

INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION - PART 3

By now you will be familiar with the pattern of the letters to the 7 churches. The 'angel' to whom each letter was addressed is presumably a human messenger, God's spokesman to that church - the church secretary or the pastor? Each letter begins with one aspect of the vision of the Lord Jesus in chapter one. From our overall Biblical understanding of Him we can draw that emphasis which fits the special need of those to whom we minister. Next there is a report on the spiritual condition of the church; first there is positive encouragement about what is going well; then the failings of the fellowship or part of it are described as God sees them. Already the answer in Christ has been explained from the vision in chapter one. God demands a response of either repentance or faith; He wants an answer to His letter! Finally the letter makes promises to those who 'overcame', who were victorious in Christ; these promises are drawn from chapters 4-22, 'the things which shall take place after these things.'(Rev.1:19) If the vision of chapter one represents what we already know of Christ throughout His word, chapters 4-22 must be what we still need to discover, not just for the future but for now.

Before getting into chapter 3, review your answers on chapter 2 under the headings - the vision, the good news, the bad news, the response and the promise. Try to come up with a title that fits the situation in each church. Think of examples of each type of problem in your own church or others you know. Don't forget to ask the question, 'to what extent does this problem apply to me?' Some people teach that the 7 churches represent 7 ages in the history of the Christian church and that the last one, in Laodicea, is the church today. Do you agree?

CHAPTER THREE

3:1 Q.1 Sardis was a city with a great past, still perhaps living on that reputation. It had once been the capital of King Croesus, whose very name was synonymous with wealth in the ancient world, but whose pride was his eventual undoing. In this time it housed at least two important heathen temples. Of what does John remind them from the vision of Jesus? What does this picture tell us about our relationship with Christ and the secret of being a true witness of Him? Was there any good news about this church? What was the bad news? Give examples of what this spiritual condition looks like in a present day church. How might the situation in the church in Sardis be a reflection of the history of the city?

3:2 Q.2 Where does the way back to God begin for a church like this one? How can we 'strengthen the things that remain'?(Phil.1:6) In what sense does a church have unfinished business? Consider for example the illustration of the work of the Christian church beginning with a farmer sowing seed in the earth.(Lk.8:5-15) How might his work be unfinished?

3:3-6 Q.3 What was to be their response to John's message? How does this explain what is involved in repentance?(II Cor.7:8-11) What was the warning if they did not heed his letter? In what sense is Jesus' coming like that of a thief?(I Thess.5:2; II Pet.3:10; Lk.21:34-36) What in those days was the most effective burglar protection? What picture is used here to describe sin and holiness?(Isa.64:6) What mistake do we usually make in trying to decide if our lives are like dirty clothes? Under what circumstances would the Lord erase us from the book of life? Does this mean we can lose our salvation?(Exod.32:32; Ps.69:28; Isa.4:3; Dan.12:1; Phil.4:3; Rev.21:27) Whose name is in the book of life? How can we be sure? What is the condition for Jesus to confess us before God?(Matt.7:21-23) What does confessing Him really mean?(Rom.10:9,10)

3:7 Q.4 Philadelphia means 'brotherly love' and was apparently so-called because it was founded by a king who loved his brother. It had suffered repeated earthquakes so that life there was lived even more nervously than was usual in the uncertain world of those days. How does this nervousness about life seem to have affected the church in Philadelphia? What encouragement were they given from chapter one? What was this 'key'?(Isa.22:22; Matt.16:19)

3:8-10 Q.5 In what sense are doors often closed to us? Is it simply a matter of adverse circumstances or is there a deeper problem?(Rev.4:1) How then can Jesus Christ be the key that opens that door?(I Cor.2:16) What was the good news about the condition of this church? What is our starting point if we are seeking to help a church which has been faithful but has little expectation of seeing God work? This is one of only two churches out of seven who are not told they must repent. What response was required of them? Who do you suppose were the 'synagogue of Satan'? How had Paul so often also found similar attitudes among the Jews?(Acts 13,14,17,18,19,)

3:11 Q.6 What did we establish previously was the significance of the Christian's crown?(Rev.2:10) What was the reason for the warning this time? Would they lose their place in heaven?

3:12-13 Q.7 What was promised this time to those who 'overcame'? What were the names of the two pillars of Solomon's temple?(I Kgs.7:21) What did the names mean? What would happen to pillars in an earthquake prone town? How were the Christians there to be different? Why from a practical point of view did the Lord so often send His workers out in pairs? Why all the emphasis here on names being written on people?(Rev.21:12-14) How can you recognise a 'pillar' of the church?(Jer.1:18,19; Gal.2:9)

3:14 Q.8 Laodicea, the last town mentioned was also the most prosperous. It had a large Jewish community and therefore should have had a very strong church. It was a centre of banking and currency exchange in which the Jews probably played a key role. This affluence seems to have spilled over into the church also. What part of the picture of Jesus was especially stressed to the Laodiceans? Amen means 'so be it'. What was this saying about words and actions for the Christian?

3:15-17 Q.9 Was there any good news about this church? What light does this cast on the meaning of verse 20? What was the condition of this group? What would it have felt like to have wandered into this church as a stranger? What does it feel like today? Do affluence and apathy inevitably go together? What in God's view was their real condition? How can we make rich churchgoers realise what their true condition is before God?(Jas.5:1-6)

3:18-20 Q.10 How did God offer to cure their condition? Was He really going to give them gold? What was their response to be? How in verse 20 does the Lord picture this response? Is it unreasonable to use this verse in evangelism? To what sort of audience would it be particularly appropriate?

3:21,22 Q.11 If they responded to the Lord's rebuke was their reward to be any less than the other churches? Where does this promise come from?(Rev.20:4) What does it mean in practice to share His throne? How can we do that now?