

# THE VISION OF THE GLORIOUS CHRIST

*by Watchman Nee*

The book of Revelation is on “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” This is clearly seen from the very beginning of the book (1:1). “The revelation of Jesus Christ” means that this revelation is of Jesus Christ, through Jesus Christ, and concerning Jesus Christ. God first gave this revelation to Jesus Christ and then gave this revelation to us through Him. All the revelations in the Bible are focused on Jesus Christ and are for the purpose of revealing Him. Hence, the book of Revelation shows not only future events but also who the person of Jesus Christ is. There are many prophecies in the Bible, but the central thought of the Bible is not to convey the many prophecies but to show who Jesus Christ is. It shows us this One, who was once Jesus of Nazareth in the world and who is now the Christ exalted to the heavens. John mentioned future events in Revelation not for the purpose of pointing out the things that are about to come but to prove how Jesus Christ is reigning on the throne today. Jesus Christ is reigning on the throne—this is what the book of Revelation emphasizes. We know that Jesus Christ is the Savior, but this is not enough; we must go on to know Him as the King. We should know the Lord’s love, but we should also know the majesty of His judgment. The goal of Revelation is that more people would know such a Christ so that they would be watchful until the day when they can see Him face to face.

God gave to John a vision of the glorious Christ. John was known as the disciple who reclined on the Lord’s breast (John 13:25; 21:20). Yet the King on the throne was unfamiliar to John. God revealed such a Jesus Christ to John. This knowledge is fundamental. Once John had this knowledge, the prophecies and the future events were not hard to deal with.

Under what conditions did John see this vision? Revelation 1:9 says, “I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” John received his revelation under this circumstance. He did not say that he was a great apostle chosen by the Lord. He said, “I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus.” He did not consider himself higher than others. He considered himself as our brother. How humble and gentle this is. Although his body was on the island of Patmos, his spirit was suffering, enduring, and waiting for the coming of the kingdom together with his brothers. He felt this way because he lived in the reality of the Body.

He knew that the tribulation, kingdom, and endurance are three inseparable things. Before the kingdom comes, there will surely be tribulations. Through many tribulations we will enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Tribulations paved the way for John to enter the kingdom, and these tribulations worked out for him, more and more surpassingly, an eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17). He aspired for the kingdom, and

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therefore, he did not shrink from the tribulations. The kingdom will come, but it is still not here. If we do not endure, we will slumber, withdraw, or turn to the enticements of the world. John knew this; therefore, he waited patiently. He believed that his brothers would become fellow partakers in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus. Praise the Lord! He was not alone in his way.

Are we not John's brothers? Are we fellow partakers in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus? Do we identify ourselves with John's feelings and experience, or are we those who have chosen the broad pathway and who are traveling on our own? We do not enter the kingdom simply by believing that there is a kingdom. We cannot enter the kingdom simply by having some knowledge about the kingdom. In order to enter the kingdom, we have to take John's way. Otherwise, our entry into the kingdom will be only a theory.

John was exiled to the island of Patmos because he was faithful to God's word and because he was for the testimony of Jesus. This island was in the middle of the ocean, with precipitous rocks and barrenness on all sides. John was put in an uninhabited spot. Humanly speaking, this was lonely and pitiful! However, John did not murmur at all. He knew whom he was suffering for. Under such circumstances, the glorious Christ revealed Himself to him and gave him new revelations. The earth had diminished before John's eyes, but heaven was opened to him! This brings to mind Joseph who was in prison, Moses who was in the wilderness, David who was in distress, and Paul who was in chains. They all received fresh revelations. John was going down the path they had trodden; he received visions that he had never received before, and he came to know the enthroned Lord whom he had never known before.

#### John's Vision of the Glorious Christ

Revelation 1:10 says, "I was in spirit on the Lord's Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet." *The Lord's Day* here refers to the first of seven days. It is not the same as "the day of the Lord." In the Bible "the day of the Lord" especially refers to the day of judgment. John saw the vision on the Lord's Day—the first day of the week—not on "the day of the Lord." In spirit John heard a loud voice behind him. The spirit has to do with the God-consciousness. It is the organ with which we worship God and the organ by which we hear God's voice through the intuition. John's spirit was free and uninhibited by the surroundings. He had the life of ascension (Eph. 2:6). His spirit was neither bound nor stirred up by his soul, and he was able to fellowship freely with the Lord and receive fresh revelation. Although his body lost its freedom on the island of Patmos, his spirit was not bound. The island of Patmos could not block the heaven above his head. On the contrary, it brought his spirit in touch with heaven. It is regrettable that God's children often misunderstand God's ordained "Patmos."

John went through extraordinary experiences on the island of Patmos. He was led away by the Holy Spirit from his own feelings into the realm of the spirit to hear God's word. Before God showed him the future glory, He first turned his attention to the present condition of the church. Hence, after he heard behind him "a loud voice like a trumpet," he "turned to see" (Rev. 1:2). What did the loud voice say?

Verse 11 says, "What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." John was charged to write to the seven churches in Asia. But why was he charged to write to only seven churches? At that time, in addition to the seven churches in Asia, there was also the church in Colossae and the church in Hierapolis (Col. 4:13). Why did God not charge John to write to them as well? Seven is the number of perfection in the Bible. God chose these seven churches

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to represent the whole church. The condition of the church from the time of the apostles until the Lord's coming is represented by these seven churches.

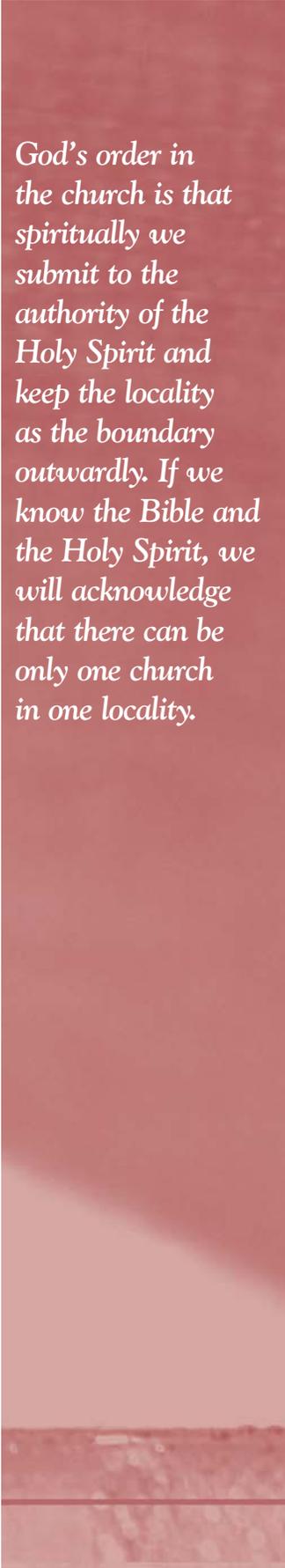
These seven churches were actual churches in John's days. If the Lord Jesus had come then, the words in the seven epistles would have been fulfilled in the seven churches. But at the same time, the Holy Spirit used these seven churches to represent all the churches after the time of the apostles. Therefore, the condition of the seven churches described in the seven epistles has a double meaning: (1) the actual condition of the various churches is depicted, and (2) the churches represent the conditions of the visible church throughout the ages.

**R**evelation 1:12 and 13 say, "I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands One like the Son of Man." The seven lampstands that John saw were the seven churches. These seven churches depict the conditions of seven local churches on the earth. The seven lampstands are not joined as one, but they are seven separate lampstands, each being responsible for shining in its own locality. The church is one in life; it is one Body. However, in their outward appearance on earth, the churches have separate administrations; each church is responsible to the Lord alone as one of the seven lampstands. In reading Revelation 2 and 3, the condition, work, circumstance, responsibility, failure, reward, and punishment of each of the seven churches are different. If we neglect this fact, we will fall into error. These seven churches do not have a common name. They are called the church in Ephesus, in Smyrna, in Pergamos, in Thyatira, in Sardis, in Philadelphia, and in Laodicea. One locality can have only one church. There cannot be more than one church; neither can a few localities combine together to form a church. God has ordained that there be only one church in each locality. Hence, we see only the church in Ephesus, and the church in Smyrna, etc. There is not such a thing as the churches in Ephesus or the churches in Smyrna. God has also ordained that no local church can be joined to another local church to form one church. This is why the Bible says, "The seven churches which are in Asia" (1:4), and not "the church in Asia." (Asia is a province, and there is more than one locality in a province.) God's order in the church is that spiritually we submit to the authority of the Holy Spirit and that we keep the locality as the boundary outwardly. If we know the Bible and if we know the Holy Spirit, we will acknowledge that there can be only one church in one locality. It is not scriptural to make a church out of a few localities or to have several churches in one locality. Forming one church out of several localities demands a oneness that is not found in the Bible, while having more than one church in one locality divides the oneness that the Scripture demands. If we are mindful that the seven lampstands are the seven churches, we will be reminded of the proper standing of the church in the eyes of God.

It is very meaningful that in the Bible the lampstands represent the churches. In the Bible gold symbolizes God's glory. The responsibility of the church is to express God's glory. A lampstand does not have any light in itself; its light comes entirely from the oil as well as from the fire. In order for the church to shine for the Lord, it should trust continuously in God's Spirit and His holy fire. Otherwise, it will not shine. How we wish to see the church shining "in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation...as luminaries in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil. 2:15-16).

*In the midst of the lampstands One like the Son of Man* indicates that the Lord's presence is with His church (Rev. 1:13). His presence is precious. Yet His presence is not altogether for blessing but for searching as well. If we are faithful and have Him in our midst, we need not fear. But if we are not faithful and He searches in our midst, how can we escape judgment?

This One who is "like the Son of Man" is our Lord Jesus. Daniel also mentioned seeing



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One "like a Son of Man" (Dan. 7:13). In the Gospels, our Lord often called Himself the Son of Man. Why does it say that He is "like the Son of Man"? This speaks of His divinity. Although He is the Son of Man, He is also the Son of God. When He was on earth, He was the Son of Man. Now He has risen from the dead, and He is no longer just the Son of Man. Therefore, He is "like the Son of Man."

God created man with the purpose that man would rule over the earth (Gen. 1:28). Regrettably, the first man failed and did not reach this goal. Therefore, the Son of God came to earth and became a man to fulfill God's goal. God put on a human body and became the Son of Man. This was the beginning of the Lord as the Son of Man. In other words, *the Son of Man* is the title given to God when He became a man. During the thirty or more years that the Lord spent on earth, He was the Son of Man. Before He was born, He was "like a Son of Man"; this was the One Daniel spoke of. After the Lord resurrected from the dead, He still had flesh and bones (Luke 24:39); however, now He is no longer merely the Son of Man but the Lord who is "like the Son of Man."

This Christ who is like the Son of Man is in the midst of the lampstands, and He is the Lord who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (Rev. 2:1). This shows that the Lord is face to face with the churches; He is examining our conduct. He is not sitting down and enjoying the church's worship; He is judging the church. We should fear the Lord, because "it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17).

Revelation 1:13 says that He is "clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle." The priests wore long garments. The Lord Jesus is also wearing a long garment, signifying that He is the Priest. The lamp in the Holy Place was not allowed to go out; its light had to shine day and night. Hence, there was the constant need for the priests to trim the lamp and replenish the oil in the Holy Place. The Lord Jesus as the Priest is walking in the midst of the churches. He sees the lamps that are shining and the lamps that are not shining. Those that are not shining are trimmed. Trimming means judging. Christ is walking in the midst of the churches executing His judgment, and this judgment has eternity in view. In the past, we knew of Him as the Lord of grace. Now we see Him as the Lord of judgment. However, the present judgment is the judgment of the priest; it is a kind of trimming. On that day, it will be the judgment of the king; He will give rewards and mete out punishments. One day every child of God will meet the fearsome holiness of the Lord. At that point, reasons will not suffice. When light comes, it removes all reasons. Light not only shines; it also kills. Light exposes the true nature of everything; it removes everything that is not compatible with the Lord. Every time God shines, the light kills man's natural life. Man can reason, but under the Lord's shining, the reasons disappear. The further a man is from the Lord, the more He tries to justify himself. However, no one can withstand the Lord's light. The church should fear the Lord and accept His trimming so that its light will not go out to the extent that its lampstand is removed and its testimony is lost.

He is "girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle." In the Old Testament there were many priests because death prevented them from continuing (Heb. 7:23). Their girdles were only embroidered with gold (Exo. 28:4-5), and they were not eternal in nature. Our Lord abides forever, and His priesthood is unalterable (Heb. 7:24). The golden girdle at His breasts is made of pure gold; it constantly shines and abides forever. Usually, girdles are girded around the waist to facilitate one's work. But the Lord is girded about at the breasts. This speaks of His love and power. The girdle speaks of the power of movement, while the breasts speak of love. The High Priest who is walking in the midst of the lampstands is full of power and love. We can only prostrate ourselves before Him in fear and trembling as well as with gratitude and thanksgiving.

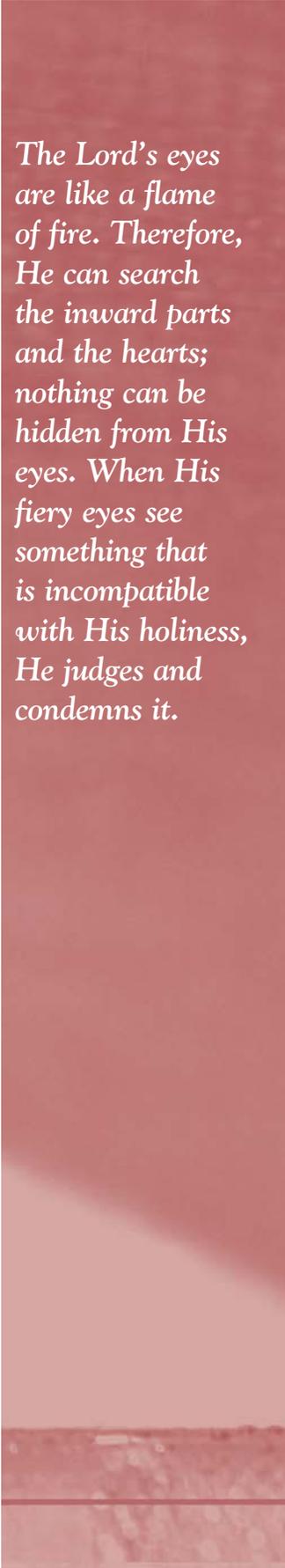
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Revelation 1:14-15 says, “And His head and hair were as white as white wool, as snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet were like shining bronze, as having been fired in a furnace; and His voice was like the sound of many waters.” Not only does the Lord’s dress reveal the nature of His judgment, but His own expression also reveals it. “His head and hair were as white wool, as snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.” In a vision Daniel saw “the Ancient of Days... / His clothing was like white snow, / And the hair of His head was like pure wool” (Dan. 7:9). The Ancient of Days is God. The Lord whom John saw was the same in form as the God whom Daniel saw. This means that the Lord Jesus is God. Our Lord has white hair. This means that He is beyond time and that He encompasses time. He is absolutely and completely holy. When the Bible speaks of man’s aging and change, it refers to the whiteness of his hair (Hosea 7:9). In this respect our Lord does not have one strand of white hair. However, Proverbs says, “The gray head is a crown of glory” (16:31), and “The honor of old men is gray hair” (20:29). Therefore, white hair signifies experience, glory, durability, as well as holiness. Isaiah mentions God’s promise to cleanse man’s sin until it is like wool and as white as snow (1:18). When we consider how our sins have been cleansed and that we are as white as the head and hair of the Lord, we cannot help but marvel at the greatness of the Lord’s grace!

“His eyes were like a flame of fire.” Fire enlightens. The Lord’s eyes are like a flame of fire. Therefore, He can search the inward parts and the hearts; nothing can be hidden from His eyes. When His fiery eyes see something that is incompatible with His holiness, He judges and condemns it. He is the light, and He is also the enlightening. He will search out all sins, and He will preserve the good men in purity, and bring the evil men into perdition. Malachi 3:2 says that when He appears, He will be “like a refiner’s fire.” At the time of the restoration of the Israelites, the Lord will wash away their filth by “the judging Spirit and the burning Spirit” (Isa. 4:4). When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, the Lord will test our work: “The day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one’s work, of what sort it is” (1 Cor. 3:13). “Do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (4:5). “We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). We must remember that “there is no creature that is not manifest before Him, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we are to give our account” (Heb. 4:13). Who can escape the fiery eyes of the Lord? What can be hidden before His fiery eyes? We should sing today: “Unto the judgment seat of Christ / I daily look away; / May all my living and my work / Abide the fire that day” (Lee 75).

“His feet were like shining bronze.” In the Bible bronze signifies judgment. The laver between the tabernacle and the altar as well as the serpent that was lifted up in the wilderness were all made of bronze (Exo. 30:18; Num. 21:8-9). His feet being like shining bronze speaks not only of the strength of His move but also of the absolute righteousness of His move, His ways, and His footsteps. His feet are not just like shining bronze but are like shining bronze that has been fired in a furnace. When bronze is fired in a furnace, it emits a fearful whitish glow. This is how strong and pure the Lord’s feet are. Whatever sin is judged by His sharp eyes will be crushed by His strong feet! He will judge whatever is sinful to His eyes. His walk is pure. He is walking in the midst of the churches with a fearsome holiness. Will He not judge many sins?

“His voice was like the sound of many waters.” This voice is fearsome and irresistible. His voice is not the same as when He was on the earth; He is not drawing men to Himself softly and gently. His voice is full of majesty, and it is foreboding yet irresistible. Psalm 93:3-4 says, “The floods have lifted up, O Jehovah; / The floods have lifted up their voice; / The floods lift up their roaring. / More than the voices of many waters, /



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Than the mighty breakers of the sea, / Jehovah on high is mighty!" This shows us how great is His voice! Ezekiel 43:2 says, "The glory of the God of Israel was there, coming from the way of the east, and His voice was like the sound of many waters, and the earth was illuminated with His glory." This describes the majesty and power of God's voice. Now this majestic and powerful voice is coming out from the Christ who is like the Son of Man. Concerning the authority in His voice, the Lord once said, "The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). When Lazarus, whom the Lord loved, had been dead and in the tomb for four days, the Lord shouted loudly, "Lazarus, come out!" (11:17, 43). Then "he who had died came out" (v. 44). How powerful is the Lord's voice! Concerning His wrath, Jeremiah 25:30 says, "Jehovah will roar from on high, / And He will utter His voice... / Against all the inhabitants of the earth." Indeed, Psalm 29:4 says, "The voice of Jehovah is powerful; / The voice of Jehovah is full of majesty." At the time of judgment, His voice alone will be enough to break man's heart! Since this is the case, the church should fear the Lord and not disobey the Lord's voice. If it does this, the church will not be ashamed when it meets the Lord face to face.

**R**evelation 1:16 says, "He had in His right hand seven stars; and out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword; and His face shone as the sun shines in its power." We have seen the holiness and majesty of the Lord who resembles the Son of Man. Now let us consider His position. "He had in His right hand seven stars." These seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches. Christ holds them in His right hand. This means that Christ has authority over them. In the Bible the right hand signifies authority and exaltation (Psa. 17:7; 18:35; Acts 2:33). These messengers are in the Lord's hand. They are the faithful ones, and their duty is to shine as stars. They are safe in the Lord's hand, yet their responsibility is great. However, these messengers are only in the Lord's hand; they are not yet crowns on the Lord's head, because the time for them to be glorified has not yet come. They must still press on faithfully before they will shine forever. Otherwise, they will become "wandering stars" (Jude 13).

"Out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword." Isaiah 49:2 says, "He has made my mouth like a sharp sword." This refers to the power of the Lord Jesus' word. The Lord's word not only awakens our conscience to the sense of sin, but it is also sharp at the time of judgment. He said, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the word which I have spoken, that will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). We have to fear the Lord because judgment begins from the house of God! Revelation 2 and 3 show that the Lord is walking in the midst of the seven lampstands. He is judging His church with His word. He charged John to write to the messenger in the church in Pergamos, saying, "These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword...Repent therefore; but if not, I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war with them with the sword of My mouth" (2:12, 16). The sword of His mouth is simply the word of God. Hebrews 4:12 says, "The word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Luke 1:37 says, "No word will be impossible [or powerless] with God." God's word is sharp and powerful. We must let the word of God dwell richly in our hearts, and we must allow His word to gain ground in us. We must also be able to use it as our weapon to withstand the devil. When the Lord was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, He overcame with the words of Scripture. God's word is indeed sharp and powerful. Therefore, we should treasure His word and put our trust in His word.

"His face shone as the sun shines in its power." Christ is the Sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2). He revealed His glory when He was on the mountain where He was transfigured. At that time, "His face shone like the sun" (Matt. 17:2). Peter said that this indicated "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:16). God calls the sun the

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greater light-bearer, and set it to rule the day (Gen. 1:16). “The sun shines in its power” means that it is a sun in a fogless, cloudless, and shadowless sky. This speaks of the Lord’s power and glory in the millennium.

In the Bible the appearing of the Lord Jesus is typified by the morning star and the sun. His appearing as the sun is to the world, and His appearing as the morning star is to the saints. The morning star appears just before dawn. Only those who are watchful at night can see it. The sun appears during the daytime, and everyone in the world can see it. First, there is the appearance of the morning star, and then the sun comes out. Before our Lord Jesus appears to the people in the world, He will first appear to those who love His appearing. What a blessed hope this is! Do you love His appearing? Are you prepared to meet Him?

Revelation 1:17 says, “When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.” John once reclined on Jesus’ breast, but here he saw the One who was about to execute judgment. Because of His glory, majesty, power, and holiness, John fell at His feet as dead. The judgment of the Lord is solemn. Who can withstand such a vision? If John reacted in this way, what about us? May none of us neglect the solemnity of this judgment.

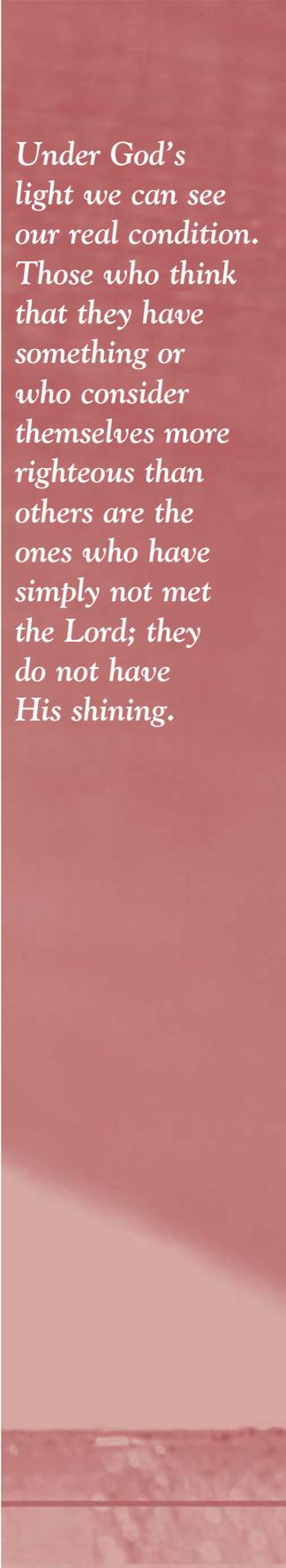
Unless a man is blind to Christ, he has no choice but to prostrate himself at the sight of His face. When Job was arguing with his three friends, he counted himself perfect. Then he saw the Lord and said, “I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, / But now my eye has seen You; / Therefore I abhor myself, and I repent / In dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6).

When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a high and lofty throne, he could not help but exclaim, “Woe is me, for I am finished! / For I am a man of unclean lips, / And in the midst of a people of unclean lips I dwell; / Yet my eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts” (Isa. 6:5).

No fault of Daniel is mentioned in the Bible, but after he saw the Lord, he said, “No strength was left in me, but my color turned deathly pale; and I retained no strength... I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground” (Dan. 10:8-9).

What did the prophet Habakkuk do when he heard the voice of Jehovah? He said, “I heard and my body trembled; / My lips quivered at the sound. / Rottenness entered my bones, / And I tremble in my place” (Hab. 3:16). Paul persecuted and murdered the Lord’s disciples. But on his way to Damascus, the Lord flashed a light from heaven around him, and he fell on the ground (Acts 9:1-4).

**I**f we have truly seen the glory of the Lord, the holiness of the Lord, even the judgment of the Lord, we will deeply abhor and hate ourselves. It is a pity that many Christians are always talking about themselves. Even when they confess their sins, they justify and exonerate themselves. Manifested pride as well as hidden pride are the result of blindness. Many Christians do not see Christ. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things / And it is incurable; / Who can know it?” Apart from the Lord, we do not know our heart. When we do not see the Lord, it is easy for us to believe in ourselves, to justify ourselves, and to be satisfied with ourselves! We must realize that it is in the light that we see light (Psa. 36:9). Under God’s light we can see our real condition. Those who think that they have something or who consider themselves more righteous than others are the ones who have simply not met the Lord; they do not have His shining. Those who have met Him will surely prostrate themselves before Him. May the Lord be merciful to those who are self-exalted and self-justified! May the Lord’s glory and holiness cause us to abhor ourselves so that we would prostrate ourselves at His feet and commit ourselves to the place of death. Only then will the Lord manifest Himself in our lives.



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others are the  
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simply not met  
the Lord; they  
do not have  
His shining.*

*We trusted  
in the Lord's  
death and  
resurrection for  
our salvation.  
We should also  
trust in His  
death and  
resurrection  
for our victory.  
The Lord Jesus  
has completed  
His salvation—  
both to sinners  
and to saints.*

Revelation 1:17 says, "And He placed His right hand on me, saying, Do not fear." The Lord not only held the seven stars with His right hand of authority, but He touched John with this right hand and said, "Do not fear." Although our Lord is in glory, He is still full of love. The words *do not fear* speak of the Christ in the Gospels; they speak of the love of the Lord! Revelation is a book on the Lord's judgment, but those who are constrained by the Lord's love need not fear, because "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). The Lord Jesus desires to manifest Himself to us. However, some people feel that His majesty is more than His lovingkindness. It seems that the more the Lord manifests Himself, the more they dare not draw near to Him. But the Lord touched John with His right hand, saying, "Do not fear." If there is no barrier between us and such a loving Lord, He will strengthen us when we are weak, and He will comfort us when we are fearful.

Revelation 1:17-18 says, "I am the First and the Last and the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades." The Lord's appearance in glory not only makes us aware of our own weaknesses, but even more it makes us aware of the loftiness of the Lord's person. However, what is of importance is not what we are but what He is. If we know Him, we will know ourselves. The Lord's intention is to reveal Himself. He said, "I am the First and the Last and the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades." What a comforting word! Because He is such a Lord, He was able to comfort John by saying, "Do not fear." Our Lord Jesus is the First and the Last and the living One. He has died and resurrected for our sake. He "was delivered for our offenses and was raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Only the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus can give us the boldness to stand before the judgment seat. Through His death and His resurrection, we are exempt from the condemnation of the eternal lake of fire. Through His death and resurrection, we are also freed from shame before the judgment seat. We need to ask, "Is our boast the Lord's death and resurrection?" Everything else will fail. Those who are spiritually strong and well prepared to meet the Lord are the ones who have put more trust in and gained more experience in the Lord's death and resurrection. It is not that they are in any way better than others. This reveals the necessity of being joined to the Lord in His death and resurrection. "If we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death, indeed we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection" (6:5). "So also you, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but living to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11). We trusted in the Lord's death and resurrection for our salvation. We should also trust in His death and resurrection for our victory. The Lord Jesus has completed His salvation—both to sinners and to saints. We need only to receive it by faith. We should know Him as the crucified and resurrected Lord, and by faith we should join ourselves to His death and resurrection.

Our Lord is the First, the source of all things; He is also the Last, the consummation of all things. In reviewing the story of our salvation, we should realize that the Lord first came to us; we were not seeking the Lord. The Lord first loved us; we did not love the Lord. We know Him as the First. But we sometimes wonder to what extent is He going to save us. What will happen if the Lord saves us only to the extent of our present condition and not any further? What will happen if God stops right where we currently are and does not go any further? What is the extent of God's salvation for us? What will happen to us? Perhaps we should consider this in a wider context. By reading Genesis, we know that God is the Creator, the source of everything. But not long after He created all things, the serpent came into the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, and the way to the tree of life was barred by the cherubim with the flaming sword that turned in every direction. The earth was cursed, and death came in. In considering all these things, perhaps we would wonder what the consummation of these things will be. God had a beginning on this earth, but what is the end going to be? To all these questions, God has provided the answer. The book of

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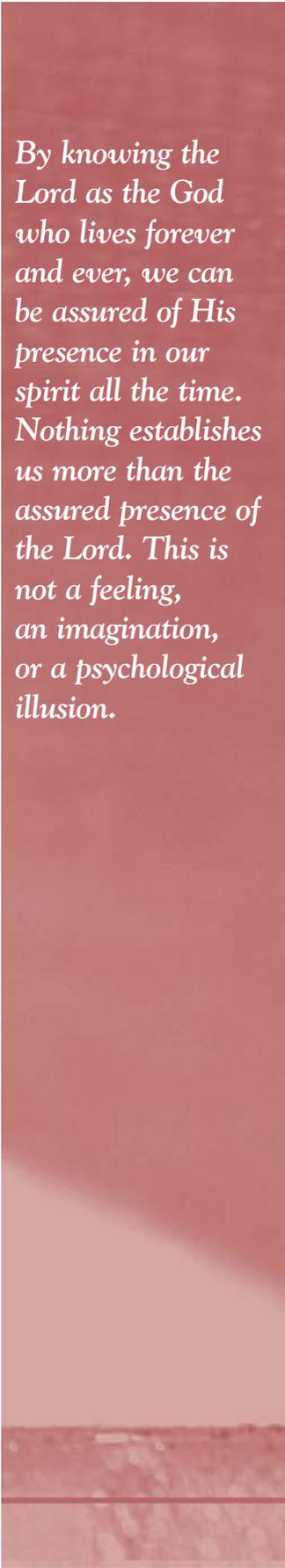
Revelation is God's answer. The Lord said, "I am the First and the Last." This is the revelation of Jesus Christ! In the last chapter of Revelation, He repeats, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (22:13). This is the revelation of Jesus Christ! God will finish what He has begun. He will consummate that which was not consummated in the garden of Eden. His redemption is complete, and His eternal plan will surely be fulfilled. What cannot be solved today will be solved one day. Thank God, one day Christ will consummate everything, because He is the First and the Last. This is the revelation of Jesus Christ. God shows that the One who is the First and the Last is the answer to all the problems.

He is "the living One." In Him is life (John 1:4). He is the life (11:25). This means that He is the source of life. His life is the uncreated life. He is the self-existing and ever-existing One. He is the One who is absolutely living, and He is life.

**O**ur Lord "became dead." He died for the sins of the sinners. This death is a death of "the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous" (1 Pet. 3:18). At the same time, He released His life through His death. What a wonderful death this is! "Behold, I am living." He has resurrected from death. Many people have met death and have not come back; there was no resurrection for them. Indeed, "Thousands of years passed, and we see only men passing away; / Those who passed away numbered in millions. / It is a law that they go and do not return; / Never has there been one who turns back." God allowed our Lord to die and gave Him an opportunity to overcome death. He was dead but is now living! How significant is this "living"! At Pentecost the apostles declared, "Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, since it was not possible for Him to be held by it" (Acts 2:24). Death cannot hold Him back; it does not have the power to entangle Him. The resurrection life outlasts death and withstands death. For Him to have died and to be living again means that His life outlasts death and can withstand death. When many people encounter ill-fated things, they are through; it seems as if they have entered into death. But the resurrection life is not afraid of death. By withstanding death, this life is now proved to outlast death. Resurrection life is a life that passes through death and still remains living. If something passes through death and remains in death, it is not resurrection life. The Lord charged John to write to the messenger of the church in Smyrna and say that He "became dead and lived again" (Rev. 2:8). The church in Smyrna suffered for the Lord and was faithful unto death. Therefore, the Lord comforted it with such a word. Just as the gates of Hades could not prevail against the Lord, the gates of Hades cannot prevail against the church. If a church realizes resurrection, it can withstand trials and sufferings. Resurrection life is a life that outlasts death; it is a life that passes through death and rises up again. Hallelujah! Our Lord became dead, but He is living again! Death has nothing to do with Him!

Not only is He living, He is "living forever and ever." He died only once and resurrected only once. After He resurrected, He will live forever and ever. He will no longer die; He will live forever and ever. Now He is not only glorified with the glory which He had with God before the world was (John 17:5), but He is vested further with glorified humanity. He lives this way, not just for Himself but for us, because "He lives always to intercede" for us (Heb. 7:25). He is appearing before the face of God for us (9:24). He has promised, "Because I live, you also shall live" (John 14:19). Is not this word for us?

By knowing the Lord as the God who lives forever and ever, we can be assured of His presence in our spirit all the time. Nothing establishes us more than the assured presence of the Lord. This is not a feeling, an imagination, or a psychological illusion. After Abraham followed God for many years, he began to develop a deep knowledge of the Lord, and he "planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and there he called on the name of Jehovah, the eternal God" (Gen. 21:33). Daniel was called the "servant of the living



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Men will  
all pass away,  
but He alone  
will live forever  
and ever.  
Men are like  
lighted lamps—  
sooner or later  
they will be  
extinguished.  
He alone is the  
true Light, the  
source of all lights,  
and He alone  
abides forever.

God” (Dan. 6:20). When he was thrown into the lion’s den, God sealed up the mouth of the lions, and they did not hurt him (v. 22). George Müller said,

If you walk with Him, and look to Him, and expect help from Him, He will never fail you. An older brother, who has known the Lord for forty-four years, who writes this, says for your encouragement that He has never failed him. In the greatest difficulties, in the heaviest trials, in the deepest poverty and necessities, He has never failed me; but because I was enabled by His grace to trust Him, He has always appeared for my help. I delight in speaking well of His name. (Taylor 152-153)

One writer said that Martin Luther was once apprehensive of the danger facing him; he was full of anxiety and fear. He knew that he could not be freed from it until he grasped hold of some power from on high. While he sat alone, he wrote with his fingers these words on his table: “He is living forever and ever! He is living forever and ever!” With these words he rejoiced and was revived. The words *He is living forever and ever* should also be our strength and hope. Men will all pass away, but He alone will live forever and ever. Men are like lighted lamps—sooner or later they will be extinguished. He alone is the true Light, the source of all lights, and He alone abides forever. The living God whom Abraham called upon, whom Daniel served, whom Müller trusted, and whom Martin Luther knew is the God to whom we also belong and whom we also serve. We should worship Him and praise His name with joy!

Not only is the Lord living forever and ever, but He has “the keys of death and of Hades.” This shows that all things after this life are in the hands of the Lord. Death and Hades are always together. (*Hades* in this verse does not mean hell or the lake of fire. In Hebrew, Hades is Sheol. The word means the underworld.) Revelation 6:8 says that Hades follows death. Revelation 20:14 indicates that the end of both is the lake of fire. In both verses, death and Hades are treated as if they are personified. Hebrews 2:14 mentions the devil as the one who has the might of death, whereas Matthew 16:18 touches upon the gates of Hades. This shows that the devil is the person who is behind death and Hades. Yet our Lord has resurrected from the dead. Not only are death and Hades powerless in Him, but He is now holding the keys of death and of Hades! Death and Hades can no longer reign over our Lord. Our Lord has overcome them. Thank the Lord, when the day of resurrection comes, “the word which is written will come to pass, ‘Death has been swallowed up unto victory’” (1 Cor. 15:54). Then all those who are of the Lord will boast, saying, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (v. 55). We must realize that we are not waiting to die. We are waiting for that morning, the resurrection morning. This is why we are full of hope in our waiting.

The glorious Christ is revealed not only for the purpose of showing His servant who He is but also for commissioning His servant. Revelation 1:19-20 says,

Write therefore the things which you have seen and the things which are and the things which are about to take place after these things. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw upon My right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

The Lord wanted John to “write therefore the things which you have seen and the things which are and the things which are about to take place after these things” because He wanted to secure a written testimony. He told John to write it down to complete His record on the earth. *The things which you have seen* refers to the things which John had seen, that is, the vision of the glorious Christ. *The things which are* refers to the things which are still in existence, the things in the church age. The Lord said, “The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” The word *are* is in the present tense, and matches

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“the things which are” in the previous verse. Hence, the things of the church are “the things which are.”

### The Seven Stars and the Seven Golden Lampstands

The stars and lampstands are a mystery; they are not just physical objects. They have a spiritual significance. The mysteries in the Bible would be incomprehensible to man unless God explained them. Mysteries do not defy comprehension; they can be understood, but God’s revelation is required (Dan. 2:28, 18-23). The Lord clearly explained the mysteries of these seven stars and seven golden lampstands to John.

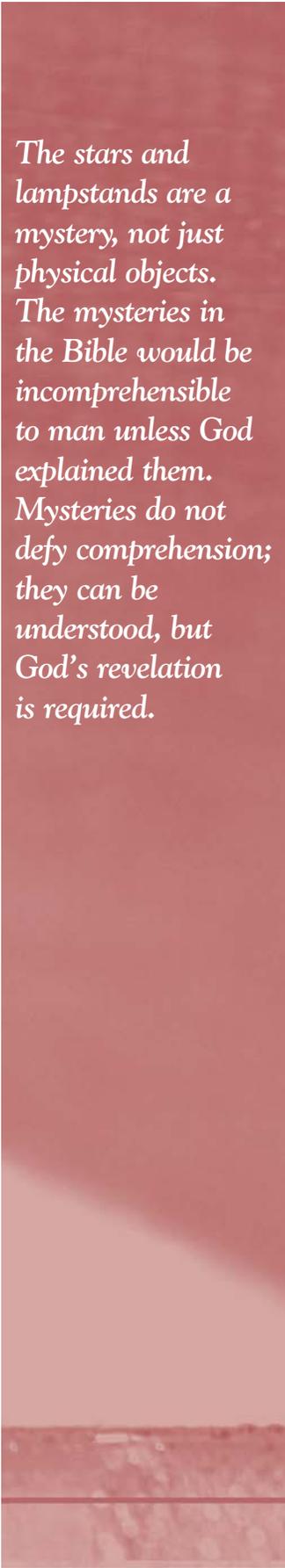
The Lord’s right hand holds the seven stars. This means that the Lord has full authority to rule over the representatives of the heavenly light. It also indicates that these representatives have to bear the responsibility in the churches. Only the Lord’s right hand—the hand of authority—can cause the stars to shine according to His will. Only His hand can hold and preserve the stars.

**W**ho do the stars refer to? The Lord Himself gives the answer: “The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches.” But who are these messengers? Expositors are divided in their opinions. These messengers are not heavenly messengers—angels—but earthly messengers, because John was writing to the messengers of the seven churches. No human being can write to angels. Hence, the messengers cannot be angels; they must be men in the church.

What kind of men are these messengers of the seven churches? The word *messenger* means a sent one, one who is commissioned. For example, two brothers are referred to as “the messengers of the churches” (2 Cor. 8:23, KJV). Epaphroditus was a messenger of the church in Philippi (Phil. 2:25, KJV). This shows that the messengers are representatives in the church. If we read Revelation 2 and 3, we will find that the Lord considers these messengers to be ones who are responsible for the churches. For example, the Lord warned the church in Ephesus, saying, “I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent” (2:5). The Lord rebuked the church in Pergamos, saying, “You have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam...In the same way you also have some who hold in like manner the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (vv. 14-15). He rebuked the church in Thyatira, saying, “You tolerate the woman Jezebel, she who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and leads My slaves astray to commit fornication and to eat idol sacrifices” (v. 20). He reminded the church in Sardis, saying, “Become watchful and establish the things which remain...If therefore you will not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall by no means know at what hour I will come upon you” (3:2-3). He encouraged the church in Philadelphia, saying, “Hold fast what you have” (v. 11). He exhorted the church in Laodicea, saying, “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire...and white garments that you may be clothed...and eyesalve to anoint your eyes that you may see” (v. 18). The above words were spoken by the Lord to the churches (1:11; 2:7). Yet the letters were written to the messengers of the churches. This shows that the messengers were aware of the condition of the churches and were bearing the responsibility of the churches.

Since the word *messengers* means the sent ones, they represent the one who sent them in a practical sense. “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who has sent Me” (Matt. 10:40). This is an example. Therefore, the messengers were those in the churches who had the gift, the influence, and the ability to turn the church. We know nothing about their work or positions. Yet they must have been true members of the church and men of spiritual stature. As such, the Lord charged them to bear the responsibility for the whole church where they were.

In the seven letters the Lord indicated that there was a distinction, but no separation,



*The stars and lampstands are a mystery, not just physical objects. The mysteries in the Bible would be incomprehensible to man unless God explained them. Mysteries do not defy comprehension; they can be understood, but God’s revelation is required.*

*The messengers view the failure and success of the church as their own. They bear in their hearts the responsibility of the church. Whoever wants to be useful in the hand of the Lord must be on his knees with an outpoured soul, interceding for the church of Christ.*

between these messengers and their respective churches. For example, Revelation 1:11 says, "What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches," yet at the beginning of every epistle in chapters 2 and 3, it says, "To the messenger of the church." This shows that the churches and the messengers are inseparable. Moreover, although seven letters were written to the messengers of the seven churches, every letter includes the words *he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. This also shows that the Lord considers the messengers as inseparable from the churches, and He holds them responsible for the churches where they are at. But there is still a distinction between the churches and the messengers. For example, the Lord says, "Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison" (2:10); "My faithful one, who was killed among you" (v. 13); "You have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam" (v. 14); "I say to you—the rest" (v. 24); "You have a few names... who have not defiled their garments" (3:4). The Lord had separated a few from among them. This shows that the messengers and the churches are distinct.

The Lord symbolizes the messengers as stars. This means they possess a heavenly position and experience like the stars in the heavens. They testify for the Lord and shine for the Lord like the stars at night. Their hope and happiness are in the heavens. They have intimate fellowship with Christ. They also have the power and authority of the Lord because they are in the right hand of the Lord Jesus. They represent the church because they are the most faithful ones in the church. They mind the things of the church. They view the failure and success of the church as their own. They bear in their hearts the responsibility of the church. Whoever wants to be useful in the hand of the Lord must be on his knees, with tears, and with an outpoured soul, interceding for the church of Christ. Although the failures of the churches are not our own, yet it will be our failure if we are unconcerned about their failures. We should have an enlarged heart to include all the children of God, viewing their business as our business. Otherwise, we will not only put ourselves in danger, but we will break the Lord's heart. What a tragedy! If we are willing to submit ourselves totally to the Lord's hand and gladly bear the responsibility for His sake, not only will we receive the Lord's reward, but the Lord will also use us to accomplish great work.

**W**e should know that God is just. He will not misjudge those who are faithful to Him. The Lord saw the faithfulness of Smyrna and Philadelphia, and He commended them. To the other five churches, the Lord had words of reproach. Even though the messengers represent the churches, and even though they bear much responsibility, in reality the messengers are the messengers and the churches are the churches, because there are differences between the stars and the lampstands. In responsibility, the Lord holds the messengers accountable. However, in judgment, the Lord would punish only those who commit sins (2:5, 16, 22-23; 3:3, 16). The Lord knows who belong to Him and who are faithful to the end.

We should be aware of another matter. In the Lord's words to the churches, there are both judgments and warnings. The words of warning and judgment are for the churches, but they are also for the messengers. A church can fail, and a messenger can fail. Even the stars that are in the Lord's right hand can fail. "You have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead" (3:1). The stars in the Lord's right hand can so utterly fail that they keep the Lord knocking outside the door (v. 20). What a solemn thought this is! Everyone who is greatly used by the Lord and everyone who bears serious responsibility in the church should not be proud, unwatchful, or unfaithful.

The Lord said, "The seven lampstands are the seven churches." In regard to the seven churches, which are represented by the seven lampstands, we should understand three things: (1) The seven churches were real churches existing at that time. (2) The seven churches represent the sevenfold history of the church. (3) The conditions of the seven churches exist simultaneously in the church's sevenfold history.

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Verse 1:4 says, “John to the seven churches which are in Asia.” This proves that John wrote the seven letters to actual churches that existed at that time. We should not think that Christ’s coming required the conditions of these seven churches to become seven actual periods in the history of the church. The Lord said to His church, “Nevertheless what you have hold fast until I come” (2:25). “Become watchful...If therefore you will not watch, I will come as a thief” (3:2-3). This proves that even in those days there was the possibility of the Lord’s second coming. The Lord’s word in 1:19 concerning “the things which are” refers to the seven churches. The things of the seven churches actually occurred in those days. There was a possibility of His second coming then!

However, we also know that there were more than seven churches at that time. The seven churches were not the only ones that needed admonishing, warning, and encouragement. Should not the well-known churches, such as Antioch, have received epistles also? But the Lord chose only seven churches to receive His special exhortations. Is this not full of significance? In considering the conditions of the seven churches, we need to see that the Lord chose them with the intention of unveiling His will concerning all the churches. By using seven churches, the Lord demonstrated the condition of all the churches from the time of the apostles to His second coming.

In the original text, there is no definite article before these seven churches. This indicates that the Lord was not just pointing to these seven churches. They represent all the churches. The number seven means completeness. These seven churches represent all the churches. If the seven lampstands represented only seven churches at that time, were the other churches not counted as churches? Not at all. The seven churches, represented by the seven golden lampstands, were representatives of all the churches in the world.

Furthermore, each of the seven letters includes the words *he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. This clearly indicates that the message was not written just for the people at that time. This word was spoken for those in the past as well the present; it was spoken to anyone who has an ear to hear the Lord’s word. Therefore, the seven churches represent all the churches on the earth.

**T**he Lord did not explicitly state that the seven churches represented the churches in consecutive generations, because He wants us to be watchful, for we do not know when He will come (Mark 13:35). Although the conditions of the seven churches aptly represent the history of the church on earth, it does not mean that Smyrna came only after Ephesus had passed away, and that Pergamos followed after Smyrna had gone. In general the first age in church history corresponds to the condition of Ephesus, and the second age corresponds to the condition of Smyrna. But in the age of Ephesus the conditions of Smyrna and the other five churches were already present. However, the condition of Ephesus was more dominant. In the age of Smyrna, there were also the conditions of Ephesus and all the other churches, but the condition of Smyrna predominated in that age. The church in every age bears the characteristics of all the other churches, just as all seven churches existed simultaneously. The Lord Jesus spoke to the church in Thyatira, “Nevertheless what you have hold fast until I come” (Rev. 2:25). He spoke to the messenger of the church in Sardis, “I will come as a thief” (3:3), and He spoke to Philadelphia, “I come quickly” (v. 11). The Lord Jesus spoke to these three churches regarding His coming again. Therefore, they will remain until His coming. The church in Laodicea is the last church. It will also co-exist with the other three churches until the Lord’s coming. The Lord told the three churches—Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia—about His coming in a way that clearly shows that His coming is nearer and nearer. He said to the church in Thyatira, “Until I come.” Here it seems that His coming is still far away. He said to the church in Sardis, “I will come.” This is more definite. He said to the church in Philadelphia,



*The Lord chose only seven churches to receive His special exhortations. In considering the conditions of the seven churches, we need to see that the Lord chose them with the intention of unveiling His will concerning all the churches.*

The central purpose of studying the book of Revelation is to know Jesus Christ. Spiritually speaking, we should either have no ambition at all, or if we have ambition, it should be a desire to learn and pursue with those who know the Lord.

“I come quickly.” This is even more urgent. Hence, we need to prepare ourselves watchfully for our Lord.

The final four of the seven churches will exist until the Lord comes. This does not mean that they were raised up at the same time. It means that Thyatira was raised up first, followed by Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The former did not come to an end because the latter was raised up. The four will continue together until the Lord comes. In other words, their beginning was different, but their consummation will be together.

The central purpose of studying the book of Revelation is to know Jesus Christ. Spiritually speaking, we should either have no ambition at all, or if we have ambition, it should be a desire to learn and pursue with those who know the Lord. Knowing the Lord is not an empty word. Everyone who knows the Lord prostrates himself before the Lord. The Lord can commission only those who prostrate themselves before Him. How about our knowledge of the Lord today? What is our burden for the church today? If we are faithful, if we hold fast what we have, and if we stand fast in the faith, we will shine as a star, and we will become useful in the right hand of the Lord. **LFC**

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#### Revelation—the Conclusion of John’s Writings and of the Bible

The book of Revelation is the conclusion of John’s writings...The writings of the apostle John are of three categories: his Gospel, his Epistles, and his Revelation. John’s Gospel is for the imparting of life. In John 10:10 Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and may have it abundantly,” and in John 12:24 He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” In these verses we see the imparting of life, which is the central thought of the Gospel of John. In John’s Epistles is the fellowship for the growth of life. Although life has been imparted into us, it needs to grow. Life grows by fellowship. Therefore, in John’s Epistles we see the fellowship for the growth of life. In the last category of John’s writings, his Revelation, we have the reaping of life. Firstly, life is imparted, then it grows, and eventually it is reaped. Without Revelation, we would have the imparting of life and the growth of life, but not the reaping of life.

As the last book of the Bible, Revelation is the conclusion, completion, and consummation of the entire divine revelation, the whole Bible. The Bible needs such a conclusion. The seeds of most of the truths of the divine revelation were sown in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The growth of all these seeds is progressively developed in the following books, especially in the books of the New Testament, and the harvest is reaped in the book of Revelation...Hence, most of the things covered in this book are not absolutely new, but refer back to the foregoing books of the Bible.

From *Life-study of Revelation* by Witness Lee, pp. 6-7