

Musings on the Apocalypse

by J. G. Bellet

Revelation 2 and 3

And it is quite according to such an introduction as this that we find our Lord in the following scene, Revelation 2.1. Here it is the Lord in the house of God, challenging the churches to answer for themselves. He had before set them in their blessing, and now He looks for fruit.

It is as though He had heard a report of their unfaithfulness, and was now saying unto them, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest no longer be steward. He had already communicated with them through the apostles, but now He does so through the angels. St. Paul addressed them in the pastoral grace of Christ.

St. John now addresses them as from the judicial authority of Christ. The apostles had fed them and disciplined them as in the place of dependence, but now these epistles challenge them as in the place of responsibility. And the moment they are thus addressed, they are found wanting as candlesticks bound to shine to the praise of Him who had set them in His sanctuary.

They are now visited, and the common result of all such visitations of God's stewards may tell us the end of the candlesticks also. For the crisis or judgment has always found man unready. Whether planted in innocence, in a sphere of providence, or under a ministration of grace, man has been found unequal even to hold a blessing.

Adam, where art thou? Got this answer. I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself. The vineyard of Israel

afterwards should have yielded its fruit to him who had planted and dressed it.

But when he came, it was only wild grapes that he found. And so it is now with the candlesticks in the house of God. They had been duly prepared by God's care. They were nothing less than golden candlesticks, churches fed by the Spirit, blessed with blessings from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, made fully furnished and well-ordered lights in the sanctuary. But now that the visitation is made, in due season too, the Son of Man finds something unsuited to the holy place. These seven churches, the sevenfold or perfect expression of the church, are here challenged by the Son of Man with these words, I know thy works, but the sevenfold light is but dim and uncertain.

This steward of God's glory is but unfaithful also. And so, by and by, the same inquisition will be made of the earthly gods, the Gentile powers to whom the Lord has committed the sword, and they will then in like manner as Adam, Israel, or the candlestick be found wanting, and they will have to fall as men and die like one of the princes. Psalm 82.

All the stewards are thus found wanting when weighed in the balance, and the Lord is justified in his saying and clear when he judges. These seven churches are here as in the place of this judgment. There were, it is true, other congregations of the Lord at the time, but these seven are enough to exhibit the judgment, for seven is completeness.

So, some of them may be found by this judgment or visitation in a better condition than others, but still the Son of Man sees the whole thing far different from what it ought to be. One was not judged in the other, but each was responsible for itself, and thus some maintained their purity longer than others. But still, the whole tone of this visitation bears with it a notice of what the end was speedily to be, as in our day we see it, for Philadelphia and Smyrna are now as fully removed candlesticks as Sardis or Pergamos.

These challenges of the churches by the Son of Man lead us to see that all was then nearly over, that there was but a step between such rebukes and their removal, and surely we do not in our day need to be told of the disturbance which has taken place in the house of God. We learn that Adam lost Eden, and the present groans of creation tell us so. We learn that Israel lost Canaan, and their present wanderings over the earth tell us so.

And how see we the sanctuary? Are we not witnesses to ourselves that we have been no more able to hold the blessing which was ours than Adam could hold Eden or Israel, Canaan? The candlestick that was set for the rebuking of all that was without as darkness, and for being itself the embodied and well-ordered light of the world, is not now at Ephesus or even Sardis. But where is anything like it? Can any one thing in any one place assert the honor of being the Lord's candle there, and show that the Lord is feeding and judging and trimming it as such? In this day of St. John, the Lord still owned the candlesticks, owned them by thus visiting and judging them. But is there such recognition now? We may try our ways most surely by all that is here said to the churches, but this does not amount to the Son of Man owning us by judgment.

And our first duty, therefore, both in grace and wisdom, is to be humbled because of this, for though we may have much in fragments that belongs to the candlesticks, yet all that does not give us the standing and privilege of the candlestick entitling us to set aside as darkness and as not of the sanctuary all that is not of ourselves. When our fidelity to the Lord became the question, we were found wanting, as any other steward. This book will, at the end, show us that the question of the Lord's fidelity to us will be answered in the other way, for as the Lamb's wife, the church will then be found to survive all the judgments, though here she could not, as the candlestick, stand the righteous challenge of the Lord.

And this is man, and this is God always. Shame and ruin mark our end, honor and peace and everlasting truth and love the end of the Lord. And in this shame and ruin, I believe, these three chapters close.

The perfect order of the seven lights of the house of God is gone, not to be restored. And according to this, the prophet is at once called to see other things and other places, to witness another scene, but still a scene of judgment, as we shall find, not that of the priestly son of man in his temple, but that of God and the Lamb in the earth.