

Revelation 1:10-20 (Edward Denny) 72438

Bible Treasury: Volume N13, Revelation 1:10-20, Notes on

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The book of the Revelation supposes that we are familiar with the whole of God's revelation; consequently it is with some timidity we approach a book that is so comprehensive, and which sums up as it were the whole word of God.

It is a judicial book. The presentation of the Lord in what we have read indicates Him as prepared for judgment. He is in priestly robes. The setting of the book is the setting of the temple; but He is not here to offer or to intercede, but to judge, and consequently in the character as given Him in the Gospel of John, with "authority to execute judgment, also, because He is the Son of man."

The book has special signification to us in that it views us not only as saints, sanctified ones, set apart, and cleansed both by water and by blood, but it views us (chap. 1 as His bondservants, or slaves. It is important to recognize this aspect of the truth—that we are not our own but bought with a price.

How the Lord is entitled to speak here as the One that has been here a Faithful Witness to God! And He addresses His bondman John, who also had been faithful in testimony, and in consequence is imprisoned in the Isle of Patmos. He is in the Spirit. You notice it is a big "S," it was not merely his own spirit—a good spiritual state, but in a condition that is characterized by the fullness of the power of God, the Holy Spirit Himself. And it is only here we have the Lord's Day mentioned—a very suitable day on which to make this revelation—when he was cut off from the weekly communion with his fellowservants on this resurrection day, "the first day of the week," and here stamped, as ever after to be known, as indeed "the Lord's Day."

On this day it was that the disciples "came together to break bread," as we know from Acts 20:7; and, cut off from the common privilege of this day, the Lord gives His servant the compensation of this presentation of Himself, and of knowing and shewing the things that must shortly be done. The Lord presents Himself, as it were, by public announcement, for the trumpet in the Old Testament announced some great public assembly—whether for festival or war. And the trumpet is intended here to announce the Lord's character as depicted in the prophecy of Daniel (chap. 7); He has all the characteristics there seen as attaching to "the Ancient of Days." And without going into all particulars, the whole is summed up by the presentation of the Lord in a judicial character.

But the Lord gives confidence to His servant and lays His right hand on him, giving him strength, as He did to Ezekiel in like circumstances. He announces Himself as "the Living One" with the keys of death and of hades; and then, in one graphic verse, the whole book is divided for us (chap. 1:19) in the simplest of ways.—"The things which thou hast seen"—evidently in ch. 1 "the things which are," or exist (as in chaps. 2, 3); and finally, "things which shall be after these things" (as from ch. 5 and on). But one would emphasize chaps. 4 and 5, because there heaven is opened, and the church—the special object of the Holy Spirit's operation in this dispensation, is viewed as glorified with Christ. I think that is as brief a summary as I know how to give on such a subject.

Perhaps it would not be amiss to make a remark on ver. 20. A mystery is mentioned there. A mystery is a secret, and this is one of many such secrets; but this is specially concerning "the seven stars" and "the seven candlesticks." The seven candlesticks represent the whole of the church period, and a testimony appointed by God. And so we have doubtless in the seven epistles the whole period of the professing church's history down to the close; and we ought to be exceedingly grateful to God that He has disclosed it to us. We want to see the range of these seven churches; and the simplest way is by that which divides them into the first three, and the last four. They are divided by the different position in which the exhortation is placed.

In the first three epistles the exhortation precedes the promise of reward; and in the last four the reward precedes the exhortation.

Now the significance is this—the first three phases of the church were not permanently to abide, but would pass away; whilst the supervening four phases of the church would after their rise respectively continue concurrently to the end. So we will first announce the characteristics of each. Ephesus is characterized by loss of first love, It is a history of declension, declension that terminates in total apostasy. The next, Smyrna, is characterized by suffering and persecution, but only for a limited period—"ten days": and the third is characterized by dwelling where Satan's throne is—the church dwelling where Satan exercises his power, as prince of this world! How rapid this decline of the church, from a chaste virgin espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2), to dwelling in a place of authority peculiarly Satan's! The next is marked by the world coming into the church—Thyatira, and the highest offices of the state and of the world coveted by those who profess to be the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. At this point the Holy Spirit describes this as religious fornication (chap. 2:14). No other figure would so strike home the awful character of the church and the world being identified as this figure. All that we understand by Romanism characterizes Thyatira—but not Rome alone—Rome and her children.

This is followed by that which is representative of Protestantism, and what characterizes Sardis is a name to live whilst dead—no vitality, just cold formalism; and alas! this is what distinctly has followed the great Reformation, wonderful as it was. I suppose no intelligent saint but what would thank God for the marvelous recovery of truth then, notably justification by faith; but even then there was not a complete recovery of the truth, and so the church had not yet the power that she should have had. The deeds of the Nicolaitanes in 3:6, and their doctrine in ver. 15 one hesitates to dogmatise about, but I think the key is in the preceding verse. It is there connected with the doctrine of Balaam, etc. The deeds of the Nicolaitanes were what we should call to-day antinomianism—do as you like, and continue in sin that grace may abound! The doctrine was what Balaam taught when he seduced the people with the daughters of Moab and brought on them the

judgment at Bethpeor. This truth is a very vital point, that the Lord held Pergams responsible for allowing them that held that doctrine in their midst. The Ephesians hated it; they were in full accord with their Master; but when the church went into the world, they put up with these things. In Matt. 13, when the enemy sowed the tares, they were first the evil teachings that preceded the evil men. A tare is a direct emissary of Satan to defile and destroy God's work. So here the Lord cites them to give account about it. The allowance of evil teaching among the saints of God is a very solemn thing, and leads the Lord to act quickly.

Philadelphia ("brotherly love") represents things when there is but "little" strength (omit the article). The condition of Philadelphia is feebleness but faithfulness. And the Lord does not rebuke Smyrna or Philadelphia. He does not rebuke those being persecuted, or those with "little strength." He has set before them an open door—an opportunity created by Himself—and no man shall shut it. This is what marks that phase which is a bright spot in the church's history, because it brings out the Lord's grace.

The last is a state marked by total indifference, Laodicean lukewarmness: and that is most repulsive to the Lord; when it comes to this He publicly disowns that which professes His name. No longer owned, but spued out of His mouth. The spurious counterfeit goes on, and is seen as the great whore in chaps. 17, 18, but all relationship as the church of Christ is disowned after chap. 3, when in fact the true church is thenceforth seen as no longer on the earth but is here seen clothed in white raiment and "round about the throne" (chap. 4). So with Israel the Lord disowned relationship with Israel after He said, "Your house is left unto you desolate," though the nation went on for forty years after. This brings us to an important juncture, because it gives us—a panoramic view, of the whole church, from Pentecost to the close.

In verse 13 the words "In the midst" occur. We get them in Matt. 18:20, also in the cross— "on either side one, and Jesus in the midst." Then on the resurrection day, in John 20, and Luke 24 Again in Rev. 5 in the midst of the throne; and in Heb. 2, "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee." There is the Divine center. If you want to put everything in its right place, as the sun is the center of our solar system, round which, and at relative distances, all the planets move, so in the word we have the divine center, and the gathering point. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, here am I." What the Christian has is not a visible thing. We have not a visible "house of God," so called, like the Jews, who had the temple—not a visible sacrifice, or a visible priest; but we have that Name, and we gather to that Name; and it is the name of Jesus, and no Christian should recognize any other as a gathering point. As Peter says, "Whom not having seen ye love," etc. Never before had there been such a gathering as this. God had an assembly in the wilderness—not the "church," but Israel. They are quite distinct. Israel is a national thing; the church is a heavenly body. No two things are more apart. But the Lord says, He will be in the midst of those gathered to His name, He is in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, and His real living Presence is in our midst. Without His being in the midst you have none to lead you. We get that in Heb. 2:12. We are dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ for everything.

Ephesus then was characterized by works, labor, and patience-zeal. They tried those calling themselves apostles, and found them liars. Their labors are referred to twice, and it was not that the Lord had (as given in italics) "somewhat" against them, but a very serious matter against them. Another church had "work of faith and labor of love," but Ephesus was marked by great activity, without the mention of faith and love. There is no mention of the candlesticks after Ephesus. It should be an encouragement to our hearts to see witnesses true to God among us. The "candlestick," or, lampstand, as you know, is taken from the candlestick in the Holy Place—a seven-branched one; and this warning to Ephesus is to remove her candlestick, though she was only one branch. The whole should have presented a perfect testimony to Christ; but if love is lacking, the centre, so to speak, represented the whole candlestick, though she was only one branch. The whole should have presented a perfect testimony to Christ; but if love is lacking, the center, so to speak, is lacking. The Lord's eye detected it—the testimony becoming, not for, but against, Him. A corrupt church is a testimony against Him. If an assembly is wiped out, the candlestick is removed. It was a warning, rather than an accomplishment. It was what would result if there was no restoration. The light of the lampstand (or, candlestick) gave light over against the table. The tabernacle was called "the testimony," and is so spoken of in Numbers. So I take it the candlestick throwing its light on the table was to throw a general testimony. The church at Ephesus had the grandest truths God made known. What we get in the Epistle to the Ephesians is the highest and fullest revelation ever made known, and that because there was no fault to find with them. To the Corinthians there was much fault to find. So with the Galatians; and so even with the little Philippian assembly he had to draw attention to division, and exhort Evodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind. There is no reference to sin in that epistle; it is true Christian experience, and should be the experience of all of us—not only Paul's experience but ours, if like Paul and Timothy we too are "bondmen of Jesus Christ," as is the Christian's obligation (Rom. 6:16-22).

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