

Seven Women Desire One Husband

None of Them Has His Approval

A Symbolical Bible Picture of Present-Day Religious Conditions

"Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, We will eat our own bread and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by Thy name, to take away our reproach."—Isa. 4:1.

Many of the prophecies are highly figurative, symbolical. Doubtless they had some measure of application to the circumstances and conditions of the people of Israel at the time they were written, but we have apostolic authority for concluding that their principal lessons were intended for Spiritual Israel. Saint Peter declares that "holy men of old spoke and wrote as they were moved by the holy Spirit," and that "not unto themselves but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you." (2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Pet. 1:12.) Our Lord and the apostles in their teachings quoted continually from the prophecies and invariably applied the lesson to their day or to some future event of this Gospel Age. Hence, we are abundantly justified in assuming that our text is applicable to some period of this Gospel Age. Its peculiar expression, "In that day," is usual all through the Scriptures in referring to the closing period of this Gospel Age, with its time of trouble and general Church and world confusion incident to the inauguration of the new dispensation, the millennium. It is proper, then, that we seek to apply this Scripture to our time and appropriate its lesson, whatever it may be.

Throughout the Scriptures a woman is a symbol of the Church—a pure woman of a pure Church, a corrupt woman of a false Church. We find our Lord comparing the true Church in the end of this age to a company of virgins—part wise and part foolish—and likening himself to the bridegroom who, at the end of the age, had come to receive his espoused Church to himself in glory. John the Baptist pictured the matter after the same manner, saying, "He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom;" the Apostle Paul amplifies the figure, declaring, "I have espoused you (the consecrated Church) as a chaste virgin unto one husband, which is Christ." (John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2.) Here, as well as in the Lord's parable of the virgins, the Jewish marriage is set forth as the example or pattern of the union between Christ and the Church—a very different figure from our marriage custom of the present time. With the Jews in olden time, when a betrothal took place, legal and binding documents were signed by or for the contracting parties, but no actual marriage or union took place for about a year. During that year, while waiting for the coming of the bridegroom to receive her unto himself, to take her to his own house, it was required of the espoused that she should be as faithful, as loyal, as true to her espousal as is now expected of any true wife who has been actually and fully married to her husband. We see the harmony between the Jewish marriage custom and the Lord's dealings with the Church. No one is espoused to the Lord except he has entered into a formal and definite contract with him, the contract on the Lord's part being the exceeding

great and precious promises of the Scriptures, assuring the espoused that if found faithful she shall be joint-heir with her Lord, the Bridegroom, in his Millennial Kingdom and all its glories. The contract on the part of the Church is our covenant of consecration, loyalty, faithfulness unto our Redeemer, to whom we are espoused, even unto death. The interim following our personal acceptance of the Lord's gracious promises by a full consecration of our all to him and his service until we actually die corresponds in a measure to the betrothal period of the Jewish maiden; but the still clearer and more exact fulfilment of the figure is found in the history of the Church as a whole. The Lord's virgin Church was espoused to him at Pentecost, and has been awaiting the coming of the Bridegroom and the resurrection change to glory, honor and immortality—the marriage, the union—for nearly nineteen centuries.

The Bride in Kingdom Glory

Our Lord continued the same lesson and illustration in his last message to the Church, recorded in the book of Revelation. There he still continues to picture the Church as a betrothed virgin, unmarried, but under strictest obligations to purity and faithfulness down to the end of this Gospel Age, where she is represented as making herself ready for the Bridegroom's coming and for the marriage. To be ready, as the Apostle explains, she must have on the wedding garment, and it must be "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." (Eph. 5:27.) Not that any member of that glorious company could even hope to maintain absolute purity and perfection, since all were "born in sin and shapen in iniquity" (Psalm 51:5); but that the robe representing the imputed righteousness of Christ covers every unintentional blemish and imperfection, and that any blemish or soil or spot or wrinkle upon this robe would be a cause of such grief to the betrothed one that the stain would be removed and the wrinkle pressed out by the gracious arrangements made therefor by the heavenly Bridegroom, who presented the robe and gave the directions by which it might be kept "unspotted from the world"—"without spot or wrinkle or any such thing."

The same record shows that with the resurrection "change" in the end of this age the "espoused virgin" Church will be no more, because she will have passed from her espoused state into the more exalted one of the Bride—married or united to her Lord and Bridegroom. Note the symbolical picture by which she is represented: the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven—that is, the heavenly Kingdom, the new government or rulership of the world, is then pictured as the glorified Church, the Bride; for we read that the Messenger said to John the "revelator," "Come and I will show you the Bride, the Lamb's wife" (no longer the espoused virgin). Then he showed him the holy city, filled with the glory of God. (Rev. 21:9, 10.) The grand office or work of the Church in glory is also pic-

"Read this I pray thee!"—Isa. 29:11

tured before us as the work of the Bride—"the Spirit and the Bride shall say, Come, and whosoever will may take of the water of life freely." At the present time not only is the Church not the Bride, but she is not even privileged to say, Come, to whosoever wills, but only to "as many as the Lord your God shall call" (Acts 2:39); for with the calling and drawing of this present time there is a measure of election, as the Scriptures declare in our Lord's words, "No man can come unto me except the Father which sent me draw him." (John 6:44.) Moreover, there is no river of the water of life now. That bountiful provision is for the future—for the world during the Millennial Age. Now, as our Lord declares, those who believe in him and become his consecrated followers are granted to have in themselves a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. (John 4:14.) The river of the water of life and its bountiful provisions for the world of mankind, to which all will be invited, is most clearly and distinctly set forth as belonging to the epoch of the Millennial Kingdom, when the Church will be no longer an espoused virgin, but the Bride, the Lamb's wife—when she will be no longer in a condition of humiliation and groaning because of her burdens, but, filled with the glory of God, the Kingdom of her Bridegroom, with which she will be associated, will be the fountain (the holy city) from whence will proceed a great river of truth and grace, of which all mankind may drink to full satisfaction and everlasting life, if they will.

Many Churches of Christ

The heathen and children in Christian lands when they begin to study the Bible are perplexed and inquire, Which is the Church of Christ? They see various churches of various names claiming they are branches of the Church of Christ. The unsophisticated mind inquires, Which is the true? Which did Jesus establish? Of which was he the Head and founder? To which did the apostles belong? The answer implies confusion and reproach. Each denomination claims to be as good as any other and a little better, to be as true as any other or a little more so, to be as legitimately the Lord's espoused Bride as any other. A measure of confusion comes as they severally endeavor to tell us their origin and founders, for one saith, "I am of Calvin;" another, "I am of Luther;" another, "I am of Wesley;" another, "I am of Zwingli." But when confronted with the thought that these various sects and parties all originated within the past few hundred years, and when asked how they can reconcile this fact with the declaration of the Scriptures respecting the founding of the Church by Christ, with the twelve apostles as the living foundation stones, they are confused.

The more courageous attempt an explanation and tell us that their *Church* was the original one founded by the Lord and the Apostles, but that a great falling away from the original simplicity took place, so that for long centuries Methodism was forgotten, Calvinism was forgotten, Lutheranism was forgotten, until later Wesley, Calvin and Luther revived them. But, we ask, How could Wesley re-establish the original Church if Calvin had re-established it? How could Luther re-establish it if Zwingli re-established it? Again there is confusion of face and stammering and hesitancy for an answer. Then the Church of Rome, the Greek Church and the Church of England come forward and declare that their organizations are older than any of these others, and that hence theirs are the true, the original; but again we ask, Which of you is the oldest? and where did your organization begin? Give us the proofs. All claim genuineness and originality, but none can show any existence of its present organization earlier than the third century. And when we contrast their elaborate and formal services with the simplicity of

the early Church, as described in the New Testament, we are sure that there can be no identity between the two. When we compare their doctrines with the doctrines of Christ and the apostles, as set forth in the New Testament, there is an equal inharmony—their claims fall to the ground for lack of support. The doctrines and practices of the churches of the Reformation period and since evidently are much more in harmony with the practices and doctrines of the Apostolic Church than are the older systems; but they are still far from being in thorough accord with each other and also out of accord with the original.

Different in Faith and Practice

We have no time here to discuss fully the difference of faith and practice between the various denominations of to-day, nor to contrast with these the faith and practice of the Church organized by the Lord. We will merely refer to a few of these latter. The Scriptures teach that there is but one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:6); that the Father is above all, that he sent the Son to be our Redeemer, and that when he had faithfully accomplished the work the Father raised him from the dead and exalted him to his own right hand or place of favor—next to himself—and the Redeemer himself said: "The Father is greater than I." (John 14:28.) But the various churches, each claiming to be the original, unite in telling us that there are three Gods, "equal in power and glory." Sometimes they explain that the three Gods operate as one God; at other times they claim that there is but one God, but that he has made three different manifestations of himself to assist us in comprehending him, and that each manifestation is as much the one God as the other.

What confusion! How impossible for those whose minds are thus muddled to understand respecting the divine plan of salvation, to comprehend the Scriptural statement that "there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time"! (1 Tim. 2:5, 6.) How could one part of God be a mediator for men with the other part of the same God? Above all, how could God in one manifestation die as Adam's substitute and ransom, while the same God in another sense would accept that ransom and raise the other part of himself from the dead? How can our dear friends, confused by the errors they have carried with them from the "dark ages," understand or appreciate that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that the Father raised him from the dead by his own power on the third day? In their confusion of trying to think of the Lord Jesus as being one in person, one in essence, etc., with the Father, they cannot imagine that he died at all, for if God died in any comprehensible sense there was a period in which the universe was without a God! and how could the Father raise the Son from the dead if the Son was merely another name for the Father? All this confusion has tended to undermine the faith of the more rational members of all these various churches, until to-day their faith is a very indefinite thing, hard to define, if indeed it has any form or tangibility. So disgusted have people in general become with their inability to harmonize their creeds of the "dark ages" with common sense that many of the brightest have abandoned the matter and sought to formulate new and more rational conceptions.

But, alas, the great Adversary, as the Apostle forewarned, manifesting himself as an angel of light and leader into all truth, has captured their college and seminary professors and most prominent ministers. He has beguiled them as the serpent beguiled Eve, with a hope and ambition for greater knowledge than that

furnished in the divine revelation. They have with wonderful unanimity become "Higher Critics" and "Evolutionists." In the name of all that is holy and good they are persuading the leading minds in all these different churches that the Bible is not the Word of God, that it is wholly unreliable, that Jesus and the apostles were honest enough, but not brilliant scholars, and were unable to detect the falsities of the Old Testament upon which all of their teachings are based. These wise men of our time assure us that the story of Adam and Eve is not a statement of fact—that at very most it might be considered an allegory, which twenty men might guess at and interpret in twenty different ways. They assure us that there never was a Garden of Eden, there never was forbidden fruit, there never was a sentence upon Adam because of his disobedience in perfection, and that, therefore, the Scriptures delude us when they tell us that it was by reason of this that sin and death entered into the world. They tell us that Adam was merely one remove from a monkey, and hence far from able to keep any divine law, and far from capable of being judged or condemned to death on account of disobedience. And since they deny the fall and that man thus lost his home, his life, his relationship to God, they perforce deny also that there was any need of a Saviour. They deny the Lord's words that he came "to seek and to save that which was lost." Denying that there was any sin they deny that Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification. (1 Cor. 15:3.) They entirely ignore the Apostle's statement that by one man's disobedience sin entered into the world and death as the result of sin, and thus death passed upon all men because all are sinners. (Rom. 5:12.) Thus do they make void the Word of God, and set up instead of it human tradition, human theories—the golden image to which all are required to bow down and worship if they would be called respectable, intelligent, sane.

Churchianity—Confusion—Babylon

We have seen that the Scriptures refer to the true Church of Christ as the espoused virgin of the Lord, and that they indicate clearly that eventually she is to be the Bride, the Lamb's Wife. But where is she now? Where has she been all through the period between the days of the apostles and the present time? We answer that the Scriptures explain that she has been in the "wilderness." (Rev. 12:14.) In other words, she has been in disfavor, ignored and, to the worldly wise, unknown. Some of her members have been scattered in the various denominations already referred to and some of them outside of all of these. Of the true Church the Master said, "If ye were of the world the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The Apostle, again describing this class, declares of them that not many wise, not many great, not many learned, not many noble, not many mighty are called—but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith. The popular institutions already referred to are worldly; their aims, their ambitions, their methods are worldly, and hence there can be very little religious sympathy, fellowship and co-operation between the majority of these sectarian systems and the minority in them who are true to the Lord and to his Word.

The majority think it strange that the minority are such peculiar people; that they take such different views of life and its proprieties; that they set their affections on things above and not on the things of the earth; that they love a prayer-meeting better than they love a ball game, a concert, or a theater. They think it strange that they do not join with them in all the various questionable means employed for raising money for Church

purposes, the fairs, socials, charades, lotteries, grab-bags, etc.; and, as the Apostle intimates, they are very likely to speak evil of those who have more of the Spirit of the Lord and of the apostles, the spirit of holiness. Our Lord's parable of the wheat and the tares explains the situation exactly. He sowed the good wheat seed and the apostles followed in the same work; but subsequently the great Adversary sowed tare seed, errors, and brought into nominal Christendom many who were Christians merely in name, and who professed morality for their personal advantage—either in the hope of escaping the torment of the future or in the hope of gaining temporary advantage in the present life. This sowing checked the real wheat and hindered its development to a very large extent, so that to-day, look where we will over the field of Christendom, we see comparatively few of the true wheat class—comparatively few true disciples of the Lord, willing and glad to walk in his footsteps in the narrow way of self-sacrifice and service. We see the vast majority ignorant of the truth and grace of the Lord—not knowing Jesus as the personal Saviour, not knowing from what they were redeemed, not knowing of the call nor to what they have been called, not knowing of the necessity of the trials and difficulties of this present time for all those who will be faithful to the Lord, and not knowing the exceeding great and precious things which God hath in reservation for them that love him.

We see that the fruits of the Spirit—namely, meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, love—possessed by the wheat class are not esteemed and not enjoyed by the tare class. We see, on the contrary, that the tare class is full of earthly ambition, earthly schemes and plans, and in every sense of the word give evidence that they are of the earth earthly. Some of these tares are fine, noble people in many respects; some of them give largely out of their abundance for garnishing the sepulchers of the righteous, for stained-glass windows representing the Lord crucified or the apostles preaching the truth; but they have not the root of the matter in them; they have never taken up their cross to follow the meek and lowly One; they have never consecrated their lives to the Lord's service even unto death; they have never entered the narrow way, which alone leads to glory, honor and immortality, to which the true Church has been called. Having in mind the numerous brands of Churchianity—Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, etc.—and having in mind also their various conflicting doctrines, we cannot wonder that the Scriptures use the word Babylon as a name for these systems as a whole—especially when we come to know that the word Babylon signifies confusion. You can put your finger with some degree of definiteness upon the teachings of Confucius and his followers and know what they believe; you can do the same with those of Buddhists, Brahmins and others, but not so with Christians, for their doctrines are legion, as are their names, and it becomes necessary to find out what kind of a Christian one is in order to know what is his faith.

The confusion of doctrines among the various branches of Churchianity has brought reproach upon them all. The heathen are inquiring how it comes there are so many different kinds of Christians, and how it comes that they all have their own Bibles, and how it comes that they all can get their various theories out of the same book. This is a reproach that is being keenly felt by the leading minds of all denominations. As a consequence their creeds are being very generally ignored, while the organizations built upon and by those creeds, as upon foundations separate from others, are held unto most firmly. A Presbyterian may despise his creed and frankly tell some one, as a Presbyterian minister did, that if he wanted to believe the creed he must swallow

it as he would a Brandreth pill, for if he would attempt to chew it he would never swallow it. Hence the Longer and Shorter Catechisms are practically buried, as things better to be forgotten in the interests of the prosperity of the denomination which formerly built upon them. And it is much the same with other denominations and their creeds; the systems are being worshiped more than ever, and the creeds are being repudiated more than ever.

But why should this be if the creeds are admitted to be unsatisfactory and better buried? Why should not all Christians come together upon the simple ground of faith in the Bible—accepting that as their only creed? Why? Because to do this would wound their pride, would destroy their denominational integrity, would destroy the image they have so long worshiped. Each denomination expresses itself as quite willing to absorb all the others, but not willing to be absorbed by any of the others—not that they see there is any principle involved, but only because of pride and Churchianity and a lack of the real Spirit of the Lord. And, as the Apostle says, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his.” Hence, in Churchianity and its various branches there are evidently many, a large majority, who at heart are not the Lord’s, but their own. They speak quite truly when they say that they “belong” to this or that denomination. It owns them body and mind; they serve and reverence it as the heathen do the idol.

As this situation is more and more clearly seen, and as the people realize the unsatisfactoriness of their old creeds, and as their theologians dispense to them their new creed of Higher Criticism and Evolution and salvation by self help and good works, the various denominations are saying to themselves: Go to now; let us build a great tower of Babel; let us have a federation of denominations without any particular creed, without any particular faith, without any particular hope, without any particular aim except our self-preservation as denominations. Let us build so high that the floods of trouble that we apprehend shall do us no injury; but let us have no confidence in the Ark, Christ Jesus, and feel no necessity for being hidden therein, nor of being buried in the likeness of Christ’s death and thus carried over to the new dispensation promised.

“Seven Women in That Day”

Who are the seven women? We have seen that women are pointed to as representatives or types of the churches—that the true Church is symbolized by a woman, a virgin, and the false systems by harlots, unfaithful to their espousals, and associating with the world. (Rev. 17:5.) The number seven is well recognized throughout the Scriptures as being a symbol of completeness. And so we assume it here to signify all the churches of this world—but not to include the true Church, which is not of this world and which does not follow its course. We have come to the time when these seven women—that is to say, all the various sects and denominations—are with one heart, and one voice feeling the reproach of their situation, as already described. And what is their conclusion as to the proper course to be pursued? We answer that the one man of our text properly represents our Lord, the heavenly Bridegroom, and that our text signifies that all the nominal churches have come, or are about to come, “in that day,” to the place where they will desire to be called merely the churches of Christ, and want nothing whatever more to do with him. They want to hold their sec-

tarian names, Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist, etc., but they want also to be called Christians—that is their chief asset, almost their only asset. For the doctrines of Christ they care nothing, and for any thought of redemption and covering of sins through him they care nothing; it is merely a name that they desire. “We will eat our own bread and wear our own apparel—merely let us be called by thy name.”

The True Church to the Contrary

We have already estimated that members of the true Church are still associated with these various earthly systems represented by the seven women of our text, but they will not be therein long, for one by one they are hearing the voice of Truth crying to them, “Come out of her (Babylon), my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins and receive not of her plagues.” (Rev. 18:4.) The more these women want to eat their own bread and to wear apparel of their own furnishment, the more all the true ones of the Lord’s people among them will awaken to the true situation and find that they have neither part nor lot there. The true Church does not wish to eat her own bread; she wants the Bread that came down from heaven. She does not want her own theories, her own plans of salvation, her own schemes, her own methods; but desires rather that which God has provided as her daily portion—“Meat in due season for the household of faith”—things new and old from the storehouse of divine truth. Neither does the true espoused virgin of the Lord desire to wear her own apparel, for she has come to understand that her own righteousness is as filthy rags. She has learned and is learning more and more to appreciate the robe given her by the heavenly Bridegroom—the wedding garment. She trusts more and more in the merit of her Redeemer, the covering of whose justification was symbolized by the skins of the sacrifices, given to Adam and Eve as the covering for their nakedness.

The message of the Lord has gone forth to his Church of the present epoch, counseling all those who claim to be his, that they trust not in uncertain riches, earthly riches, but that by faithful sacrificing of the earthly interests they buy of the Lord the gold tried in the fire, the divine nature, and that they maintain the white raiment of justification, that their eyes may see clearly the things that make for their peace and the things to come—the riches of grace, the knowledge of which has not entered into the heart of natural man. The Lord addresses the nominal system of the present time, at the closing epoch of this age, saying, “Thou sayest I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eye salve to anoint thine eyes that thou mayest see.”—Rev. 3:17, 18.

To whatever extent, dear friends, we have had the spirit of Babylon, the spirit of the world and the confusion of doctrines that are contrary to the Word of God, let us get rid of these. To whatever extent we have had blindness and misapprehension of the true riches, and a failure to appreciate the white raiment of Christ’s righteousness, let us finally accept the Lord’s favor and anoint our eyes and see the glories of the situation of the true espoused of the Lord, that we may make our calling and election sure as well as be burning and shining lights in the world for those who are seeking the true ways of the Lord.