and Domitian.(12:3) He was a strong and politically capable leader who brought the Empire together after a series of weak and ineffective emperors. Like the other Caesars before him he was regarded as becoming a god at his death. It was on this issue that the Christian church and the Roman state came into inevitable conflict. Jesus and the Emperor could not both be God.

In this period of history, Rome was the Devil's chief instrument as becomes even more apparent in the next chapter. At the birth of Jesus, Herod, the Emperor's ally, tried to get rid of a rival king by killing all the children around Bethlehem.(Matt.2:16) Mary was taken by Joseph through the Sinai desert to safety in Egypt.(Matt.2:13-15) When Herod was dead they returned to Nazareth. We are not told by Matthew how much later this was but it could well have been after 1260 days, 3 1/2 years. The Devil's attempts to destroy Jesus continued throughout His life, culminating at the cross. God raised Him up and took Him back to His rightful place in heaven.(12:4-6)

After being reminded how the Devil failed to get rid of Jesus and His mother during His time on earth, John was taken back in time to the Devil's original rebellion against God in heaven which was equally unsuccessful, and resulted in his expulsion from heaven.(12:7-9) The cause of that rebellion, pride, had been described in Isa.14 and Ezek.28. The conflict itself was mentioned in Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1. The result was that though defeated he became 'the god of this world' for a time. As such he would work principally in two ways as he attempted to destroy us. First he would tempt us to sin, to rebel against God as he himself had done. Secondly when sin resulted he would accuse Christians of what God had already forgiven through the blood of Jesus. He accuses us in heaven but Jesus is the counsel for the defence who proclaims our innocence.(I Jn.2:1) Satan also accuses us on earth to cause us to doubt our salvation. Heaven celebrates the Devil's defeat through the blood of Jesus and we can join that celebration on earth.(12:10-12)

Knowing this would be a real help to Christians struggling with Roman oppression.(12:13-17) God used a human woman to send His Son into the world to create His church, also frequently pictured in the Bible as a woman, a bride and a wife.(Rev.21:2; Eph.5:23-30) The eagle's ability to rise above a situation, to see it from another dimension and so to have supreme power was also a common picture.(Isa.40:31; Jer.49:22) As God had sent a flood as punishment in Gen.6-8 the Devil would try to do the same to accomplish his purpose, but he would fail. Since the flood was described as coming from his mouth it was presumably a

flood of false teaching, but it would come to nothing, like Korah's rebellion when the rebels were swallowed by the earth.(Num.16:31)

Our protection against the worst the Devil can do is the 'seal on our foreheads', the certainty in our minds that Jesus has won,(9:4) fed by what we know of the word of God, 'the little book',(10:2) which enables us to 'keep the commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus'.(12:17)

13:1 Q.1 A second creature now appeared in the story. What were his characteristics in this verse? Who presumably was he and what would be his relationship to the dragon, the Devil? Why did he come out of the sea? Keep a map of the Mediterranean Sea in mind as you think about this question.

13:2 Q.2 Compare this verse with Daniel chapter 7 which describes 4 kingdoms. They are normally understood to refer to Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome which dominated Israel in turn. Which of the four beasts in Daniel corresponded to the one in Rev.13? Why were there also features of the other three in the beast of Rev.13?

13:3 Q.3 In the year preceding Vespasian's takeover as Emperor, Rome was in chaos and looked like it was finished. How might this explain what is described as happening to the beast in this verse?

13:4 Q.4 What was the spiritual issue behind the rule of Rome? Imagine you were an ordinary citizen of Rome in the days of Vespasian and the Jewish war. How might you interpret Vespasian's success?

13:5-7 Q.5 How could this passage describe events in Jerusalem from 67-70AD? What understanding of those events would these verses give to the Christians and Jews of that time?

13:8-10 Q.6 As the Christians saw Rome ruling what to them was the whole world, and people doing what they were told and worshipping the Emperor how were they encouraged to respond? What was the most important thing they needed to know to survive those times or even to accept death because they refused to worship Vespasian? What is the secret of our spiritual survival today when it seems like the whole world has turned away from Christ?

13:11-12 Q.7 Vespasian had two sons, Titus and Domitian, who would eventually rule after him. When Vespasian became Emperor, he appointed Titus to command the Roman army in Israel in his place. How could these verses describe how he went about it?

13:13,14 Q.8 Where according to these verses did Titus' success as a general come from? What might he have done in the temple once he had destroyed the Holy of Holies? Does the Devil have power to do miracles?(Exod.7:11,22; 8:7)

13:15-17 Q.9 It was a common practice in those days for idols in heathen temples to have an 'oracle', someone who spoke presumably by spirit power on behalf of the idol. Could this be the meaning of verse 15? What would happen to those who did not go along with such practices? Even if the mark of verses 16 and 17 was not an actual tattoo what idea is represented by such an identification? How might people today bear 'the mark of the beast'?

13:18 Q.10 A device used in that time was to give a numerical value to each letter, A = 1, B = 2 and so on. It was possible to add up the value of the letters of someone's name to produce a total. About one person in a hundred would have a score of 666. Nero, the 6th Caesar, who persecuted the Christians in great numbers after the fire of Rome in 64AD would have had the number 666 - but so would many others then and since. What message therefore do you think this verse had for those times and for today?