

Bible Studies

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Revelation- Victory Book Chapters 1-11

Introducing

Letters from the Lord Himself
but written by John

From Study Groups

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(Revelation 3)

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Revelation 4:3

LETTERS FROM THE LORD HIMSELF BUT WRITTEN BY JOHN

John had written three times as moved by the Spirit to saints in the church in Ephesus, and perhaps to the others in Asia as well, for whom he would care as apostle and shepherd. From those, especially the Second in our Bible, we see foreshadowing of the alarming conditions in five of the seven assemblies. The dangerous behaviour of a Diotrephes (3 John vv.9-10) and the implied following he had among the saints is comparable to the corruptions that the Lord spotlights. We note the disappointment with which Paul also wrote, from his last imprisonment, 'All who are in Asia turned away from me', doubtless meaning those companions in Rome who had left him (2 Tim. 1:15).

John, however, is now writing messages from the Lord Himself, His character, that John could only imitate, expressed in every phrase. Unfailing, true love, even when exposing the lukewarm Laodiceans, is the clear motive, and authority rings out in warning.

The repeated 'I know ...' searches us also today, with the impassioned appeal of the Creator, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' He has already opened His right hand to show John His close protection of the seven messengers who will receive those weighty letters, as John Miller touchingly draws from the use of Greek *en* in 1:16 but *epi* in verse 20 ('Notes on the Book of the Revelation', *B.S.* 1958, p.34). Please read on through the articles from fellow students of the Book for their culling of the blessings promised to those who read.

How many scrolls and how long?
That each church received either its own copy of all the messages, or one scroll with seven letters which was passed from one to the next, is confirmed by the Lord's words, 'Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches' in each letter. Whether the copies were made separately before writing the rest of the book which now contains all the chapters to 22, we cannot say. The urgency

of the messages certainly suggests so, while a copy kept by John was extended with chapters 4-22. Doubtless all churches extant would make it their business to get a copy of the whole book in due course. It is possible that by divine enablement John compressed

receiving the visions and writing them into his scroll(s) within, say, a week; but of those receiving visions of judgements, Daniel for instance was physically overwhelmed and in one case needed days before he was fit to write (Dan. 8:27; cp. Rev. 1:17).

M.A.

From Study Groups . . .

THE LORD AND HIS CHURCHES IN SARDIS, PHILADELPHIA AND LAODICEA (Revelation 3)

From Aberdeen: *The expression 'the seven Spirits of God' surely indicates the diversity of the workings of the Holy Spirit of God and also His omnipresence. John Miller ('Notes on the Book of the Revelation', B.S. 1958, p.2) associates the 'seven Spirits of God' mentioned in Revelation 1:4, 3:1, 5:6 RV with 'the eyes of the LORD' being in every place, keeping watch (Prov. 15:3), and also in Zechariah 4:10 where we read about 'these seven which are the eyes of the LORD; they run to and fro through the whole earth.'*

To Sardis the Lord's message was devastating. They had a name which they weren't living up to: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead' (Rev. 3:1). What was the problem with Sardis? It had defiled garments. While Christian disciples journey through this life there are defilements to be guarded against. The Lord's prayer for believers is not that we should be taken out of the world, but that we would be 'kept out of the evil' (John 17:15 RVM).

Nevertheless, there were 'a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments' (Rev. 3:4). The spiritual condition of every saint in Sardis was accurately assessed by the all-seeing One. Some were in need of repentance and others were given assurance that they would walk with the Lord in white. Such a worthy saint was also assured that the Lord would 'in no wise blot his name out of the book of life' (3:5). This brings before us the question of God's records of believers' lives. John Miller helpfully distinguishes between two books, the Book of Life being distinct from the Lamb's Book of Life. Each one of us will stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ to receive a reward or rebuke 'for the deeds done in the body, whether good or bad' (2 Cor. 5:10). This would therefore correspond to the

Book of Life as being related to the believer's life of service, whereas the Lamb's Book of Life would be specifically related to the matter of the believer's eternal salvation.

James Johnson

From *Aberkenfig*: *Sardis*, about 50 miles NE of Ephesus, once a prominent and wealthy city, was devastated by an earthquake in AD 17. Sardis was also known for its manufacture of woollen garments. The church had a reputation for 'a name that thou livest, but thou art dead.' What did it mean that the church was dead? They were still a golden lampstand. Their position was right, but their condition was wrong. A lifeless formality had set in. 'Dead' means 'of poor quality' or 'useless', when referring to inanimate objects. They were urged to be watchful and remember what they had received and heard, keep it and repent. There were some who had *not* defiled their garments (or habits) and their behaviour was commended, using such words as 'walk with me in white.' We must walk with Him in His ways; but He will not walk with us in our ways if they are unworthy. Verses 4-5 (RV) state 'they will walk with me in white ... they are worthy', and they would be acknowledged before the Father and before His angels.

The church in Philadelphia links back to 1:18—He has the keys; He was dead, but He is alive for evermore. Philadelphia, like Sardis, was destroyed with ten other cities by a severe earthquake; it sits on a geological fault. (Some commentators date this to 17 BC, others to 17 AD.) The Lord first presents Himself as holy and true, i.e. perfectly pure in His righteousness and completely trustworthy in His character. He is of absolute holiness, as is true of the Father and the Holy Spirit. He also is the one who is true: He could not say anything that is untrue. Further, He has the key of David: He opens and closes doors that none can alter. It echoes the imagery from Isaiah 22 in judgement on the treacherous leader Shebna, whose office was given to Eliakim, a faithful man. Eliakim was a dependable administrator of his father's affairs, who was given 'the keys of the house of David' and to a limited extent (see v.23) is a picture of our Lord Jesus.

The Lord knows the works of those in Philadelphia, and that they had kept His word and had not denied His name; for this they were commended but they had only a little power, indicating that at an earlier time greater power would have been shown by them, the open door referring to opportunity for preaching (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9) [Comment 1].

There was instability, not only geologically but from social and personal upheaval which was causing severe unrest. This conflict arose due to those of the strong Jewish community who were 'the synagogue of Satan', refusing to accept Jesus as Messiah, and as members of the church, resulting in false teachers infiltrating it. In contrast with the region's instability, 'He that overcometh, I will

make him a pillar in the temple of my God' (v.12) [Comment 2].

Laodicea There wasn't one commendation, but rather they were proud, materialistic and lazy, and so became self-sufficient and self-righteous. Their wealth and independent spirit led the church to become self-reliant and apathetic towards the authority of Christ. Hierapolis was 6 miles north, and had hot springs. Colossae, known for its refreshing cold springs, was 10 miles east; but both lay below the level of Laodicea. Water there was tepid and sometimes bitter or chalky after travelling along stone aqueducts. Cold water has therapeutic and culinary uses as does hot water, but lukewarm water is unpleasant, insipid, and rather useless. So it was with their works: they were half-hearted, insincere and self-indulgent, reflecting nothing of the love of Christ. They considered God unnecessary. Christ has in essence said 'You make Me sick!' and yet He has the grace and love to say to those who overcome that 'He will sup with them.'

Bill Paterson

From Cromer: *The recording* John was to write what he would see on a scroll and send it to the seven churches. Does the order in which the churches are listed indicate that there was one scroll of prophecy and that this would be taken, by a messenger, to the churches in the order given? [Comment 3] For each church there would be an additional letter applicable to their particular church, as given in chapters 2 and 3. It does not seem reasonable that the individual letters would be included in the scroll of prophecy [see 'Introducing', para. 3—*Eds*]. Following that route the distances are approximately: Ephesus 50 mls; Smyrna 7; Pergamum 50; Thyatira 40; Sardis 35; Philadelphia 55; then Thyatira. Such a journey would have taken the messenger at least two months to complete.

Sardis In Roman times it was a large, wealthy city, but at the time of John's writing was decreasing in size in favour of the newly reconstructed town of Smyrna. Today near the remains of the city of Sardis, is the small village of Siri.

Credits: A reputation of being alive; some among them who are still worthy.
Debits: They had not lived up to their reputation and were a dead church. There was, however, the possibility of strengthening what remained, through repentance and obedience, because of those who had held fast to their beliefs.

Promise: Those who respond and overcome their apathy will be acknowledged before God.

Philadelphia A small town which suffered from frequent earthquakes, but was between a fertile plateau and a broad valley leading down to the sea. This resulted in it being an important commercial centre. As many people had left the town because of the earthquakes, the church was correspondingly small and weak.

Credits: 'You have kept my word. You have not denied my name.' They had

endured patiently.

Debit: There were some among them who made false claims [see Comment 2].

Question: Does the open door refer to an opportunity for the continuance of the church in Philadelphia or does it refer to the future Kingdom? [Comments 4 and 9]

Promises: 'I will keep you from the hour of trial ... I am coming soon ... He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God' (3:10-12 ESV).

Laodicea Lying at the crossroads of two trading routes, Laodicea was a wealthy city. Because of its position there were no nearby water sources or hot springs, and so the reference to the church being lukewarm may be a likening to the water that they received.

Credit/Debit: There seems to be nothing to commend the church in Laodicea. They were too content with their wealth in material things and did not realise their lack in spiritual things. They were however, a loved people, and if they were repentant and ready to overcome their desire for earthly wealth there would be a place [of continued fellowship in service on earth—*Eds.*] for them with the Lord.

David Hickling

From Greenock: *Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea* Many of the saints in Sardis and Laodicea were materially rich but spiritually poor: 'wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked' (v.17) are words that may be applied to the saints in both churches. Their Lord and Master was poor when He was on earth, owning nothing but the clothes on His back. It should have been enough for them that the 'servant be as his Master, and the disciple as his Lord' (Mat. 10:25 AV). There are no words of censure from the Lord to the church of God in Philadelphia. The Philadelphian saints must have lived out in their lives the meaning of the name of their city—'brotherly love', and we deduce that their spirit of unity and humility was well-pleasing to the Lord, who had loved them (v.9). The Lord offered great rewards to those who would become overcomers in the seven churches in Asia, but His greatest gift to them was Himself and the assurance that He would be with them always.

The only requirements to enter the Door (the Lord) were a true and honest heart, true repentance, and to leave behind the sins of a past life. Conversely, as a door is double-sided, so Jesus is the Door (John 10:7-9), and sinners must come to Him to be saved; there the Lord longingly waits for the door of each heart to be opened so that a close relationship can be had between the Lord and the believer. Sadly, the Lord often waits outside some hearts' doors into which He may never enter. An open door—inviting, welcoming, challenging—but where is the Lord? Is He still on the outside of the door of our hearts that He bought and cleansed by His precious blood, waiting and longing to be invited in? With Christ we can accomplish anything through Him; without Him we can do nothing. [Comment 5]

John Peddie

From Halifax: *Behold, I stand and knock* John was next instructed by the Lord, who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, to write to the church in Sardis (Rev. 3:1). The saints here were called upon to be ‘watchful’ (v.2), literally ‘become awake and on the watch’, or ‘vigilant’ (see 1 Pet. 5:8). They were to remember what they had received and heard, to hold fast and to repent.

He that is holy and true — the Holy One of God (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34)—the worthy possessor of the ‘key of David’ (v.7; cp. Is. 22:22), in His word for the church in Philadelphia commends them: they had little strength, but they kept His word and denied not His name (v.8) [cp. Comment 11]. For this church there was an ‘open door’; a door that even those of ‘the synagogue of Satan’ (v. 9) could not close [see Comment 4].

Finally, ‘the Amen, the faithful and true witness’ gives His message to the church of the Laodiceans. He speaks of Himself as being ‘the beginning of God’s creation’ (Rev. 3:14 ESV). Paul instructed the Colossians that his letter be read in the nearby Laodicean church (Col. 4:16). It is therefore evident that the pre-eminence of the risen Lord, ‘the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature’ (1:15) was well known in the Laodicean church. Yet they were lukewarm. A.T. Robertson (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*) explains that ‘neither cold’ in Revelation 3:15 (Gk. *oute psuchros*) is from the old word *psucho*, which means to ‘grow cold’ (see Mat. 24:12). So the Lord stirs them up to being zealous and repentant (Rev. 3:19) saying, ‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me’ (v.20).

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): *The Sardis church* is credited for having some few members who did not defile themselves—those who represented their God and stood for Him. The majority of the people there, however, had become dead as to their works. God is warning us as His church that He wants earnest commitment.

Philadelphia as a church had little strength, yet they still kept the word of God and did not deny God’s name. They were, however, faced with temptation because it is always easy for a bad thing to spoil good things.

The church in Laodicea also did not do well because God does not like spiritual smugness (2 Cor. 10:12).

God is all-knowing. He sees everywhere and the intent of each heart. This shows us that God weighs every one of us in His scale. We equally need to examine ourselves to know whether we are still in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Each church of God might think that it stands. God’s message for us is like the message He sent to Belshazzar—‘Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting’

(Dan. 5:27 AV). So the elders and the church of God must give sound judgement on major sin. The responsibility is given to them in chapter 3:2—Wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die.

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: The implications of just one man from each church being among only seven in the right hand of the exalted Son of God (1:20) are weighty. For instance: Why this singular privilege and responsibility of those ‘star’ individuals if the context is churches of God always led by a united elderhood of equals? [Comment 6] And why not an elder, if accountability is in view (Heb.13:17)? Each ‘angel’ serving independently, as perhaps the church’s recognizable elder, apostle or prophet (see 22:9) seems to conflict with plural responsibility. Anyway, why use Gk. *aggelos* and not *presbuteros*, *prophētēs*, or especially *apostolos* (as in 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil.2:25; Rev.2:2)? Why take *aggelos* as a human ‘messenger’ of a church here, when despite that valid translation alternative the word is never used elsewhere as a significant description of a person in a church of God? Why should the same word *aggelos*, have different meanings in the same passage (3:1,5)? Perhaps these are among the reasons all major versions of the Bible uniformly translate as ‘angel’ not ‘messenger’ in Chapters 2 and 3.

Contrariwise, however, some see insuperable difficulties if *angelos* here represents a spirit and not a man.

First, *why* ‘write’ rather than speak to a visible angel, i.e., does not writing imply a distant and human recipient? But writing is not confined to our normal earthly activity (e.g. Ps. 119:89; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Rev.13:8), though we may not understand all that is meant by heavenly recording. *All* Scripture is recorded in heaven. Writing rather than speaking may be commanded for emphasis, precision and especially to record accountability.

Second, *how* practically could John write to a spirit, and why, if the message is for earthly churches? Certainly, John eventually wrote from Patmos the whole book to all ‘the seven *churches*’ (1:4), fulfilling the command given in 1:11. But in chapters 2 and 3 the context is explicitly writing ‘to the *angel*’, and is the outworking of a command given while in the Spirit he sees himself at the feet of the glorified Christ in heaven (1:10,17-19). Writing to seven different ‘angels’ is what, in the continuing vision, he simply saw himself told to do at that point. Elsewhere, he records other parts of the vision, received while he was ‘in the Spirit’ (note: 1:10; 4:2; 17:3), including approaching an angel who gives him a scroll, which he eats (10:4,9-10). If we can accept that a spirit gives a document to John, is it more difficult to accept that John visualizes writing to an angel? [Comment 7]

What John writes in these chapters are Christ's heavenly views of earthly conditions. The seven angels become first recipients of the Spirit's words 'to the churches' (e.g. 3:6). Those same words are subsequently conveyed orally on earth [Comment 8] as part of reading the whole book, and the objective then is for people on earth to see what their assigned angel is already aware of and be reminded overcoming earthly activity must conform to heavenly precedent, prescience and requirements (Mat. 6:10; Ps. 67:2; 103:20-22; Rev. 3—'I know'; 22:6,18). The rest of Revelation will provide insights into angelic deployments to make that so.

Geoff Hydon

From Podagatlapalli: *The Lord and His church in Sardis (3:1-6)* The church had a reputation as being alive to human eyes, yet God, who sees the inner spirit, declared it to be dead. The problem was not heresy but spiritual death. Its deeds were evil and its garments soiled. They were urged to hold onto the Christian truth that they had heard when they first believed in Christ, and to get back to the basics of the faith. It is important to grow in our knowledge of the Lord to deepen our understanding through careful study. Jesus will always be God's Son, and His sacrifice for our sins remains permanent. No new truth from God will ever contradict these Biblical teachings. The book of life is a register of the manner of our service to God. 'Clothed in white' means set apart for God and made pure, yet we must walk worthily and keep ourselves unspotted from the world. We are exhorted not to lose our crown or our reward.

The Philadelphia saints (3:7-13) were faithful to God and He was pleased with them. The key of David represents Christ's authority to open the door of invitation into His future kingdom [Comment 9]. After it is opened no one can close it. Salvation is assured and once it is closed no one can open it. Judgment is certain (3:8) [see Comment 4]. Philadelphia and Smyrna were the only churches to receive completely positive messages from Christ. God would vindicate their faithfulness. It is not what we accomplish but what we *are* that really counts with God. In verse 10 'I will protect you from the time of great tribulation' can also be translated, 'I will keep you from falling in the hour of testing.' We believe there will be a future time of great tribulation from which true believers of this present age will be spared. The emphasis then and now is on patiently obeying God through suffering. Christians have different gifts, abilities, experience and maturity (v.11). God does not expect us all to be the same, but He does expect us to persevere in using our assets for Him. The Philadelphians are commended for their effort to obey and encouraged to hold tightly to whatever strength they have (v.8).

The Lord's church in Laodicea (3:14-22) This city was the wealthiest of the seven cities of Asia, known for its banking industry, manufacture of wool and a medical

school that produced eye salve. The church had become lukewarm and thus distasteful and repugnant. Indifference had led them to idleness. By neglecting to do anything for Christ, the church had become hardened and self-satisfied. The church was destroying itself (3:17). What the Laodiceans could see and buy had become more valuable to them than what is unseen and eternal. Wealth, luxury and ease can make people feel confident, satisfied and complacent; but no matter how much we possess or how much money we make, we have nothing if we don't have a vital relationship with Christ.

Christ told the saints to buy their gold from Him. The city was proud of its cloth and dyeing industries, but Christ told them that they were naked and must purchase white garments from Him. Laodicea prided itself on its precious salve that healed many eye problems, but Christ told them to get medicine from Him to heal their eyes so they could see the truth. Their possessions and achievements were valueless compared with the everlasting future of the kingdom of Christ (3:19). God would discipline this lukewarm church unless they turned from their indifference toward Him. His purpose in discipline is not to punish, but to bring people back to Himself.

B.V. Prasada Rao

From Ravulapalem: *Sardis* The significance of the prize awarded to the overcomer is that some who have not defiled their garments will be allowed to walk with Christ in white for their worthiness. They will be clothed in white raiment, their names will not be erased from the book of life, and the Lord will confess them before His father and His angels.

Philadelphia Those who kept the Word with patience would be kept from the hour of temptation, and the synagogue of Satan would come and fall down in respect before their feet. The overcomer will become a pillar in the temple of God and will be protected in it, as seen in Jacob's recognition of the house of God (Gen. 28:22). James, Peter and John were as pillars (Gal. 2:9), and in 1 Timothy 3:15 the church of the living God as a whole is seen also as a pillar. The name of God and the name of the city of God, which is new Jerusalem, will be written upon him [Comment 10].

Laodicea As the Lord is knocking on the door, and when anyone comes to open the door the Lord will come in, and both will eat together. The overcomer will be granted to sit with the Lord, even as He too overcame and sat down with His Father on His throne. Since as many as Lord loves He rebukes and chastens, so we must be zealous and repent (3:19).

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *Debts to be remedied* The almighty God 'has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities' (Ps. 103:10)

NKJV). For, indeed: ‘If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared’ (Ps. 130:3-4). The Lord, however, does not merely gloss over our sins and transgressions, as if they are inconsequential. To do this would be untrue to His essence of supreme holiness and purity: ‘For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones”’ (Is. 57:15). It is in keeping with His nature—‘You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness’ (Hab. 1:13)—that the Lord discloses the deficits in the lives of His saints: ‘for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives’ (Heb. 12: 5-6).

The church of God in Sardis was in an utterly sad state. The Lord’s assessment was unflattering. There was no doubt as to the incalculable value of the saints in Sardis, for they had ‘been redeemed not with corruptible things, like silver or gold, ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot’ (1 Pet. 1:18); and as a church: ‘the church of God which He purchased with His own blood’ (Acts 20:28). Although positionally alive, yet the church was dead regarding the good works which God had foreordained for us to do (Eph. 2:10). The Lord’s antidote for revival and restoration was to ‘be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God’ (Rev. 3:2).

It is indeed intriguing that, juxtaposed between a dead church and a lukewarm church, is the faithful *church of the Philadelphians*, for whom the Lord had nothing but commendation. Their seeming debit, ‘for you have a little strength,’ was a means of displaying the grace and glory of the Lord in their midst, like those who out of weakness were made strong (Heb. 11:34) [Comment 11].

The Lord constantly reviews the work of His churches, and *the Laodiceans* were in a perilous state: ‘neither hot nor cold’ and deluded as to their self-importance and attainments. The Lord, the righteous judge, laid down the plumb-line: ‘I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you might be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see’ (3:18). As always, it is only all about the Lord in His dealings with His churches.

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Aberkenfig): It may rather be that the open door was now before the Philadelphians, since the verb is perfect tense, so the Lord may have acted shortly before speaking. On their weakness, cp. Cromer paper para. 3 and Comment 4.

2. (Aberkenfig and others): '*Synagogue of Satan*' is an extreme way to describe any group of saints within the assembly. Given the commendation of the Philadelphians in verse 8, it is more probable that the contrasting conduct of verse 9 belongs to the recognised synagogue of Jews in the city, who would proudly claim descent from Abraham, but were devoid of his godly character and faith, and were being used by Satan to attack the testimony of the church.

M.A.

The force of the Lord's language that He would cause those of the synagogue of Satan to pay homage to the faithful saints in the church in Philadelphia marks a clear distinction, heralding the fact there had been a hostile Jewish element in the synagogue who were determined to bring the testimony of this assembly of the Lord into disrepute.

R.B.F.

3. (Cromer): There can be no doubt that it was one book / scroll that contained the different messages for each church, and this would have been passed on from one to the other in all likelihood by correspondents / messengers of the churches after the readings, when possibly copies would have been taken for further 'digestion' (Rev. 1:11). Perusal of a map would indicate the natural journey would have been northward along the three coastal churches, then moving inland and southward for the remaining four. (See also Comment 8 and 'Introducing', last para.)

R.B.F.

4. (Cromer and Podagatlapalli): *The open door of Revelation 3:8* The mention shortly before of the work the Philadelphia saints had done points to opportunity for further witness. In all the churches, the Lord wishes to see effective witness to the gospel and the truth of discipleship, but it was time in this case for immediate action.

M.A.

5. (Greenock) That a door is double-sided is relevant to Revelation 3 where the Lord knocks on the outside and waits for the door to be opened from the inside by the believer. The picture in John 10 is completely different. There the Door,

being the Lord Himself and not the believer (nor anyone or anything else) has no relevance to the Revelation scripture.

P.D.

6. (Mount Forest): There is no reason to ascribe any form of ascendancy to any man in the churches being described as a 'star'. The recipients are merely channels of communication chosen by the Lord for the delivery of His messages to the churches.

R.B.F.

7. (Mount Forest): *The seven 'angels' of the churches (1:11, 2:1 etc.)* The word *aggelos* for a man expected to communicate a scroll written by a man, but with contents formed by the Son of God, to people on earth, could be chosen by the Lord to set the level of importance for these messages from the owner to His churches. There are several uses of the word for John the Baptist as a prophet sent by God, most quoting from the Greek LXX. The Lord also endorses the authority of the first recipients, and His personal protection of them, by displaying them as stars held in His own hand, radiating light sourced in the holder. Those brothers were surely the expected correspondents of the churches, since they had to convey the contents to those who could read and doubtless others who couldn't, and they'd encounter sharply divided responses to the messages. They would, however, be men who bore much responsibility in their normal assembly work.

A basic principle in interpretation of this remarkable book is to accept that (a) some language means what it normally does to the human reader, while (b) descriptions that cannot be structured within the physical rules of our world (e.g. the cubic form of the holy city in 22:16-17) are expressed in terms that remind us of the limits of our present perception, and may either bear symbolic meaning(s), or foreshadow future conditions we are not ready to understand in full (e.g. the properties of a spirit body). Similarly, it is common to have two distinct senses of the same word in one short passage, as context requires. In each case we need to decide which applies, hence the argument made here for (a) as to the scrolls, their scribe, and the men who received them; but (b) for their appearance as stars held in a hand.

M.A.

8. (Mount Forest): *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* notes that the Greek word *aggelos* "a messenger, an angel, one sent," is translated "messenger," of John the Baptist, Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27; in the plural, of John's "messengers," Luke 7:24; of those whom Christ sent before Him when on His journey to Jerusalem, Luke 9:52; of Paul's "thorn in the flesh", "a

messenger of Satan”, 2 Corinthians 12:7; of the spies as received by Rahab, James 2:25.’

The implication that the use of *aggelos* in the context of letters written with pen and ink and sent from John to the seven churches, means heavenly angels rather than human messengers representing each church, creates an unnecessary difficulty. John is given a vision in which the Lord Jesus gives him a message for each church. John then writes by hand what he has heard and seen (as commanded in Rev 1:19) and gives this written record to the seven men who are messengers from and to their respective churches, so that they will convey the Lord's words to the saints. There is no scriptural indication that angelic beings from heaven were involved, in contrast to precedents where they are specifically identified as such, for example Judg. 6:11; 13:3, Zech. 1:11, Mat. 1:20, Mat. 2:19, Luke 1:11,26 etc.

9. (Podagatlapalli): *The key of David* While recognising that “the key of David” includes the future Millennial kingdom fulfilment of God’s purposes, the primary message for the church of God in Philadelphia was that the Lord was going to open up a new opportunity for them to preach the gospel and make disciples, as Comments 1 and 4 suggest.

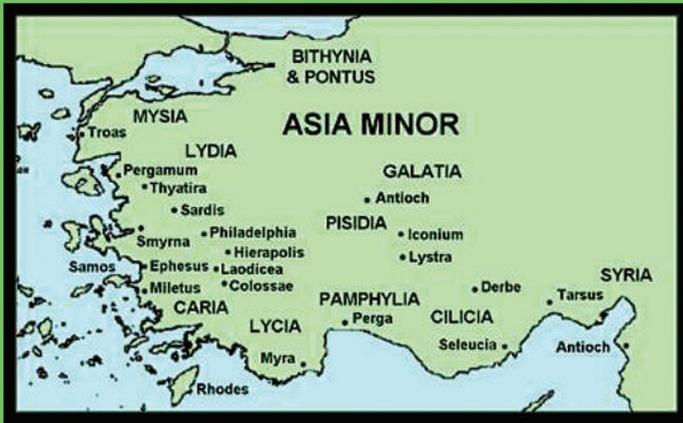
J.J.

10. (Ravulapalem) I take it that friends have in mind a future reward for overcomers (for consistency with the other promises to overcomers) although the references given relate to the earthly House of God. It seems to me that the metaphor of the pillar and three (not two) divine and heavenly names suggests nearness to God in the future day rather than protection and office-holding in the present.

P.D.

11. (Surulere and others): *A little power* It has been suggested that the church in Philadelphia could have been much reduced in number through persecution of their faithful stance. Cromer paper notes the probable effect of the earthquake of 66 B.C. Certainly no other reason is given in the rest of the account for their having only a little power. The Lord gives realistic assessment, since assemblies today may know all too well the limitations of lack of numbers and skills, but many examples in Scripture show that the Lord can work wonders with willing hearts, whether many or few (e.g. 1 Sam. 14:6).

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