

CHAPTER SEVEN



EACH LETTER REVEALS JESUS

"His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns... He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God" (Revelation 19:12-13).

The apostle John recognized that he was not the source of the letters to the various churches. When we look closely, there is an interesting chain of communication: ***"This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John"*** (Revelation 1:1, NLT).

We might say that God was the ultimate source of the revelation, Jesus was the immediate source, and the angel that had been dispatched was somewhat of a narrator (this angel, I believe, was a heavenly angel). John then writes that he ***"faithfully reported everything he saw,"*** and that all that follows ***"is his report of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ"*** (Revelation 1:2). In turn, John passes the information along to other servants of God—the messengers or pastors of the churches—who would then share the revealed insights with their respective congregations.

What Would Jesus Say

In addition to God, Jesus, the angel, and John, there may have been one additional party involved. It was not uncommon for well-to-do people in the first century to have scribes (or secretaries) who wrote letters on their behalf. One tradition says that John had a scribe named Prochorus who recorded the words of the Revelation according to John's directives. We also see this type of situation with Paul relative to one of his greatest epistles. In Romans 16:22 we read, *"I, Tertius, the one writing this letter for Paul, send my greetings, too, as one of the Lord's followers"* (NLT). It is very feasible to think that John may have also had such a scribe assisting him.

Relative to the Lord's role in this communication, there would have been a simpler form for each letter than what John actually used. For example, every letter could have begun with, *"To the angel of the church of [city] write, 'This is what Jesus says to you...'"* While that would have been factually correct, the letters are much more picturesque. Instead of simply identifying Jesus by name, various symbolic images are used to convey a distinct aspect of His nature to the churches.

Consider these descriptions of Jesus to each of the congregations:

- Ephesus – *"These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamp-stands"* (Revelation 2:1).
- Smyrna – *"These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life"* (Revelation 2:8).
- Pergamum – *"These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword"* (Revelation 2:12).
- Thyatira – *"These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass"* (Revelation 2:18).
- Sardis – *"These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars"* (Revelation 3:1).

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- Philadelphia – *“These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”* (Revelation 3:7).
- Laodicea – *“These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God”* (Revelation 3:14).

These various descriptions present specific facets of the overall descriptions given of Jesus elsewhere in the book of Revelation, and many of them were expressed in John’s initial vision in Revelation 1:12-16. It is very likely that each of the unique aspects of Jesus that are presented had some type of significance to each church based on their locale or situation.

For example, Ephesus was the largest of the seven cities, and it had the largest congregation. It was the megachurch of its day and was probably the mother church of all the rest. If the Ephesian believers were tempted to be prideful because of the preeminence of their city and of their church, Jesus put things in perspective by the way He introduces Himself to them. When Jesus said that He *“holds the seven stars in His right hand”* and that He is the one who *“walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”* (Revelation 2:1), it may have served as a reminder that Jesus esteemed all of the leaders and all of the congregations equally, not just the church with the most members.

In the same way, there is also great significance in Jesus revealing Himself to the church at Smyrna as the one *“who was dead, and came to life”* (Revelation 2:8). Persecution was on the horizon for this church, and Jesus even admonishes them to *“be faithful unto death”* (Revelation 2:10). As these believers faced possible martyrdom, Jesus wanted them to know that there is a life beyond its earthly component—He wanted them to know that He had conquered death, and because of their faith in Him, they would conquer death as well.

What Would Jesus Say

By observing different ministers today, it is noticeable that various ones have a focus on a certain aspect of Jesus' character and interests. For example, some ministers will focus on Jesus offering the new birth, while others highlight Jesus as the healer. Still others may emphasize Jesus as the sanctifier, while others yet may draw significant attention to His compassion for those who are weak and struggling.

These varied emphases also apply as we look at different local congregations. Some churches will heavily emphasize evangelism and missions, while another congregation emphasizes teaching and discipleship. It is not that one emphasis is right and another wrong; they are just different facets, as it were, of the same diamond. Thyatira seeing Jesus with "*eyes like a flame of fire*" is not contradictory to the believers in Philadelphia seeing Jesus holding "*the key of David*." All of the different images communicate something that Jesus was drawing the attention of that particular congregation to at that specific time.

It is safe to say that none of us fully comprehend the vastness of Jesus in the fullness of who He is. Paul teaches that "*we know in part and we prophesy in part*" (1 Corinthians 13:9) but thank God for the part we do know of Him. He also said that we have "*gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us*" (Romans 12:6).

No one individual or single congregation can comprehend or represent everything that Jesus is in all of His fullness, yet it should be our heart's desire to have an ever-increasing knowledge and expression of Him. John points out the transformative nature of "seeing" Jesus in 1 John 3:2 when he states, "*we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*" In whatever way you perceive the Lord, value Him. The more He is revealed to you, the more your life will be transformed.

 **PRAYER CONNECTION:** *Lord, thank You for helping me to see more and more of the amazing aspects of Your character and nature. My heart desires to know You more fully and completely—not just as You revealed Yourself to the seven churches, but as You are seen throughout the entire Word of God. It will take an eternity to fathom and appreciate all that You are, but thank You for helping me to progressively continue this journey of loving and knowing You. Amen.*
