

# REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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And the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, and go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I swear unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it: and I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way. And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments. For the LORD had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiffnecked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb.

—Exodus 33:1–6

### The People Mourned

**T**he children of Israel were stricken. The news that they had heard from Moses was shocking beyond imagination. Jehovah had told them to leave Sinai. They were to go directly to Canaan. God would send an angel before them, though it would no longer be the special messenger—angel that was Jehovah’s presence but a created angel. The angel would drive the powerful tribes out of the promised land, and Israel would inherit the land flowing with milk and honey. But here was the unfathomable news: Jehovah would not go with them! The people were too stiff-necked. At any moment they would corrupt themselves again, and Jehovah would destroy them. It would be better to part ways now. God would keep his word and give them the land, but after that they would have no more to do with each other. From now on Jehovah would no longer be in the midst of Israel.

Imagine the shock and sorrow and despair of Israel! It would be as if God came to us on a Sunday morning in the preaching of his word and announced that he was finished with us. He would still bring us to church, but he would not be there anymore. He would even bring us to heaven, but he would be gone. Our sins are too great. Our sinfulness is too great. Our necks are too stiff. Our corruption runs too deep. We cannot be trusted to

obey. Better to part ways now than to consume us every moment.

When the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned. Their hearts were rent in two. There was nothing without Jehovah! Who wants to go to Canaan if Jehovah is not there? Who wants to go to heaven without him? The only thing that really matters about the promised land is Jehovah, for his lovingkindness is better than life. In their anguished grief the children of Israel stripped off their ornaments. They had many ornaments, for they had spoiled the Egyptians of their gold, silver, and raiment when the Israelites had left Egypt (Ex. 12:35–36). Without their God, what use did they have now for such worthless trinkets? Below Mount Horeb, which is Sinai, before the face of him who is a consuming fire, they stripped off their ornaments and did not put them back on. The people mourned.

Let us follow Israel’s mourning back into their hearts a moment to see something wonderful. There in their broken hearts was God’s grace at work. God’s grace was giving Israel a true faith in him. God’s grace was showing Israel the truth that God and God alone was their treasure. Israel had known many treasures. In Egypt she had known leeks and onions. In the wilderness she knew the spoils of Egypt: earrings and bracelets and rings.

In Canaan she would know milk and honey. So many treasures for her, even here upon this earth! But by faith Israel now saw the truth: there is no treasure without Jehovah! He alone is his people's shield and exceeding great reward, as God had said to Abraham many years before (Gen. 15:1). It is the same thing that God always teaches his people in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus alone is our righteousness. Jesus alone is our unsearchable riches. Jesus alone is our inheritance.

And now Israel in the wilderness, hearing that God would not go with them, knew by faith that God was the only thing worth having. The children of Israel were not thinking carnally about leeks and onions in Egypt or milk and honey in Canaan or gold

and silver in the wilderness. They were thinking only of Jehovah. And they must have him! Without him they had nothing! Deep in Israel's heart, it was faith that mourned in true repentance. For by faith the believer, finally seeing God as the only good, hates and mourns his sin. Our mourning—as it was Israel's mourning—is the mortification of our old man, proceeding from the faith that God graciously works in us. By faith we have “a sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 89).

The people mourned! Why? It was the work of Jehovah, who was still among them! For God is gracious.

—AL

## HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

*The Banner*

July 27, 1922

(pp. 469–70)

Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

### Article CLXVIII: The Seven Churches in Asia: The Church in Tribulation (continued)

This apprehension of suffering the Lord corroborates in his letter to them. And not only does he caution them in advance so that they may be fully prepared, but he also comforts and encourages them to face the future without fear. In the first place, by assuring them that it will be the devil that is the prime author of their tribulation. Surely, they will be cast into prison, and for ten days they shall have tribulation, but they need not be ashamed of their reproach and suffering, nor need they fear. On the contrary, they may deem it an honor to be in oppression for the simple reason that it is the devil who causes it all. Indeed, this is a glorious comfort to know that the devil is persecuting us. To suffer persecution from the hand of righteousness and justice is unbearable, but to be an object of the devil's hatred is a cause of rejoicing. Perhaps these Christians in Smyrna will be treated by the civil powers in the city as

criminals and rebels, and before all the world they will be branded as such, but they must be mindful of the fact that behind these municipal authorities and behind the malignant Jews is the devil, instigating his agents to their hellish work. It might be grievous to them to be publicly exposed and treated as dangerous criminals, but to know that the devil was behind it must for them be a cause of serene satisfaction; for to be an enemy of the devil is to be a friend of Christ; to be persecuted by the adversary is the best proof of our belonging to God's party in the world.

In the second place, the Lord encourages them by informing them concerning the essential character of their future suffering. They will be cast into prison in order to be tried. Not, indeed, as if this was the devil's purpose, for his highest aim was their apostasy from the truth. But above the devil stands the Almighty God, and the powerful

Priest-King walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. His purpose will after all be reached. And, therefore, also by this explanation the Lord encourages his church. In the first place, because in this phrase they have the assurance that they are not unconditionally delivered to the power of the devil, but safe in the hands of their Lord. He only employs the devil even in persecution to reach his own divine purpose. And, secondly, this is a source of comfort to them, because it assures them that they shall be faithful to the end through the grace of their Lord. It will not be their downfall. In their own strength they would never be able to stand or persevere.

And as they consider themselves, fear, no doubt, fills their hearts that they shall become unfaithful and deny him whom their soul loves. But now they are informed that this will not be the ultimate outcome of this persecution. It will assume the nature of a trial. God will try his people in order that the strength of his grace may become manifest to the world and to the devil and thus his own name may be glorified. And to be worthy to be thus tried, to be deemed worthy of being manifestations of God's grace over against the devil and the wicked world, is a cause of joy and a source of mighty comfort.

And finally, the Lord encourages his church with a view to the coming suffering by informing them as to the time of its duration. They shall be in tribulation ten days. This measure of time has symbolic significance, for even though this period should be understood in the literal sense, in the first place, as applied to the congregation of Smyrna, the symbolical significance would by no means be excluded, no more than the recognition of the historical existence of the seven churches prevents us from considering them in their typical character in relation to the church of all times. But besides, it may safely be adopted as a general rule that the indications of time and space in the book of Revelation are to be taken in the symbolical sense of the word. Not all the numbers occurring in the book can possibly be taken in the literal sense, but on the general basis that they are symbolic of some higher spiritual reality

they can all be interpreted. And, therefore, also these ten days we take in its symbolical sense. And then we agree with interpreters in understanding this expression as being indicative, in the first place, of only a short period. But the brevity of the period is not to be found in the number 10, for in itself this number may indicate a long as well as a short period of time. No, that the time of their persecution will be comparatively short, though severe, is expressed rather by the fact that it is measured not by years or months, but by days. In comparison with the glory that shall be revealed in us, the Apostle Paul has it, the suffering of the present time is not worthy of consideration (Rom. 8:18). When viewed in the light of the ages of ages, the tribulation of the church in this dispensation is always insignificantly short. So also in Smyrna. It will last but ten days.

But the figure 10 implies a far greater comfort and is symbolic of a far higher reality than the mere fact of brevity. Ten is a number that is very frequently employed in Scripture and often occurs in the book of Revelation. The antediluvian period is comprised by the lifetime of ten patriarchs; before the heart of the king of Egypt is inclined to let the children of Israel go to serve their God, ten great plagues are sent upon the country; life in its totality is measured by ten great spheres, indicated by the division of the law into ten commandments; the Lord in his parables speaks of ten virgins and of servants entrusted with ten pounds whom he will place over ten cities. In the book of Revelation we read of ten horns of the great red dragon, of the ten horns of the beast and his ten royal diadems, of the ten kings that shall hate the harlot with whom they first commit fornication (Chapters 13, 17). Now, if we consider this number in the abstract, there can be no question of the fact that it is a round number, that whatever other number is multiplied by it must also be a round number, and that as such it beautifully serves as a symbol of completeness and fulness.

But if we consider the passages in which it is employed, we soon find that there is still a more specific significance attached to the number ten. The general idea that lies at the basis of its

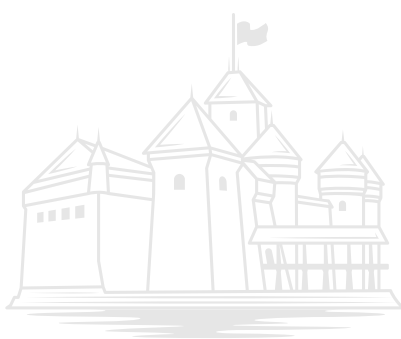
employment in Scripture seems to be that of a fulness, completion, totality of the measure of anything, whether it be of time or power or action, of reward or punishment, determined solely by the fixed plan of God Almighty. And, therefore, in our text it denotes neither that the time shall either be long or short, nor that the evil one shall be permitted to develop his full power in persecuting the church of Smyrna; but it simply indicates that a certain definite period is allotted the devil, during which he may persecute the church of Christ, a period that is determined not by himself, but by the will of our Lord.

The devil possesses no power of himself, nor can he sovereignly decide upon the persecution of the church. His power and authority is characterized and symbolized by the number 10. It is both limited and meted out to him by God. It is the same story as with Job. The devil must approach God for permission to afflict his servant Job, and when he fails to bring Job to apostasy by depriving him of all that he possesses in the world, he must turn to the Almighty for the second time to obtain permission for the attack upon Job's person.

The devil, therefore, cannot go beyond the limits set him by the Almighty.

Thus it is with the church in Smyrna. Thus it is with the tribulation of the church of all ages. The devil possesses power to oppress the church, no doubt. He will make life hard for it. He will rage against it in all the fury of his hatred against Christ. But his power is controlled by him that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. The King of the church has received all power in heaven and on earth, power also to control the devil, the mighty adversary of God. And when the full measure of his time and power has been meted out to him according to the will of God, the Lord commands him to stop, and he cannot stir against the church! What a mighty comfort for the church of Smyrna! What a source of courage for the church of all ages! The gates of hell shall not prevail against it! The devil even is in control of only so much power as Jesus allows him, and under the protection of its King the church has nothing to fear. "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!"

(To be continued)



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