

Behold | Sermons through the Revelation

Sermon #5: Revelation 1:19-20 | Foundational Understanding of the Churches

Revelation 1:19 | The Outline That Isn't

- Virtually every commentary on the Revelation gives verse 19 as an outline of the book, typically as follows:
 - **The things which thou hast seen** – Rev. 1
 - **The things which are** – Rev. 2-3
 - **The things which shall be** - Rev. 4-22
- In Revelation 1:2, we are told that John wrote **of all things that he saw**. This helps make it clear that chapter 1 is actually an introduction written *after* John had *already seen*. Thus **the things which thou has seen** is *the entire revelation*, not just Revelation 1:1-18.
- Why does it matter?
 - When one uses this oft-taught outline, he/she will inevitably only interpret Revelation 4-22 in a futurist sense, with Revelation 1-3 in a *preterist* (already occurred) sense.
 - It is my opinion that a preterist interpretation of the book of Revelation is not merited anywhere in the book, including chapters 1-3.
- Note: there is a danger to *outline-driven* teaching/preaching. We can easily let the man-made outline drive our understanding of the text, rather than vice-versa.

Revelation 1:20 | The Mystery of Stars and Candlesticks

- In the Bible, a **mystery** is something that cannot be discerned by study or investigation.
- All mysteries in the Bible are no longer mysteries in the modern sense, because the full meaning has been given explicitly. After the revelation of a mystery, there is no need for speculation.
- In verse 12 we had been told of seven candlesticks (menorah). In verse 17 we were told of seven stars. However, those verses did not give an understanding of any meaning.
- The “Golden Rule of Interpretation” is this: *if the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense*.
 - Often in the book of Revelation, the *plain sense* will shout out for some hidden meaning.
 - Our goal is to allow the *book to explain itself* rather than delve into wild speculation.
- In verse 20, we are given the *key* to understanding the previous vision.
 - The stars are **the angels of the seven churches**.
 - The candlesticks are **the seven churches** themselves.

- Do churches have angels?
 - Possibility #1: Every church is assigned an angel. There would be no other place in Scripture by which we could make such a conclusion.
 - Possibility #2: The churches of the Revelation have a *human messenger* which is given the message. Since the message comes from Christ, to the church, through John, it makes much more *common sense* that the **angels** are *messengers*. The messenger could be the *pastor/rabbi* or an elder or the “Shaliach Tzibbur” (or *Chazzan*) of the Jewish congregation.
- Are these Christian churches or Jewish Assemblies?
 - By far, Christian teachers assume these to be Christian churches.
 - Interpretations of the seven churches are:
 - *Historical*: Seven churches that are simply strategic in location and prominence in John’s day.
 - *Dynamic*: Seven churches that have problems and/or issues which are generally relative to all churches of all locations and times.
 - *Prophetic*: Seven churches which represent the overall history of the church. Such an interpretation does not deny the historicity of the assemblies in John’s day.
 - A futurist interpretation: The seven churches are future Jewish assemblies living in the days leading up to the Second Coming (thus, during the Tribulation). The letters are instructive to *future Jews* and not to *present-day Christians*. Such an interpretation does not deny the historicity of the assemblies in John’s day.
- Are the letters to *individuals* or *assemblies*?
 - The common interpretation is that these are *letters* (plural) to the seven churches. Does the Biblical text support this?
 - Revelation 1:11 says that **a book** (singular) is to be sent to the churches. That (presumably) is the book of Revelation. In this sense, the churches must have been existent in John’s day.
 - On each of the letters, however, the addressee is **the angel**, not the *church*. And the vast majority of each letter is written in the second person singular (*thou*).
- Next week: *Seven letters for seven future messengers*.