

Revelation 1: 16, 20; "The Mystery of the Seven Stars", Sermon # 12
in the series - "The Faithful and True Witness", Delivered
by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 26th, 2006,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.

John is seeing a vision of Christ Himself, a vision of Christ standing in the midst of the golden lampstands. He is seen by John as an awesome and powerful High Priest and King who rules over His Church and each individual local expression of it. He has all the prerogatives of the King of the nations, and as Commander-in-Chief of His people. He has already overcome all of His enemies and ours by His cross and resurrection, and now has all power and authority to advance and extend His glorious kingdom of truth and grace throughout the earth. "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun does his successive journeys run; His kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moons shall wax and wane no more." Jesus, having overcome sin and death, now stands in the midst of His spiritual forces, poised to help them to overcome the world, the flesh, and the Devil. His head and His hair are white like wool because he has all the experience necessary to help us in the spiritual battle to which we are called. Do you realize that you and I, as a part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, are just as much in a spiritual battle as those who were called to suffer persecution in past generations? When you became a believer, you enlisted in the Lord's army, whether you realized it or not. We are called to follow our Captain and to become like Him. The Devil would like to make us just as worldly and complacent as we can possibly be, so that the cause of Christ will stagnate in this place. Will we let him? We are called to holiness, which the world and even our own hearts are opposed to in certain ways. The evil one would like to destroy all the good work of grace and truth in our hearts. He would like to prevent the gospel from coming with power to our loved ones and our community. But our Jesus has not only gone before us and has overcome, but He now stands with us in the spiritual battle that we are undergoing as a church. Every church is a part of this spiritual battle that I am speaking of. Jesus sees it clearly; do you? His eyes are like a flame of fire which shows us that He is well able to discern all things related to our hearts and the evil plans and purposes of the wicked men of this world who oppose His kingdom's advance.

I want us this afternoon to focus on the mystery of the seven stars which are in Christ's right hand. The mystery is interpreted for us in verses 16 and 20 as meaning that these stars are the angels of the seven churches. We are going to see in Chapters 2 and 3 that there are messages given to the seven churches. These messages are addressed to the angel of that certain church to which John writes. And I would like to assert to you this afternoon that the angels who are referred to in verse 20 are none other than the pastors, elders, and messengers of those local churches. So the question that will naturally occur to you is this. How do we know

that the seven stars are ministers in the local churches? I want to give you 3 reasons why I think that this is so.

1st, Let's look at the meaning of the word Angel in the original language.

The word angel in the Old Testament is sometimes used to refer to a prophet. Turn to Haggai 1: 12 and 13. "Then Zerubbabel the son of Sheltiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the Lord." "Then Haggai the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying, 'I am with you,' says the Lord." It is plain from this scripture that Haggai was the Lord's messenger to the people on behalf of God. The way that they "obeyed the voice of the Lord their God," was by obeying the words of Haggai to them. He was God's representative to the people. The word "messenger" in the Hebrew language, which is used here, is also the word for angel. This is the same kind of thing that happens in the New Testament churches when a pastor or preacher is declaring the Word of the Lord from the Bible.

Now turn over to Malachi 2: 7. Here we find that the same word is used in reference to a priest. "For the lips of priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." He is the "angel" of the Lord of Hosts. In performing the ministerial functions as a priest, he was "keeping knowledge", and the people were to resort to him to "seek the law from his mouth." Both prophets and priests had a word to the people in accordance with their ministerial functions. In the New Testament we are all priests unto our God, but some are appointed to preach and teach. These are what fall under the term "angel" in our passage. Turn over to Daniel 12: 3 and we can couple this with the idea of these ministers being stars. Here we have a passage which could refer to the end of the age when Jesus Christ returns and the resurrection from the dead that takes place then. It could refer to that, but I am inclined to think that there is a closer reference indicated as well. It may be speaking in prophetic fashion about the conversion of the Jews as a nation and to their national resurrection from the dead and how this will come about. There is reference to Michael in verse 1 here, as well as in Revelation 20, which in my mind could refer to the beginning of the Millennium. There is a "time of trouble" which could refer to the time before the Millennium and the national conversion of many of the Jews. I am not sure of the context, but I believe that the words of Chapter 12 must apply far beyond the time period of Antiochus Epiphanes. But we read this: "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever." Here we see that "those who turn many to righteousness" are like stars. The only way that any person is turned to righteousness is through the preaching of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. The stars here are the angels of the respective churches. And it is only

preachers of the gospel that turn many to righteousness, not literal angels. They are the messengers to the churches.

How did this concept of "angels" being ministers play out in the Old Testament synagogues? Listen to Dean Humphrey Prideaux in the 2nd book of his Connection between the Old and New Testaments. "There was a minister of the synagogue that officiated in offering up the public prayers to God for the whole congregation, who, because he was the mouth of the congregation delegated from them as their representative, messenger, or angel, to speak to God in prayer for them, was therefore, in the Hebrew language, called Sheliah Zibbor, that is, the angel of the church. And hence it is that the bishops of the seven churches of Asia are, in the Revelation, by a name borrowed from the synagogue, called the angels of those churches." A little later down the page he says, "He is a messenger of God to the congregation in bringing from him the messages of life, peace, and everlasting salvation unto them." So we see that the use of the word "angel" was something commonly used in the synagogue worship of the time of John to refer to a man delivering a message and a man who would be delegated to represent the whole congregation in prayer.

2ndly- We know that the stars are human messengers because these angels are found in Christ's right hand.

This is mentioned in both verses 16 and 20. I have often said before that the right hand is the hand that we do everything with. Christ is said to be "the right hand and the holy arm of the Father, who has gained the victory for Him," it says in Psalm 98: 1. This is how Christ also, during this whole church age, purposes to accomplish everything related to the progress of the gospel and His kingdom; by using men in the ministry to be His right hand men and preach. Listen to 1 Corinthians 1: 21: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." This is something that God has not generally appointed for His Spirit angels to do. It is something that He has given to men whom He has called to do, as gifts to the church, so that they would be able to preach the gospel to the unconverted and also build up the saints for the work of service to Christ. Ephesians 4: 11 and 12 says, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." This is why the messages to the 7 churches in chapters 2 and 3 center upon true and false doctrine and whether or not the saints are persevering in their faith. The minister and his ministry in any given church are of tremendous significance to whether or not the kingdom will advance in a community. You should pray for your pastor that he would be useful in the right hand of our Master; a faithful representative in both word and deed.

The physical stars of this universe have been placed in the sky by God. He numbers them and calls them all by name. In Job 38: 31 it says, "Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion?" "Can you guide the Great Bear with its cubs?" "Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?" "Can you set their dominion over the earth?" In the margin of my Bible at verse 31 when it says, "Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades," it has an alternate rendering which reads, "Can you bind the cluster of the seven stars?" Can anyone bind up the Word of God from going forth from the lips of Christ's ministers so that His purpose in salvation will be thwarted? No, it cannot be. God has fixed His stars in the physical universe and will lead them forth in their season, and He has fixed His ministers in the starry firmament of the blackness of the spiritual darkness of this fallen sinful world, so that they might shine.

Listen to Lenski on this verse. "The preachers of the church, as the Lord's messengers to the church, are in a peculiar way "in His right hand" to act as His agents and ministers in the churches, there to carry out His will and His alone. The right hand symbolizes majestic authority, the Lord's will; purpose, intent, and the power back of them. He is their authority; His purpose they serve; His will they execute; His word they speak; His power is back of all that they rightly do in His name." "The stars are far above the earth; they move majestically in their courses. The movements and the agitations that are abroad on earth do not affect them. Their light and the place they hold are ever the same." "Here is a vision of the office of the holy ministry which every church and every pastor should note." Stars; not human gas-lights, or will-o'-the-wisps." "Stars; not doormats on which men wipe their feet." "Unchanging stars; not men who are always out of breath in an effort to catch up with the changing times of the earth." The stars which shine so bright in the darkness must make way for the reign of the Sun of Righteousness during His day. Even so, ministers ought always to remember that even such a man as John the Baptist, who was spoken of as a "burning and shining light", only goes before Him to prepare His ways and to give knowledge of salvation to His people." But what a glory and a privilege it is for any man to be called to the right hand of Christ.

And then 3rdly- We know that the seven stars are human messengers because in the context, they are related to the sword of Christ's mouth.

"He had in His right hand seven stars, and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword," it says in verse 16. The sword proceeding out of Christ's mouth is a two edged sword. It means a large double-edged sword of the type that David used in cutting off Goliath's head. "Give it to me," he says later in 1 Samuel 21: 9, "There is none like it." And so it is with the gospel sword which is being pictured for us here. Listen to Isaiah 49: 2, where Jesus is speaking prophetically saying, "He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow His hand He has hidden Me." It is by the Word that Christ speaks that His kingdom is protected from what is sinful and false, and advanced by the proclamation of Truth. Listen

to Hosea 6: 4 and 5. "O Ephraim, what shall I do to you?" "O Judah, what shall I do to you?" "For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away." "Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth." "And your judgments are like light that goes forth." "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." Here we find the light of the stars (who are the prophets) going forth to spiritual battle against the unfaithful in Israel. They are hewn "by the words of Christ's mouth," even though it is the words of the prophets themselves. This is how Christ advances His kingdom in righteousness and truth. This is how he brings men to repentance and to salvation; this is how he wages war through His ministers who are the angels of the churches. Listen to Revelation 2: 12 and 16. In speaking to the church of Pergamos, Christ says, "These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword." "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against those who hold false doctrine, with the sword of My mouth." This is the sword of conviction and conversion, or it becomes a sword of judgment. Christ wields this awful sword. Ministers only shine the light. But both work together to accomplish the purpose of advancing His gospel and His kingdom; to see sinners saved, and to overcome all our enemies and His by a faithful proclaiming and adherence to the truth.