

INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION - PART NINE

In our quest to understand how to be 'blessed' in tough times we have so far seen how six seals have been broken;(chap.6) six key questions which stand in the way of many people trusting Christ have been raised. Why does He allow man to oppress man?(seals 1-4) Why do Christians suffer more than all?(seal 5) When and why will God judge?(seal 6)

Before breaking the last seal we are taken back to heaven for another glimpse of how it is in eternity.(chap.7) We are reassured that believers whether Jew or Gentile are secure in Christ and can know it in their minds and celebrate it with all of heaven even while they face the horror of suffering on earth.

Finally the seventh seal was broken by Jesus Christ and God's message in the book that was sealed could be heard.(8:1,2) But before it began there was half an hour of silence, time to reflect on what we have heard so far and on our position before God. Again the message was to be delivered in 7 parts.

One more very significant thing happened before the 7 angels began; another angel offered incense before God. We have already seen that incense pictures the prayers of Christians.(5:8) God has heard us all through our difficult times. Now He will answer as pictured again by thunder, lightning and earthquake, as at Mt. Sinai.(Exod.19:16-18) Knowing we have been heard is a tremendous blessing when we are in trouble.(8:3-5)

In the first 4 angels' messages were 4 attacks upon the environment. The first three were the result of fire from heaven. The fourth could also be by the same means. Fire in the Bible was both a blessing and a curse. It was used for heating, lighting, rubbish disposal and purifying metals.(1 Cor.3:11-15) but it could also be a terrible scourge.(Amos 7:4,5) This was the effect in chapter 8.

The first attack was on 1/3 of plant life on which we depend for food and shelter. Enough remained for our survival, but there was a terrible warning. In recent years we have accomplished this first scourge by our destruction of the rain forests. In Roman times the process was already well under way; forests had gone and erosion followed; the N. Sahara had been turned from arable land to desert by overuse.(8:7)

The second assault was on the sea where pollution killed fish, and storms destroyed ships. Blood again represented death. Modern over-fishing and pollution have brought much of this about. Even in the Roman era the process was well advanced in inland seas.(8:8,9)

The third area of disaster was in fresh water lakes and rivers, our sources of drinking water, which were poisoned by a meteor. 'Wormwood' was a tree root which made water undrinkable. This picture had been used before to warn that as false prophets poison people's minds, so God would poison their water in judgment.(Jer.9:15; 23:15) The problem of polluted drinking water was well known to the Romans, and has been the major health problem world wide in the 19th and 20th centuries as the world population has multiplied rapidly.(8:10,11)

The fourth environmental threat was air pollution partly obscuring sun, moon and stars. In the big cities like Rome this had begun in the first century and has reached global proportions in the 21st.(8:12)

All these threats to our world should make us ask about our relationship with God.(Lk.13:1-5), but the worst was yet to come. There were even bigger threats to man in his rebellious state than deterioration in our physical world.(8:13)

9:1 Q.1 What worse things could happen to man than military oppression, (chap.6) and destruction of the environment?(8:13) Who or what was the 'star from heaven which had fallen to the earth'?(Lk.10:18) What was the 'key'?(1:18) Where was the bottomless pit?(Lk.8:31)

9:2,3 Q.2 Who was pictured elsewhere by the sun?(Ps.84:11; Isa.60:19,20) What was the effect of a plague of locusts in the Bible countries?(Exod.10:4,5; Amos 7:1,2; Joel 1:4) Where did these locusts come from? What was likely to be represented by the locusts? Did locusts directly kill people? Why was this attack worse than another environmental disaster?

9:3-6 Q.3 How were these creatures different from ordinary locusts? What could they do that locusts cannot normally do? Whom were they attacking? Who was safe from their sting? Why will men want to die when attacked by these locusts? What kind of thing were they therefore describing that the Devil has the power to do to man?

9:7-10 Q.4 What did the locusts look like? What does each part of their appearance tell us about the nature of their attack on man?

9:11 Q.5 Abaddon is Hebrew for destruction, and Apollyon Greek for destroyer. Who was he? What means did he use to destroy man?(Jn.8:44) What light does this cast on the nature of the locust swarm?

9:12-14 Q.6 What reassurance did this verse give to the Christians of the 1st century about who was actually in charge in the world?(I Jn.4:4) How does this help when we feel overwhelmed and outnumbered by false teachers?

9:14 Q.7 Why would angels have been bound? Whose angels were they? What was special about the River Euphrates in the Bible? What country lay just beyond it?

9:15-19 Q.8 The population of the world in those days is estimated to have been about 200 million. What have we already seen to be the significance of horsemen?(chap.6) What might these horsemen have been doing to the world at that time? What did the colours of their clothing represent? Who was pictured by their heads and tails?

9:20,21 Q.9 What greater problem than military oppression enslaved the people of those days? What does idolatry do to the way people behave?