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The Seven Lampstands, Incense and Harps

By Bryan Hodge

The book of Revelation is a book of symbols. The message was signified (Rev. 1:1). While some of the symbols may be difficult, there are many great lessons which are fairly easy to discern. Let us notice...

The Seven Lampstands

"Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me and having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands." (Rev. 1:12). What are the lampstands? We are not left to guess. We are informed, "the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20).

This is tabernacle/temple imagery (Ex. 25:31-40; 27:20-21; Heb. 9:2; 1 Kings 7:48-49).

Lampstands have a purpose, and that purpose is to bear light. Jesus is "the true light" (John 1:9), "the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5). The church is to be the bearer of this light. Jesus spoke of the purpose of the lampstand saying "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house" (Matt. 5:15). We should let His light shine through our lives (Matt. 5:16; Phil. 2:14-16).

The lampstand was costly. It was made from a talent of pure gold (Ex. 37:17-24). At \$1,500/ounce (for round figures) the lampstands value (calculated in gold alone) would be \$1.8 million. Now, consider the purchase price of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Incense

Incense is mentioned (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4). Again, there is no need for speculation. The image is explained. This is the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8). This too is tabernacle/temple imagery (Ex. 30:6-9).

Incense was offered in the Holy Place (Ex. 30:6-9). However, it wafted into the Most Holy Place, which represented the presence of God (Num. 7:8-9; 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Isa. 37:16) Our prayers come before God's presence! (Rev. 8:4).

Homer Hailey remarked concerning Revelation 8, "If incense symbolized the prayers of the saints in 5:8, could not the incense of 8:3, which was added to the prayers of the saints, have been the intercession of Christ, and the Holy Spirit being added to them? This I believe" (Prayer and Providence, p. 52).

Wayne Jackson remarked, "Does God really listen to the prayers of his people: Some of those early Christians, literally bathed in their own blood, must have wondered at times. This context, though, explicitly states that 'the prayers of the saints went up before God.' God listens to his people" (Revelation, p. 178).

Harps

Harps are mentioned (Rev. 5:8; 14:2; 15:2-3). Remember, this is figurative language. Incense represents the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8). We should not conclude that harps mean harps.

Harps represent worship. It is depicted in tabernacle/temple imagery (1 Chr. 25:1, 6; 2 Chr. 5:12; 9:11; 20:28, etc.)

They are pictured singing the song of Moses (Rev. 15:2-3; cf. 14:3). Moses and the children of Israel sang to the Lord (Ex. 15) following their salvation by baptism (Ex. 14:13, 30 cf. 1 Cor. 10). Shouldn't we?