

# The Seventh Vial Chapter XI. Avenging Power of the Witnesses



Elijah tells King Ahab there will be no rain.

Continued from [Chapter X. The Western Witnesses, or The Waldenses](#)

THE office of the two witnesses is still further symbolically described. It is not unimportant to attend briefly to the more noticeable points in this description. Chapter xi. 4—“These are the two olive-trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.”

The station of the witnesses was a very dignified one: they stood before the God of the earth. Not less dignified and excellent was their office. They were “the two olive-trees”—the only repositories of the true oil; they were “the two candlesticks”—the only dispensers of the true light.

Let us consider them first as the two olive-trees. Of all the valuable trees with which Palestine abounded, the most precious was the olive. Not to speak of its numerous commercial and domestic uses, its oil alone was permitted to be burned in the temple lamps. Seeing this tree was devoted to a sacred use, it may well be used as a symbol of persons in sacred office. The pastors of the Church are here intended.

There is an evident allusion to the vision exhibited to Zechariah, at a period of great depression in the history of the Old Testament Church. The prophet was shown a candlestick, all of gold, with seven lamps burning on its branches. By the side of the candlestick stood two olive-trees, whose oil flowed into the seven lamps, and kept them alive. The prophet had the vision interpreted to him, and was given to understand that the candlestick was the symbol of the Old Testament Church—the lamp of Divine truth preserved by God in the midst of heathenism; and that the two olive-trees which supplied that candlestick with oil were “the two anointed ones (sons of oil) that stand by the Lord of the whole earth”—meaning the prophets and priests who communicated the truth to the Church of old.

The same symbols are employed in the vision of the Apocalyptic witnesses, and, of course, are to receive the same interpretation. The two candlesticks are plainly the Churches—the Eastern and Western, we have supposed—preserved by God’s power and mercy during the period of Antichrist. Zechariah saw seven lamps; John, at a former stage of the Apocalypse, had seen seven candlesticks—the seven Churches of Asia; but now he beheld only two candlesticks. This showed how dark would be the time; no light in the world but the two candlesticks, struggling to dispel the thick gloom that shrouded the earth. Yet there they burned throughout the long night, maugre (in spite)

all the efforts of the Man of Sin to extinguish them, till the light of a glorious day returned once more to bless the earth.

By the two olive-trees are meant plainly the pastors of these Churches. They conveyed the oil which maintained the brightness of the mystic candlesticks. They performed the same office to these Churches which the prophets and priests performed to the Old Testament Church; they preached the Word, and they were employed, moreover, in multiplying manuscript copies of the Holy Scriptures. The art of printing had not yet been invented, and the Church was indebted for the *written word* to the *pens* of her ministers, as she was indebted for the *word preached* to their personal ministry; these two means of supply answering, according to the ingenious and natural supposition of Vitringa, to the two golden pipes by which the two olive-trees in Zechariah's vision emptied the golden oil out of themselves.

Besides its great fruitfulness, the olive possesses this property, that it remains green all winter. So did these mystic trees. They were green during the long winter of the Christian Church. When the storm of temptation arose, and others were overturned, they remained firmly rooted and grounded; when the poisonous wind of error blew, and its deadly influence became visible in the seared leaves and moldering (decaying) trunks of the spiritual vineyard, they remained unscathed by the blight—like the fleece of Gideon, wet when all around was dry.

And why did their lamps burn amid the darkness that had extinguished those of others? Why was their leaf green during the winter that brought so deadly a blight on all around them? They were full of oil—oil drawn from no earthly fountain, but flowing down upon them from the heavens.

Placed in the midst of powerful enemies, called to discharge a duty peculiarly irritating and tormenting to these enemies, provided with no outward means of defense, how would they be able to repel the assaults to which they should be exposed? How, in short, should they continue to exist? The Apocalyptic symbols represent them as armed with the most ample avenging powers. "And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth and devoureth their enemies; and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy, and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues as often as they will."

The avenging powers here ascribed to the witnesses are threefold. First, they should have power to smite the earth with famine; second, to desolate it with the sword third, to consume it with fire and burning. "These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy." The allusion here is to an incident in the life of Elijah; and we are taught by association the horrors of the famine that was to prevail during the prophesying of the witnesses. Elijah's first appearance before us is with the words, "As the Lord God liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these three years, but according to my word." And the word of the prophet was fulfilled. That moment the heavens became brass over the land of Israel. The spring came, and summer and autumn followed, and these were succeeded by winter; but there was neither cloud in the heavens, nor rain or

dew on the earth. What a doleful picture did the land of Israel then exhibit! Every mountain and pleasant field was burnt up, the channels of the brooks were dry, the figs dropped from the fig-tree, the cluster hung rotting on the vine, the herd perished from the stall, and the faces of men began to gather the blackness of famine.

As it was with the land of Israel during these three years and a half, so was it to be with Roman Christendom during the three and a half prophetic years of the prophesying of the witnesses. It was not a literal famine with which the world was to be scourged—a blight upon the earth, which should consume its fountains and its fruits, and cut off from man the bread on which the body lives. The drought here foretold was to afflict the spiritual heavens and earth, and dry up the fountains of salvation. It was a famine of the Word of God. It is a historical fact, that during the ages of their ministry, there was neither dew nor rain of a spiritual kind on the earth, but at the word of the witnesses. There was no knowledge of salvation but by their preaching, no descent of the Spirit but in answer to their prayers; and as the witnesses were shut out from Christendom generally, a universal famine ensued. The Word of God was locked up in a dead language, or forbidden to be read. The priests of Rome, instead of preaching the gospel, descanted (sang) on the merits of indulgences, the efficacy of relics, or entertained their hearers with monkish traditions, or ridiculous and mendacious (false) legends—things that could not feed the soul.

The heavens were shut, and there was no rain. Pining away under their sore thirst, men sought to the fountains of life, but only to find that they were dry. Had the spiritual world been disclosed to one's eye, what a terrible spectacle would it have presented! Everywhere sterility and death; souls, pale, sickly, emaciated, peopling the earth, and hell gaping for its prey.

“And have power over waters, to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues as often as they will.” There is, we apprehend, an allusion here to the plagues by which Egypt was destroyed, which began by the turning of her river into blood. The former symbol indicated a spiritual infliction. This imports a temporal judgment. We are told, at a subsequent part of the Apocalypse, that waters are the symbol of peoples; and when we are told that these symbolical waters should be turned into blood, we learn that the nations in question were to be wasted by direful carnage and bloody wars. The Egyptians had attempted to destroy the Hebrews, by drowning their children in the Nile; and righteously was the Nile turned into blood. The antichristian nations would employ the sword to exterminate the witnesses, and by the sword should God exterminate them.

Hence the song of the angel of the waters, when the third vial was poured out “upon the rivers and fountains of waters”— “Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus; for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets; and thou hast given them blood to drink, for they are worthy.” This angel was answered by another from the altar—“ Even so, Lord God Almighty; true and righteous are thy judgments” intimating that the Church would take special notice of the Divine equity, in that God had done unto her persecutors as they had done unto her.

Rome had lived in blood, and in blood she expires. When power is ascribed to them to smite the earth with all plagues as often as they will, the allusion to Egypt is plainly continued. Moses had power to smite that kingdom with all the plagues necessary to accomplish its overthrow, and set free the Israelites. A similar power were these men in sackcloth to possess over the Papacy—a power to bring destruction upon destruction, till the kingdom of the Man of Sin should be annihilated, and its captives liberated. Not that these plagues should come at their wish, as if they cherished a vindictive spirit, or had pleasure in the destruction of their enemies; but, foreseeing the doom with which prophecy menaced the antichristian nations, they should predict its approach.

For the quarrel of the witnesses, moreover, all these plagues would be inflicted. Christ, their Head, would take care that, under His administration, not one wrong ever done them should pass unavenged. For every drop of martyr-blood split by her, Rome must one day reckon.

“And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies.” We have placed this last, because it is a final judgment. The symbol becomes of easy interpretation when we refer to that part of Old Testament history from which it is taken. “Behold,” said God to Jeremiah, “I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.” This plainly refers to the consuming judgments Jeremiah was commissioned to denounce. Of the same sort is the fire that proceedeth out of the mouth of the witnesses.

When Rome was wasting the witnesses with fire and sword, they foretold a time when she should be visited in like manner—have blood to drink for all the blood she had shed, and be consumed in the fires she had kindled for them. And not one of their words ever fell to the ground. The warning is repeated, to intimate its terrible certainty:—“If any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed;” a caution not unnecessary, seeing they were apparently so defenseless; for never did men appear more completely in the power of their enemies. But—as if the caution had run—let no man plot their harm, tempted thereto by the hope of impunity, seeing them, as he may believe, so completely without the power to retaliate. In seeking to hurt them, he will most infallibly destroy himself. Invisible guards protect them, invisible powers are at their command, they need only to utter the word, and the bolt of heaven is not more speedy nor more deadly.

And have not their words been as fire to the nations? What mean the bloody wars, and the calamities of divers kinds, which have ravaged the Popish countries of Europe these three hundred years? What, especially, mean the terrible wars of the present century, which have covered the Papal earth with conflagration and slaughter? These are the words of the men who dwelt amid the Alps— words uttered long ago, remembered in heaven, though forgotten on earth, and now awfully verified. This is the answer to their prayers.

This is the fire from the mouth of the witnesses, kindled, burning, and to burn yet more fiercely. This power the witnesses were to exercise, not when the time to possess the kingdom should come, but during their prophesying, and while they wore sackcloth. It was especially during the latter half of

the period of their prophesying that these judgments were to be inflicted, and particularly after the seventh angel had sounded, and her last plagues had begun to fall on Rome. All these plagues will come in answer to the prayers, in fulfilment of the predictions, and in recompense of the wrongs of the witnesses.

The words we have been considering look back on three theaters of judgment—Jerusalem, Egypt, Sodom—and they exhibit the three leading plagues by which Rome’s destruction shall be accomplished—Famine, Blood, Fire. By famine was Jerusalem scourged, by blood was Egypt destroyed, and by fire was Sodom consumed. These are the three awful types of Rome’s end. Neither Jerusalem alone, nor Egypt alone, nor Sodom alone, could suffice as the symbol of her unprecedented doom. The terrors of her punishment could be adequately represented only by combining all three. When her end approaches, a combination of calamities, any one of which singly would have sufficed for the punishment of any ordinary criminal, will burst upon this great and notable enemy of Christ in a tornado of wrath, which will be remembered with horror, and spoken of with awe, while men dwell upon the earth.

God has raised up mighty prophets to warn her: He has spoken to her by Luther, by Calvin, and by all the reformers; but Rome refused to hear. He has visited her with fearful judgments, but Rome refused to be humbled. She put from her the robe of sackcloth, saying, “I shall see no sorrow.” Woe unto her! for if the mighty works which have been done in her had been done in Jerusalem, or in Egypt, or in Sodom, these cities would have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes: therefore it shall be more tolerable for Jerusalem, and for Egypt, and for Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for Rome.

“Her plagues shall come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.” -Revelation 18:8

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