

# THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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## I.

### THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST TO THE OLD TESTAMENT.

**B**OTH Jews and Christians receive the Old Testament as containing a revelation from God, while the latter regard it as standing in close and vital relationship to the New Testament. Everything connected with the Old Testament has, of recent years, been subjected to the closest scrutiny—the authorship of its several books, the time when they were written, their style, their historical value, their religious and ethical teachings. Apart from the veneration with which we regard the Old Testament writings on their own account, the intimate connection which they have with the Christian Scriptures necessarily gives us the deepest interest in the conclusions which may be reached by Old Testament criticism. For as the New Testament dispensation presupposes and grows out of the Mosaic, so the books of the New Testament touch those of the Old at every point: “*In vetere testamento novum latet, et in novo vetus patet.*”

We propose to take a summary view of the testimony of our Lord to the Old Testament, as it is recorded by the evangelists. The New Testament writers themselves largely quote and refer to the Old Testament, and the views which they express regarding the old economy and its writings are in harmony with the statements of their Master; but, for various reasons, we here confine ourselves to what is related of the Lord Himself.

Let us refer, first, to what is contained or necessarily implied in the Lord's testimony to the Old Testament Scriptures, and, secondly, to the critical value of His testimony.

## V.

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

THE systematic arrangement of these messages, the exactness of plan on which they are all constructed, the identity in the order of certain prominent events in them and the artificialness of their whole form, in both thought and language, are most noteworthy. No one can even glance at them without receiving that impression. When we get down to the mind of the Spirit as unmistakably seen in this, it becomes marvelous. It is so very remarkable that it must have had a purpose in the economy of revelation. In these messages where every point seems to be more striking than the preceding, there is scarcely anything which is more wonderful than this.

We are safe in affirming that in no other portion of the Word of God is there such exact and such significant system as in this. In this respect it is doubtful whether there is to be found, in any writing, sacred or secular, any such order as here. It is so perfectly symmetrical as to have an indescribable charm. Most heartily do we endorse the assertion of an eminent writer that "there never was a book penned with that artifice of this of the Apocalypse." Probably no other portion of the Bible is so charming in its system and so exact in number. Like some splendid cathedral which has been the admiration of centuries, every adornment is in its fitting place, every proportion is according to precise number, all things conspire to one effect; diversity gives prominence to the wondrous symmetry and all is sublime. Even if we were impelled to the study of this feature of the messages by no higher motive than a wholesome curiosity it would be a very worthy pursuit. But there is something far higher. This peculiarity of the passage must be significant. There must have been an important purpose in a form of revelation that was so peculiar.

1. We glance at the undoubted system according to which the messages are arranged. In this we would notice *the orderly method in which the various churches are introduced*. They are not addressed at random, but according to an exact plan. Ephesus is first addressed because nearest to Patmos, and because a sort of metrop-

olis of the whole country; then Smyrna, the next to the left, if we take the cities in a kind of rude circle; then Pergamos, next in this order; then Thyatira, going onward in the course; then Sardis, still in the circle; then Philadelphia; then, last, Laodicea, after which the circuit would lead back to Ephesus, the place of starting. This is the obvious geographical order, but, as we shall see, there was a deeper, a providential arrangement in the character of the churches, and consequently in the messages sent them.

2. *There is a marvelously significant method in the structure of the messages.* They are all framed on precisely the same plan. As we closely examine them we find that in each message there are seven leading elements. As the messages are seven in number, from the seven spirits of God to the seven churches, so we find that there are seven special elements in each one of them. This is the general rule, with only very slight deviations in one or two instances, as might be expected in a matter which is necessarily so complicated.

We place these special elements of each message in one view that the arrangement may be better seen. The elements are—(1) The title of the Son of Man, different in each message. (2) In each church there is something rebuked, with only one slight exception. (3) In each there is something applauded, with one slight exception again. (4) Some special advice is given to each. (5) To each there is a threatening in case of unfaithfulness. (6) In all of them there is a promise to those who overcome. (7) Then, each concludes with, "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

3. *There are certain things which are precisely the same in each of the seven messages.* (1) In each we find the expression: "He that overcometh"—showing that all the churches would have to contend for the faith. (2) In each of them there is some special symbol taken from some local object, some symbol that could be applied to that church and no other. Such symbols are "Nicolaitans," "Synagogue of Satan," "white stone," "that woman Jezebel," "white raiment," "open door," "spew thee out of my mouth."

4. In each message there is *one central point* around which everything else is arranged, upon which everything else has a bearing and which gives shape and color to all. There was some special thing intended to be communicated to each church, which pertained to something peculiar in it, and which could not be addressed to any other—some evil to be corrected, some virtue to be acknowledged, some information to be given or some hope to be encouraged. This was the *one* thing, the burden of the message. This will be better understood and appreciated if we place the central points of them all together, so that they may be distinctly seen. To Ephesus

the burden of the message is, "Thou hast left thy first love;" to Smyrna, "I know thy works and tribulations and poverty;" to Pergamos, "Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam;" to Thyatira, "Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which callest herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants;" to Sardis, "Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead;" to Philadelphia, "Behold, I set before thee an open door;" and to Laodicea, "Thou art neither cold nor hot." It was to convey to each church that special thing that its message was sent. That key being found all else can be opened.

5. *There is a surprising gradation in the leading elements of the messages.* They are not isolated in the matters they contain, but they are so related that in the leading elements of them all as a body they form a complete embodiment of the subject. This deserves our special attention.

(a) There is a gradation in the character of the churches, so that in them we have specimens of almost all classes. Against the two churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna there is no charge whatever; Ephesus had lost its first love, Pergamos tampered with evil, Thyatira affiliated with corruption, Sardis was grossly hypocritical and Laodicea was disgustingly lukewarm. (b) There is a gradation in the threatenings. The mildest is that of removing the candlestick—taking away gospel privileges. The worst is, "I will spew thee out of my mouth"—utter abandonment. (c) But this gradation is most striking in the promises. Nothing could be more beautiful than this is. From the very lowest to the very highest, every shade of blessedness is assured to those who shall prove faithful to the Lord. Nothing but looking at the promises in detail will enable us to see this in its astonishing beauty. (1) The first and lowest is the promise to the faithful of Ephesus: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." This is simply an assurance of the continuance of life forever. (2) The second is the promise to the suffering but victorious believers of Smyrna: "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life." This is a degree higher, but it is merely an engagement to bestow a victorious reward of glory. (3) The third is the promise to the steadfast amid the persecutions of Pergamos: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." This is a great advance, inasmuch as it promises the everlasting and intimate friendship of the Son of God. (4) The fourth is the promise to the unyielding heroes of Thyatira: "He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power



over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father." This is higher still. It is an assurance of going forward steadily forever in victory and power and glory. (5) The fifth is the promise to the few noble and upright ones of Sardis: "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess him before my Father, and before his angels." More exalted still is this engagement. It is the assurance of everlastingly enjoying the very acme of purity and glory. (6) The sixth is the promise to the humble, patient and suffering ones in Philadelphia: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is the New Jerusalem, and my own new name." This is higher than any of the promises that went before it, for it is a pledge that they shall be identified in glory with the exalted Son of God for evermore. (7) The seventh is the promise to the most faithful because the most tempted believers of Laodicea: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with the Father in his throne." This is the highest of all—the highest of which imagination can conceive, even that of being fully identified with the Lord of Glory in the government of the world. Such are the seven promises in their various degrees or shades of blessedness; and, verily, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, these things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Oh, no! imagination can frame nothing so surpassingly glorious as the prospect they together hold out to the suffering, tried, but faithful followers of our Lord.

6. The climax of this remarkable system is reached in *the strange recurrence of the number seven at every point*. This is too obvious not to awaken very special attention—too obvious not to make an impression that there is great significance in it. The moment we open the messages we are impressed with the remarkable use of this number in their every element. There are seven spirits before the throne, seven golden candlesticks, seven stars in the right hand of the Son of Man, seven churches of Asia, seven elements in each one of the seven messages. Then, when we follow on through the whole book of the Apocalypse, this peculiarity becomes more and more striking. We find the lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, the book with seven seals, the seven angels with seven trumpets, the seven thunders, the seven vials with the seven last plagues, the seven heads of the dragon and the seven crowns on these heads, the

seven mountains and the seven kings, the two witnesses prophesying in sackcloth the half of seven years, and lying unburied the half of seven days. In many other instances throughout this book we find the same number. Whatever may be its special significance as a symbol, or whatever may be its use, it is eminently the number of the Bible.

Then what is its significance? Before answering we must first for a moment glance at two or three other sacred numbers which are used as symbols. Certain numbers occupy too prominent a place on the inspired pages—they are used in too many different connections and they too evidently have a special purpose, for us to slight them; or, as many do, sneer at an earnest effort to interpret them. That would not be giving due honor to the Holy Ghost. They must mean something. As divinely used symbols they must mean much; yea, they do teach and should deeply impress important truths.

We notice only two of them here, namely three and four. On *three* we need not dwell, as nothing could be more palpable than that it is the established symbol of the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Ghost. *Four* is not so well understood, and yet the various passages in which it is found leave no doubt as to its meaning. We take a sample as we find it in the Book of Daniel: "Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the *four* winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And *four* great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another." More briefly, in other places, we have "four rivers of Paradise," "four living creatures," "four winds," "four notable horses," "four workmen," "four chariots," "four corners of the earth." We can hardly mistake the significance of this number as it thus lies before us—four rivers, winds, seasons, cardinal points, workmen, chariots. Everything is of the world, humanity, mankind. Four then is the number for the world. It is the symbol for mankind. Four the symbol for man, as three is for God.

We would now attempt to answer the question, What is the origin and what the significance of the number *seven* as used in these messages? The usual explanation of its frequent use in Scripture is that God rested from His creative work on the seventh day, and hence its constant use ever afterwards in the Sacred Book. That is correct so far as it goes, but we must go farther and examine whether there may not have been sublime reasons why he rested on the seventh day rather than on the sixth, the eighth, or any other. All His ways are guided by infinitely wise purposes—what were the deep purposes here? What we find revealed concerning His glorious designs in creation and providence, in Scripture and providence, is

that all was for His adorable Son, our Lord—"all things were created by Him and for Him." Then this seventh day of rest was surely not excepted. It also, as we shall see, was created with reference to Him—as *His covenant number in redemption*. "All things were created for him," hence the seventh day of rest amongst others. "The Sabbath was made for man," but for him as originally belonging to Christ, and bestowed through Him and for His sake.

The well-known fact that the same word used for seven is also used for oath, and that covenants were ratified by oath, leads to the conviction that it was a covenant number, and we proceed to show that it was the covenant number of redemption in Christ, who was thus typified even by the seventh day of rest. We have already seen that the established numerical symbol for God is *three*. We have also seen that the undoubted Scriptural symbol for man is *four*. But three and four brought together or added are seven. Hence, as clear as symbolic language can make it, seven becomes the symbol of God and man brought together, or reconciled. This could not be more strikingly set forth by emblems which, especially in early days, were the chief method of imparting truth. Imagination or fancy have nothing to do with it; but here are the facts. Whatever were the reasons for fixing upon the seventh as the day of rest at creation, and hence for establishing seven as the sacred number of the world, it must have been something in the mind of God alone. It could not have been, as has been argued, the genius of the Hebrew literature or hoary traditions of the nations, for the very good reason that none of these existed when the infinite wisdom appointed the seven as the consecrated number. We must trace its origin to His mind alone; and if we can see that, even at the moment when creation was finished, the Creator gave to the world this significant prediction of the redemption that would be needed and that would come, then seven as the sacred number becomes most sublime. And short of this no explanation satisfies.

Three and four brought together are seven—God and man brought together are the atonement, or covenant, or God reconciled in Christ. The sublime covenant of redemption is this reconciliation of God and man. It is God and man made one. This is the fundamental thought of the whole gospel—yea, of the whole Bible. It is the very central and all-essential idea of all religion; and the very word *religion*—to bind back or bind anew—implies it. It means to reunite God and man whom sin had separated. It is the very thought and substance of the atonement—the *at-one-ment*—*God and man united—three and four added—seven*. The essential idea then of the atonement, the covenant, the reconciliation effected by the mediation and death of Christ is God and man at one.

Hence, most appropriately, most beautifully and most significantly is seven, in Scripture the invariable symbol of the covenant and atonement. All the Bible through it is always used in connection with atonement and reconciliation. As specimens of this we find that seven is the number of all sacrifices by which the atonement was typified, of all sacrifices and devotements connected with the covenant, of all in the old economy which illustrated or set forth forgiveness. Its very recurrence, then, so constantly in these messages, is the most impressive kind of proof that it is connected with the covenant of redemption, that it at every point and element is a part of the sublime work by which the redemption of Christ is to be applied to the salvation of mankind.

We come now to a second deeply interesting question concerning this marvelous symmetry which we find in the structure of the messages. What does it indicate? What was its design in the economy of revelation? There must have been some sublime purpose in the mind of the Holy Ghost—something higher than merely to make the meaning of the revelation complete or well rounded out. Studying it carefully, can we help the conviction that this extraordinary system was an *intimation from God Himself that a well-ordered plan would prevail in conducting the affairs predicted in revelation—the affairs of the Church and the world?* The very structure of the passage is a prophecy of this.

We can present but two or three of the leading points that come into the answer. The number *seven* holds such a conspicuous place in the system of the structure that we notice it first. The constant use of the covenant number in the messages most intimately connects them with all the fundamentals of religion, with the grand purposes of creation, with the marvels of redemption and with every part of the glorious scheme of the divine government. They are all parts of the same exalted manifestations of Jehovah. They are all stamped with the impress of the perfections of the same divine workman. The same symbol of mysterious and perfect wisdom and power and goodness, unchanged and unchanging, is on them all and reveals their celestial origin. This covenant number being interwoven with every element of the messages shows, in its own deeply significant way, that they are connected with the sublime cause of human redemption. They are designed to explain that cause; to delineate its destiny; to help it forward; to exhibit its great, God-like features, to urge its claims, and to reveal its tendencies and its inexhaustible benefits to that world it was appointed to rescue from ruin.

Again, this wonderful system in the messages reveals a most attractive characteristic of our glorious Lord. It shows that he is



a God of order. The observance of exact system in His Word and works is not beneath Him. This is His very nature; it is His way of working, both in the realms of nature and of grace; it is His delight. Every page and element of revelation makes this most evident and satisfactory. Every point in the messages renders it most manifest that this is His nature. Exact plan characterizes all His ways of speaking and working. Order and well-arranged system are His pleasure.

But the leading point of instruction is, that from the contemplation of this perfect system of the messages we learn assuredly, as it was intended that we should learn, *that the same order, the same perfectly arranged plan will prevail in all the coming changes in the Church, in the world, in the whole future track of human destiny.* Blessed beyond imagination is this prospect! Horrible would be the outlook for humanity were it not for this! To look forward with the thought that there is no plan in the changes that are awaiting our race, no divine scheme guiding its progress, no protection from the anarchy of selfishness and cruelty and lies, no safe bourne towards which we are trending—oh, such a thought would crush out all hope and make the heart sick! But this very significant system in the messages gives us a sure intimation that it will be otherwise. *It is itself a type of the well-ordered plan which will direct the whole future of the Church, of the world, of the souls of individuals and of the whole human race.* From it we have a most comfortable assurance that all the affairs of the Church, for which the world stands, will be conducted according to a prearranged scheme of heavenly wisdom. Then this structure of the messages becomes a prediction—a pre-intimation of what that scheme will be. It shows that God has arranged a definite plan as to the future career of His Church, and that plan receives a prophetic delineation in the rest of the Apocalypse. In no sense is the future of Christ's kingdom to be at haphazard, or accidental, or at the sport of mere human caprice. No, all is under the unerring control of our gracious Lord. He has planned every feature of the coming ages. All will be molded by His all-wise providence.

*This is most deeply significant as standing at the opening of the Apocalypse.* All this system in these messages is undoubtedly a sample and a pledge of God's minute government of the interests of the Church and of the world. The words of this revelation and the works of Providence are both the offspring of the same mind, and that the mind of the infinite, the eternal and the unchanging Jehovah. The system so impressively manifested in the passage is, as it were, a transcript of that mind. As such it becomes a pledge that all the affairs of time shall follow the plan of divine wisdom;

that the past has been wisely directed; that the present is working out the purposes of our Lord; that the future shall follow a well-ordered path; that the events of each believer's life shall be carefully conducted; that families shall be led by the gracious hand of our heavenly Father; that churches shall be conducted in paths where they shall glorify the King; that all nature shall fulfill a destiny of celestial planning, and that mankind, angels, beings celestial and terrestrial, are all moving forward according to the everlasting purposes of the Most High God. We cannot give our thoughts attentively to this most significant order in the messages without feeling certain that system, divinely perfect, prevails in the whole universe. The prospect thus opened is sublime. To say that all this system is the result of chance is but the language of stupendous folly. Poor, puny, short-sighted unbelief must stand helpless and abashed before such glories. It may speculate and doubt, or cover up its eyes as it pleases, but there are the facts, in the presence of which it is as weak and as ignorant as a child.

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