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THE SACRED NUMBER.

DR. TALMAGE DISCOURSES ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SEVEN.

Important Truths of the Bible Illustrated by the Use of That Numeral. Favored by the Divine Mind.

[Copyright, Louis Klopsch, 1899.]

WASHINGTON, June 25.—Many of the most important doctrines of the Bible are by Dr. Talmage presented in this sermon in a very unusual way. Genesis ii, 3, "God blessed the seventh day."

The mathematics of the Bible is noticeable; the geometry and the arithmetic; the square in Ezekiel; the circle spoken of in Isaiah; the curve alluded to in Job; the rule of fractions mentioned in Daniel; the rule of loss and gain in Mark, where Christ asks the people to cipher out by that rule what it would "profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul." But there is one mathematical figure that is crowned above all others in the Bible; it is the numeral seven, which the Arabians got from India, and all following ages have taken from the Arabians. It stands between the figure six and the figure eight. In the Bible all the other numerals bow to it. Over 300 times it is mentioned in the Scriptures, either alone or compounded with other words. In Genesis the week is rounded into seven days, and I use my text because there this numeral is for the first time introduced in a journey which halts not until in the close of the book of Revelation its monument is built into the wall of heaven in chrysolite, which, in the strata of precious stones, is the seventh.

In the Bible we find that Jacob had to serve seven years to get Rachel, but she was well worth it, and, foretelling the years of prosperity and famine in Pharaoh's time, the seven fat oxen were eaten up of the seven lean oxen, and wisdom is said to be built on seven pillars, and the ark was left with the Philistines seven years, and Naaman, for the cure of his leprosy, plunged in the Jordan seven times; the dead child, when Elisha breathed into its mouth, signaled its arrival back into consciousness by sneezing seven times; to the house that Ezekiel saw in vision there were seven steps; the walls of Jericho, before they fell down, were compassed seven days; Zechariah describes a stone with eyes; to cleanse a leprous house the door must be sprinkled with pigeons' blood seven times; in Canaan were overthrown seven nations; on one occasion Christ cast out seven devils; on a mountain he fed a multitude of people with seven loaves, the fragments left filling seven baskets, and the closing passages of the Bible are magnificent and overwhelming with the imagery made up of seven churches, seven stars, seven candlesticks, seven seals, seven angels and seven heads and seven crowns and seven horns and seven spirits and seven vials and seven plagues and seven thunders.

Favored by the Divine Mind.

Yea, the numeral seven seems a favorite with the divine mind outside as well as inside the Bible, for are there not seven prismatic colors? And when God with the rainbow wrote the comforting thought that the world would never have another deluge he wrote it on the scroll of the sky in ink of seven colors. He grouped into the Pleiades seven stars. Rome, the capital of the world, sat on seven hills. When God would make the most intelligent thing on earth, the human countenance, he fashioned it with seven features—the two ears, the two eyes, the two nostrils and the mouth. Yea, our body lasts only seven years, and we gradually shed it for another body after another seven years, and so on, for we are, as to our bodies, septennial animals. So the numeral seven ranges through nature and through revelation. It is the number of perfection, and so I use it while I speak of the seven candlesticks, the seven stars, the seven seals and the seven thunders.

The seven golden candlesticks were and are the churches. Mark you, the churches never were, and never can be, candles. They are only candlesticks. They are not the light, but they are to hold the light. A room in the night might have in it 500 candlesticks, and yet you could not see your hand before your face. The only use of a candlestick and the only use of a church is to hold up the light. You see it is a dark world, the night of sin, the night of trouble, the night of superstition, the night of persecution, the night of poverty, the night of sickness, the night of death. Aye, about 50 nights have interlocked their shadows. The whole race goes stumbling over prostrated hopes, and fallen fortunes, and empty flour barrels, and desolated cradles and deathbeds. How much we have use for all the seven candlesticks, with lights blazing from the top of each one of them! Light of pardon for all sin! Light of comfort for all trouble! Light of encouragement for all despondency! Light of eternal riches for all poverty! Light of rescue for all persecution! Light of reunion for all the bereft! Light of heaven for all the dying! And that light is Christ, who is the light that shall yet irradiate the hemispheres.

But, mark you, when I say churches are not candles, but candlesticks, I cast no slur on candlesticks. I believe in beautiful candlesticks. The candlesticks that God ordered for the ancient tabernacle were something exquisite. They were a dream of beauty carved out of loveliness. They were made of hammered gold, stood in a foot of gold and had six branches of gold blooming all along in six lilies of gold each and lips of gold, from which the candles lifted their holy fire. And the best houses in any city ought to be the churches—the best built, the best ventilated, the best swept, the best windowed and the best chandeliered. Log cabins may do in neighborhoods where most of the people live in log cabins, but let there be palatial churches for regions where many of the people live in palaces. Do not have a better place for yourself than for your Lord and King. Do not live in a parlor and put your Christ in a kitchen. These seven candlesticks of which I speak were not made of pewter or iron; they were golden candlesticks, and gold is not only a valuable but a bright metal. Have everything about your church bright—your ushers with smiling faces, your music jubilant, your handshaking cordial, your entire service attractive. Many people feel that in church they must look dull, in order to look reverential, and many whose faces in other kinds of assemblage show all the different phases of emotion have in church no more expression than the back wheel of a hearse. Brighten up and be responsive. If you feel like weeping, weep. If you feel like smiling, smile. If you feel indignant at some wrong assailed from the pulpit, frown. Do not leave your naturalness and resiliency home because it is Sunday morning. If as officers of a church you meet people at the church door with a black look, and have the music black, and the minister in black preach a black sermon, and from invocation to benediction have the impression black, few will come, and those who do come will wish they had not come at all.

The Seven Candlesticks.

Golden candlesticks! Scour up the six lilies on each branch, and know that the more lovely and bright they are the more fit they are to hold the light. But a Christless light is a damage to the world rather than a good. Cromwell stabled his cavalry horses in St. Paul's cathedral, and many now use the church in which to stable vanities and worldliness. A worldly church is a candlestick without the candle, and it had its prototype in St. Sophia in Constantinople, built to the glory of God by Constantine, but transformed to base uses by Mohammed the Second Built out of colored marble; a cupola with 24 windows soaring to a height of 180 feet; the ceiling one great bewildernment of mosaic; galleries supported by eight columns of porphyry and 67 columns of green jasper; nine bronze doors with alto-relievo work, fascinating to the eye of any artist; vases and vestments incrusted with all manner of precious stones. Four walls on fire with indescribable splendor. Though labor was cheap, the building cost $1,500,000. Ecclesiastical structure, almost supernatural in pomp and majesty. But Mohammedanism tore down from the walls of that building all the saintly and Christly images, and high up in the dome the figure of the cross was rubbed out that the crescent of the barbarous Turk might be substituted. A great church, but no Christ! A gorgeous candlestick, but no candle! Ten thousand such churches would not give the world as much light as one homemade tallow candle by which last night some grandmother in the eighties put on her spectacles and read the Psalms of David in larger type. Up with the churches, by all means! Hundreds of them, thousands of them, and the more the better. But let each one be a blaze of heavenly light, making the world brighter and brighter, till the last shadow has disappeared, and the last of the suffering children of God shall have reached the land where they have no need of candlestick or "of candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign forever and ever." Seven candlesticks the complete number of lights! Let your light shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Turn now in your Bible to the seven stars. We are distinctly told that they are the ministers of religion. Some are large stars, some of them small stars, some of them sweep a wide circuit and some of them a small circuit, but so far as they are genuine they get their light from the great central sun around which they make revolution. Let each one keep in his own sphere. The solar system would be soon wrecked if the stars, instead of keeping their own orbits, should go to hunting down other stars. Ministers of religion should never clash. But in all the centuries of the Christian church some of these stars have been hunting an Edward Irving or a Horace Bushnell or an Albert Barnes. And the stars that were in pursuit of the other stars lost their own orbit, and some of them could never again find it. Alas for the heresy hunters! The best way to destroy error is to preach the truth. The best way to scatter darkness is to strike a light. There is in immensity room enough for all the ministers. The ministers who give up righteousness and the truth will get punishment enough anyhow, for they are "the wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."

I should like, as a minister, when I am dying, to be able truthfully to say what a captain of the English army, fallen at the head of his column and dying on the Egyptian battlefield, said to General Wolseley, who came to condole with him: "I led them straight. Didn't I lead them straight, general?" God has put us ministers as captains in this battlefield of truth against error. Great at last will be our chagrin if we fall leading the people the wrong way; but great will be our gladness if, when the battle is over, we can hand our sword back to our great commander, saying: "Lord Jesus! We led the people straight. Didn't we lead them straight?"

Those ministers who go off at a tangent and preach some other gospel are not stars, but comets, and they flash across the heavens a little while and make people stare, and throw down a few meteoric stones, and then go out of sight if not out of existence. Brethren in the ministry, let us remember that God calls us stars, and our business is to shine and to keep our own sphere, and then when we get done trying to light up the darkness of this world, we will wheel into higher spheres, and in us shall be fulfilled the promise "they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever."

The ministers are not all Pecksniffs and canting hypocrites, as some would have you think! Forgive me, if having at other times glorified the medical profession, and the legal profession, and the literary profession—I glorify my own. I have seen them in their homes and heard them in their pulpits, and a grander array of men never breathed, and the Bible figure is not strained when it calls them stars; and whole constellations of glorious ministers have already taken their places on high, where they shine even brighter than they shone on earth; Edward N. Kirk of the Congregational church, Stephen H. Tyng of the Episcopal church, Matthew Simpson of the Methodist church, John Dowling of the Baptist church, Samuel K. Talmage of the Presbyterian church, Thomas De Witt of the Reformed church, John Chambers of the Independent church, and there I stop, for it so happens that I have mentioned the seven stars of the seven churches.

The Seven Seals.

I pass on to another mighty Bible seven and they are the seven seals. St. John in vision saw a scroll with seven seals, and he heard an angel cry, "Who is worthy to loose the seals thereof?" Take eight or ten sheets of foolscap paper, paste them together and roll them into a scroll, and have the scroll at seven different places sealed with sealing wax. You unroll the scroll till you come to one of these seals, and then you can go no farther until you break that seal; then unroll again until you come to another seal, and you can go no farther until you break that seal; then you go on until all the seven seals are broken, and the contents of the entire scroll revealed. Now, that scroll with seven seals held by the angel was the prophecy of what was to come on the earth; it meant that the knowledge of the future was with God, and no man and no angel was worthy to open it; but the Bible says Christ opened it and broke all the seven seals. He broke the first seal and unrolled the scroll, and there was a picture of a white horse, and that meant prosperity and triumph for the Roman empire, and so it really came to pass that for 90 years virtuous emperors succeeded each other—Nerva, Trajan and Antoninus. Christ in the vision broke the second seal and unrolled again, and there was a picture of a red horse, and that meant bloodshed, and so it really came to pass, and the next 90 years were red with assassinations and wars. Then Christ broke the third seal and unrolled it, and there was a picture of a black horse, which in all literature means famine, oppression and taxation; and so it really came to pass. Christ went on until he broke all the seven seals and opened all the scroll. Well, the future of all of us is a sealed scroll, and I am glad that no one but Christ can open it. Do not let us join that class of Christians in our day, who are trying to break the seven seals of the future. They are trying to peep into things they have no business with.

Do not go to some necromancer or spiritualist or soothsayer or fortune teller to find out what is going to happen to yourself or your family or your friends. Wait till Christ breaks the seal to find out whether in your own personal life or the life of the nation or the life of the world it is going to be the white horse of prosperity or the red horse of war or the black horse of famine. You will soon enough see him paw and hear him neigh. Take care of the present, and the future will take care of itself. If a man live 70 years, his biography is in a scroll having at least seven seals, and let him not during the first ten years of his life try to look into the twenties, nor the twenties into the thirties, nor the thirties into the forties, nor the forties into the fifties, nor the fifties into the sixties, nor the sixties into the seventies. From the way the years have got the habit of racing along, I guess you will not have to wait a great while before all the seals of the future are broken. I would not give 2 cents to know how long I am going to live, or in what day of what year the world is going to be demolished. I would rather give $1,000 not to know. Suppose some one could break the next seal in the scroll of your personal history and should tell you that on the next 4th of July, 1901, you were to die, the summer after next, how much would you be good for between this and that? It would from now until then be a prolonged funeral. You would be counting the months and the days, and your family and friends would be counting them, and next 4th of July you would rub your hands together and whine: "One year from today I am to go. Dear me! I wish no one had told me so long before. I wish that necromancer had not broken the seal of the future." And meeting some undertaker, you would say: "I hope you will keep yourself free for an engagement the 4th of July, 1901. That day you will be needed at my house. To save time, you might as well take my measure now, 5 feet 11 inches." I am glad that Christ dropped a thick veil over the hour of our demise and of the hour of the world's destruction when he said, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels, but my Father only." Keep your hands off the seven seals.

There is another mighty seven of the Bible—viz, the seven thunders. What those thunders meant we are not told, and there has been much guessing about them; but they are to come, we are told, before the end of all things, and the world cannot get along without them. Thunder is the speech of lightning. There are evils in our world which must be thundered down and which will require at least seven volleys to prostrate them. We are all doing nice, delicate, soft handed work in churches and reformatory institutions against the evils of the world, and much of it amounts to a teaspoon dipping out the Atlantic ocean, or a clam shell digging away at a mountain, or a tack hammer smiting the Gibraltar. What is needed is thunderbolts, and at least seven of them. There is the long line of fraudulent commercial establishments, every stone in the foundation, and every brick in the wall, and every nail in the rafter made out of dishonesty; skeletons of poorly paid sewing girls' arms in every beam of that establishment; human nerves worked into every figure of that embroidery; blood in the deep dye of that refulgent upholstery; billions of dollars of accumulated fraud intrenched in massive storehouses, and stock companies manipulated by unscrupulous men, until the monopoly is defiant of all earth and heaven. How shall the evil be overcome? By treatises on the maxim: "Honesty is the best policy?" Or by soft repetition of the golden rule that we must "do to others as we would have them do to us?" No; it will not be done that way. What is needed and will come is the seven thunders.

There is drunkenness backed up by a capital mightier than in any other business. Intoxicating liquors enough in this country to float a navy. Good grain to the amount of 67,950,000 bushels annually destroyed to make the deadly liquid. Breweries, distilleries ginshops, rum palaces, liquor associations, our nation spending annually seven hundred and forty millions of dollars for rum, resulting in bankruptcy, disease, pauperism, filth, assassination, death, illimitable woe. What will stop them? High license? No. Prohibition laws? No. Churches? No. Moral suasion? No. Thunderbolts will do it; nothing else will. Seven thunders!

Yonder are intrenched infidelity and atheism with their magazines of literature scoffing at our Christianity; their Hoe printing presses busy day and night. There are their blaspheming apostles, their drunken Tom Paines and libertine Voltaires of the present as well as the past, re-enforced by all the powers of darkness from highest demon to lowest imp. What will extirpate those monsters of infidelity and atheism? John Brown's shorter catechism about "Who made you?" or Westminsetr catechism about "What is the chief end of man?" No. Thunderbolts! The seven thunders! For the impurities of the world, empalaced as well as cellared, epauletted as well as ragged, enthroned as well as ditched; for corrupt legislation which at times makes our state and national capitals a hemispheric stench; for superstitions that keep whole nations in squalor century after century their juggernauts crushing, their knives lacerating, their waters drowning, their funeral pyres burning the seven thunders!

The Seventh Chrysolite.

Oh, men and women, disheartened at the bad way things often go, hear you not a rumbling down the sky of heavy artillery, coming in on our side, the seven thunders of the Almighty? Do not let us try to wield them ourselves; they are too heavy and too fiery for us to handle; but God can, and God will; and when all mercy has failed and all milder means are exhausted, then judgment will begin. Thunderbolts! Depend upon it that what is not done under the flash of the seven candlesticks will be done by the trampling of the seven thunders. But I leave this imperial and multipotent numeral seven, where the Bible leaves it, imbedded in the finest wall that was ever built or will be constructed, the wall of heaven. It is the seven strata of precious stones that make up that wall. After naming six of the precious stones in that wall the Bible cries out, "the seventh chrysolite!" The chrysolite is an exquisite green, and in that seventh layer of the heavenly wall shall be preserved forever the dominant color of the earth we once inhabited. I have sometimes been saddened at the thought that this world, according to science and revelation, is to be blotted out of existence, for it is such a beautiful world. But here is this layer of the heavenly wall, where the numeral seven is to be embedded, this strata of green is to be photographed and embalmed and perpetuated, the color of the grass that covers the earth, the color of the foliage that fills the forest, the color of the deep sea. One glance at that green chrysolite a million years after this planet has been extinguished will bring to mind just how it looked in summer and spring and we will say to those who were born blind on earth and never saw at all in this world, after they have obtained full eyesight in heaven, "If you would know how the earth appeared in June and August, look at that seventh layer of the heavenly wall, the green of the chrysolite."

And while we stand there and talk, spirit with spirit, that old color of the earth which had more sway than all the other colors put together, will bring back to us our earthly experiences, and noticing that this green chrysolite is the seventh layer of crystallized magnificence, we may bethink ourselves of the domination of that numeral seven over all other numerals, and thank God that in the dark earth we left behind us we so long enjoyed the light of the seven golden candlesticks and were all of us permitted to shine among the seven stars of more or less magnitude, and that all the seven seals of the mysterious future have been broken wide open for us by a loving Christ and that the seven thunders having done their work have ceased reverberation and that the numeral seven, which did such tremendous work in the history of nations on earth, has been given such a high place in that Niagara of colors, the wall of heaven, "the first foundation of which is jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite."

When shall these eyes thy heaven built walls
And pearly gates behold,
Thy bulwarks with salvation strong,
And streets of shining gold?

THE HEADSMAN.

He Used the Sword and Not the Ax Prior to 1483.

I am inclined to think that prior to 1483 the sword and not the ax was usually employed as the weapon for judicial decapitation and that a block was dispensed with, the victims receiving their doom "meekly kneeling upon their knees," and in this opinion I am fortified by the concurrence of an eminent clerical historian. This learned writer agreed with me that the ax did not become the "regulation" lethal implement until after the rough and ready "heading" of Lord Hastings on the Tower green, when he was summarily dispatched by order of the protector, Gloucester.

In this instance, according to the chroniclers, the victim's neck was stretched upon a piece of timber then in use for the repair of the adjacent church of St. Peter ad Vincula, probably a "putlog," part of the scaffolding which, we read, "conveniently lay in the way." Contemporary accounts seem to indicate that the executioner straddled over the prone body, and from this position I infer that the decapitation was effected by the tool known as an adz, the cutting edge of which is at a right angle to and not in a plane with the haft.

I may add that the only contemporary reference I have come across of the use, or proposed use, of an ax and block for inflicting capital punishment prior to this tragedy is in one of the Paston series of letters describing the peril of an unfortunate captive of Jack Cade's rebels (A. D. 1450), a generation before Lord Hastings was so clumsily hacked to death.—Notes and Queries.

American Speech.

The faults of American speech, according to an authority on the subject, originate in the primary school. The child is not taught the melodic value of his phrase. He is allowed to use his throat instead of the tongue, and his flow of speech becomes, therefore, harsh and guttural.

"Educate your alphabet and you will find your language as mellow as any of the family of Latium," is the advice given. "Your i's are throaty, your m's are too labial, your s's are too hissing, your c's are not soft enough. When you can train your scholars to emit these and the other consonants within the pitch, using the tongue instead of the throat for their emission, then you will see that for rhythm and sonority your English language may be compared with the Tuscan, the Roman, the Spanish and the Provencal."

The Cocaine Habit.

A well known chemist states that a surprising number of well to do young ladies have taken to buying the various forms of doctored up coca extracts (cocaine) in large quantities, also phenacetine and various bromides, because "they make one feel so nice and happy." It is needless to say that such practices are exceedingly risky. Perhaps, however, they are preferable to another extremely foolish trick—that of sniffing chloroform dropped on a handkerchief, with the object of producing a pleasant, dreamy laughor.—New York Telegram.

One Ear Better Than Two.

A well known professor asserts that the smallest intervals of sound can be better distinguished with one ear than with both.

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