

Revelation 2:1

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Jesus, the authority over the seven churches and the angel of each church, greets the Ephesian church.

Chapter 1 set up the fact that Revelation is written to God's servants, and Jesus through John is writing to *seven churches* to confront them on whether they are being faithful or unfaithful servants. Those who read, understand, and do the words of this prophecy are promised special blessings (Revelation 1:3). These letters to seven churches begin to lay out the special blessing to those who "overcome" the temptations set forth in these letters, and become faithful witnesses for Jesus. It is these witnesses who are faithful despite rejection, loss, or death, who will gain the greatest of blessings available from living in this life.

Another theme of Revelation is that God has everything under control, as God is the one "who is and who was and who is to come" as was stated in Revelation 1. We will see throughout Revelation that God's "throne" is mentioned consistently, showing that "God is always on His throne, ruling over all." God can look at each of the *seven churches* and state what will happen if they make a good choice versus a bad choice, because he knows the outcome. But while God has everything under control, he has also given his people the responsibility to make choices, which is why it's important that they make a good choice, a choice that benefits them the most.

Jesus wants His servants to understand that the best choice is to choose to be a faithful witness, regardless of what the earthly consequences might be. This is therefore both a book of admonition and of comfort since we have a choice to make, but God is also in control. But we should take our comfort in God's sovereign hand rather than in circumstances.

That God is in control, but we are asked to make wise choices is a paradox that John invites his readers to rest in. Believers, Jesus's servants, are asked to make an all-out effort to be faithful witnesses, while resting in the firm faith that God will work all things to accomplish His will; He will restore all things, and reward all faithfulness. Our faithful witness might be costly on earth, but Jesus will ensure that it will be more than worthwhile (Revelation 22:12).

Looking first at the *church* in *Ephesus* from a historical standpoint, it is the trade center of its region, which is located in modern-day Turkey. At the time Revelation was penned, modern-day Turkey was the Roman province of Asia. All seven churches are located in this Roman province. The location of Ephesus was important for its role in the spread of Christianity. As a hub of trade, there were many people going in and out of this town who could give and receive the gospel message.

The letters to each of the *seven churches* starts with a greeting, but it's more like a "memorandum" greeting format such as "To: all office employees" rather than the more formal greeting that is seen in the Pauline letters.

Revelation 1:2 said that God communicated the message “by His angel to His bond-servant John.” There, the word translated *angel* comes from the Greek word “angelos,” which means “messenger.” In that context, the messenger referred to Jesus, who gives God’s message to John.

Here in Revelation 2:1, the word *angel* is also the Greek word “aggelos” which means “messenger.” Following the instructions for blessing in Revelation 1:3 to read, hear, and heed, it can be inferred that the messenger here is the person, the messenger who is going to read the letter to the church in Ephesus. It seems unlikely that there is a heavenly angel/messenger that John is referring to, but rather a human messenger who will deliver the letter from John to the people of *Ephesus*. Therefore, Jesus the “messenger” gives a message to John, which he is instructed to write and deliver to the seven churches of the Asian province by means of human “messengers.”

John begins his instruction, stating that the letter is to the messenger of the *church in Ephesus*. The letter is cited as being from the *One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven lampstands*. This description of *stars* and *lampstands* is a reference back to John’s vision of God in Revelation 1:20 where it is explained “as for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” When John invokes these images again at the beginning of the letter to the church at Ephesus, it should be viewed as the *One who holds the seven messengers in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven churches*.

This is an instance of the connection between heaven and earth that will continue to be explored throughout Revelation. The God of heaven holds the seven churches in His heavenly hand, even though the seven churches are literal churches in a literal Roman province at an actual point in human history. We will see an additional paradox that what happens on earth has been bound in heaven, and what happens in heaven has been bound on earth (Matthew 16:19).

This is also a way to name Jesus by a description of His power. If the greeting is the memo “To: all office employees,” this would be “From: the one who can reward or fire you all.” This makes clear that this message is being given by the One who has power over those to whom He writes. This is appropriate given that Jesus will exhort the churches, in most instances chastising them to repent and change their ways. Jesus will also offer a great reward, a “bonus” for those who wholly follow Him. He is the One with authority and power to make and keep such a bold promise.

The images of the messengers as *stars* and the *churches* as *lampstands* are significant. In the ruins of the ancient city of *Ephesus* there still exists today holes in the streets where they would have put the physical *lampstands* to see by at night. So this would have been a familiar image. And *stars* are what sailors used to navigate at night, which many people coming through the import-export city of *Ephesus* would have been familiar with. In this invocation, Jesus establishes that He has the power to choose which *churches* are going to be the guides for other people and which *churches* are going to serve as an example to others.

As will be seen later in the exhortation, sometimes the *churches* seem to forget that they have been chosen by God for such a purpose, to be His witness to the world, and start to go astray. Although the Ephesian church has many good traits, Jesus makes it clear that if they do not have the same love they began with, they will not be allowed to serve as His example to the world. Their lampstand will be removed (Revelation 2:5).

It is worth noting that this letter is addressed to the *church in Ephesus*, with *church* as a singular noun. The word *church* is a translation of the Greek word “ekklesia” which means “gathering” or “assembly.” It refers to a gathering of believers in a place. There are numerous mentions of churches that gathered in the house of a specific person (Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2). These gatherings in houses are each a church/gathering in a specific place. But the phrase “church in Ephesus” likely refers to all the believers who are gathered together by virtue of living in that city.

Biblical Text

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: