

SENDING OUT THE SEVENTY

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Lessons: Genesis 46:1-7, 26, 27; Luke 10:1-14, 16, 17

The Old and New Testament passages we just read have two features in common, which you may have noted. Each story concerns seventy people, and both groups of people were active in the beginning of a new church. The seventy souls of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were the early beginnings of the Hebrew or Israelitish Church. The “seventy” appointed by the Lord to go before His face were instrumental in establishing the Christian Church.

From the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, we know that the whole Word is like a parable. It has an inner meaning or spiritual sense. By noticing the similarities between the two stories, we can find the key to unlock the heavenly secrets contained in those stories. The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us that the number seventy is used in the Word whenever the story is talking about something that is full and in order (*Arcana Coelestia* 6024). We have already noted that the subject of these stories is the beginning of two churches, so in the inner sense they tell us things about the beginning of any church, including the New Church.

What secrets can we learn from these stories? What should be “full and in order” in the New Church? Think of the seventy disciples sent out by the Lord. They went out by twos to every city and place where the Lord would be going in the future. Two is a little number, and these men must have felt very alone in the places where the Lord was not yet known. But they knew that they had work to do for Him. They prepared the way so the Lord could build a church in each place and city to which they went.

All churches, in the first beginnings, seem small and lonely. The few believers are, like the seventy, sent out to various places all over the world, to go before the Lord’s face and prepare for His work there. The Lord only builds a church through the work of men and women, through the patient and loving effort of those who believe in Him and labor for His kingdom.

Many of these people may seem very much alone in their communities, like two in the midst of many, yet they all have work to do for the Lord and His church. Each person who is trying to follow the Lord has some special gift, some understanding of truth or a way of living it, that is different from any other person’s contribution—a way which adds to the church’s fuller understanding of Revelation, or brings about a more complete living of the life it teaches. This

is what is spiritually meant by the number seventy—a full set of states which will be able to keep the church in order so that it can meet the needs of all the types of people who will come to it, seeking the Lord and the way to heaven.

This is a wonderful work which the Lord has entrusted to the few people, scattered throughout the world, who have the teachings of the New Church. This is what is meant by the words, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38).

Sometimes we may feel weak and helpless in trying to work for the growth of the church, both inside ourselves and in the world around us. The Lord understands this, for He said, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matthew 10:16). But if we trust in Him and His Word and use what we know of His truth to guide our actions in the journey of life, then the Lord will be with us and will crown our efforts with spiritual success.

We must have trust in the Lord to do His work, trust that He will give us the truth and good, the strength and courage, the patience and perseverance, to go before His face, to be His disciple. Those the Lord sent out were told to carry “neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food” (Matthew 10:9-10). This means that we do not have to worry about the future, neither the future of our personal salvation nor of the church’s growth, if only we do what we know is right each day and each hour. Then the efforts we put forth will bring the necessary spiritual food and drink to sustain us, “for a worker is worthy of his food.”

And when we finish the journey of life on which the Lord has sent us, having done the work of shunning evils as sins so that He may come to us and all the world, then we return to our Lord in the joyousness of a heavenly state. Then, with our own evils subdued, we can exclaim, like the seventy, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name” (Luke 10:17).

The Lord replied to the seventy as He does to all who conquer in His name, saying, “Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:19-20). And in the following verse we are told, “In that hour Jesus rejoiced....”

Amen.