

Revelation 11:12-14. Ascent Of The Witnesses. Great Earthquake



This is the continuation of [The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's Horae Apocalypticae.](#)

Political Establishment Of The Reformation. Separation From The Papacy. A.D. 1552-1790.

[12] And they [I] heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

[13] And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

[14] ¶ The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.
(Rev 11:12-14)

THE ANGEL OF THE COVENANT, having brought his retrospective account of the two witnesses down to the point of his own intervention, has ceased to speak. Excellent manuscript authorities, instead of the expression "they heard," read "I heard," in the first person. This reading seems preferable; and hence we infer that at this place the Apocalyptic figurations were resumed before St. John in their former regular course. The direct series of visions, as at the end of our Nineteenth Lecture, and this supplemental narrative of the Angel, present to our view the witnessing Reformers in a firm attitude of consolidation, united in a public Confession of Faith, under the well-chosen name of PROTESTANTS. This was their situation at the close of the year 1530, and continued to about A.D. 1543, when the prophecy unfolds further particulars, to which we now proceed. And first –

I. The Witnesses' Ascension To Heaven.

Judging of this symbol by former prophecies, before explained, we take the "heaven" here mentioned to denote some political ascendancy, to which at that time the witnessing body should be advanced; and the call, "Come up hither," as proceeding either from Divine Providence, or from persons in a position of high political authority and eminence. That the heaven of their elevation is only figurative seems plain from what is afterwards said of them, namely, "Their enemies beheld them." But could it be that men so lately objects of extermination should be called, as with an audible voice through Europe, to political ascendancy? Such was indeed the fact, and that within little more than twenty years from the anti-Protestant decree of Augsburg. We will

briefly notice the means which God's all-ruling providence made use of for the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Upon Charles V., head of the Germanic Empire, did the Popes mainly trust to crush the rising heresy; and had the state of affairs continued as it had been, there was both inclination and power on his part to gratify them. But a threatened Turkish invasion of the Empire made it a point of necessity to reconcile the Protestant states, and induced from the Emperor and Diet a decree called The Pacification of Nuremberg, by which full toleration was given to Protestantism until the assembling of a General Council. "Thus," says Robertson, "from having been viewed hitherto only as a religious sect, the Protestants came thenceforth to be considered as a political body of no small consequence." It was their first step, at the imperial call, to political ascendancy. Other embroilments of nations and invasions succeeded, and hindered the embarrassed Emperor from calling the expected Council; concurrent with which was the reluctance of successive Popes to the convening such an assembly at the time. Thus for thirteen years toleration prevailed. But when peace was resumed amongst the contending nations, all was again changed. The Emperor now deemed that the time was come for putting down the Protestants. Their requisition for permanent toleration was rejected, and a hostile decree soon followed. The Council of Trent assembled, and a month after Luther died. The threatened war broke out: the Protestants were defeated, and their chief supporters, the Saxon Elector and Landgrave of Hesse, were made prisoners. All these things seemed against them. But, as not unfrequently is the case, the time of depression is but the introduction to a more conspicuous elevation, through God's gracious overruling for his people. New agencies appeared. Maurice, Duke of Saxony, who had previously betrayed the Protestant cause, was now led to espouse it.

This turned the tide of war. Then followed the surprise of the Emperor at Innsbruck and his rapid flight; consequent upon which was the Peace of Passau, in August 1552 – that celebrated peace whereby the fullest toleration was secured to the Protestant body. Equally with Romanists, they were admitted to sit as judges in the Imperial Chamber. This was their political ascension in Germany. And almost contemporarily they attained like privileges in Saxony, Prussia, Sweden, and Denmark. It is written also, "Their enemies beheld them." And truly it was so. At the passing of each decree by which they rose to ascendancy, in the Diet and in the Council, their enemies were present and beheld them. As they sat in the supreme chamber, they beheld them. The song of thanksgiving from these ascending witnesses might well have been that of another witness for God in long earlier times: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." (Ps. 23:5)

But what of the cloud in which the witnesses ascended? For in the original Greek the definite article is used – "the cloud." Now as the only mention of a cloud has been that in which the Lord Jesus, the Covenant Angel, had been clothed in his descent from heaven, in the first verse of the tenth chapter, must we not take this to be the same? But for what can this have been so specified? Probably – 1. To show that the witnesses' ascent was the direct result of Christ's special intervention; and, 2. To identify yet further the cause and triumph of the witnesses with that of the Reformation.

II. The Earthquake

That followed is the next point to be noticed. "And at the same time there was a great earthquake." The adoption and established profession of Protestantism by different countries must have involved a considerable separation from the Papacy. In Saxony, Prussia, Sweden, and Denmark the Reformed doctrine became the state religion. But all these countries lay beyond the north boundary line of the old Roman Empire. They constituted no part of the ten kingdoms, of which, in Apocalyptic prophecy, the great city was composed. We are therefore to look elsewhere for that which is represented in the vision – "The tenth part of the city fell."

And is it true that history records the fact of the falling away of one of the original ten kingdoms of Papal Christendom from the Roman Church, overthrown by Protestantism? Surely it points to England, – to England, one of the most notable of those ten parts of the great apostate city. The story of this revolution may be told in few words. Certain Lutherans had visited our shores soon after Luther's departure from his Patmos, by whose teaching, with that of the surviving Lollards and Wicklifites, the smoldering sparks were rekindled, and men's minds prepared to seek a change. Outwardly the political preceded the spiritual movement here. By the passions of men God was working out his great designs. The imperious and licentious Henry VIII. was king of England when Luther began the Reformation. He had even come forward to dispute with Luther as the champion of the Papacy, for which the Pope honored him with the title of Defender of the Faith. Ere ten years had passed other motives swayed him. Dissatisfied with his queen, Catherine, he sought from the Pope a divorce. This being refused, he summoned his Parliament, and the memorable Act was passed by which Papal supremacy was renounced in England, and the king declared temporal head of the Church. As yet, however, the Reformation was not established. During Henry's reign Popery lay in ruins, but no evangelical Protestant edifice was erected in its stead. But in Edward's reign, which succeeded, this was effected; and though for a few years threatened again by the efforts of the bigoted Mary, was, thanks be to God, fully organized and established. Thenceforth the Protestant or Witness Church of England has been fixed in the heaven of political exaltation.

But another result of the earthquake is given: – "There were slain seven thousands (chiliads), names of men." Observe, that it is not the numeral adjective that is here used, but the substantive chiliads. The term is originally Jewish, denoting a subdivision of a tribe. "So Moses chose able men, rulers of thousands," (Exod. 18:25) etc. Henceforth the chiliad, being about one-fiftieth of a tribe, became noted as a subdivision in Israel. To these chiliads land was afterwards allotted; and each became a district, like the hundred in an English county, and gave "a name," or distinctive title, to its chief ruler.

Bearing, therefore, in mind that the whole population of Roman Christendom had been symbolized in the Apocalypse by the figure of the twelve tribes of Israel, we have only to turn to history again, and to see whether any subdivisions of Western Christendom were in fact separated from Papal Rome, and so might be considered politically destroyed at the time Papal England

fell, and by the same agency, viz., that of Protestant principles. What then do we find? We read that during the reign of Elizabeth the seven Dutch United Provinces were emancipated from the Spanish yoke, and at the same time the Papal rule and religion were destroyed in them.

The first constitution of these as provinces was at the time Roman Gaul was conquered by the Franks. The Netherlands, including French and Dutch Flanders, formed part of the Frankish Empire. They were divided into seventeen provinces, each being a territorial domain assigned to some Chieftain, like the territorial chieftains assigned to Israel on their settlement in Canaan. In the course of the seven hundred years between Charlemagne and Charles V. many changes occurred affecting them. Having been transferred from one emperor to another, they passed to Charles V., and from him to Philip II. of Spain.

Into these provinces of the Netherlands Protestant doctrines had soon found their way; and here also martyrs, to the number of 100,000, sealed the truth of what they preached with their blood. The arm of power and dread of the Inquisition long prevented an open outbreak. But under Philip II. political was added to religious oppression, and war commenced in A.D. 1569. Thus the earthquake, under which England, the tenth kingdom of the Popedom, had just fallen off, began to threaten its supremacy in these lesser districts. While some of the provinces adhered to Spain and the Papacy, some separated; and the union of the Seven United Provinces in A.D. 1579 was formed by deputies from Holland, Zealand, Utrecht, Friesland, Groningen, Overijssel, and Guelderland. Their success against Philip might well have appeared hopeless. His was the mightiest monarchy in Europe, and they but a small people in territory and population; besides being badly organized and indifferently armed. But the energy and fortitude imparted to them by religion was not to be overcome; nor was the purpose of God to fail. After a thirty-seven years' war, the impossibility of recovering the seven provinces to itself and the Popedom was recognized by Spain. The seven chieftains of the Papal city were overthrown; and out of their ruins arose the Protestant Republic of Holland.

Such were the two principal and permanent changes that rose out of the earthquake attendant on the Reformation. It was fondly hoped by the French Protestants – when Henry IV. of France obtained the crown, he too being Protestant – that such also would have been the result in that kingdom. But no prophecy had foretold such an event. On the contrary, Henry, after his accession, abjured Protestantism; and though by his Edict of Nantes in A.D. 1598 civil liberty and rights were secured to the Protestants, yet the restrictions were such that it could not be said that there the witnesses had ascended into the political heaven. Ere the predicted results had received their full accomplishment in Northern Germany and England, this Edict of Nantes was revoked by Louis XIV., and Protestants were thenceforward put out of the pale of the law in France. In Germany also the Emperor Frederick II. issued an edict in A.D. 1629, by which Protestants were required to restore to the Church of Rome all the possessions they had become masters of in that country in consequence of a religious peace concluded in the preceding century. This was called the Restitution Edict. A war thereupon arose in defense of Protestant liberties, in which Gustavus Adolphus fell victorious

at Lutzen, A.D. 1632; but it was not till 1648 that Protestant rights were firmly established by the Peace of Westphalia.

In England, Charles II., and still more his brother, James II., made efforts to restore Popery; until in 1688, through God's gracious favor to this island, William of Orange superseded James, and the Protestant ascendancy was permanently confirmed in England, and eventually in Holland also.

In every case, whether in England or Holland, "the remnant," i.e., the Papists who remained, "were affrighted." Penal enactments were passed against Romanists. The popular tide of feeling set in against them. At times they dared scarcely be seen, and soon large numbers conformed to Protestantism.

On the other hand, the ascended Protestants everywhere "gave glory to the God of heaven." In England again and again sounded forth the thanksgiving song. On the death of the persecuting Mary and the ascent of Elizabeth to the throne, – on the defeat of the Spanish Armada sent to re-subjugate the kingdom to Rome, – and again long after, on the commencement of the third William's reign, solemn thanksgivings, individual and national, were rendered, not as hitherto to the Virgin Queen or to the saints, but to the God of heaven. Sovereign and people in each case publicly acknowledged that it was THE LORD'S doing, and gave HIM their praise. As in England, so in Germany and Holland also were offered by the Protestants thanksgivings for the successes given to them. The expression of the text marks a sign of the times – a sign that the vindication of God's honor had begun.

Nor did the sound cease till the echo of thanksgiving was waited west and east to the continents of America and Asia. Commercial power soon flowed in on England and Holland after their overthrow of the Papal religion; and numerous and large dependent colonies were formed in those distant regions. We may now see why the rainbow-crowned Covenant Angel had in his descent set his right foot on the sea as well as his left on the mainland. Insular England was, even in Elizabeth's reign, the bulwark of Protestantism; and seemed preparing, too, as a colonial power, to be the chief propagator of its doctrines beyond the seas, in opposition to that of the numerous Romish missions. At length, in William's reign, was established the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, being the first Protestant Missionary Society. We might go on and show how, a century later, on a scale as mighty as that of the Papal Antichrist's pretensions to universal dominion, similar societies were multiplied, which carried far and wide the claims of the name of Jesus, as of him to whom every knee should bow. This was our highly favored island's work, the severed tenth of the Roman Empire: as if the impulse of the angel's foot-press still continued, and there had never ceased within it the influence and blessing of his visitation.

But though in the ascendant, the sackcloth robe of the witnesses had not been entirely put off. The 1260 days were not finished. In Italy, Spain, and Portugal the Inquisition might still count its thousands, barbarously murdered. Neither in Austria was toleration fully granted till A.D. 1783. In France the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day in A.D. 1572 showed the feeling of kings and nobles, priests and people, against the Huguenots or Protestants; and sad indeed is the picture of their miseries up to the year

1788, just before the Revolution. England and Holland could not be said to have put off their sombre garments while ever their sister Churches were thus oppressed. One member of the body suffering, all sympathized with it.

One only subject remains here for consideration: – “The second woe is past.” We have already had occasion to observe how the Saracenic and the Turkish woes had been designed against “the men that had not the seal of God upon their foreheads.” Mohammed’s asserted commission had been against idolaters; and, as such, the apostate nations of Christendom (especially in the Eastern third of the Roman Empire) had been chiefly exposed to the shocks. We have also observed how the Turkish irruption, which had threatened the Emperor Charles V., had, in a remarkable manner, served to protect and advance the interests of the Reformation. But no sooner is the Reformation accomplished than the agency of judgment begins to be removed. It was in A.D. 1571, just a year or two after the severance of the Seven United Provinces from Rome, that the great naval battle of Lepanto interposed an effectual barrier to the Turkish arms; and this was followed, about thirty years after, in their ejection from Transylvania. It was not, however, until the latter end of the seventeenth century, and the victories of John Sobieski and of Prince Eugene, that the woe could be regarded as near its end. This latter was immediately consequent upon the final settlement of the Reformation in England on the accession of William III. Thenceforward the decay of the Turkman power progressed. The next war of A.D. 1770, signalized by victory after victory on the part of the united forces of Austria and Russia, proclaimed to the world, in language not to be mistaken, that the Turkmans were no longer a woe to Christendom, but Christendom to the Turkmans. The second woe had passed away.

Then follows, in the Apocalyptic prophecy, the announcement of the speedy-coming future. No new external judgment, no changes worthy of prefiguration were to intervene before the breaking forth of the Third Woe – that woe of the Last Trumpet. Into the particulars of this part of the prophecy we shall have to enter at length when it will come again in course before us. And since the unfulfilled future is beyond the purpose of our lectures, we shall close, for the present, with the words of the vision: –

[14] ¶ The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

[15] And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

[16] And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,

[17] Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

[18] And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

[19] And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and

thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail. (Rev 11:14-19)

Continued in [The British Church Amongst The Witnesses](#)

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