Take Away Your Lampstand

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From time to time while studying the Bible, I invariably make it a point to read through the book of Revelation. And like most other times, I find that not much has changed and what I mean by that is not much has changed in my being able to understand the many symbols and assemble the proper timeline of when and how all these things listed will occur, compared to the last time I read it.

Now, beginning in chapter 6, for instance, we see seven seals are being opened. Along with those seals we have four horsemen beginning to ride. By the time we get to chapter 7, we have 144,000 people being sealed, which are called the servants of God.

As chapter 8 begins, we have the seventh seal being opened, which is the beginning of seven trumpets which are about to be blown. Shortly thereafter we have seven bowls that are about to be poured out by angels. Now, no doubt there is a lot of sevens in the book of Revelation. As things seem to be accelerating and cascading toward a definite climax at the return of Jesus Christ, now moving on through the book, we have a woman riding a beast. We have Satan being cast down to the earth, earthquakes, and the fall of Babylon. And on and on the events unfold. We may feel that things are bad now, but are headed in that direction.

But brethren, living through the book of Revelation sounds absolutely terrifying. It certainly seems a lot like Amos 5, where a man flees from a lion and he runs into a bear. He then finds a house to duck into while he thinks he is safe. Hiding, he leans on a wall and a snake bites him. Sounds like my luck. Now in Revelation 6, perhaps we find something similar to what Amos describes, where the great men of the earth are trying to hide from the wrath of God and begging the rocks and the mountains to fall on them.

Now I will tell you up front that this time around, in looking through the Book of Revelation once again, I did not have any new revelations, if you will. But a couple of things did come to mind as the book begins. Now, as the book of Revelation begins, we find that Jesus Christ's concern is for the church, His bride to be. In chapters 2 and 3 we read of His instructions to each of the seven churches throughout Asia, and with each one their problems are described, and then He instructs them on what to do. Except for Smyrna and Philadelphia, the other ones seemed to have serious problems.

Most of us who came through the church via the Worldwide Church of God were led to believe that the seven churches were actually seven eras and did not necessarily exist at the same time, but were eras of time beginning with Ephesus that proceeded through time all the way down through Laodicea. And of course those who decided this picked the time period that coincided with us, or Worldwide, being in the Philadelphia era. How convenient. They are one of the best. Now I am not saying that they were right or wrong, but if we were indeed Philadelphia, why did God scatter the church to the four winds? Did He decide to shut the door that only He can open or shut, as it says in chapter 3, verse 8?

Since that time, how many splinters are there out there that now believe that they have but a little strength? Therefore, they must be Philadelphia. Some even call themselves Philadelphia. Now I do not want to pooh-pooh these people in their research or their ideas. That is not the point of this sermonette, and certainly not what it is about. But what does the book of Revelation say in regards to the churches? Remember, this is the revelation of Jesus Christ. And I might add, I do not know how many times I have heard John Ritenbaugh say that he believed that the Bible was written for the end time church. That means us.

Now, let us begin in the book of Revelation, and I just want to look at a few scriptures that are very plain and simple, at least to me. Beginning in the first chapter, we will be looking at verses 4 and 11, but before we go to 4, I want to back up to verse 3. My proofreader and my dear wife pointed something out to me that I had never considered before. And brethren, this scripture is loaded. It may be located in a prophetic book. So let us go ahead and read Revelation 1, verse 3.

> **Revelation 1:3** Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Brethren, he says, "blessed is he who reads." Can we add, blessed is he who hears, blessed is he who keeps? Practically every other one of my translations in the Bible reads, "Blessed is he who reads aloud." While we tend to think of Revelation as being a book of prophecy, it begins with a promise of blessing. And how many times have we ever considered reading it out loud? We might want to try it. We might just get a blessing.

> **Revelation 1:4** John, to the 7 churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before His throne.

> **Revelation 1:11** "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia."

I just wanted to point out here what these two verses do not say. They do not mention a progression of time, eras, if you will. Both verses 4 and 11 say that the churches "are." Unlike the opening of the seals and the pouring out of the bowls, shown later as being opened one after the other, or bowls being poured out as well, one after the other, with the churches it does not appear that there is a progression of time, at least not here. Now this is not the point of the sermonette, but I want us to consider how easy it is for men to take a scripture and twist it; maybe not twist it, but try and make it say what they want it to say.

Now this leads us to the first church that we find in Revelation chapter 2. And it is only seven verses, so I think I will go ahead and read the whole thing.

> **Revelation 2:1-7** "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: "I know your works, your labor, 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 labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'"

These people sound great. They are working, enduring, patient, and have been laboring to proclaim the name of the Lord, and have not become weary in doing so. They have been testing those who proclaim to be apostles, and just like Christ, they hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. What could possibly be wrong with Ephesus? They were patient, enduring, standing up against false apostles, and yet God says they have fallen.

Had they been focusing so intently on doing what they considered to be God's work that they forgot God Himself? Jesus Christ tells them, "You have left your first love." How many times have we heard that so-and-so is just going through the motions? Is this what they were doing? They took the work, let us say, of preaching the gospel very seriously, but in reality they were just going through the motions and forgot God, or at least they did not see it.)By the way, we still have not reached the SPS yet).

So for the rest of the time here, let us focus on the danger that they faced. I do not know if you caught it: what was it? Or if we apply it to ourselves: what is it?

Now, let us go back and read verse 5 again.

> **Revelation 2:5** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place.

Even though God had commended these people for their work, endurance, and patience, He tells them to remember from where they have fallen, and repent. This is written as if they had already fallen. Now what is the warning? Repeating again part of verse 5:

> **Revelation 2:5** Repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove the lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

He repeats the command to repent twice. Now if we think the churches are eras, and we are part of Philadelphia or whichever one we might like to choose, would we not automatically dismiss this message to Ephesus as not applying to us? We have not fallen, have we?

Now finally we get to the warning, and brethren, this is a very serious warning. Ali told me it scared her. It scares me too. Jesus says that if we do not repent, He is coming quickly and will remove our lampstand. That is the warning. Now what is a lampstand, or perhaps what does it represent here?

As it turns out, the word lampstand appears four times in Revelation chapter 1. Let us go back and read those. We will find them in verses 12, 13, and 20.

> **Revelation 1:12** Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me, and having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and 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.

> **Revelation 1:20** The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

We read here that verse 20 says that the lampstands are the seven churches. If the lampstand is the church, what does Christ mean back in chapter 2, verse 5, I'm going to remove your lampstand? Now, as I generally start to look into a word, I first pull out my *Strong's*, it is pretty simple. But in this

case, lampstand was not in there. And most of my life I have thought *Strong's* had every word that was ever in the Bible, but in this case, it was not there. But some are not translated as the same word we read in our Bible. As I began researching the word lampstand, it seems that some translations use the word candlestick. And that is where I eventually found it in *Strong's*. The same Greek word was used to mean candlestick. Now, at first glance, we might think it does not really matter. They both hold a light, do they not? Now maybe they are interchangeable in some cases, but is this one of those cases?

To get a description of the lampstand, let us go back to Zechariah and just get a couple of scriptures there in Zechariah chapter 4, verse 1 and 2.

> **Zechariah 4:1-2** Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps."

Here we find that the lampstand is made in such a way that a bowl sits on top of it, and then out of this bowl seven pipes go to the seven lamps, through which the oil flows to the lamps. Now weeding my way through some of the other dictionaries, I found that *Mounce's Dictionary* addresses the lamp and the lampstand quite well. Let us take a look at his rendering, from his dictionary:

> A person's association with the light of a lamp keeps him in good spiritual health. Jesus tells us to keep our lamps lit so as not to be caught in darkness. In Revelation, the seven churches are symbolically called the seven lampstands, and he adds that the two witnesses are called the two lampstands. These designations point back to Zechariah 4, where the lampstand stands for the witnessing presence of God's Spirit within Israel. Now the Spirit-empowered church, rather than Israel, is the lampstand. [He goes on to say] that Jesus threatens to remove the lampstand from the church at Ephesus unless they repent.

Now I am not saying that Ephesus was the Worldwide that many of us knew, but God did. But did God remove the lampstand? Were we in danger of losing our first love? I have to include us, because Ali and I were actually in the Pasadena area when the new regime began taking power, and at first it seemed that all was right with the cosmos. Now I use cosmos because that is the word that they began using around the campus there. Cosmos is one of those words of Greek origin that means world. Looking back, we might say worldly.

What happened to Ephesus can happen to any of the churches, including us. Can we conclude that without the lampstand there is nothing to hold the bowl that contains the oil, God's Spirit? Without God's Spirit, there is no church. It does not matter what name they put on it or what era they put it in.

> **Revelation 2:2-5** "I know your works, your labor, your patience, 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 labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

These people were working tirelessly even for God's name's sake, but they had left their first love. They have lost sight of God and fallen, and it appears they did not even know it. How many churches in the world proclaim God's name but they do not know Him? Do we know Him? Do we still have the love for God's truth that we had when we first began, when He had His truth revealed to us? Are we just going through the motions? How many churches are nothing more than social clubs, focused on having a good time?

As we begin to close, let us go to one more scripture, and this one is back in Matthew 5.

> **Matthew 5:14-16** "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do they light a lamp and put it under

> a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Now, I certainly do not like talking about myself, but this little story, Ali is in it with me, so I figured it was safe. Several years ago we had an acquaintance with a man in the world, and this went on for several years. And one day as we were talking, this man, out of the blue, said to us both, "I don't know what it is about you, but you guys are different. You live what you believe." Now we never tried to convert this man, and I cannot remember ever talking to him about the church, but he saw something in the way that we lived that was different. I certainly pray that it was God's Spirit and His light shining in us. What does the world see when they look at us? Does the world see us as one of its own, or do they see something different? Are we in danger of losing our lampstand?

Let us read verse 16 again:

> **Matthew 5:16** That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Do we realize what this says? When people see the way we live, it should make them want to glorify God the Father. Jesus Christ's entire ministry here on earth was to glorify the Father. Are we glorifying our Father, or are we hiding our lamp under a basket?