



SESSION 4 | REVELATION 2:1-7

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## THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

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### THREE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MESSAGES

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- **Historical interpretation:** seven real churches in first century Asia
- **Representative interpretation:** seven types of churches found in any age
- **Prophetic interpretation:** seven periods of church history through the ages

### ARGUMENTS AGAINST PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION

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- **Imprecision:** too many have claimed too much
- **Imminence:** a prophetic interpretation would remove imminence of the rapture
- **Silence:** the text does not state the letters as prophecy

### IMPLICIT VERSUS EXPLICIT PROPHECY

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- **Explicit Prophecy:** Clearly stated by the text to be prophetic of that which to come in a future day.
  - Ezekiel 36 and following
  - Jeremiah 29:10
- **Implicit Prophecy:** Not stated as prophetic of a future event, but containing remarkable correspondence to a future event
  - Psalm 9
  - The book of Ruth
- **Explicit Prophecy** is known as prophetic before the events take place
- **Implicit Prophecy** is known as prophetic only after the events take place
- Because Revelation 2-3 is implicit prophecy, the argument of imminence is removed

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## THREE TYPES OF MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES

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- **A Direct Message:** Christ's word for a particular church
- **A Dynamic Message:** Christ's word for the entire church
- **A Deferred Message:** Christ's word for the history of the church

## WHO ARE THE “ANGELS” OF THE CHURCHES?

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- They could be angels, which is the **transliteration** of *angelos*
- They could be messengers, which is the **translation** of *angelos*
- The problem with the angelic view: (*Theodore Zahn*)
  - Why would the letter be written to a spiritual being and given through the agency of man?
  - Why would the angels receive rebuke and accusation of sinful conduct?

## THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

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### THE DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST | V. 1

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- The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand
  - If these messengers are interpreted as pastors, then they are held in His hand. However, this word for held is an almost violent word, used here more in the sense of being held accountable than held in protection.
- The one who walks among the seven golden lampstands
  - The seven golden lampstands are the churches (1:20). Note that a lampstand is not a lamp, but that which holds the lamp (Matt 4:15). When the church tries to BE the light, it fails. The church LIFTS UP the light. The light of the world is Jesus.

### THE MESSAGE TO THE MESSENGER | VV. 2-6

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- “I know...”
  - There are three Greek words for knowledge.
    - Ginosko - to know by experience
    - Epistamai: to know by proximity (see the use of both terms in 1 Cor 13:12)
    - Eido: to know with the mind's eye, a mental perception.
  - Here, Christ knows in His mind, as in Matthew 6:8.
- Commendations:
  - Works, labour, and patience (v. 2, 3)
  - Intolerance of evil men (v. 2)
    - The Greek word for tolerate / bear is *bastazo* is the root of our English "basis." Literally, "you give no footing to evil men."
  - Testing of apostles
    - The apostolic test was to have received instruction directly from Jesus Christ, with no intermediary.
  - A hatred for the deeds of the Nicolaitians
    - Literally, the "followers of Nicolas."
      - The name means "victory people," perhaps an indicator of their love for power, victory, and achievement."

- **Condemnations**
  - Having left the first love.
    - The first love of the Ephesian pastor had been left, and remedy was to "remember and repent" and "do the first works."
    - It seems that the first love was a work, not a Person. The pastor was reprimanded for losing a love for *something* not *someone*.
    - Since the pastor was already commended for his works and labor (v. 2), this is some kind of deed that he *first* did, but no longer does.
    - The most likely possibility (drawn from extra-Biblical sources) is the support for Jewish believers.

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#### THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH | V. 7

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- In each letter, a portion is given to the Pastor, and a portion to the church.
- The reader can discern the difference by watching closely the use of 2nd person singular for the Pastor and 2nd person plural or 3rd person singular for the church.
- The overcomer is the one with the ultimate victory, a play on words from the *Nicolaitans*. The true Victory People are described in 1 John 5:4-5.
- The overcomer will be granted to eat of the tree of life in the "Paradise of God." This phrase is used in two other places of Scripture, and refers to Heaven, prior to the establishment of the Kingdom. See Luke 23:43 and 2 Cor 12:4