

Text: Exod. 25:31-40, 27:20-21, 37:17-24

Title: "The light of the lampstand"

Time: 8/21/2022 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Around AD 81 the Roman Emperor Domitian built a celebratory arch in Rome in honor of his recently deceased brother Titus, both marking his official deification and commemorating his destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70.

This Arch of Titus depicts a triumphal procession held in AD 71 after the fall of Jerusalem. The procession paraded some of the furniture taken from Herod's temple, including a lampstand, the menorah. The Arch has a carving of what the lampstand looked like in Herod's day. It is that carving that was used in the creation of a National Emblem in 1948 for Israel, who had just become a nation once again.

The symbolism of the lampstand on Israel's national emblem seems to signify a call for the peace of Israel. It is surrounded by olive branches, and its use of the menorah from Titus's Arch is a reminder of the horror that war can bring. Of course, Israel has known little peace since 1948.

In our passage we find the origin of the lampstand of the tabernacle. It is a piece of furniture, but much more than merely a piece of furniture. It is a God-designed implement of revelation that heralds God's truth found from the early pages of Scripture to its very end.

George Carter Needham was the protégé of D. L. Moody. Needham served the Lord as an evangelist until his untimely death at the age of 56. At the age of 10, Needham had been sent to sea on an English ship bound for South

America. The seamen treated him harshly, including tying him to the ship's mast and tattooing his arms and body. When the expedition ended, George's shipmates deserted him on the Chilean shore. Cannibals captured him, but when they saw his tattoos, they refused to eat him. He returned to civilization and became a successful businessman but left business to become an evangelist. He wrote a number of treasured books, including one called *Substance and Shadow* about the symbolism of the tabernacle.

In his exposition of this passage, Needham had this to say about the importance of the lampstand: "[Light] is the peculiar emblem which most represents God in his nature and revelation." Many Scriptures can be cited in support of Needham's insight:

Deut. 4:24, "For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God."

Ps. 18:28, "For thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness."

Ps. 56:13, "For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

Ps. 84:11, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

Ps. 118:27a, "God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light."

Isa. 60:19b, "The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory."

John 1:4-9, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of

that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

2 Cor. 4:6, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Heb. 12:29, “For our God is a consuming fire.”

1 John 1:5, “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

Rev. 21:23, “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

Rev. 22:5, “And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

Clearly, the God who designed the lampstand of the tabernacle is the God of light. Needham is correct to say that light characterizes both His nature and His self-revelation. Yet the God of light is seen only with great difficulty in our world of darkness. Men and women need this light, and the lampstand of the tabernacle is an important part of this truth. This morning I want us to notice three things the lampstand says about God and His light this morning.

I. The lampstand reminds us that God is the creator of light (25:31-32).

Illustration: After my son finished his internship with us last summer, he still needed a job for a few weeks before going back to Greenville, and the Lord provided a good paying temporary job at Alene Candle Company in Milford.

When you work for Alene, you enter an employee entrance, over which hangs a big sign that says: "Through This Door Walk Makers of the Best Candles in the World." As Kent prepared to spend another evening putting candles into boxes, he could glory in his exalted position as one of these makers of the best candles in the world.

Application: Now it is one thing to be one of the makers of the best candles in the world, but quite another to be the Maker of the light that lights those candles. The Bible tells us that the first thing God created to give order to heaven and earth was light (Gen. 1:1-5; cp. $e=mc^2$).

The lampstand reminds us of this truth in two ways. First, it is hammered gold. You may remember that the cherubim above the ark of the covenant were also hammered gold. The hammering of the gold seems to symbolize the work of creation in the furniture of the tabernacle. The cherubim were created beings, and light and its sources are also works of God's creation.

The other reminder of creation from the lampstand is the number seven (v. 37). Seven is the number of completed creation in Scripture. There are seven lamps, and this reminds us of the first week, with its six days of creation and God's ceasing creation on the seventh day. God supernaturally created the universe, and He did so in six days, stopping on the seventh, and pronouncing all that He had made as very good.

Illustration: You may have heard about the James Webb Space Telescope, which is a device designed to penetrate infrared light better than any other telescope has been able to thus far. This gives astronomers the ability to peer out to greater distances with greater clarity than before and to find galaxies previously unknown.

As of an August 9 report, it has found 44 of these, and those it has found have begun to undermine what had been previously believed about big-bang cosmology. The galaxies at these great distances (at what old-earth cosmologists believe to be very early dates relatively close to timing of the big bang) are fully formed galaxies. For us who read in our Bibles that God saw all that He had made as very good on day six, with the stars coming on day four, we are not surprised that the distant galaxies are fully formed.

During the first week of creation, the Maker of the best universe in the world made galaxies supernaturally and very good. The lampstand reminds us that God is the creator of light.

II. The lampstand reminds us that God is the giver of new life (25:33-36).

Illustration: In the Middle East, the almond tree is the first to bloom in the springtime after a lifeless, dormant season of winter. It symbolized miraculous new life, especially in the almond rod of Aaron that supernaturally bloomed in Num. 17:8, "And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds."

Application: The lampstand has a lot of almond blossoms on it. Each of the seven lamps is set on an almond blossom, and then there are three more almond blossoms on the shaft of the lampstand where the three sets of branches meet.

So lamps and almond blossoms go together in the lampstand just like light and the miraculous gift of life go together in God's work of salvation. The Bible is clear - darkness kills and light gives life. Remember what John

said about Jesus: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on His name." Have you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Have you believed on His name to save you from sin?

Paul explains how light brings new life in 2 Cor. 4:3-6. You are either in darkness or light this morning. If you are in darkness, you are blinded by the god of this world, Satan. If you are in the light, you have seen the glory of God in face of Jesus (His deity), and you have come to see the glory of the truth that He died for your sins and rose again for you. The lampstand reminds us with its almond blossoms that God's light gives new life.

III. The lampstand reminds us that God uses us to disperse life-giving light (25:37-40; 27:20-21).

Illustration: We have a lot of tree work going on in New Hampshire to keep the powerlines clear of branches that could cause power outages. We know from experience that life becomes difficult when the lights go out.

Application: It was one of the jobs of Israel and her priesthood to not let the lights of the lampstand go out. They were to keep the lamps burning continually. To do so they needed to keep the lamps full of oil, and they had to trim the wicks.

The oil and the golden implements to trim the wicks are symbols of the Holy Spirit. In Isa. 6:6 one of these tongs is used by an angel to cleanse the unclean lips of the prophet

in preparation for ministry. The Holy Spirit cleanses us with the blood of Christ that way: "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). So the trimming of the wick is emblematic of our being cleansed from sin through the Holy Spirit's convicting power, so that His light can shine from our lives.

But the oil also fuels the light. It provides the light's power source. In Zechariah 4 the lampstand vision received by the prophet emphasizes the need for our light-dispersing ministry for this fuel and power: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord of hosts" (v. 6). Israel was to bring the life-giving light of Spirit-empowered ministry for God to their children and grandchildren especially (27:21).

Israel ultimately fails in this mission, but Isaiah prophesied that they shall have a future of dispersing life-giving light to the nations, which shall fulfill their Lord's original purpose for them: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isa. 60:1-3).

Conclusion: So what does the light of Israel's lampstand mean for us NT believers today? As one of Jesus's local churches, we are living in Isaiah's gross darkness, still waiting for the time when the nations of the world will come to Israel's Messiah to find God's light and life. But our ministry together, as one of Jesus's local churches, is also to be a lampstand ministry cleansed and empowered by the Spirit's oil and wick-trimming, a place where needy people can find life-giving light. See Rev. 1:12-20.

What we sometimes see as a small flickering lamp in a world of gross darkness, God sees our local church ministry as an angel of God, a star of heaven in the hand of our risen Savior. As New Testament Christians, we are the light of the world, and our churches are the lampstands of Christ. We must not put our light under a bushel but keep it shining brightly on the lampstand (Matt. 5:14-16). We must shine for Christ from the inside of a Bible-believing, gospel-preaching local church.

Then the world shall see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. God is the creator of light that gives new life. He has entrusted this light to us to shine it into a darkened world. Is your light on the lampstand or under the bushel?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching