

INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION - PART TEN

Over the last few chapters we have alternated between earth where people are suffering in time, and heaven where the timeless conditions of eternity reign. The exciting news for the people of John's day, and people facing hard times ever since, is that eternity can be tasted now, not just longed for in the future. We saw in chapter 6 the effects of the oppression of foreign rule, and in chapter 8 the consequences of environmental destruction whether then or now. The question remained, could anything worse happen?

Chapter 9 begins now to look at the other, terrible side to eternity, hell itself. Just as heaven can be experienced now, even while we are facing trouble, so hell is tasted today as the Devil does his worst. He has power to destroy through man's inhumanity to man,(chapter 6) and through environmental disasters,(chapter 8) but that is not all. He was created to be a 'star' in heaven but because of his rebellion,(Isa.14; Ezek.28) he was cast out of heaven to become 'the prince of the power of the air'(Eph.2:2) with power to take men with him to hell, the bottomless pit.(9:1,2) How does he do it?

The locusts of the Middle East and North Africa are a potent cause of famine because of their vast numbers by which they blot out the sun and eat everything green in their path leaving nothing to eat. False teachers from hell rob us of truth and so cause a spiritual famine. The scorpion is an ever present, unwelcome surprise for the unwary. Its sting is not normally fatal to an adult but produces a fierce burning pain which persists for days. The combination of locust and scorpion would be a fearsome threat. Their targets are men who do not belong to Christ.(9:3-6) This secret weapon from hell describes graphically the suffering the Devil can unleash on the world through demonic activity. Worse by far than all the physical attacks so far described is the ability of the Devil through temptation and false teaching to cause pain to man, both because of what we do to each other and because of what we inflict on ourselves.

Several other features of the locusts are pictured in ways now familiar to us from the rest of the Bible. They want to dominate, (the horses), and to rule our lives, (the crowns). They use men and women to do it. They cause fear like lions. They seem unable to be defeated, (the breastplates and the chariots).(9:7-10)

Their king and commander is the one who is committed to man's destruction, the Devil. His means of destroying is by deception.(12:9) He is the 'father of lies' and hence a 'murderer'(Jn.8:44) If lies are his chief weapon then this is presumably what the locust-scorpions are all about. As locusts cause physical famine so the Devil's lies cause a spiritual famine and terrible pain from guilt, failure, doubt and anxiety. The most effective lie is one which resembles truth, so it has always been Satan's strategy to pervert truth. False teaching and its painful consequences are the even worse fate which can befall man. Only Christians who know where they stand with God are protected.(9:11)

The sixth angel sounded his trumpet with further trouble following for those who did not know the Lord as the only God. Just as the Devil had been allowed to let his agents out of hell, so now four of his angels who have been bound were let loose on the world, for the moment. The River Euphrates was one boundary of the original land of Israel, but at the same time it ran through Babylon which so often represented the Devil's alternative to truth.(Gen.11; Isa.14; I Pet.5:13)

Two hundred million was about the population of the world in the first century. The whole world was the target of the Devil's army. Their colours were the colours of hell. We have already seen

how their heads like lions and their tails like serpents are two familiar pictures of Satan.(I Pet.5:8; Rev.12:9) Hell came out of their mouths and by their mouths and tails they killed. Again the picture was of destruction by words rather than weapons. Their victims were those who worshipped their own work which had become their idol. Notice how, just as in chapter 7 with the different parts of the environment, it was one third who were destroyed, indicating major loss but not total annihilation. Consider through history how false ideologies have triggered conflict and terrible suffering. In the twentieth century there were example such as Fascism and Marxism. In the twenty-first century the most damaging ideologies are shaping up to be materialism, hedonism,(which means the pursuit of pleasure) and Islam. All depend on self effort and self belief which have always been the Devil's message. The crimes that followed were only the symptoms of the disease.(9:12-21)

10:1 Q.1 When did we last meet a 'strong angel'?(5:2) What do they have in common? What four pictures are used to describe the appearance of the angel? What do these pictures represent?(Exod.13:21; Gen.9:13; Rev.1:15,17)

10:2-11 Q.2 We have already looked at some of the books described in the Bible.(5:1) Which book do you suppose is the 'little book'? What is John later told to do with this book?(10:8-10) What does it equip him to do?(10:11) When he first eats it, what effect does it have? Why might its effect a little later be totally different? Who else was told to eat a scroll?(Ezek.2:8-3:3) How are we given similar instructions?

10:2 Q.3 Why does the angel stand in the way he does?(Jonah 1:9) What does this tell us about the God he serves?

10:3 Q.4 How is it that both the Devil and God speaking are pictured by a lion?(9:17) Isn't this confusing? What have we previously seen to be the significance of thunder?(8:5)

10:4 Q.5 First the message of the little book is to be heard and then it is not. Why is this? What does John have to do first before he can communicate this message? What do we have to do before we can reveal God's mystery to man?

10:5-6 Q.6 By whose authority does the angel speak? What particular aspect of God is emphasised here? Why is this always a good place to start explaining the truth concerning Christ? Where does this quotation come from?(Exod.20:11)

10:7 Q.7 We will meet the seventh angel in chapter 11:15. Before he sounds his trumpet what is to be completed? What in the New Testament is 'the mystery of God'?(Col.1:26,27; Rom.16:25; I Tim.3:16) Why is it a mystery? How would eating the little book help to unravel the mystery?

10:8-11 Q.8 Have you had any further thoughts about what is meant by the little book? How does this chapter fit into the theme of Revelation so far? What are the Christians struggling with persecution and suffering being urged to do?