

If you want to know Christ better, the book of Revelation is a tremendous help. It's here we learn some things about Christ not seen quite so clearly elsewhere in the Bible.

Discuss: Like what? What do we learn about Christ in Revelation?

The book of Revelation is the record of a vision(s) that Jesus gave to the apostle John. He was exiled on Patmos towards the end of the first century at the time.

The Lord gave John specific instructions concerning what he was to do with the revelation he was privileged to see. He was to send it to seven churches located in Asia Minor.

In 1:11 Jesus told John, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches..." In 1:19 He repeated, "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."

Q: What was the first thing John saw? Notice verse 12. John turned to see the voice that spoke to him (in verse 11). What did he see? First He saw "seven golden lampstands" (12), and then in their midst someone "like a son of man" (13).

In 1:13-16, John describes the Risen, Glorified Savior. His portrait utilizes highly symbolic images: dressed in a long robe, head and hair as white as snow, eyes like blazing fire, etc.

Then in 1:17-20 John *heard* the Risen, Glorified Savior speak.

A Key Q: What do the seven lampstands represent, according to Jesus' words in verse 20? The seven churches. What seven churches? The ones who will receive this revelation.

Chapters 2-3 record a series of letters Jesus sent to these churches...

Discuss: In *general* (we'll get more specific in a moment), what stands out about the letters of Revelation 2-3? What phrases are repeated? What structure is followed?

General Observations about the Seven Letters:

1. *Each letter is addressed "to the angel of the church" in a particular city.*

The word "angel" can also be translated "messenger." The *NIV Study Bible* summarizes three common interpretations. 1) Heavenly messengers, 2) Earthly messengers/ministers, or 3) Personifications of the prevailing spirit of each church.

Note: Each of the seven churches received the *whole* book of Revelation, not just the particular letter addressed to it.

2. *The order of the letters seems to be geographical in orientation.*

Jesus begins with Ephesus and moves clockwise through the next six cities (almost in a horseshoe shape). See map.

Note: In apocalyptic literature, the number "seven" often represents completeness.

Note: Some scholars have suggested that the seven letters give an overview of church history, presenting a downward course toward Laodicean lukewarmness.

3. *Each letter follows the same basic pattern:*

--Description of Jesus

--Words of commendation ("I know...")

--Words of critique/challenge ("But...")

--A Concluding Promise ("To him who overcomes I will give...")

4. *Of the seven churches, only two were not criticized: Smyrna and Philadelphia.*

5. *Each letter concludes with "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches," indicating the letters were intended for all.*

Let's survey the letters in chapter 2...

The Letter to the Church in Ephesus:

I. Description of Jesus

Q: How does the Lord describe Himself in verse 1?

--holds seven stars

--walks among lamps

Q: What does that indicate about Jesus?

II. Words of commendation ("I know...")

Q: What did Jesus say He knew about this church in verses 2-3?

--Your deeds, hard work, perseverance

--Cannot tolerate wicked men

--Tested apostles

--Persevered

III. Words of critique/challenge ("But...")

The first words of verse 4 are perhaps the saddest words a church could hear the Savior say to it, "Yet I hold this against you."

Q: What was the problem? --Forsaken your first love

Q: What does that mean?

Q: What did they need to do? Remember, repent, and do

Note: What did Jesus say the church had in its favor in verse 6? "You hate what the Nicolaitans do." Who were they? Apparently a heretical sect within the church that was guilty of compromise.

IV. A Concluding Promise ("To him who overcomes I will give...")

In verse 7 we see the first of seven uses of "To him that overcomes."

Q: The first question is, "Overcomes what?"

Q: What reward is promised?

The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

I. Description of Jesus

Q: How does Jesus refer to Himself in verse 8? (see chart below)

II. Words of commendation ("I know...")

Q: What did the Lord commend about this church in verse 9?

III. Words of critique/challenge ("But...")

Q: There is no critique, but what challenge did the Lord offer this church?

IV. A Concluding Promise ("To him who overcomes I will give...")

Q: What promise is offered?

The Letter to the Church in Pergamum

I. Description of Jesus

Q: How does the Lord introduce Himself here in verse 12?

II. Words of commendation ("I know...")

Q: What pleased the Lord about this church? Verse 13

III. Words of critique/challenge ("But...")

Q: What displeased the Lord about this church? Verses 14-16

Observation: People talk about finding a "good" church. What's a good church? Notice that churches (like individual Christians) have "good" traits as well as things that need to change. Churches, just like the people that make up the churches, never *arrive*.

There's something worse than being rebuked by Jesus. What's that? *Not* being rebuked when there's a problem. Notice what Jesus said in His seventh letter (3:19), "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be

earnest and repent."

IV. A Concluding Promise ("To him who overcomes I will give...")

Q: What reward is offered?

The Letter to the Church in Thyatira

I. Description of Jesus

Q: What's the description?

II. Words of commendation ("I know...")

Q: What did Jesus commend in verse 19? Wow, you wouldn't think a church like this would have any problems. Think again...

III. Words of critique/challenge ("But...")

Q: What did Jesus have against this church? See verses 20-21

Q: What did Jesus say He was going to do about it? Verses 22-23

Q: What did Jesus call for the church to do? Verses 24-25

IV. A Concluding Promise ("To him who overcomes I will give...")

Q: What's the promise in verses 26-28?

Discuss Questions:

- How does the particular description of Jesus in each letter relate to the specific critique/challenges given?
Example: To the Ephesian church, the Lord said He was "walking among the lampstands." That indicates He was right in their midst. But what was their problem? They'd forsaken their first love. He hadn't left them, but they'd forsaken their love for Him.
- What types of things *please* Jesus in local churches? What does He commend?
- What types of things *displease* Jesus in local churches? What does He confront?

A summary chart...

The Letters to the Seven Churches--Revelation 2-3

Church	Description of Jesus	Commendation ("I know")	Critique/Challenge	Promise ("To him who overcomes")
Ephesus (2:1-7)	--holds seven stars --walks among lamps	-- Your deeds, hard work, perseverance --Cannot tolerate wicked men --Tested apostles --Persevered	--Forsaken your first love --To do: Remember, repent, and do --In your favor: You hate what the Nicolaitans do	--Right to eat from the tree of life
Smyrna (2:8-11)	--the First and the Last --Who died and came to life again	-- Your afflictions & poverty --Slander from the synagogue of Satan	--Do not be afraid; you will suffer persecution --Be faithful; if so you will receive the crown of life	--Won't be hurt by the second death
Pergamum (2:12-17)	--has sharp, double-edged sword	--Where you live (Satan's throne) --You remain true to my name	--You tolerate the teaching of Balaam --You tolerate the teaching of the	--Hidden manna --White stone with a new name

		-- You did not renounce your faith	Nicolaitans --Repent!	
Thyatira (2:18-29)	--the Son of God --Eyes like blazing fire --Feet like burnished bronze	-- Your deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance -- You are doing more now than at first	-- You tolerate Jezebel, a "prophetess" --I have given her time to repent --I will cast her on a bed of suffering --I will repay each of you --Hold on to what you have until I come	--I will give authority over the nations --I will give him the morning star
Sardis (3:1-6)	--holds the seven spirits and seven stars	-- Your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but are dead	--Wake up! --Strengthen what remains! --Remember, obey, repent --If you don't, I'll come like a thief --Good: You have a few people...	--Dressed in white --Never blot out name from Book of Life --Will acknowledge his name before the Father and His angels
Philadelphia (3:7-13)	--Holy & True --Holds the key of David	--I know your deeds --I know you have little strength but have kept my word --I will keep you from the hour of trial	--Hold on to what you have	--I will make you a pillar in the temple of God --I will write on him the name of God, and the new name
Laodicea (3:14-22)	--the Amen --the faithful and true witness --the Ruler of God's creation	--I know your deeds --You are neither hot nor cold --I am going to spit you out of my mouth --You are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked	--Buy gold from me --Get white clothes from me --Get salve from me --Be earnest and repent	--Open the door and I will come in --I will give the right to sit with me on my throne