

## INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION - PART 2

In the first chapter, John set the stage for probably the most controversial book in all history. He introduced himself, a prisoner in exile for his witness of Jesus Christ, on the small island of Patmos off the coast of the Roman province of Asia, the south-west tip of modern Turkey. He was writing to a group of seven churches who were already also facing some persecution but had much worse to come and needed to be prepared. They had first been evangelised by Paul and his Bible school students during Paul's time in Ephesus described in Acts 19, around 55 AD. It is likely that the date was now 30 or 40 years later. A new generation was rising to leadership.

John described an awesome figure who had appeared to him; unmistakably it was the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. His appearance was rich in symbolism, pictures drawn from the Old Testament, particularly books such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. So He was clearly the Old Testament Messiah, but equally John himself would remember the transfigured Jesus he himself had seen in Matt.17. He was the Christ of the whole Bible. The key to all Bible study is to find the central place that Jesus Christ has in every part of His word. The key to helping those who are struggling is to take from that total picture of Jesus and apply the relevant parts of the picture to the special needs of the individual or church. This was what John now did in chapters 2 and 3.

### CHAPTER TWO

2 and 3 Q.1 Read quickly through these two chapters. What is the pattern of the seven letters? Who is addressed in each letter? What each time is drawn from chapter one? What does each letter say about the spiritual condition of the church? What are the two parts to this spiritual check-up? What response is urged in each church? How does each letter conclude? What can we learn for today from John's example about how to minister to churches in difficulty?

2:1-7 Q.2 Recall first what you know of the spiritual and practical circumstances of the church in Ephesus, from Acts 19 and 20. What would have been the particular difficulties facing you if you had been a Christian in Ephesus in the first century? What on the other hand would have been the advantages of belonging to that church?

2:1 Q.3 Why would God write a letter to one of His angels? The word 'angel' is the ordinary Greek word for 'messenger'. What does this suggest might have been the practical meaning of this greeting? What aspect of the picture of Jesus from chapter one did John take for this letter? What were the seven stars and the seven lampstands?(1:20) What do stars and lampstands have in common? What was missing in the church in Ephesus that Jesus wanted to put back?

2:2,3,6 Q.4 What were the three good things about the condition of this church for which John was told to encourage them? Why is it usually best to start with the good news when we have to deal with problems? There is no indication elsewhere in the Bible except in 2:15 of who the Nicolaitans were or what they believed. Presumably they followed Nicolas. What kind of movement is it likely therefore to have been?

2:4,5 Q.5 The church in Ephesus had many strengths but just one thing was missing. What was it? Was it important? If it were not restored what would the Lord do to this church? Did this mean that they would lose their salvation? What do you suppose it would have felt like to have visited this church? What kind of love was John talking about?(Jn.13:34,35; I Cor.13) What does all this have to do with 'the lampstand'? How could they put the problem right?

2:7 Q.6 John closed with a phrase he had probably heard Jesus use.(Matt. 11:15) Put it into your own words. What was promised to these Christians if they returned to God's love for them and began again to love as He does?(Gen.2:9; Rev.22:2)

2:8 Q.7 The likely leader of the Christians in Smyrna at this time was Polycarp, a faithful old man who died a martyr in 155 AD at the age of at least 90. He was a pupil of John. According to history the church was still strong in Smyrna in his day. Of what part of the vision of Jesus from chapter one did John remind this church? What two aspects of the Lord was he highlighting?

2:9,10 Q.8 What was the good news and the bad news for Smyrna? What had they suffered so far? What was to come in the future? How could they have poverty and be rich at the same time?(Matt.6:19-21; Lk.18:22; Eph.1:18) How is this the secret of facing tough times? Why does God sometimes give advanced warning of trouble for Christians? Is it so that we can avoid problems?(Acts 9:16; 21:4-14)

2:10-11 Q.9 What was to be the response of the church to the information they were given? Why were they not told to repent like the church in Ephesus? What was promised to them if they were faithful? What was it?(I Cor.9:25; Phil. 3:14; II Tim.4:8; Rev.4:10) What was John's final encouragement to the Christians of Smyrna? What is the second death?(Rev.20:6,14; 21:8) If the body dies at the first death, what is left to die next time? How would knowing this help those in Smyrna?

2:12 Q.10 Pergamum was another ancient city otherwise unknown to us from the Bible. Archaeology has shown that it was a major centre of heathen temples including one to Zeus, the chief of the Greek gods, and Asklepios, the god of healing, whose temple was full of snakes so often in the Bible representative of Satan.(Gen.3:1; Rev.12:9) Which part of the vision from chapter one did John bring to their attention? How would it be particularly relevant to Christians facing such a range of false ideologies?

2:13-15 Q.11 How was the spiritual health of the church in Pergamum? What difficulties had they already experienced? In what two ways had they responded? John gave us more insight into the story of Balaam and Balak than is contained in Numbers 22-25. After his preparedness to curse God's people if the price was right and his consequent meeting with the Lord whom his donkey recognised before he did, how apparently was he behind Israel's problems in Num.25?(Num.31:16) How would teaching like this apply in Pergamum? Why would it be so destructive? What forms does it take today? Again we hear about the Nicolaitans, who presumably followed Nicolas. What sort of compromise with Satan might they have offered?

2:16,17 Q.12 What response was commanded of the Christians in Pergamum? What difference would it make in practice to the compromise with idolatry which was going on? How was the Lord Jesus Christ going to deal with the problem? How would those who had remained faithful be part of His response? What is the connection between verses 12 and 16? What is our response to be if we find ourselves in a situation where others are compromising with false teaching? What resource do we so often overlook? What two things were promised this time to those whose spiritual ears were really functioning? Where does each picture come from?(Exod.16:4; Jn.6:31-35; Isa.56:5; 65:15; Eph.2:20-22; I Pet.2:4-8; Rev.21:14) Again what confidence would such pictures give to these people?

2:18 Q.13 Thyatira was a more down to earth place. It had a long history as a garrison town and a centre for craftsmen. Even membership of a craft guild involved problems for a Christian because it often demanded heathen sacrifices which in turn could be linked to all kinds of immorality. Standing against such things could lose a craftsman his status and so his living. What aspects of Christ were emphasised this time? How might they be particularly relevant to the problems that follow? For what do we use our eyes and our feet?

2:19-25 Q.14 What was going well in Thyatira? How could things possibly go wrong with what sounded to be such a healthy mature church? What were the problems among these Christians? How do such problems begin? Why might the woman who led this movement be compared to Jezebel?(I Kgs.16:31; 19:2; 21:5-25; II Kgs.9:7,30-37) Who did Jezebel most readily manipulate? How did she do it? How might similar things be happening in Thyatira? What was Jezebel's fate? How would this be a warning to the church in Thyatira? What was to be the response of those who had been sucked into this false teaching? How on the other hand were those who had stayed clear to handle the problem in the church? What can we learn from their example? How would being reminded of the 'eyes like a flame of fire' and the 'feet like burnished bronze' help both those who were entangled and those who had stayed free?

2:26-29 Q.15 What was promised this time to those who remained victorious in Christ over such temptations? The promise was quoted from Psalm 2:8,9. Put this promise into your own words. Does this mean that Christians will have a military victory? Look up Acts 4:26 where the same Psalm is quoted on another similar occasion. What do these stories have in common? What kind of authority has the Lord promised us if we trust Him and do not compromise?(Matt.28:18-20) How does this work out in difficult situations like Thyatira? What final promise was made in verse 28 to those who really took notice?(I Jn.3:2; Rev.22:16) What was the significance of the morning star after a dark night? How does this picture apply to us?