

## THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation: 1:17-2:7 | Session 4 | When Angels are not Angels, and Churches are not Churches

The characteristics of Jesus presented in Revelation 1 are those we have not fully seen elsewhere in Scripture. At His first coming, Jesus came to His people, born of a virgin, announced as the One who would “Save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Jesus came to “Seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10; Matthew 15:24). He referred to himself as the “Bread of Life” (John 6:35), the “Light of the world” (John 8:12), the “Door of the sheep (Israel)” (John 10:7), the “Good Shepherd (to Israel)” (John 10:11), and “The Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). These were the humble earthly features of Jesus.

At His second coming, His attributes are no longer earthly but heavenly. He is not returning at His second coming as a lowly, humble servant, rather,

*His head and hair will be white like wool, as white as snow; his eyes will be a flame of fire; his feet like brass, as if burned in a furnace, and his voice as powerful as the sound of many waters. Out of his mouth will come a sharp two-edged sword, and his face will be as bright as the Sun when it shines in all its strength. (Revelation 1:14-16).*

The purpose of the two-edged sword is found in Revelation 19:15, “*And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he will rule them with a rod of iron....*” More about that when we get to chapter 19 (see also 19:21).

This is Jesus Christ the Almighty, coming as King of kings, as the Almighty Judge and Ruler over all. At the first coming, the shepherds rejoiced at the sight of the Christ child; But seeing the vision of His second coming, John *fell at his feet as dead* where we left off in our last session.

Verses 17, 18—

Jesus, the Almighty Judge, speaks to John, who is lying prostrate before him, **Fear not**. What John saw was enough to put fear into him. To see the glorified Creator, the first and the last, might be more than a mere man could handle. But John also saw his Savior, who died and rose again. What greater words could John hear from the mouth of the King of kings? Although He is ready to Judge the earth, His grace shines forth to John and implores him to be unafraid. If this were John the apostle (which I believe he is), he should have recognized Jesus, but perhaps not in His glorified state (see description above).

Therefore, Jesus must assure him, John, **I am the first and the last: it is me, he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore**. This is the resurrected Christ, the One who holds **the keys of hell** (Literally, Hades or the grave) **and death**. Romans 14:9 says, “*For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.*”

Verse 19—

Based on the following statement, John is writing this introduction after seeing the Revelation. Jesus commands him to **Write the things which thou hast seen**, past tense, that is, the entire Revelation he has already seen.

We also know this introduction is written after the fact because of 1:2, where it says **John bare record...of all the things he saw**.

He is to **write the things which are**. He is to write *what they signify*. (Greek, *eisi* = *what they signify*) and, **The things which shall be hereafter**, or as Daniel 10:14 says, “in the latter days.”

John is instructed to write one account of the future. This entire book is prophetic, and remember that it is one record, one Revelation, and one prophecy (Rev. 1:1-3). Verse 19 describes one Revelation, not three, as some erroneously think.

Verse 20—

In vs. 16, Jesus held seven stars in his right hand; he says it’s a mystery that He will now reveal. (The book of Revelation typically explains symbols in the text. There is no need to allegorize). The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. We will see shortly that the seven golden candlesticks, or lampstands, are light-bearing churches, and the stars represent the angels of the churches.

Before looking at the candlesticks, let’s consider angels.

### When Angels are Not Angels

**Angels.** We should always stop and consider this word, angels, when we read it in scripture. The word angel in Greek is *angelos*. It always means some kind of *messenger, envoy, or one sent, human or otherwise*. It does not always mean “*an angelic being*.”

John the Baptist was a human, but he’s called an angelos. The word angelos is used 186 times in the New Testament and is sometimes translated as messenger. For example, angelos in Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, and Luke 7:27 refer to John the Baptist, “Behold, I send my messenger (angelos) before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”

#### OTHER USES OF ANGELOS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- In Luke 7:24, *messengers (angelos)* came to Jesus to ask if He was Christ or Messiah they were waiting for.
- In Luke 9:52, Jesus sent 77 *messengers (angleos)* into a village of the Samaritans.

- The book of James recounts the Old Testament account of Rahab, who had *received the messengers (angelos)...that is, the spies* (James 2:25).

All of these examples are humans referred to as angelos. Therefore the phrase, **angels of the seven churches**, does not require them to be created heavenly beings as we might think. Do you see why it is important to figure out the context? We will come back to angels in a moment.

## When Churches are not Churches

**Churches.** Let's review the word, **churches**, in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. As we saw in the previous sessions, the word church is always translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning the congregation or assembly, Christian or otherwise. An *ekklesia* could be a mob of people on the street corner.

We should not assume that the **seven churches** in the next two chapters are identical to the church we attend. Because we already know that the Tribulation is the time of Jacob's trouble and not the time of trouble for the body of Christ, we can be fairly confident that these **seven churches** are seven assemblies of Jews, or the assembly of the Lord's people (which is always Israel).

Something that should seal the deal for us is that the **seven churches** we will read about are Jewish. We can surmise that from what we read in 2:9 and 3:9, the word *synagogue* is used, **the synagogue of Satan**. That term is *used in relation to the other assemblies (i.e., synagogues)*<sup>1</sup>. The seven churches in Revelation are seven Jewish synagogues.

Let's go with that for now and look again, with this in mind, at the word **angel** as it is used regarding the seven Jewish synagogues. We have already seen that the word **angel** means messenger, and the messenger can be human. There is an interesting fact that, while not mentioned in the Bible, but found in Jewish texts, writings, and traditions, in Judaism and specifically in the *synagogue*, there is a leader called in the Hebrew the *Shaliach Tzibur*. This leader is referred to as the *messenger of the community*. Jews would know this very well.

“A SHALIACH TZIBUR (שליח ציבור) — literally “messenger of the community” — refers to anyone who leads services in the synagogue, not necessarily someone professionally trained or specifically hired for the job. Shaliach Tzibur is the term used to refer to in the Talmud and later Jewish legal codes<sup>2</sup> as prayer leader. In theory, anyone can serve in this

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are (of the synagogue of the) Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan”

<sup>2</sup> Documents which discuss the specific laws and requirements of prayer at length. The Talmud is the central text and primary source of Jewish religious law.

position, but the Shulchan Aruch (a text of Jewish law) states that a Shaliach Tzibur must be one who is “fit” — that is, free of sin, possessing a good reputation, humble, acceptable to the community, skilled at chanting, and who is well versed in sacred texts.”<sup>3</sup>

This messenger is perhaps what we might call the Pastor. Therefore, my assumption (which is becoming more solid as we step through this study) is that the seven churches are seven synagogues. The angel of the churches are men: the *community's messengers—the congregation's leaders* in each of the synagogues. *And the seven letters we are about to read are for Tribulation Saints (Jews) living during the Seven-year Tribulation (see session 3, Are the Seven Churches Symbolic?). All of this, put together, lends more sense to the passages we will read in the next two chapters. It keeps our interpretation consistent that Revelation is not about the church or body of Christ as we refer to it today; rather, it is Jewish through and through.*

In truth, English translations have misled us to a degree with their one-word-fits-all translation of *angelos* and *ekklesia*.

Chapters 2 and 3 contain the seven letters which will find their true interpretation and fulfillment during the Day of the Lord (The Tribulation) by the people on the Earth during that Day: that is, by Israel and those who latch on to Israel and embrace the Law and Jesus as Messiah. If we don't interpret this correctly from the beginning, we will make a mess of the rest of the book.

These letters are very Jewish and works based; they have no grace. If we say these letters are addressed to the body of Christ, then all that Paul wrote in his epistles are to be found wanting because, as we about to see, there is nothing in the letters to the seven churches about Christianity as we call our faith today, or our standing in Christ (i.e., we are washed, sanctified, justified, complete, perfect). There is nothing in these letters that harmonizes with the apostle Paul, who states, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus...”, rather the seven letters are filled with warnings, reproof, and promises given only to those who overcome and endure to the end.

These letters are not written for those in the body of Christ; we must rightly divide and assign them to assemblies in a dispensation to follow after the body of Christ has been raptured.

Again, the **seven stars are the seven angels** (*angelos*), and the **seven candlesticks are the seven churches** (*ekklesia*).

## To the Angel of the Church of Ephesus

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-cantor/>

Chapter 2:1—

**Unto the angel**, that is, the Jewish messenger **of the church of Ephesus** (the Jewish assembly as we have already discussed), **write; These things saith he...** he is the glorified Jesus as He was described in 1:13ff who was in the ***midst of the seven golden candlesticks (the seven assemblies)***.

Verse 2—

**I know thy works**, in the dispensation of the Law, this is always how God dealt with Israel, by their works (all seven letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 begin with works)<sup>4</sup>. In the Tribulation, the Jews will be back under the Law. Grace (in which works are not allowed) will no longer be offered. Anyone on earth during the Tribulation cannot and will not be saved by grace through faith. They will have to practice works and overcome to the end to enter the Kingdom, as we will see in these seven letters. The dispensation of grace has ended with the Rapture of the body of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). The prophet Isaiah presents a picture of the Day of the Lord (The Tribulation):

For, behold, the LORD will come with fire,  
And with his chariots like a whirlwind,  
To render his anger with fury,  
And his rebuke with flames of fire.  
For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh:  
And the slain of the LORD shall be many...  
**...For I know their works** and their thoughts:  
It shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues;  
And they shall come, and see my glory.<sup>5</sup>

**And thy labour, and thy patience.** This will be necessary in the Tribulation. The patience of the saints is referred to in Revelation 14:12, *“They that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”* This is what Jesus commends the assembly for in Ephesus, **how thou canst not bear them which are evil and thou hast tried false apostles...and found them liars** (Greek: *pseudes*: fake).

Verse 3—

This assembly of Jews will have enduring **patience and** will not grow weary in their labor. The Jews in this assembly sound faithful...

Verse 4—

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<sup>4</sup> Revelation 2:2,9,13,19; 3:1,8 15

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 66:15,16,18.

**Nevertheless, I have something against thee...thou hast left thy first love.** They had a love for the Lord a first, but it appears to be waning. This can be true of churches through the centuries—and individual Christians. Love for Christ can wane due to the cares of the world. We need always to remind ourselves of our first love.

Verse 5—

**Remember...from whence you have fallen, and repent.** When Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, he told them they were *blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)*. These blessings were a gift from God to the Ephesians.

If this Revelation letter were written to a church existing in the dispensation of grace, then this command to **repent** would not make sense, especially in light of Romans 11:29, *“For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.”*<sup>6</sup>

**Do the first works, or else.** For this assembly, works are required for the Lord to return. **I will come...will remove thy candlestick...except thou repent.** Where is any assurance of salvation here? There is none.

Repentance was always the **first work** of Israel and was a condition of the Law and for God’s blessing on them; Leviticus 26:40-42; Deuteronomy 30:1-3; Daniel 9:3,4; Zechariah 1:3.

Repentance is **the first work**, and just like in the early chapters of the book of Acts, it was required as the one condition for a national blessing of Israel and proclaimed by John the Baptist, Matthew 3:2; Jesus, Matthew 4:17; and Peter, Acts 2:38. Because many people do not rightly divide, it has become common for pastors to tell people they must first repent before they can be saved. Since repentance is a work or something you do, it is not grace.

Verse 6—

**Thou hatest the deeds of Nicolaitans, which I also hate.** The Nicolaitans are also mentioned in verse 15. During the Day of the Lord, the meaning of the Nicolaitans will be known. Otherwise, there is no meaning we can connect to this group (presumably a group of people). Nevertheless, notice that the deeds which are hated. While difficult to do in practice, we should not hate the men and women who practice evil deeds—but we must speak out and hate and repudiate their deeds and doctrines. Unfortunately, that will often be misconstrued as hating the person.

Verse 7—

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<sup>6</sup> ESV and other modern translations in Romans 11:29 use, incorrectly, the word irrevocable in place of *without repentance*.

**He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.** Jesus used this phrase six times in the Gospels; it is used in Revelation eight times. The Bible says, “The natural man receives not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

**To him that overcometh.** While the idea of being an overcomer has crept into our Christian language, the apostle Paul never referred to believers in the body of Christ as *overcomers*. There is not even a hint that believers in the dispensation of grace have to overcome. Those who are “complete in him” have no other needs (Colossians 2:10).

The admonishment to *overcome* fits perfectly in this Day of the Lord scenario where Israel must do works and overcome the *beast/antichrist*. They will need to *endure to the end*.

The recipients of the seven letters will be Jews living in the prophetic days we will read about as we study this book of Revelation. They will be the special *overcomers* of the specific form of evil that will unfold in this book.

Jesus prophesied of those who would endure, during the Day of the Lord, to the end (Matthew 24:13). The promise for *overcoming* is to **eat of the tree of life...in the paradise of God** (Revelation 22.2). The Paradise of God likely refers to the future New Earth, when the curse of the old will be removed.

We will see that all seven assemblies will receive a Promise for *overcoming*. There are six assemblies to go, and we will pick up here next time.