

Rev. 1:19-20. the Symbolic Sevens

by Horatius Bonar

The passage reveals the significance of the number seven in the Bible, emphasizing completeness, perfection, and divine fullness, and highlighting the importance of the seven churches, the seven stars, and the seven titles of Christ.

Scripture: Revelation 1:19

Topics: "Symbolism in Revelation", "Spiritual States of the Church"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the significance of the symbolic sevens in Revelation 1:19-20, where John is instructed to write about the past, present, and future of the churches. He explains that the seven stars represent the angels of the churches, while the seven candlesticks symbolize the churches themselves, each reflecting different spiritual states that persist throughout the ages. Bonar highlights the importance of Christ's titles, the searching words of knowledge, and the messages of grace and exhortation given to each church, culminating in the promise of rewards for those who overcome. The sermon calls believers to introspectively assess their spiritual condition in light of these truths. Ultimately, Bonar reassures that even the lukewarm Laodicea is offered redemption and a place in Christ's kingdom.

Transcript

"Write the things which you have SEEN, and the things which ARE, and the things which shall be HEREAFTER. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks is this--the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks which you saw are the seven churches." --Revelation 1:19, 20.

Write, says the Lord! Write! You can not now speak to these churches over which you did once watch; but write! Write (1) the things that you have SEEN--this glorious vision of my person, a vision like that which you saw when you were with me on the holy mount. Write (2) the things which ARE--the things relating to the present state of these churches. Write (3) the things which shall be HEREAFTER--the words of prophecy which this book is to contain. Write them for the churches now; write them for the churches throughout all the ages. What you write, let them read, 'The writing is the writing of God' (Exodus 32:16).

Christ dictates the words of the message, and John writes them; yet even in this writing he is something more than a mechanical instrument. The Spirit takes full possession of his whole man; so that while it is the Spirit that speaks it is also John; no, and it is Christ also. The thoughts and words are divine, and yet it is in a human mold that these thoughts and words are cast. We recognize the voice of the beloved

disciple; but we recognize also the voice of the Spirit--'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches.'

Here is the mystery or secret of the vision which you have seen. The seven stars are the angels of the churches; for each church, like each kingdom (Daniel 10, 13, 20, 21), has its angel. The seven candlesticks are the seven churches.

The symbols or figures in this book are very vivid and expressive. They are not ornaments, but truths; not flowers, but fruit bearing trees. They are pictures, no doubt; but each has an articulate voice, and a living eye, and a powerful hand.

Let us arrange and group together the symbols of the first three chapters into sevens; for it is that number that is so conspicuous among them.

I. The seven candlesticks or CHURCHES. There were hundreds of churches in the apostle's days throughout the Gentile earth; but the Holy Spirit selects seven of these, and presents them to us by name; all in Asia Minor, not in Palestine, for from Judea the glory had departed. They are 'representative churches'; chosen to set forth 'seven distinct states' in which the Church of God would in all ages be found. They do not represent or predict seven consecutive states, in which the Church would be found during succeeding ages; but seven co-existing states, in which the Church would be found in each age; so that there would be always an Ephesian state, and a Smyrnian, and so on. Every age would exhibit these seven spiritual phases; so that, taking this as our key we might always classify the church. We shall at all times find churches, congregations, individuals corresponding to these seven photographs. It is this that makes these epistles so searching. Were they consecutive and prophetic, much of their practical design and importance would be lost. Let each saint and each congregation be always asking, 'Is it I?' as the words to Ephesus or Sardis or Laodicea are read. We shall be sure to find one of them to suit us.

II. The seven STARS. These epistles are sent to the churches through the 'angel' or 'star.' The lamp and the star are both (each in its own way) figures referring to the dark night in which the Church now exists. Shining in the midnight skies, there is the star; and shining down here on earth, there is the lamp. The members of the Church are addressed through this angelic messenger. He carries to them from the Lord a letter descriptive of their spiritual state, and containing corresponding warnings and encouragements.

III. The seven TITLES of Christ. We find these in the first chapter; and we find them repeated in the second and third, in connection with the admonitions to the churches.

(1) He who holds the seven stars, and walks among the seven golden candlesticks. The source of all light in heaven and earth--the watchful guardian of the churches.

(2) The first and last, the dead and living one. He to whom all things belong in time and space, above and beneath--the crucified Christ, the risen Lord.

(3) He who has the sharp two-edged sword. The judge, the searcher, the executioner--God's true minister, who bears not the sword in vain.

(4) He who has eyes like fire, and feet like fine brass. He with the penetrating glance, and feet all splendid, yet repellent of evil.

(5) He who has the seven Spirits and the seven stars. He who has the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and who has it for His Church, and for ministry therein.

(6) The holy, the true, the holder of David's key. He who is the fountain-head of holiness, faithful to His word, true successor of David, heir of his house and throne.

(7) The Amen, the faithful witness, the beginning of the creation of God. He who is the true witness of the Father, who created all things by the word of His power.

Each of these seven titles is wonderful--each a brilliant orb of glory--each a storehouse of heavenly provision--each a mine of gold--each a coronet of gems--all together, how transcendently excellent and glorious!

IV. The seven SEARCHING words. 'I know your works.' Your works! Not your words, but your works; what they are; whether real or formal, genuine or heartless. All that you do and have done, I know. How piercing and overawing! He who cannot be deceived or imposed upon as to quality or quantity--He tells you that He knows you and your works! O saint of God, O child of His love, O Church of His election--He knows you!

V. The seven words of GRACE. To each of the churches He has some loving message, suited to its state. These are various, scattered through each epistle. Of Ephesus He acknowledges the labor and the patience, the hatred of evil, and the unfainting endurance. Of Smyrna He acknowledges the spiritual wealth, in the midst of earthly poverty; and to her He says, 'Fear none of those things which you shall suffer.' To Pergamos He says, 'You hold fast my name.' In the case of Thyatira, He acknowledges the charity, and service, and faith, and patience. In Sardis He owns the few names who have not defiled their garments, and promises that they shall walk with Him in white. To Philadelphia he speaks of her fidelity to Him, and His love to her. But the most gracious words are reserved for Laodicea, the worst of the seven churches. He offers her gold and clothing and eye salve; He knocks at her door, and offers Himself as her guest; He tells her of His love in rebuking and chastening.

VI. The seven EXHORTATIONS. How suitable, how various, yet how brief! To Ephesus He says, 'Remember whence you are fallen; repent, and do the first works;' to Smyrna, 'Be faithful unto death;' to Pergamos, 'Repent;' to Thyatira, 'Hold fast until I come;' to Sardis, 'Be watchful; strengthen what remains; remember, hold fast and repent;' to Philadelphia, 'Hold fast that which you have;' to Laodicea, 'Be zealous and repent.' In each of these, each one of us may find something for ourselves.

VII. The seven REWARDS for the seven conquerors. Each epistle takes for granted the warfare--warfare for the churches as well as for each member; and each epistle speaks of victory. 'To him who overcomes' is the keynote of each. Battle and victory, to these are we called. And then there are the spoils of battle; and the division of these among the conquerors. The strong one is overthrown, and his kingdom is divided among the victors. But there are special rewards.

(1) To Ephesus there is the tree of life; the restoration to Paradise; the gift of the Paradise of God.

(2) To Smyrna the crown of life, and deliverance from the second death--through Him who was dead and is alive, and who is now crowned with glory and honor.

(3) To Pergamos the hidden manna, the white stone, and the new name; each of these denoting something very glorious.

(4) To Thyatira power over the nations, and the morning star; she is to be made partaker of Messiah's glorious reign on earth.

(5) To Sardis the white clothing and acknowledgment before the Father and the angels.

(6) To Philadelphia the being made a pillar in God's temple, the name of God and His city, the new name.

(7) To Laodicea a seat upon Christ's throne. This is glory--thus are we heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

We shall reign with him forever. Even Laodicea is counseled and besought to return from her lukewarmness ('Be zealous') by the assurance not only of reception into former favor, but of a kingdom! Herein is love--love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown--'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?'

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