

12.02.2019 AMONG THE LAMPSTANDS

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 2:7

The focus of this lesson is the introduction to the messages to the seven churches. Our study passage is Revelation 1:9 -2:7. The themes in this passage are:

1. The identity of the Lord’s Day (1:10).
The Sabbath is the best explanation for John’s understanding of the Lord’s Day (Exodus 20:10, Deuteronomy 5:14, Exodus 31:13, Isaiah 58:13, Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:27, 28, Luke 6:5). The Sabbath is a memorial of what God has done for us; He has created and redeemed us and has set us apart (sanctified us) for His glory.
2. Jesus meets the churches where they are (1:9-20).
Jesus approaches each of the seven churches with different characteristics drawn from the introductory vision.
3. John’s basic outline of Revelation (1:9-20).
In Revelation 1:19 John summarizes the whole vision as concerning the things that are and the things that will happen in the future. Revelation 4:1 shows that much of Revelation focuses on the future. This future begins in John’s time and extends until the end of time.
4. Interpreting the Seven Messages to the Seven Churches
The messages to the seven churches contain information for the actual churches in Asia Minor, but they also parallel the spiritual conditions of Christianity in different historical periods.

On Patmos

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Revelation 1:9

John was suffering as a Christian for righteousness’ sake. The Bible offers a number of reasons why God allows His children to suffer: to produce fruit (Hebrews 10:36, James 1:3, Psalms 30:5; 126:6, 1 Peter 5:10), to silence the devil (Job 1:9-12; 2:3-7), to glorify God (John 9:1-3; 11:1-4), to make us like Jesus (Philippians 3:10), to teach us dependence (John 5:1-5, 2 Corinthians 12:1-10), to refine our lives (Psalm 66:10, Proverbs 17:3, 1 Peter 1:6, 7), to rebuke our sin (Hebrews 12:5-9), to enlarge our ministry towards others (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

John’s Vision of Christ: Revelation 1:12-20

This passage introduces us to the first of the 7 sanctuary scenes in the book of Revelation. This sanctuary scene is followed by the message to the seven churches found in chapters 2 and 3. In this vision, John sees the glorified Jesus (similar to Daniel’s vision of Daniel 10:5, 6). Jesus is seen as the High Priest walking among the lampstands. He is fulfilling His eternal desire to walk among His people, for the lampstands are the churches (Revelation 1:20).

“I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.” Leviticus 26:12

Not only does He walk among the churches; He knows each church intimately. Of each church He says, *“I know you...”* Revelation 2:2, 9, 13, 19 and 3:1, 8, 15.

Jesus presents Himself in a different way to each of the seven churches. He is able to adapt to each church’s particular needs and circumstances. He meets each church as it is. And if no church and no Christian has the full picture of Jesus, then we all have reason to be humble.

As we follow Jesus among the lampstands, we see, like He does, that the churches have failings; nevertheless, Christ sees them as seven GOLDEN lamp stands.

In the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. (1:13-18).

In Revelation, John shows us Christ as He is not seen in the gospels. In the gospels, He is Saviour; in Revelation He is King and Judge. In the gospel of John He is Alpha (John 1:1); in Revelation He is also the Omega. The gospels reveal His love; Revelation His majesty. In the gospels His tender look melted Peter's heart; in Revelation His eyes are as a flame of fire. His voice is gentle in the gospels; in Revelation it is a terrible as the sound of many waters and from His mouth proceeds a sharp two-edged sword, striking death to His enemies.

It is not enough to know the Jesus of the gospels; the Lamb of God and Saviour of the world. We must also know the Jesus of Revelation - Christ, King and Judge. To know the Jesus of the gospels results in thanksgiving; to know the Jesus of Revelation results in worship. He is the Faithful and True Witness, the divine Guarantor that all God's purposes will be fulfilled.

John's Basic Outline of Revelation (based on Revelation 1:19)

The author of Revelation often embeds clues about the organization and key ideas of the book in the transition texts. One of those transition texts is Revelation 1:19. In this text, John lays out the plan of the whole book. The text begins, "*Write, therefore, what you have seen*" (author's translation). This sentence parallels Revelation 1:11: "*Write what you see*" (author's translation). Revelation 1:11 is present tense and Revelation 1:19 is past tense (Greek aorist indicative). This means the entire vision of Revelation was given between the command in Revelation 1:11 and the command in Revelation 1:19.

Now he is told to write it out. What has John seen?

Two things: "*The things which are*" and "*the things which shall be hereafter*" (Rev. 1:19).

So the book of Revelation includes both things current at the time of the seven churches and things that were yet to come, from their perspective. What, then, are "*the things which are and the things which will take place after this*" in Revelation 1:19? The answer: everything between Revelation 1:19 and 4:1, namely, the messages to the seven churches.

In Revelation 4:1 Jesus says to John, "*Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things*".

This statement is similar to Revelation 1:19. Beginning with Revelation 4:1, the rest of Revelation focuses primarily on the future after John's time. While there are flashbacks to the cross (Rev. 5:6, Rev. 12:11), and even events before Creation (Rev. 12:4, 7, 9), the primary focus, for most of the book, is events future to John's day.

Interpreting the Seven Messages to the Seven Churches

The messages to the seven churches are "prophetic letters." They are more like Matthew 24 than they are like Daniel 7 or Revelation 13. So their message concerns seven actual churches in Asia Minor, the ones that originally received them (Rev. 1:4, 11) and, by extension, for all those who read these messages (Rev. 1:3; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29 etc).

There were, however, more than seven churches in Asia Minor, but the spiritual conditions in those churches parallel the spiritual conditions of Christianity in different historical periods from the time of John until today. So embedded in these messages to seven historical churches was a grand survey of the major developments of Christian history.

The letters therefore, have a historical, prophetic and universal application.

Message to the Church in Ephesus: Revelation 2:1-7

"The church in Ephesus" was a most blessed church. It had Paul, Apollos, Aquila, Priscilla, Timothy, Tychicus, and others working in it. The apostle John had ministered there. It was very advanced in the knowledge and holiness of the doctrine of Christ Jesus. Paul highly recommended them in his Epistles. The Epistle to the Ephesians revealed to the church there the doctrine and position of the individual believer and the church.

Jesus wants His church to love Him (Revelation 2:1-7)

To the church at Ephesus Jesus reveals Himself as *'Him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lamp stands'* Revelation 2:1.

Each of the titles of Jesus given in the messages is connected to the vision John sees in Revelation 1.

Commendation (Revelation 2:2, 3): Jesus commends the church for *'your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for My name's sake and have not become weary.'*

Nevertheless, this will be worth nothing if you do not repent and love Jesus above all else. Works, labour, being zealous for the truth, perseverance - all this is worth nothing if Jesus does not hold the first place in our hearts. Though full of good works and sound doctrine and patient endurance, God seeks our love above all else. When we have done all that we are commanded to do, we are still 'unprofitable servants' if we have only done our duty (Luke 17:10).

'Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love' (2:4).

If we will repent and return to our first love, Jesus, and love Him to the end as He loves us (John 13:1) Jesus promises that we will eat from the tree of life which is the midst of the Paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).

The Issue: God comes first. This is the message of the first commandment. God is to be loved supremely. Everything else we do, even in His name and for His sake is secondary to our love for Him. We are to love Him with all our heart and soul and might. *'This is the first and great commandment'* Matthew 22:38.

Christ is spoken of as walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks. Thus is symbolized His relation to the churches. He is in constant communication with His people. He knows their true state. He observes their order, their piety, their devotion. Although He is high priest and mediator in the sanctuary above, yet He is represented as walking up and down in the midst of His churches on the earth. With untiring wakefulness and unremitting vigilance, He watches to see whether the light of any of His sentinels is burning dim or going out. If the candlesticks were left to mere human care, the flickering flame would languish and die; but He is the true watchman in the Lord's house, the true warden of the temple courts. His continued care and sustaining grace are the source of life and light. *Acts of the Apostles:p.586*

Additional Note:

I have used material from the Sabbath School study author's book 'Plain Revelation'. It is available on Amazon Kindle here in the UK and is a very helpful guide to the book of Revelation.

The web link is posted below:

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Plain-Revelation-Ranko-Stefanovic-ebook/dp/B00JO2W004/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1547129335&sr=1-4&keywords=ranko+stefanovic
