

INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION - PART TWELVE

Chapter ten is a vital key to this book because it answers the question, 'How do I bring eternity into time?' How do we draw on what is already ours in Christ in heaven, so that we can resist in our minds the pressure of false teaching which comes from hell, the other part of eternity? False teaching is what lies behind persecution of Christians on earth. It is especially because people hate the truth that they will ill-treat us. To be strong enough to stand against the worst the world can do to us, we need swallow the word of God and let it have its full effect upon our own lives first. Then we can speak clearly and compellingly to others.

In chapter eleven, John's vision began to focus on a series of specific events. Traditionally they have been put into the future but if we are still to take Rev.1:3 seriously we should have a close look at the events of John's own time first to see how this message could bless them in their present circumstances.

The chapter began with an invitation to John to measure the temple in Jerusalem, the altar and the worshippers. The picture is another familiar one from the Old Testament. In Exodus, Moses was given detailed plans for the building of the tabernacle.(Exod.25-30) In Ezekiel 40-43, the prophet was given detailed specifications for the rebuilding of the temple which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. In Zechariah 2, an angel was busy measuring the city of Jerusalem. In the New Testament, the tabernacle and the temple became first the body of Jesus, and then they become us as He comes to live within our bodies.(Jn.2:21; I Cor.3:16; 6:19; II Cor.5:1) Measuring becomes no longer the use of a tape measure but it is a comparison of our lives with the Lord Jesus, God's plan for humanity.(Eph.4:13; Rom.12:3) There are times in our Christian lives when we are to have a check-up, not with the doctor, nor against one another but in comparison with Jesus.(I Cor.11:28; II Cor.13:5) Only then do we see how far we have fallen short of what the Lord wants to be and do in our lives, and how to make changes.

The outer court of the temple was the court of the Gentiles, the unbelievers. We have no business to be measuring them. Judgement of the unbelieving world is God's business not ours. We are not even to be measuring other Christians, only ourselves against Jesus.(Matt.7:1)

Repeated reference is made to a period of 3 1/2 years whether as forty-two months or as 1260 days, and then to 3 1/2 days. A terrible event occurred around the time of John's writing which lasted for exactly 3 1/2 years and must have been fresh in the minds of his readers. At the beginning of 66AD the Jews revolted against Roman rule. After some initial Jewish success the Romans besieged Jerusalem. Although the siege was temporarily relaxed for a while in 69AD when Vespasian, the general in charge, became Emperor, it was soon resumed under the new general, his son Titus. It continued from February 67 to August 70AD, exactly 3 1/2 years. The city was finally taken, the temple destroyed never to be rebuilt, and 600,000 people killed. For the most part, the Christian church survived because they heeded Jesus warning in Matt.24:15-28 to get out of the city during a break in the fighting. The loss to the Jews was nevertheless a dreadful one.

Interestingly although no exact date is given, Jesus ministry appears also to have lasted for approximately three and a half years. The other highly significant event in the life of Jesus, which was obviously intended to be related to these things, was the time from His death to His resurrection. Traditionally it has been assumed that He died on Friday and rose again on Easter Sunday. However there is no way this can be fitted to His very specific prophecy that there would be three days and three nights from one to the other. (Matt.12:40) If on the other hand we follow events day by day from the previous Sunday when He rode into Jerusalem we come only to Wednesday night for His arrest and Thursday for the crucifixion. We are told that the day after the crucifixion was a 'high day'(Jn.19:31), a special sabbath rather than a regular one. As such it was decided by the timing of the Passover and could be on any day of the week. It appears that in this particular year it fell on a Friday. Thus Jesus was in the tomb for three nights and part of four days; hence 3 1/2 days.

The two witnesses, two olive trees, and two lampstands all speak of the same two parts to God's message to man in the Old and New Testaments.(11:3,4) Zechariah 4:2-6 used a similar image to explain how oil, a picture of the Holy Spirit, would be poured into His people by two means. God's word has awesome power to change men which God will not allow to be denied.(11:5,6) Nevertheless for the moment it must have

seemed like the enemy had won when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.(11:7-10) The beast will be identified as Rome in chapter 13:1, a city built on seven hills. What seemed like the end to those who lived through those times would be a new beginning when the Bible, the Jewish nation, and the Christian church, like Jesus, 'rose again' from seeming annihilation to spread around the world.(11:11-13) All this was part of the terrible picture described in the second half of chapter 9, the second woe.(11:14)

The last of the seven angels sounded but before anything bad happened on earth we were reminded once again how it was in heaven where God is in charge, nothing has changed and the 24 elders, the teachers of the word, Old and New Testament agree.(11:15-18) God's plan for His temple, His people remained intact.(11:19) He was still speaking. Hearing this must have been a great encouragement.

12:1,2 Q.1 What surrounded the woman in this vision? What might be the significance of these things? Who could she be?(Gal.4:26; Isa.7:14)

12:3,4 Q.2 Who was her adversary? Why was he described as being red? What might be the significance of him having seven heads and ten diadems? Who else was similarly pictured? Where was the enmity between them first promised?(Gen.3:15) How was this hostility expressed in history?(Matt.2:16)

12:5,6 Q.3 Who was the child who was born? What was God's future plan for him?(Ps.2:8,9) What would ultimately happen to him?(Phil.2:9,10) How did God protect the woman?(Matt.2:13-15) For how long would she be protected?(Rev.11:2)

12:7-9 Q.4 Another conflict was now described. When did it take place? Between whom?(Dan.10:13,21; 12:1; Jude 9) Who won and with what consequence? How does this passage help to explain what was happening in Gen.3:1? What help is knowing this to us?(I Jn.4:4)

12:10-12 Q.5 What important information about Satan and his tactics does this passage give us? What is the difference between conviction and accusation so far as the Christian is concerned? How can we recognise which is happening to us? What examples of Satan accusing can you find in the Bible?(Zech.3) What do you suppose Satan was saying to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross?

12:10-12 Q.6 What was being celebrated in heaven in relationship to the Devil's activity? How can knowing this help us? How can we deal with the Devil's accusations? What about the accusations of other people? How should we respond to these?

12:13-17 Q.7 What means did the dragon use to try to destroy the woman and her child? What act of God was he trying to imitate? Why did it fail? Comparing this passage with Jn.7:37-39 what important differences are there? What does this tell us about false teaching? When had the earth opened before to swallow false teachers?(Num.16:31) How does this image help us in practice to handle the Devil's twisting of truth that seems at times like it is going to drown us?

12:14 Q.8 How did the Lord rescue the woman and her child? To what historic event could this be referring?(Matt.2:13-21) How long does this passage suggest all this took? Where had a similar phrase been used before? (Dan.12:7) Why did God use the same period of time for this story as in 11:2? How would it have helped the people of those days to have these events tied together in their minds?

12:17 Q.9 Having failed to destroy the woman and her child whom does the dragon turn on next? Who are 'the rest of her offspring'?(Gal.4:26; Eph.5:25-29; Rev.6:9; 20:4) Again how would it help John's readers to know that this was the Devil's plan?