

Rev. 1:12. the Seven Golden Lamps

by Horatius Bonar

The vision of the seven golden candlesticks represents the seven Churches, which are made 'burning and shining lights' by the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Revelation 1:12

Topics: "Church as Light", "Holiness and Responsibility"

Description

Horatius Bonar explores Revelation 1:12, emphasizing the significance of the seven golden candlesticks representing the seven churches. He highlights that these churches, made of gold, symbolize holiness and divine beauty, reflecting the light of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Bonar stresses the importance of the churches as light holders in a dark world, urging them to shine brightly and maintain their purity amidst challenges. He also discusses the number seven as a symbol of perfection, variety, and unity, reminding the churches of their honor and responsibility to reflect Christ's image. Ultimately, he encourages the churches to let their light shine in the darkness until the day comes when they are no longer needed.

Transcript

"And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And, being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks."
--Revelation 1:12.

John hears a voice--a great voice, a voice like a trumpet--behind him, not above, nor before. Dwelling, if tradition be correct, in the southern extremity of the island, on a steep cliff, and looking over the Aegean, he would have his back to the continent of Asia, and, of course, to the Churches there. The voice he heard makes him turn round, and look to the north-east, where the cluster of the seven Churches lay, the churches with which he was specially connected. The first thing meeting his eye is seven golden candlesticks, or lamp stands, as if just somewhere in the region where he might have expected to see the Churches. What a vision in that lonely, barren island! It would seem as if he had been transported back to Jerusalem, and brought into the sanctuary, or as if the golden relics of that now ruined sanctuary had been transported by some angel hand, and placed upon the desolate rock!

Let us seek to gather something from this vision. What did the Holy Spirit mean by it? What does it teach us? We are told that 'the seven candlesticks are the seven churches' (ch. 1:20). This much is plain. Seven Churches, which he knew well, had just been named to him, and he is told that these golden lamp stands are meant to represent or symbolize these churches.

With these 'golden candlesticks' we must connect the 'seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God' (ch. 4:5). Not that these two sets of lamps are the same. In the one case we read of 'lamp stands,' in the other of 'lamps;' in the one case it is the Churches that are described, in the other it is the Holy Spirit. Still, they are connected. The former get their light from the latter. It is by the Holy Spirit that the seven Churches are made 'burning and shining lights.'

The 'stars' (verse 20) are not, as some have supposed, the flame of the lamp. They are quite different, as we shall see. Of the New Jerusalem, the Lamb is the light; but in His absence from this world just now, the Holy Spirit, in His sevenfold fullness, and with His sevenfold gifts and sevenfold illumination, gives light, by lighting up the churches. They owe all their light to Him. As He came down at Pentecost under the emblem of fire (Acts 2:3), so does He abide upon the Churches still. In the upper chamber this fire 'sat upon each' of the disciples, and so it sits still. It is the Pentecostal fire that kindles these seven lamps, and maintains their heavenly brightness; for that brightness is not human nor angelic--it is divine. It is light communicated by the Holy Spirit--a spark or flame from the Shekinah glory; the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Let us look at this more in detail.

I. The CANDLESTICKS. It is not so much to the light as to the utensil or stand for holding it that his attention is turned; for the light of these lamps is not from themselves, or from any earthly source, but from Him who is 'the light of the world,' and who said to His disciples as His representatives here, 'You are the light of the world.'

'Among whom you shine as lights in the world' (Philippians 1:15), says Paul, adding, 'holding forth the word of life.' The individual saint is a 'light;' a Church is a 'light holder' or 'lamp stand.' The saint personally, and the Church or body of saints, is placed 'in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,' and, like 'the word of prophecy' (2 Peter 1:19), 'shines as a light in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise.'

Israel, for ages, was the world's only light--a light confined within narrow boundaries--not diffused over earth, nor set upon a hill. Of this the one seven-branched candlestick in the tabernacle and temple was the symbol. That lamp stand was doubly shut in--first, by the outer curtain, or wall of the house; and, secondly, by the inner curtain, or wall of the holy place. But these curtains have been torn in pieces, these walls thrown down; and now that lamp stands in uncurtained, unhidden splendor, shining out over all the world.

Take the lamp as meaning, in the first place, CHRIST Himself, the light of Israel, and of the world. This is true. He was 'a light to enlighten the Gentiles;' 'His life was the light of men.' Take it again as meaning ISRAEL, who was so long earth's only light. This is true; for Israel, when her exclusive privileges passed away, gave forth her light around. Take it as meaning the CHURCH, or Churches, or saints of God. This is also true--they shine out as lights over all the world--not over Israel's valleys and hills alone, or her cities and villages, but over all earth's wide expanse, over all kindred's, and nations, and tongues, and peoples.

Christ is the world's light; the church is the world's light; each saint is the light of the circle where he dwells and where he moves.

II. The MATERIALS of which the candlesticks are made. They are of GOLD. Generally in scripture gold symbolizes the holy, the perfect, the divine. 'Be holy, for I am holy;' 'be perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect;' 'partakers of the divine nature;' 'as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly,'--these are some of the passages which help to illustrate the meaning of 'gold.' The Churches are 'in God the Father, and in Christ Jesus, our Lord.' They are not from

beneath, but from above; they are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world. They are composed of men born from above. With divine glory they shine; with divine beauty they stand forth before the world, 'perfect with the loveliness which God has put upon them,' and representing the surpassing and all-precious excellence of Him in whose beauty they are beautiful, and in whose perfection they are perfect.

How noble the lesson which we are thus taught! How holy and unworldly ought the Churches to be, and each saint in them! As gold cannot rust, so neither ought they to take on the world's rust or defilement, but to stand in the midst of it as a witness against its evil; 'holy, harmless, and undefiled, separate from sinners;' 'unspotted from the world.' If the iron and clay cannot mingle, how much less the gold and the clay! What a rebuke to the Churches--'How is the fine gold become dim!' Where is the church now that could claim the symbol, and say, 'I am a golden candlestick?'

The furniture of Israel's two inner sanctuaries was all of gold; the candlestick of the holy place was of gold--thus in all past ages foreshadowing the true character of a church and of a saint. Golden Churches! Golden men! Golden witnesses for Christ and His truth! How far the church of God in the past centuries, since John wrote, has fulfilled the description, ecclesiastical history can tell. The age of gold was not a long one; and then followed the silver, the brass, and the iron. How much of gold is to be seen in the churches of our day? It does cheer one to know that the Lord still counted such imperfect churches as Ephesus and Pergamos, or such backslidden ones as Sardis and Laodicea, as represented by gold. The grace of our Lord is exceeding abundant. He prefers to praise rather than to blame. His love and patience are boundless; His desire to discover the least 'good thing' in His people is sincere and earnest.

And this truth is of itself a gospel for the declining churches of the last days. While the sight of the golden candlesticks rebukes, it encourages amazingly. It humbles, yet it cheers. The love of Jesus cannot fail. The efficacy of the cross, as covering, with its atoning shelter, all who have consented to accept that shelter, cannot change; the backsliders shall be saved, but it will be 'so as by fire.' Lowest of all, it may be, will the 'orthodox' Churches of the last days be found, who had the name, and the form, and the profession--but not the love, or the holiness, or the power.

III. The NUMBER of the candlesticks. SEVEN. In the temple the candlestick was one, the branches seven. In this symbolic scene it would rather appear that the seven were quite separate from each other--possibly with the view of intimating that the Churches throughout the world, though all of gold, were to be separate; and if so, then there is here a most vivid protest against the pretended unity of Rome. The number seven is the number of--

(1) PERFECTION. As the one sunbeam is composed of seven parts, and thus perfected into whiteness--so seven is the divine number of perfection, or completeness.

(2) VARIETY. Not absolute uniformity, but variety; the variety which is needful for perfection--the manifold gifts of the one Spirit, sent from the one Christ.

(3) UNITY. Seven is oneness; oneness with diversity--one body, many members; one household, many members; one temple, many stones; one loaf, many crumbs; one sky, many stars.

(4) Covenant-CERTAINTY. Seven is the covenant number. The seven lambs at Beersheba were for covenant; and that place means 'the well of the seven,' or the 'well of the oath' (Genesis 21:31). The Churches are the Churches of the everlasting covenant--the covenant between the Father and the

Son--'ordered in all things, and sure.'

1. What HONOR belongs to the Churches! They are made of heavenly gold, the gold of the sanctuary. All splendor is theirs; untarnished beauty and glory.

2. What RESPONSIBILITY rests upon them! It is special responsibility to the Son of man, who walks in the midst of them; the responsibility of being what He would have us to be, and what He represents us in this emblem as really being--'golden Churches;' the responsibility of being holy and consistent--of reflecting the image of our Lord; of being lights in the world.

To the Churches, the Son of man is saying, 'Let your light shine! Hide it not. Raise it aloft, that it may send its radiance wide and far. Let nothing dim it; let nothing intercept it. The world is dark. The night is gloomy. The light shines in the darkness. There is no other light but this for a dark world.'

The day is coming, the time when these lamps shall be needed no more. Until then, shine on, shine on, O church of the living God! And in proportion to the darkness of the last days, let your light blaze out in heavenly splendor!

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