

INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION - PART SIX

John continued his glimpse of eternity, the open door in our imaginations to what the Lord wants to be in us, even in the midst of persecution and suffering. If as Christians we already have eternal life, this is what is available to us right now. It is a foretaste of heaven even while we are living through hell on earth.

Having glimpsed, in chapter 4, the Lord in glory in charge of the universe, John was now shown that there was a major hindrance to God's truth being known to man - the book was sealed and could only be opened by one who was worthy. The identity of this book needs clarifying because the Bible speaks of a number of books. Firstly there is the Bible itself, 'Biblia' means 'books'. Rev.1:11, 22:7,9,10,18,19 refer to the book of Revelation itself as John was writing it. The Bible is never described as sealed, although its meaning is hidden from the unbeliever. Secondly there was the little book of Rev.10:2,8-10; and Ezek.2:8-3:4 which is to be eaten by God's messenger if he is to have something worthwhile to say. This was not sealed either. Thirdly there was the book of life in Rev.3:5; 13:8 and numerous other places, and the book of the deeds of the spiritually dead mentioned in 20:12; and Dan.7:10. There was no mention of seals in relation to these. Finally there was the sealed book also described in Isa.8:16; 29:11; Dan.9:24; 12:4,9. As we follow the breaking of the seals in the next few chapters the special importance of this book will become apparent.

Seals in Bible times were made with a signet ring in wax. The ring bore the distinctive mark of its owner. It was his signature and therefore represented authorship of a book or letter, ownership of goods, genuineness of a product, or a commitment to keep to a bargain made. A sealed letter or book such as the one here in Rev.5 could only be opened by the one to whom it was addressed. He alone would be worthy to break the seals. It was therefore a book written by God the Father to His Son, called here the Lamb.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God was represented in this chapter by two seemingly opposite animals, the Lion(5:5) and the Lamb.(5:6,7) On the one hand He was the almighty king descended from King David. On the other hand He was the lamb sacrificed for the sin of the world. He did not overcome by exerting His great power as king but like a gentle, helpless lamb allowed His life to be taken. Only through the cross could Jesus open the secrets of heaven to us. The secret of handling the abuse of man's power on earth was not to fight it but to be willing if necessary to die for what was right.

In the face of such an awesomely simple solution, all heaven bowed in worship. First the cherubim, God's way of revealing Jesus, then the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament,(5:8-10) joined in the second song by the angels of heaven, agreeing with God's solution in worship.(5:11,12) Finally the rest of us still on earth were invited to join in the third song. By doing so we are agreeing that the gospel is the only answer to the terrible problems on earth.(5:13,14)

6:1-17 Q.1 What kinds of events accompany the breaking of each of the first six seals? How would these issues be relevant to John's readers? What question do we usually ask when any of these things happen to us? What features are present in common in the account of the first four seals being broken? What do you suppose this chapter is about?

6:1,2 Q.2 Where have horses been used before in a picture sense?(Zech.1:8-11; 6:1-8) What would be the present day equivalent of the horse from a military point of view? What human

problem did the first horse represent? How would this be especially relevant to John's readers? How do we face similar problems today? What solution does the gospel offer to this universal problem?

6:3,4 Q.3 What problem was associated with the second seal and the second horse? Again how would this match the experience of those who first read this letter? What invitation was made again on this occasion to John? How might it be a development of the same invitation in 4:1? Again what hope does the Bible offer to those suffering in this way?

6:5,6 Q.4 What in our time is normally represented by scales? What is one of the almost inevitable accompaniments of oppression? What therefore was the problem of the black horse? What is the question people ask at such times? To what extent did the voice from between the four living creatures answer that question?

6:7,8 Q.5 What was the problem of the fourth horse? What social and political conditions normally give rise to such suffering? How does this explain why the New Testament writers supported the existence of government, even bad government?(Rom.13:1; Tit.3:1; I Pet.2:13) Where does the gospel offer hope at such times?

6:9-11 Q.6 The conditions described by the appearance of the four horses would apply to everyone in John's day. When the fifth seal was broken the problem pictured related to only a segment of society. Who were they? Why were they not the first to be mentioned? What question does such a situation raise in the minds of Christians? What answer does this revelation give us? What answer does the gospel give in general to this issue which is very real for many in our world even today?

6:12-17 Q.7 What events were foreshadowed by the breaking of the sixth seal? Where have such things been promised before?(Joel 2:10; 2:31; 3:15; Matt.27:45,51; Acts 2:17-21) What major event in the history of the earth will be associated with these things? How will people respond at such a time?(Lk.23:27-31) What now is to be our response to all this information about world events some of which are going on around us even today?