

INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION - PART NINETEEN

By this point in the book of Revelation, we have become familiar with the four faces of evil, the dragon - the Devil; the beast - one particular Roman Emperor who acted as if he was God; the false prophet - his son who promoted the worship of his father, and the harlot - a compromising church which joined forces with the empire for political and monetary gain. They were the threats to the very survival of God's people in the first few centuries after Christ. The same opponents under different disguises have tried to intimidate the church ever since.

In chapter 18 the fourth enemy, the harlot, was destroyed as unfaithful churches have continued to self-destruct ever since. But the first three enemies remained. Would God allow them to continue their persecution of His true church? The answer finally came in chapter 19 as one by one they met their fate. This enormously important piece of information was introduced by a heavenly dialogue between the Lord and His people who have suffered so much.

First a vast crowd of believers praised God with a single voice, so completely were they united in their worship.(19:1) As Christians we will be so much more united in eternity than we sometimes seem to be on earth. Their excitement was the result of knowing that God had finally demonstrated His justice. Those who died for their faith in Jesus have been avenged, and the unfaithful church has received what she deserved.(19:2,3)

The 24 elders whom we have previously seen to represent the teachers of God's people in the Old and New Testaments, and the 4 living creatures who remind us of the 4 ways of looking at Jesus - king, servant, man and the Son of God - in the 4 gospels,(Rev.4) agreed because the whole Bible agrees that God is just and will ultimately deal with evil.(19:4)

The Lord replied from His throne, a reminder that He was in charge,(19:5) urging all of us to go on trusting Him. The heavenly chorus responded again as one, celebrating the climax of redemption, the final union of Jesus Christ, and His bride, the church for whom He died, and who stood before Him clean from sin.(19:6-8) John was instructed to write the wedding invitations to all those who have faithfully looked forward to this occasion by testifying of Christ even at the cost of their lives.(19:9) We are both part of the bride, the church, and individually guests at the wedding. John made the mistake of worshipping the angel who had been speaking to him, and was firmly reminded that only God was to be worshipped.(19:10)

There followed a fresh vision of the Lord Jesus Christ,(19:11-16) repeating many of the same images that were used in chapters 1-3 - faithful and true,(3:14); eyes like flames of fire,(1:14); the name no-one else knows,(2:17) the sharp sword coming from His mouth,(1:16), and the title King of Kings and Lord of Lords,(17:14). There were some new details familiar from elsewhere in scripture - the white horse of the conqueror,(6:2); the robe dipped in blood,(Isa.63:3); the title, Word of God,(John 1:1). He, rather than the Devil, was now wearing the many diadems.(12:3) The more we study the scriptures the fuller our picture of Jesus becomes. In chapter one the vision of Jesus was of the One who gives light to the world through His church. This time He was the King, Judge and Conqueror.

A battle was about to take place which would result in the total defeat of God's enemies. Normally after a battle there would be some survivors who would be able to bury the dead. This time only the vultures would be there to clean up the battlefield. God's people would be elsewhere enjoying the wedding celebration.(19:17,18)

A final conflict between the Lord Jesus and His enemies was described. The beast and the false prophet were captured and their followers who had accepted their mark, their way of thinking, were killed. Presumably this description was completing the account in chapter 16 of the battle of Har-Magedon which was put on hold while we were told about the fate of the harlot, the compromising church. The fire and brimstone had already been warned of in the Old Testament,(Isa.30:33; Dan.7:11) and anticipated earlier in this book.(14:10) It helps today to know that every false ideology is already, in eternity, totally bankrupt.

20:1-3 Q.1 One last enemy remained even when every earthly opposition had been defeated. Who was it? What was to happen to him? How long was this punishment to last? Why at this stage did God not do something permanent? What would happen at the end of the jail sentence?

20:4-6 Q.2 While the Devil was serving his sentence, what would be happening? Who will reign with Christ? Why will they have this privilege? What in practical terms will it mean to reign with Jesus? Was this describing something past, present or future? Is it to happen on earth or in heaven? When do we become 'priests of God'?(I Pet.2:9; Rev.1:6)

20:7-10 Q.3 What was to happen at the end of the thousand years? What would the Devil do again? Who in the Old Testament were Gog and Magog?(Ezek.38:2; 39:1,6) What form would his deception take? How would people express their support? Would a battle take place this time? How would God act? What would be the Devil's final fate? Is it any clearer now why God released the Devil one last time?

20:11 Q.4 What one last event faced those who refused God's offer of redemption in Jesus Christ? Why would everyone run away from God's throne? What does this tell us about what men really know in their hearts about sin?

20:12-15 Q.5 What two kinds of evidence will be presented before God's court? Will anyone be acquitted on the basis of what is in the books of our deeds? How will those who never heard the gospel be treated?(Rom.2:15,16) What do we have to do to have our names in the book of life?(3:3,5)

20:13-15 Q.6 Will those who died without trusting Christ rise from the dead? Will Christians also be there?(Matt.25:31-46) Will we face judgement?(Jn.5:24)

20:14 Q.7 Why will death itself be thrown into the lake of fire?(I Cor.15:26) What is the second death?