The Church List in Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 2
Code: BQ11911

“Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things . . . 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:” (Revelation 1:19; 2:1)

The astounding vision John saw inspired in him a healthy tension between fear and assurance. But to that was added a reminder of his duty. Christ’s earlier command to **write** is now expanded, as John is told to record three features. First, **the things which you have seen,** the vision John had just seen and recorded in verses 10–16. Next, **the things which are,** a reference to the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, which describe the present state of the church. Finally, John was to write **the things which will take place after these things,** the prophetic revelations of future events unfolded in chapters 4–22. This threefold command provides an outline for the book of Revelation, encompassing (from John’s perspective) the past, present, and future.

Like John, all Christians have a duty to pass on the truths they learn from the visions recorded in this book. Those visions may at first be startling, disturbing, or fascinating. But they, like all Scripture, are “inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). As believers study the glory of Christ reflected in the book of Revelation, “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, [will be] transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

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: The seven churches addressed in chapters 2 and 3 were actual existing churches when John wrote. But while not precisely duplicated, they also represent the types of churches that are generally present throughout the entire church age. Five of the seven churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia being the exceptions) were rebuked for tolerating sin in their midst, not an uncommon occurrence in churches since. The problems in those five churches ranged in severity from waning love at Ephesus to total apostasy at Laodicea. Further, any church in any age could have a mixture of the sins that plagued these five churches.

Though Christ may have addressed the Ephesian church first because it was first on the postal route, it was also the most prominent church of the seven. It was the mother church out of whose ministry the other six were founded (cf. Acts 19:10) and gave its name to the inspired letter of Ephesians penned four decades earlier by the apostle Paul. The contents of this first letter form the pattern for the other six.

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