



# REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 13

JULY 4, 2026

*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 Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that every one which sought the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp. And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, that all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle.

—Exodus 33:7–11

### The Pillar at the Tent

**I**t was a moment of great suspense. Moses took a tabernacle and pitched it without the camp of Israel, in fact, afar off from the camp. The tabernacle that he pitched was not *the* tabernacle that he had seen in the mount, for that was not yet built. This was only a tent like the children of Israel dwelled in as their homes in the wilderness. Before the tabernacle could be built, this tent would have to make do as a symbol of Jehovah's presence. Pitching the tent afar off from the camp was a symbol that Jehovah's presence was afar off from Israel and that he would not go with them anymore (Ex. 33:3). All eyes were on Moses as he went out to pitch the tabernacle. Every family stood in their tent doors, watching, waiting. What would happen?

It was a moment of great faith.

When Moses pitched the tent afar off from Israel, he treated it as if Jehovah were still with Israel. He called the tent the tabernacle of the congregation, or the tabernacle of assembly. This name meant that this was the place where Jehovah would assemble the people of Israel to meet with him. This was the name that Jehovah had said he would give to the actual tabernacle when it

would be built. God explained the name to mean “there I will meet with the children of Israel” (Ex. 29:42–43). Moses now called this plain tent afar off from the camp by the name of the holy and glorious meeting place of Jehovah with his people. It was Moses' confession of faith in the promise of God. That was all Moses had left. Only the promise! Never mind that the tabernacle was outside the camp. Never mind that the people's sins were so great. God had promised that he would meet with Israel! And Moses believed it!

Then the people came. They left their tent doors for a moment and went to seek Jehovah. They went out to the tabernacle of the congregation, even though it was without the camp. Their sin had put the tent so far away. But Jehovah was their only hope, and all they had was his promise. And they believed!

It was a moment of great grace.

The people went back to their tents and watched as Moses went into the tabernacle of the congregation. And Jehovah came in his towering, burning, billowing cloudy pillar! Jehovah stood at the door of the tabernacle, just as he had said he would! And he spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to

his friend. Jehovah is a gracious covenant God. In the grace of his promise, which is Jesus Christ, he came to his covenant people. And in Jesus Christ he never forsakes his people but dwells with us. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people,

and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Rev. 21:3).

And all the people saw and rose up and worshiped.

—AL

## HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

*The Banner*

August 3, 1922

(pp. 486–87)

**Our Doctrine** by Rev. H. Hoeksema

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

II. But, so we ask, what was the inward condition of this church in tribulation? Does tribulation work dissatisfaction and grumbling, weakness and fear? Does it lead the church away from its Lord and cause it to cater to the desires of the enemy? Never! Exactly the reverse is true. The condition in the congregation of Smyrna was as good as possible. The church was in as flourishing a condition as might be expected in this dispensation. In proof of this there is, in the first place, the negative observation that the Lord in this letter mentions no cause for rebuke in the church. He does not come with his warning, “But I have against thee \* \* \* \*.” And surely this is sufficient to justify the inference that there was nothing worthy of rebuke. If there had been, the Lord would have called the attention of the church to it. He was thoroughly acquainted with the condition of the church, and if there had been any reason to reprove, he surely would have known.

Nor must we entertain the erroneous idea that the Lord would have overlooked the weakness of this specific congregation and pass it in silence in view of the fact that in its tribulation it had need of encouragement rather than of rebuke. This would have been fatal and detrimental to the church. No, but there is nothing to criticize. There is no reason to reprimand the church in any respect. And again, also here we must remember

that it is not the individual member, but the church as a whole Jesus is addressing. It is not so that the members of the congregation in Smyrna had already reached perfection, that they sinned no more. No, but addressing the congregation as a whole, the Lord finds no weakness, mentions no cause of rebuke, for the simple reason that it did not exist. The church of Smyrna possesses all the favorable features of the church in this dispensation and does not present any of the weaknesses and signs of degeneration found in the others. But, further, this sound condition of the congregation is positively expressed by the Lord when he says, “But thou art rich.” Its condition is exactly the opposite of that of the church in Laodicea. The latter was rich and luxurious, filled to the full and in need of nothing, suffered no tribulation, yet it was poor and naked in the consideration of him that walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks.

But the church of Smyrna is outwardly destitute, poor and despised, a social outcast, in the midst of tribulation and with more severe persecution to be expected in the near future; yet it was rich spiritually, rich and abundant in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor is there any reason to limit this assertion of the Lord as to the condition of the church in Smyrna in any way. It implies that it is rich in all the treasures and blessings of grace.

Rich the church was in the knowledge of the truth, as might be inferred even from the fact that it was faithful in the midst of trials. Rich it was in works and patience, rich and strong in bearing the cross. Rich the church was, undoubtedly, in that respect in which the congregation of Ephesus was so fatefully weak; it had not lost its first love, as had the latter. Strong it was in the faith, firm in hope, ardent in love, abounding in works, in affliction patient, in tribulation expectant of the day of deliverance. Rich in true, sound, experimental Christianity. I imagine it was a pleasure to make a house to house family visitation through the church of Smyrna. The members were prepared to give testimony of the hope that was within them at all times. They were rich in actual fact. Though the world hated them, deprived them of their possessions, made them poor and naked and miserable from the temporal point of view, yet they knew that their King was Lord of heaven and earth, and by faith they were saved in hope. Yea, indeed, the church in tribulation is rich.

Not only is this applicable to the individual church in Smyrna, but equally much to the church in tribulation of all ages. It has even become proverbial that the blood of the martyrs has become the seed of the church in history. Never does the church offer a more miserable and pitiable aspect than in times of prosperity in the world and peace and abundance; never is its condition more precarious than when it caters to the good pleasure of the world and craves for wealth and glory and honor after the measure of the world. The church of Laodicea is the warning example. But on the other hand, it is equally true that the church is never more nearly perfect in this dispensation than when it is called upon to fight the battle of faith, to suffer and endure for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

This is but natural. The question might be asked: Why is it that the church of Smyrna, that

the church in tribulation generally, is so strong and rich? And the answer is not difficult. In the first place, there is no doubt a theological reason. Scripture reveals to us that among the elect of God, there are not many wise and noble and rich in the world. God has chosen the foolish and the weak and the base things of this world, that which was naught. And that for a very evident reason. The church does not exist for its own glory, but for the glory of God Almighty. And, therefore, the church does not exist for the purpose of showing forth its own strength and abundance from a natural point of view, but the grace and power of the Lord her God. This it can do no more clearly than in times of tribulation, when it becomes manifest that it possesses no resources, no strength, no faith, no hope outside of Christ, that its all is in him, that from him it receives its strength to stand and be faithful.

Besides, there is also a spiritual reason why the church in tribulation flourishes and is strong. The root of its life is faith, for by faith it is connected with him that walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, by faith only it receives all the treasures of salvation. The stronger and the more conscious this faith, the more the church will grow in grace and increase in all spiritual riches in Christ. But what is more conducive to the exercise and strengthening of this faith than a period of outward poverty and tribulation? It is when the storm howls in the woods that the oak strikes its roots more firmly in the soil and is strengthened. So it is when the storm of persecution sweeps through the church that the latter strikes the roots of its faith more deeply into Christ and draws from him more consciously the very strength of its life. And, therefore, it is especially in times of trouble that the church flourishes, for in such times it is taught to cling to its powerful King and seek its all in him.

(To be continued)

