

The Seventh Vial Chapter XIV. Resurrection Of The Witnesses



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THE witnesses were slain; and how were their bodies disposed of? Doubtless by being committed to the grave—the quiet grave. When one dies, both friends and foes unite in consigning him to the tomb—his friends to show respect to his memory, and his enemies not to incur the reproach of a revolting inhumanity. When John was beheaded, his disciples came and took up the body and buried it. The tyrant who put him to death did not think of carrying his resentment so far as to forbid the rites of sepulture (burial) to his remains. But it was not to be with the witnesses as with other dead. They had no friends who might perform this office to their remains; and their enemy, whose rage and Vengeance extended beyond death, would not suffer their dead bodies to be put into graves. Therefore, where they had fallen, there they lay. “And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city.”

Our first inquiry regards the place where the dead bodies of the witnesses were to be exposed—“the street of the great city.” As regards the “great city,” there is no difficulty. The symbol is explained in chapter 17, where it is said to be that “great city that reigneth over the kings of the earth.” (Rev. 17:18) There is only one city to which this can apply, even Rome; not the literal city, but that system of polity, ecclesiastical and civil, of which Rome was the center, and which extended over, and was supreme in, all the ten kingdoms of Europe. Governed by the Papal code, Europe formed but one corporation or symbolic city.

To make the city indicated still more clear, its designation is given, “which, spiritually, is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.” It will not be supposed that the literal Sodom is here meant, because she had been turned to ashes many ages before the visions of Patmos. That it is neither the literal Sodom nor the literal Egypt that is here intended, is plain from the words, which, *spiritually*, is called Sodom and Egypt.” The city, on the street of which the dead bodies of the witnesses were to lie, was to exhibit the same moral and spiritual character as Sodom and Egypt. The resemblance would be as close as if these long-perished kingdoms had risen from their graves. She is called Sodom, to denote her impurity and lewdness. This was the characteristic vice of that city on which God rained fire and brimstone.

But we question whether the most revolting abominations of Sodom equaled

those gigantic and dreadful pollutions of which sober history affirms the palaces of the popes and cardinals, and the religious houses throughout Europe, were the scene. This "great city" is called Egypt, to denote her idolatry and cruelty. Egypt was the land of false gods; and she was, moreover, the first and cruelest persecutor. The resemblance holds good, too, in that Rome was a land of superstition, a worshiper of demons; and, like Egypt, held the Church in captivity; and, in seeking to destroy it, shed more righteous blood than ever was shed on the earth by any other power. Others have been sated—she was drunk with blood; and that drunkenness brought with it a raging thirst for more. Both cities have inherited an immortality of shame—Sodom from her lewdness, and Egypt from her superstition and cruelty. Rome has become the heir of both: she unites in her own person the impurity of the one, the cruelty of the other.

It is added, as farther descriptive of this city, "where also our Lord was crucified"—that is, Jerusalem; Jerusalem being used, not literally, but symbolically. "Where our Lord was crucified," not in His own person. Since the day that He ascended from the Mount of Olives, and entered within the gates of heaven, no suffering has come near His blessed person. But there are other ways in which Christ may be crucified. The apostle tells us that they who apostatize from the faith crucify the Son of God afresh. Rome is the grand apostasy. Christ, in His truth, she has crucified; and Christ in His members she has crucified. His own blessed body was beyond her rage. She could neither imprison, nor torture, nor crucify it. His members were fully in her power; and there are no torments which racks, and fires, and steel can inflict, to which she did not subject them. "Inasmuch," said He from Heaven, as another and another of His witnesses was slain—"inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these, ye did it unto Me."

Here, then, are the three types of the city—Sodom, Egypt, Jerusalem. Here are portrayed, by a single stroke, her three leading characteristics—impurity, idolatry combined with persecuting cruelty, and infidelity. And as we are to view these three as types of the manner of her life, so, as we have already said, we are to view them as types of the manner of her end—utter rejection, like Jerusalem—the sword, like Egypt, and burning, like Sodom. All three are needed to constitute the type of her unequalled and inconceivable doom.

The "great city," we have said, is wide Europe in its Papal character. But what locality is symbolized by the "street" of the great city? The street, (Greek word), literally the broad place, has reference plainly to the forum of ancient cities. This was the place where public assemblies were held, where laws were proclaimed, justice administered, and merchandise set forth. To guide ourselves to the street on which the sad spectacle of the dead bodies of the witnesses should be seen, we have only to inquire in what city of Europe was it where the Papal gatherings took place, where the Papal laws were proclaimed, where Papal causes were adjudged and sentence pronounced, and where the Papal merchandise was set forth? The answer is, Rome. This was the broad place, or forum, of the great city. And here it was that the death of the witnesses was proclaimed with all formality and pomp. From here Rome sent forth the tidings to all Europe, that the object for which she had so long labored she had at last attained, in the total suppression of all public

testimony against her errors. Thus she made a public spectacle of the witnesses, lying slain and dead upon her street, and inviting the nations, as it were, to come and gaze upon their remains.

“And they of the people, and kindreds, and tongues, and nations, shall see their dead bodies three days and a half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.” – Revelation 11:9

To deny burial to one is one of the greatest indignities that can be done him. It was in ancient times employed to express the extreme of contempt. Nothing more may be here meant than the scorn which Rome ever expressed for heretics, and the ways innumerable which she took to inflict the last humiliation upon their persons, and to heap the lowest disgrace on their cause. But perhaps this may not be thought precise enough. Then we must first inquire what we are to understand by their corpses or dead bodies.

Life and organization are connected. The moment life departs, the organization is lost, and the body is reduced to its component elements. The witnesses were organized societies, and the slaying or silencing of them lay in their suppression as Churches. After that, though a few of the individual members which had composed these Churches existed, they had lost their organization—the principle of social life; they were the mere elements of what had been the living witnesses—they were their corpses. The same day in which it was proclaimed that there were no longer any opposers to the Papal rule and religion, the Council issued an edict cutting off all heretics, of whatever kind, and of whatever nation, from the Church, and decreeing against them the usual punishments. Seeing that, on the avowal of Rome herself, there was no longer any organized Church anywhere opposing her authority, the edict could have respect only to individual dissidents which might and did exist, though concealed, in some places—the corpses of the witnesses. These by her edict she cast out of the Church, and adjudged to contempt and punishment.

By her famous proclamation, “*Jam nemo reclamat, nullus obsistit,*” she affirmed that the witnesses were slain; by the edict that followed, she proclaimed that their remains were still upon the earth. That edict, in truth, served the same end to these remains of the witnesses, which the refusal of burial does to a dead body—it kept them in the sight of men. Now indeed there was rejoicing. The two witnesses were slain, and every square and street of the great city rang with shouts of triumph over their death.

“And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts to one another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.” – Revelation 11:10

What! So powerful and proud, and yet so afflicted by the sight of these two witnesses! How little was Rome to be envied, even when at the height of her glory! What tormentings burned beneath her purple, and scarlet, and fine linen! Had she not unbounded riches and dominion? Did not the whole world worship before her? And yet all this availed her nothing, so long as these two witnesses in sackcloth refused, like Mordecai at the palace-gate of old, to do obeisance. “These two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.” They condemned Rome as the Antichrist; and though one would have thought that

that "still small voice " would have been unheard amid the loud roar of a world's homage, it reached her ear; and there was in it that which roused her indignation and at the same time shook her courage. Conscience—not utterly extinct—told her that the testimony of the witnesses was just, and that the words spoken by them on earth were ratified in heaven. But now the witnesses were silent; and the prediction before us—"rejoicing, and making merry, and sending gifts one to another"—whose terms are borrowed from the customs of ancient festive occasions, is finely and vividly descriptive of the unbounded exultation and congratulation which reigned throughout the Roman world, now that all heresy was suppressed, and the voice which, like a barbed arrow, pierced the folds of her armour and rankled in her heart, was silenced for ever. But since man was placed upon the earth, the triumphing of the wicked is short.

Accordingly, the next event in the Apocalyptic scene is the RESURRECTION of the slain witnesses.

"And after three days and a half, the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them." – Revelation 11:11

Three days did Christ lie in the grave, and then He returned from it, to the terror of His enemies. In this He was the prototype of His witnesses. Their enemies imagined, doubtless, that, being dead, they had now done with them; but at the very height of the triumphing of their foes the witnesses suddenly arose—spectacle appalling to those who had slain them!

The resurrection must be of the same kind with the death. The death was symbolic; so also must be the resurrection. It was the truth that was suppressed; it was the truth that again burst forth. *The witnesses did not arise in their persons, but in their cause.* The confessors that had been put to death in former ages, and whose martyred blood and ashes had been sown over the various countries of Europe, still continued in their graves; their spirits returned not from their glory, to animate their former bodies, and contend over again on the stage on which they had suffered and died; but a *new generation of men, animated by the spirit of the ancient martyrs, and testifying in behalf of the same cause, arose;* Churches were organised; and a public testimony was again borne against the abominations of Popery—fuller and bolder than ever. This was the resurrection.

The spirit that quickened them is termed the spirit of life from God—the knowledge of the truth conveyed by the Holy Spirit. It is said the Spirit entered into them. The original term denotes not only entrance, or taking possession, but entrance so as to dwell in them. The witnesses were not again to be slain; the truth was not again to be totally suppressed, as before. They stood upon their feet; terms which indicate the courage with which they were filled. They stood boldly up, as men who knew that God had raised them from the dead, and that their enemies had no power to kill them a second time.

But in what event in the history of the Church are we to seek for the fulfillment of this symbolic resurrection? If we were right in applying the

death of the witnesses to the suppression of all public testimony in behalf of truth at the beginning of the sixteenth century, their resurrection can refer only to that remarkable Revival which immediately followed this event, namely—the Reformation. Indeed, in the past history of the Church, there is not another event to which we can apply it.

The exposition which Mr. Elliot has given of this prediction is so precise, striking, and satisfactory, that it is enough on this subject to quote it.

“But does the chronology suit?” asks Mr. Elliot. “It was predicted that for three-and-a-half *days* the witnesses were to be looked on as dead; in other words, that there was to be the interval of three-and-a-half years between the *first recognition of their extinction* by the assembled deputies from the states of Christendom, and their *resuscitation*. Was this the interval between that memorable day of the ninth session of the Lateran Council, on which the orator pronounced his paeon (fervent expression of joy or praise) of triumph over the extinction of heretics and schismatics, and the first and yet more memorable act of protestation by Luther?

Let us calculate. The day of the ninth session was, as we have seen, May 5, 1514; the day of Luther’s posting up his theses at Wittenberg (the well-known epoch of the Reformation), October 31, 1517. Now, from May 5, 1514, to May 5, 1517, are three years; and from May 5, 1517, to October 31 of the same year 1517, the reckoning in days is as follows:—

May 5-31	27
June.....	30
July	31
August	31
September ...	30
October	31

In all, one hundred and eighty, or half three hundred and sixty days; that is, just half-a-year. So that the whole interval is *precisely, to a day, three-and-a-half years—precisely, to a day, the period predicted in the Apocalyptic prophecy!* Oh, wonderful prophecy! is the exclamation that again forces itself on my mind. Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the foreknowledge of God!”

That the symbol of *the rising from the dead* was fulfilled in the fact that, although the martyrs continued in their graves, the cause for which they had suffered arose, we may appeal to the testimony of both friends and foes. “And I,” said John Huss, speaking of the gospel-preachers that should appear after he had suffered at the stake—“and I, awakening as it were from the dead, and rising from the grave, shall rejoice with exceeding great joy.” Again, in 1523, after the Reformation had broken out, we find Pope Hadrian saying, in a missive addressed to the Diet at Nuremberg—“The heretics Huss and Jerome are now alive again in the person of Martin Luther.” The consternation and dismay which fell upon all the adherents of the Papacy when Luther arose, and the Reformation under him began to gain ground, is a fact too well known to every reader of the history of the period, to need any particular illustration here.

This symbolization is the picture of a transformed Church. A marvelous change has she undergone—we cannot say in the tomb—for her enemies would not permit her the quiet of the grave, but in the state of the dead. She was sown in weakness, she is raised in power. “The Spirit of Life,” it is said—not life only, but “the spirit of life from God entered into her.” She is now quickened with an intenser vitality. Aforetime she had the “sentence of death in herself,” and, as if against the day of her burial, she wore a robe of sackcloth; but now, risen from the dead, she wears the sackcloth no longer. She feels in her veins the throbbings of immortality, she knows herself invulnerable, she stands upon her feet, and bids defiance to her unnumbered foes. So stood Luther before the Diet of Worms. He felt that all the power of the empire could not crush him. So, too, stood the Reformers before the Diet of Spiers. What a moral grandeur belongs to these scenes! What a fulfillment of the prophecy! And with what rage and terror did these appearances fill their enemies! Prophecy has foretold that they would be witnesses for (*testes pro*) the truth, - and it is sufficiently striking that this is the very name by which they have become known in history— *Protestants*.

“And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud.” What was done in Christ the Head is here represented as done over again in the Body mystical.

This symbolizes some notable advance in the position of the Reformation Church. She was no longer to dwell upon the earth, hidden from the sight of men, unfelt by the world, and subject to the power of her enemies. She would be taken up into a higher region, so to speak, whence she would look down upon her foes, and where she would enjoy a security unknown to her till then, and wield an influence on the world she had never aforetime been able to put forth.

Look at the Church before and after the Reformation, and what a contrast do we see! From the sixth to the sixteenth century her members are truly a “little flock.” They are entirely without social position, and without political privileges. But, at the opening of the sixteenth century, what an accession of members, influence, and moral power! Suddenly she grows into an army. How numerous her champions! Men of prodigious intellect, of profound erudition, and of the most dazzling eloquence, stand up to plead her cause. But the most wonderful characteristic of the Reformation Church is her deep, and clear, and spiritual insight into truth. The Bible opens, and Revelation now discloses its full glory. A new day has broke upon the Church, and the primitive era is remembered in comparison but as the morning twilight. She dwells no longer amid the clouds of earth; she has mounted into the light of heaven, and, by her joint confession of truth—the harmony of the “Reformed Confessions” —she sheds upon the world a glorious noonday.

Moreover, we now find her wielding a host of subsidiary agencies for the defense and diffusion of the truth, not one of which had she possessed in previous ages. The revival of learning enables her to translate the Bible; and the invention of the art of printing enables her to circulate it. The world is opening around her—new continents and islands are being discovered—and the facilities of intercourse are daily multiplying. Liberty is advancing; states and princes profer (put forth) their protection; and although she still has enemies—nay, against her is still arrayed the great

military powers of Europe—yet no force is able to put her down. The Popish nations fight against her, but they cannot destroy her. The Reformation Church is the true phoenix. She rises from her ashes, instinct with immortal youth, clad in the panoply of divine strength, and radiant with celestial beauty.

The resurrection of the witnesses, like that of their Lord, was accompanied by an earthquake. The earthquake was connected with and sprung out of the resurrection, and may therefore be viewed as symbolizing a revolution mainly of a moral or religious character. In the earthquake, “the tenth part of the city fell.” To explain this, we have only to bear in mind that the “city” was constituted of the ten Roman kingdoms of Europe, confederated under the Papacy. Which of these ten kingdoms was it that fell at the Reformation, as a Popish country? The answer is, Britain. The fall of this tenth part (the tithe) of this city was the first-fruits, as it were, of that great harvest of destruction awaiting the Papacy.

This wonderful chapter is closed with an intimation of the final doom of the Papacy. That event was to follow at the distance of some centuries from the Reformation: nevertheless it is given here by anticipation, accompanied with a brief account of the attendant circumstances. It is the manner of the Apocalypse, as it is that of ordinary history, to glance at the grand close, and to give a succinct view of what is afterwards to be described in detail. The great progression that here takes place in point of time is sufficiently marked by the announcement, “The second woe is past.” This tells us that we have passed from the beginning of the sixteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century; for not till then, as we shall afterwards show, was the second woe past, and Christendom delivered from the terror of the Turkish arms.

“And, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.” A short interval indeed was to separate the second and the third woes. There were not fewer than five hundred years between the first and the second woes; but the second was to be followed by the third at a much shorter distance. Moreover, it would come swiftly and stealthily; it would take the world—which would be looking for no such event—by surprise; and it would do its work quickly after it had come. A series of fearful and exterminating judgments, following each other with astounding rapidity, should fall on Rome, and accomplish her overthrow.

“And the seventh angel sounded.” The end comes at last. The domination of the Gentiles and the sackcloth of the witnesses are both alike terminated. Thrice welcome sound!—welcome, though but the herald, in the first instance, of the lightnings, voices, thunders, and earthquake, of civil convulsion. To mystic Babylon this was a terrific peal. It was her death-knell—her trump of doom; but to the Church it was a trumpet of jubilee. It proclaimed the fall of her prison-house, the expiry of her bondage; and the coming of her King to set up His throne, and, with the Church seated by His side, to reign over a ransomed earth. No sooner does this trumpet sound, than great voices are heard in heaven, announcing the reduction of the world under the reign of God.

“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. And the four-and-twenty elders

which sat before God on their seats fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, 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.” – Revelation 11:15-17

(To be continued)

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