

January - March 2014

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

Part 10

“And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same. And six branches shall come out of the sides of it; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side: Three bowls made like unto almonds, with a knop and a flower in one branch; and three bowls made like almonds in the other branch, with a knop and a flower: so in the six branches that come out of the candlestick. And in the candlestick shall be four bowls made like unto almonds, with their knops and their flowers. And there shall be a knop under two branches of the same, and a knop under two branches of the same, according to the six branches that proceed out of the candlestick. Their knops and their branches shall be of the same: all it shall be one beaten work of pure gold. And thou shalt make the seven lamps thereof: and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it. And the tongs thereof, and the snuffdishes thereof, shall be of pure gold. Of a talent of pure gold shall he make it, with all these vessels. And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.” (Exodus 25:31-40)

Throughout the Holy Scriptures, the recurring theme of **light** is used to express the nature and character of God, and of Christ the Mediator. For example: *“God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all”* (1 John 1:5); *“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”* (John 8:12). The connection between ‘light’ and ‘life’ is also often made: *“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not”* (John 1:4). The Old Testament character Elihu makes reference to ‘light’ in this

context: “*Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living*” (Job 33:29-30) – light being the portion of those who are restored to newness of life.

Christ rose from the dead, and by virtue of His resurrection, is the source and sustainer of His Church in **life** and **light**. This is the meaning of such Scriptures as: “*our Saviour Jesus Christ ... hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (2 Timothy 1:10); and, “*For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:8); and, “*your life is hid with Christ in God*” (Colossians 3:3); and, “*God... hath quickened us together with Christ, And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Ephesians 2:5-6). According to God’s eternal purpose, new life proceeds to all His redeemed people through the resurrection of Christ; and by union with Christ that life is maintained. Through His death and resurrection, atonement was effectually wrought. In bringing Christ, the Head, out of the pit, God causes all His members to be brought out with Him, to be enlightened in due time with ‘the light of the living’ – as expressed in the verse from Job 33. These are the spiritual themes set forth by the next item of Tabernacle furniture to be considered, namely, the **Candlestick of Gold**. In a simple way, it portrays something of the wondrous mystery of the union with Christ of all His elect, and the glorious consequences of that relationship.

The Candlestick was the most ornate and elaborate of all the vessels of the Sanctuary. Unlike the Ark and the Table of Shewbread (both constructed of acacia wood, then overlaid with gold), this lamp-stand was made of solid metal (akin to the Mercy Seat). What is more, it is described as being of ‘beaten work’ – not cast in a mould, but rather hammered into shape. This was a work of great skill and wisdom, producing in the end an article of great solidity and exquisite beauty.

This affords a most apt illustration of the Divine skill, and infinite wisdom of God, displayed in Christ and His Church, as fashioned by Him, and quickened out of death – the wondrous sequel to God’s deep and eternal counsels, the abiding manifestation of His manifold wisdom, and the exceeding riches of His grace. Was not this in the mind of the apostle Paul when he wrote: “*That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus*” (Ephesians 2:7), and again: “*To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God*” (Ephesians 3:10)?

Let this article of Tabernacle furniture be examined more closely, and the way in which it illustrates and aids understanding of the high doctrinal statements of the New Testament will be clearly seen.

Although translated as ‘candlestick’, a better term to use for this object is ‘**lamp-stand**’, since no ‘candles’ in the English sense of the word were involved. The light source was from oil lamps, as will be described presently. By reference to Exodus 25, the general shape of the lamp-stand can be pictured. It is described as having a central shaft and six branches (v. 31). The shaft was the main upright stem of the vessel, magnificently decorative, and forming a rugged and solid support for the whole. From the sides of this vertical shaft extended six branches, three on either side. It should be noted that these branches were not welded or soldered on, but wrought from the same single piece of gold as the central shaft. This is confirmed in a parallel scripture: “*And he made the candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work made he the candlestick; his shaft, and his branch, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, were of the same*” (Exodus 37:17). Shaft and branch (here given in the singular) and the ornamentation were all of the same. Here is set forth in type the indissoluble union, yea the eternal, mystical union of Christ and His Church.

Regarding the subject of Spiritual Union, throughout the pages of Scripture, Christ – the Head, and the Church – His body, are always presented as **one**, from the beginning of time (cf Ephesians 1:3-4) to its conclusion (cf Revelation 21:2); Head and members are ever viewed together. God, in His eternal purposes, has **not** commenced (so to speak) with a Head, and gradually, over the course of human history, built up a Body – first forming a neck, then as more come to Christ, given shape to the shoulders, and as time progresses fashioned a torso and limbs as more people ‘decide for Christ’. No! This is the error of Arminianism, a frightful distortion of Truth, and a bizarre caricature of the eternal counsels of God.

The Church of Jesus Christ has been in its **entirety** in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world. He elected every member. There are no more, no less; all that number were atoned for, reconciled to God, and **in Christ** as ‘flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone’, all fitly framed together (cf Ephesians 2:21), a glorious Body. The hymn-writer grasped this truth when he wrote:

“What from Christ that soul shall sever,
Bound by everlasting bands?
Once in Him, in Him forever,
Thus the Eternal Covenant stands;
None shall pluck thee
From the Strength of Israel’s hands.

Heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus,
Long ere time its race begun;
To His name eternal praises,
O what wonders He hath done!
One with Jesus,
By **eternal union** one.”

(John Kent)

Consider again the wonderful design of the lamp-stand. From the description given, it is evident that the central shaft, which is first spoken of, was more profusely adorned than the branches, and of necessity, more substantial than them. The blessed Lord and Mediator is Himself the Head and originator of the Body. He is central to ‘the branch’ – which is the Church. Although both are one, He is the central pillar upon which the Church depends.

As the New Testament explains: “*For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, ‘I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee’.* And again, ‘*I will put My trust in Him*’. And again, ‘*Behold I and the children which God hath given Me*’” (Hebrews 2:11-13). The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all one. Christ is in no way embarrassed or ashamed to call His redeemed children His ‘brethren’. His great Name is declared in the midst. Thus Christ is, as it were, the trunk from which the branches spring – yet it is but one tree.

He is the central shaft, He towers above the members. In all things He hath the pre-eminence (cf Colossians 1:18). Although in the midst of His fellows, yet is He anointed with the oil of gladness **above them** (cf Psalm 45:7). A man – yea the Man Christ Jesus – in the very middle of His people, yet fairer than the children of men (cf Psalm 45:2), the chiefest of ten thousand, the altogether lovely one (cf Song of Songs 5:10, 16). Thus there is typified by this lamp-stand oneness, yet pre-eminence; similarity, yet superiority.

Coming now to the matter of the **oil**, the Scripture states: “*And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always*” (Exodus 27:20), “*And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the*

lamps to burn continually” (Leviticus 24:1-2). This fuel was derived from the Olive Tree, which holds a rather unique and honourable position in the Word of God. For example: “*But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?*” (Judges 9:9); “*But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever*” (Psalm 52:8); “*The Lord called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit*” (Jeremiah 11:16); “*His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon*” (Hosea 14:6).

The oil from the olives was to be ‘beaten’ out, and the underlying meaning of the word is one of ‘spontaneous outpouring’. In this there is presented a beautiful symbol of the Holy Spirit; the rich and ever-fresh presence and grace of Him who is called “*the **unction** [oil] from the Holy One*” (1 John 2:20).

The lamp-stand with its golden lamps, causing light to shine constantly in the sanctuary, through the pure oil continually supplied, is highly expressive of the Church in union with Christ, radiating and shedding forth **His** light and glory in the presence of God. This, through being anointed and fed by the fulness of the Spirit, which has been given without measure (cf John 3:34) unto Him who is the central shaft of that lamp-stand. ‘Grace has been poured into His lips’ says the Scripture (cf Psalm 45:2), “*And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace*” (John 1:16).

It should be noted that the typology here is not primarily that of the Church sending forth gospel-light into the world. That is another aspect of truth described in other places (cf Matthew 5:14, Philippians 2:13). This lamp-stand was housed exclusively within the Holy Place of the Tabernacle, into which no unregenerate person ever entered. The picture in this Old Testament object is one of Christ and His Church presented **before God** in the heavens. That Holy Place made

with hands in the Tabernacle was a 'figure of the true'. "*He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the Lord continually*" (Leviticus 24:4). The great purpose of this beautiful, pure vessel was that it should shed forth its light and radiance in the sight of God. "*And he lighted the lamps before the Lord; as the Lord commanded Moses*" (Exodus 40:25).

The Lord Jehovah, who Himself is eternal light, who dwelleth in light unapproachable, nevertheless delights to have this candlestick shed its light in His very presence! What a holy and exalted standing the Church of God has! It finds its place, yea its home, in heaven itself, ever before the eye of the Almighty, seen as one candlestick – Christ the Head, His people the members, yet one body in the sight of God. As the Saviour Himself prayed: "*And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me*" (John 17:22-23).

The magnitude of this truth should stir the heart of every Christian reader! Can anyone truly comprehend and appreciate the greatness of this fact? What need there is for such a prayer as:

"O teach us, Lord, to know and own
This wondrous mystery,
That Thou with us art truly one,
And we are one with Thee." (J. G. Deck)

Another aspect of doctrine presented by the lamp-stand remains to be considered. Concerning the practice in the Tabernacle, and use of the Altar of Incense it is stated: "*And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a*

perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations” (Exodus 30:7-8). *“Without the veil of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it **from the evening unto the morning** before the Lord continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the Lord continually”* (Leviticus 24:3-4). There is nothing coincidental or unimportant in these words. All are highly significant. The lamps would burn from the evening when first lit, until the morning, when they could be ‘dressed’, cleaned and recharged.

When the princes of this world crucified the Lord of Glory, they openly refused Him who had displayed Himself to them as the Light of the World (cf 1 Corinthians 2:8, John 1:5-11). To His enemies at the time of His arrest He said, *“this is your hour, and the power of darkness”* (Luke 22:53). Of Judas, who instigated that act by his treachery, the Scriptures emphatically state that he, *“went immediately out: and it was night”* (John 13:30).

Mortal man loves darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil. (cf John 3:19). Men put to death the incarnate Son of God, thus exacerbating that darkness. They sealed the tomb, and set their watch. The dark grave was the last place that the world beheld Christ. The Risen Saviour is unknown to them; they dwell in darkness, and cannot see beyond death’s gloomy portal. But the redeemed of the Lord have been brought out of darkness, into His wonderful light (cf 1 Peter 2:9)! Raised with Christ, they sit with Him in heavenly places. From the dense darkness of Golgotha and the tomb Christ arose, and ascended, leading captivity captive! In that seemingly darkest hour, the lamp of God of was ignited and illuminated in the Holy Place! And there it will burn continually – **until the morning**.

Throughout the perpetual night of this evil world, the light burns on undimmed in the Holy Place above. God’s eye rests upon Christ and

His Church. This is a glory which continually radiates in heaven. Is not earth's night already far spent? Yes we believe that the day is at hand; the great day of resurrection; the morn without clouds. Then will the Church be raised in reality from death, as every one of God's elect receives their glorified body, raised incorruptible, having put on immortality, made like unto Christ's body of glory – glorified humanity fitted for an eternal heaven. *“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matthew 13:43); then, *“they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever”* (Daniel 12:3).

Yet, the amazing truth set forth by the lamp-stand in the Tabernacle is that the glory of the church does **not commence** on that day of final resurrection. The Church is **already** united unto Christ, and spiritually raised with Him. Indeed, in the eternal purposes of Almighty God, it was ever thus; and from before the foundation of the world, unto ages unending, is as secure in His presence as was the candlestick in the Holy Place. May God by His Holy Spirit grant to every reader a deeper appreciation of this truth.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

“Its bowls, which were to hold oil for the lamps, may denote men of capacity in the Churches, full of the gifts and grace of the Spirit, able to teach others also: and the knops and flowers were for decoration, and may signify the graces of the Spirit, with which private members and believers are adorned; or the gifts of the Spirit with which the ministers of the Word are furnished, and appear beautiful, publishing the glad tidings of salvation by Christ.”

John Gill (1697 – 1771)

ABIDING IN CHRIST

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.” (John 15:4)

The union of the believer with Jesus and its consequent fruitfulness is a glorious truth; the Holy Spirit has laid great emphasis on it in His Word. It is referred to as being **in Christ**: *“Every branch in me”* (John 15:2), *“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”* (2 Corinthians 5:17), *“So we, being many, are one body in Christ”* (Romans 12:5). But in what sense are we to understand this being ‘in Christ’? To be in Christ truly, spiritually, and vitally is to be in that eternal covenant of grace made with Christ as the Surety and Mediator of His people. It means to be one of the number spoken of as the Lord’s ‘peculiar treasure’: *“For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure”* (Psalm 135:4). It concerns those whom the Holy Spirit declares as elected in Christ: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love”* (Ephesians 1:3-4).

To be truly in Christ is to stand accepted in His righteousness; to be justified by Him freely from all things; it is to be brought to the knowledge of our own vileness, in-sufficiency, and guilt; to be made to cast aside all self-dependence and works of human merit, and to come as the thief on the cross came, without any confidence in anything of self, but as a poor, helpless, ruined, condemned sinner, whose hope of pardon and acceptance is only through the free mercy of God in Christ.

To be in Christ is to be the subject of a living, holy, influential principle of faith. It is to be brought into the blessed state described by the apostle as his own: *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I,*

but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). To be in Christ is to be one with Him, a member of His mystical body of which He is the spiritual Head. The Head and members are one. It is to have Christ dwelling in the heart: *“Christ in you the hope of glory”* (Colossians 1:27). Indeed, it is to dwell in the heart of Christ; it is to rest there in the pavilion of His love, to abide there every moment, sheltered there from all evil and soothed there under all sorrow. Oh, blessed state of being in Christ! Who would not want to experience it? Who would not enjoy it? *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1).

These are the living branches, united to the true vine, which bear fruit. Their fruit comes from their union to the living vine: *“From Me is thy fruit found”* (Hosea 14:8). *“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me”* (John 15:4). And oh, what precious fruit does such a living branch bear! It bears a broken heart; a contrite spirit; mourning over sin; low, abasing, humbling views of self; the venturing by faith to a full, mighty, willing Saviour; the abandonment of self, and resting in His all-atoning work and all-satisfying righteousness.

This is followed by a progressive advance in all holiness and godliness, the fruits of faith which are abounding in the life by Jesus Christ, and proving the reality of the wondrous change. These mark the man with the close walk with God, the submission of the will in all things to His, the conformity of the life to the example of Jesus, the experience of the ‘power of His resurrection’ and the ‘fellowship of His sufferings’, and ‘conformity to His death’. These are some of the fruits of a truly regenerate soul. The Holy Spirit testifies that the *“fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth”* (Ephesians 5:9).

Octavius Winslow (1808 – 1878)

THE CHURCH REVEALED

“...and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.”
(Revelation 1:20)

Exiled upon the Isle of Patmos on account of the Word of God and his testimony concerning Christ Jesus, the apostle John was as far removed from any source of help or communication as his persecutors could contrive to place him. Yet for all their spite and malicious devices, the island to which John was banished became the venue for one of the greatest and fullest revelations of truth ever delivered at one time, to one man. The aged apostle amply demonstrated the inexorable power of the Word of God; and proved with so many saints, before and since, that a time of deepest affliction and confinement may also be one of highest blessing.

The unveiling of truth which he witnessed was nothing other than the ‘Revelation of Jesus Christ’ (the rightful title of the book) for it is Christ who is preeminent above all the other pronouncements and portents contained therein. Indeed, He is the first that appeared unto His beloved disciple; who records how he, on that momentous Lord’s Day, “*heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last*” (Revelation 1:10-11). Being arrested by the authority and power of those words, John was compelled to turn in the direction from whence they came. There could be no question as to the identity of the speaker. Doubtless the apostle recognised the voice he had loved so well years before, and most longed to hear again. ‘It was the Lord!’ What sight, then, did John expect to see, as he turned himself around? What image of glory?

“And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks” (v.12). That is what he initially beheld; not a figure or person, but seven lamp-stands made of

gold. That is where the voice proceeded from; and lest any should miss the significance, the interpretation of this surprising symbolism is given immediately by the speaker: “*the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches*” (v.20).

John heard the voice of the Lord. He turned to see the source of that sound, and beholds – **the Church**. Or, more particularly, **churches**, plural. Individual, local, earthly churches. They are the place from which the Word of God is sounded forth; the place in which the Incarnate Word is to be sought, and found. What pertinent application is here then, to the members of the Church upon earth! How conscious they should be of the duty, privilege and responsibility thus entailed. **Duty** in that they are to be the channel of Divine speech, and by preaching and practice, declare His truth; **privilege** in that they are in such proximity to Deity – assembled in the very place where He promises to presence Himself, and declare His name in their midst; and **responsibility**, in that, when men upon earth turn themselves in search of Christ, the Church is what they will behold.

The Church is the body of Christ, and as such, is a manifestation of Him to all who look on; a representation of the Saviour’s glory, and beauty, and attributes. His countenance shineth as the sun in its strength – they are to cause their light to so shine before men; He is girt about with gold, His feet as glowing brass – they are to be a lamp-stand, golden and lustrous. This is the great objective of the Church upon earth. Anything less is not worthy of the Great Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Oh, make Thy Church, dear Saviour,
A lamp of burnished gold
To bear before the nations
Thy true light as of old!” (W. W. How)

As its opening chapters make abundantly clear, the book of the Revelation is a Church Epistle, and thus resounds with instruction for the New Testament Church. It is also a General Epistle, as John was specifically told, “*seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book*” (Revelation 22:10) in order that it might be freely read by any and every one into whose hands it ultimately falls. The people of God in the present day therefore have reason, justification and need, to apply its teachings to themselves. The Lord in first dictating its content stresses that the mysterious vision of candlesticks should be a mystery no longer. They represent Churches. Let the connection be made, the allegory be seen, and the lessons drawn out.

Their Name

What do we picture in our minds when reading of these ‘candlesticks’? The original Greek word literally means a ‘light stand’, and has reference to a device designed to hold a lamp. Such lamps had been in use from earliest times, often consisting of a small, shallow, open bowl containing olive oil as a fuel and having a spout into which a wick might be laid. Thus ‘lamp-stand’ is a better word to use. Neither is there any contradiction here, for the seven-branched candlestick spoken of in the Tabernacle had not candles but seven corresponding lamps which it held aloft.

What of the spiritual significance of these practical details? The relevance of ‘light’ in Scripture is well known. It stands for truth and purity and righteousness. It is a fitting metaphor for the dwelling place of God (cf 1 Timothy 6:16, 1 John 1:7). One might therefore expect the Church to be described as ‘a lamp’. But in this particular instance it is not. Rather is it likened to a lamp-stand. The Scripture does not record any detail of light-sources in this vision; the Church is represented as the ‘stand’ or ‘holder’ of light. The responsibility and charge of the Church is to **bear** the light, but the Church is not the light itself. The light which she is called upon to carry is a thing greater

than the earthly Church; neither is it dependent upon, nor derived from her.

Three things are primarily likened unto 'light' in Holy Writ. Firstly, there is Jesus Christ, **the Incarnate Word**, the only begotten Son of God. "*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*" (John 8:12). Secondly there is **the Written Word**, the Bible, the lively oracles of God. "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*", "*the entrance of Thy word giveth light*" (Psalm 119:105, 130); while Peter adds: "*We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place*" (2 Peter 1:19). Thirdly, a life of godliness and righteousness, which might be styled **the Performed Word**, is described as a 'walking in light': "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16).

The Incarnate Word, the Written Word, the Performed Word – these are all 'over and above' the Church itself. The Lord Jesus is not dependent upon it; He is the Head upon which the members rely. God's Word does not depend upon it; that Word is 'forever settled in heaven'. Even in the more practical matter of obedience to the Word, it is God who enables and sanctifies His people; it is God who, in the face of His people's failure or sin can ordain praise from babes and sucklings, or cause the very stones to cry out, to ensure He is not 'left without witness'. This three-fold spiritual light is not something generated by the Church in its own strength – it is a Divine radiance that has its origins in heaven.

Since such is the case, is the purpose of the Church negated, and its members surplus to the requirements of God? No indeed! "*Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it*

giveth light unto all that are in the house” (Matthew 5:15). The lamp-stand has a vital function. God has supplied the light; He has a brilliant effulgence in store. How might it best be disseminated across a darkened and sin-benighted world? It needs to be multiplied across many places and lands; it requires to be borne aloft, clearly and distinctly, by a recognisable body. This is where the Church comes in, which institution God has made to be the ‘pillar and ground of truth’ (cf 1 Timothy 3:15), solidly founded and established, and lifting high a portion of Divine illumination in order that it might be broadcast far and wide.

Their Number

Throughout Scripture, the number seven is frequently used to denote ‘breadth’ and ‘completeness’. The seven local Churches singled out by the Lord in the opening chapters of Revelation stand as a representation or epitome of all New Testament Churches in all subsequent generations.

The point to note is that the seven Churches were symbolised by seven candlesticks – there was a direct correspondence – for each congregation, a golden lamp-stand. Doubtless those named assemblies of believers were very different from one another, consisting of diverse numbers of persons from various classes and walks of life. Perhaps the Ephesus church counted its members in the hundreds, while Thyatira was a fraction of that size; the company at Smyrna seems to have known poverty and want, whilst at Laodecia there was a surfeit of material goods. Nevertheless, in the sight of the Great Head, every place constituted a lamp-stand; each local Church was charged with bearing the light. None could say they were too small, or too few, or too weak, or too afflicted; nor could any claim that it was not their calling to shine forth the light. Every true, Biblical Church is a lamp-stand. Whatever their state, they are responsible to act as such; whatever their condition, they are capable of being so.

It should be observed that in the vision of Patmos, seven distinct candlesticks were manifested. This contrasts with the typology of the Old Covenant era, and the single, seven-branched candlestick of the Tabernacle: “*And he made the candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work made he the candlestick; his shaft, and his branch, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, were of the same: And six branches going out of the sides thereof; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side thereof, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side thereof*” (Exodus 37:17-18). There is however no contradiction between the symbols used, but rather a further development and unfolding of Truth.

In the second image, the Lord Jesus needs not to be represented figuratively, for He is there in person, fully and clearly seen: “*And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle*” (Revelation 1:13) – so in this picture, it is possible to portray the **diversity** which exists within the New Testament Church; whose congregations have variously consisted of Jew and Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bondmen, freemen; all incredibly different, and yet, “*Christ is all, and in all*” (Colossians 3:11).

It is imagery which also serves to illustrate **God’s appointed order** for the governance of New Testament Churches. Here are seven separate lamp-stands, each in its own place, each bearing the light, with no physical connection between them, no other person or body present than the Great Head Himself. It is just the candlesticks, and their Lord. Each New Testament Church is to be independent, autonomous, and responsible directly to the Saviour in its administration. ‘Denominations’, ‘ecclesiastical councils’, and ‘ecumenical alliances’ are utterly alien to Scripture, and an unbiblical invention of man. The Lord stands in the midst of His candlesticks, and makes enquiry of each one independently, and singly. And this will be His pattern in the final judgment. He recognises no organisation or authority which dares to

interpose itself between Him and His churches. There can be no hiding behind the majority decisions of committees, or traditions of men. Each assembly of saints must ultimately give an answer for the deeds done in that local body. *“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”* (Romans 14:12).

Their Nature

One feature common to all these candlesticks is the substance from which they were made. They were all golden. And in this lies further instruction. What is the Church made of? Who is qualified to comprise a part of it? Only those who are truly saved. Membership of any earthly Church can only be conferred upon those who by grace are members of the Church universal – the kingdom of God. This is a point upon which nominal and State Churches have erred for generations, amongst whose congregations the majority believe nothing at all, much less being possessed of saving faith. The candlestick cannot be made of an alloy. It must not consist of a mixed metal like brass or bronze, but of gold – pure and elemental and all of the same type throughout. A true Church can only be formed in this fashion.

There is also an application to the individual members of every local Church. They are each called upon to be a part of a candlestick of gold. Now, by grace and through the work of justification, they have been cleansed and purified to stand before God in all the perfections of Christ. There remains the important matter of practical sanctity; of personal obedience and righteousness. If the Church is to be a lamp-stand of burnished gold, then all must be concerned with this; each member must be building up the Church with gold and silver and precious stones; not the carnal dross of wood, hay and stubble (cf 1 Corinthians 3:12-13). The lustre and purity of any local Church depends upon the conduct and behaviour of each member. Let every man examine himself, that as a part of a lamp-stand, the light of truth might be reflected by him.

It should be the united desire and aim of the whole Church to be a place of beauty and splendour, spiritually radiant; in worship and practice conforming to the word and will of the Lord; a place of beauty and delight unto Him. Recall how David described Zion: “*Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth*”, “*Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined*” (Psalm 48:2, 50:2). The companies of God’s people upon earth should aspire to resemble this. Being entrusted with a light so wonderful and splendid, they will long to be more worthy of it; yearn to be a more fitting lamp-stand for these heavenly beams. This is surely the desire – but how can it possibly find fulfilment?

Hear the word of the Lord, who promises: “*to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious*” (Isaiah 60:13). Where is His sanctuary? Where is the place of His feet? Is there any spot upon this sin-stricken earth where the Lord is pleased to dwell? “*And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man... And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters*” (Revelation 1:13, 15). John beheld the risen, ascended, glorified Lord Jesus – not seated upon a throne, nor standing upon a sapphire pavement, nor surrounded by angelic hosts, but among the seven candlesticks.

Of all the settings in which the Lord might have displayed and magnified His glory, of all the places in earth or heaven in which He might have deigned to presence Himself, He chooses to be in the midst of His Churches – be that only ‘two or three gathered together in His name’, be it eleven disciples assembled behind locked doors for fear, be it small congregations of the few and faithful in this land today, He says: “*there am I in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18:20). **This** is the place of His feet, and He will make it glorious. **This** is His chosen sanctuary, and He will beautify it – with His own most holy presence.

R. J. Steward

EDITORIAL

There are few references in Scripture to the ‘turning of the year’, but one such example may be found in the Second Book of Kings, where certain events are described that happened, “*at the coming in of the year*” (2 Kings 13:20). The date was possibly in the 830’s BC, and it was a particularly dark time for God’s people Israel. A deficient and faithless king was upon the throne who persisted in the idolatry of his predecessors; the Syrians occupied the land and oppressed the populace; Moabite raiding parties made repeated incursions, disturbing and preventing religious observances; and added to it all, the prophet of the Lord, Elisha, ‘having served his generation by the will of God’, had but recently ‘fallen on sleep’, and was dead.

The black backdrop of that New Year nearly three millennia ago bears a striking resemblance to the situation amongst God’s people in the present day. The Church at large continues to be beset by age-old errors, polluted with the folly of the world, overrun by ungodliness, and harassed by enemies who would thwart its practice and purposes. Its supposed leaders are weak and vacillating, devoid of true faith; while men of stature and spiritual calibre become fewer and further between, as death removes them from the earth’s stage. “*The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away*” (Isaiah 57:1), oft prompting from those who remain the plaintive cry, “*Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men*” (Psalm 12:1).

Another such year, which threatened to be as trying and afflicted as the foregoing one, was dawning in Israel. An attempt was being made to maintain a proper form of service under enemy fire, when suddenly and unexpectedly, a mighty miracle was wrought! The body of a man, cast hastily into the sepulchre of Elisha, was upon contact raised to life

again – doubtless to the joyous amazement of his companions, and the flight-inducing terror of his enemies (of whom no more is heard). Thus was the late prophet’s prayer answered in precise measure. He had previously desired a ‘double portion’ of the Spirit of Elijah (cf 2 Kings 2:9), and whilst one miracle of resurrection had been wrought by his predecessor, two were hereby accomplished through the instrumentality of Elisha.

God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think; in spite of the most adverse circumstances; in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles; at the darkest and lowest of times. ‘His touch hath still its ancient power’. When He ordains to bring to life one who formerly was dead in trespasses and sins, no force in earth or hell can stay His hand; not the degeneracy and failure of His professed people, nor the rage and malice of all their foes. And though on times His faithful servants are called home, this does not impede His work, nor necessarily mark an end of their service. Their prayers may go on to be answered, and their godly influence continue to be felt, such that, though they rest from their labours, their works do follow them (cf Revelation 14:13), and they, being dead, yet speak (cf Hebrews 11:4). The Holy Spirit who empowered Elijah, and Elisha likewise, transcends the brief duration of their earthly lives, and indwells all the saints of God, raising up others to ‘stand in the breach’ in due time.

How auspicious was the coming in of that year, in Samaria! Before long, Israel’s enemies would be repulsed, and their former losses restored. “*And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, **because of His covenant***” (2 Kings 13:23). The Lord’s people may take courage for the future by looking, not at ‘things which do appear’, but by focussing upon the exceeding great and precious promises of God, and His Eternal Covenant.

May the Lord be pleased to bless all our readers in the year ahead.