

The Seventh Vial Chapter XVIII. The Harpers On Mount Zion



Continued from [Chapter XVII The Commencement And Termination Of The Twelve Hundred And Sixty Days](#)

As the night of his seven last plagues closes darkly around Antichrist, we behold the day opening upon the Church. John had just been shown a vision of the rise of the beast of the abyss. He had seen him erect his monstrous and horrid shape above the troubled deep. He had seen him cast looks of pride and scorn towards heaven; and he had heard him blaspheme the God who dwells there. He had beheld him rushing in his fury upon the two witnesses, and killing them; and, not content with shedding their blood, he had exulted over their remains, subjecting them to foul dishonour. All the while these deeds were being enacted, John had seen the world bowing down before the beast, and worshipping him as God.

After these awful events, one would have expected the next scene to be the terrible one of the beast's overthrow. But the catastrophe is not yet. When the curtain rises, the view rests on a comparatively small but blessed company gathered with the Lamb, and standing with their harps amid the light of the Mount Zion: "And I looked, and lo! a Lamb stood on the Mount Zion, and with Him an hundred, forty, and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." (Chap. xiv.)

We saw this company before. Immediately previous to the apostasy of Christendom, and just as the beast, after which the whole world was to wonder, save those whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life, was about to rise and begin his domination, we saw a certain number—the precise number that now appears on Mount Zion with the Lamb—selected in Divine sovereignty, and sealed by God, in order that they might not be seduced by the craft of the beast, nor destroyed by his power.

But where had they dwelt, and how had they been preserved? When Antichrist reveled in the wealth and dominion of the western world, they had found an asylum in the wilderness; when the Gentiles were treading under foot the outer court, they ministered at the altar; and how often did they there present the sacrifice of their own lives! For as individuals they were mortal, though as a sealed company they—were inviolable and immortal. But now, after being so long hidden from view, they re-appear, and not one of them is lacking.

The identical number sealed at the commencement of the twelve hundred and

sixty years of sackcloth is seen with the Lamb on Mount Zion, now that these years begin to draw towards a close. "And I heard the number of them which were sealed." The special attention of the Apocalypse was called at the time to the number sealed, that he might afterwards mark the wonderful fact of their complete preservation: "I heard the number of them which were sealed; and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand." John recognized them as the same company, and could not but admire their completeness, notwithstanding the calamities and apostasies that had been prevalent since the epoch of their selection:

"And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." -Revelation 14:1

To what occasion in the Church's history does this appearance refer? It is exceedingly improbable that so important an epoch as the Reformation would pass unrepresented in this symbolical drama. It had been referred to in the history of the witnesses under the symbol of their resurrection; but we would expect also to meet it in the parallel prophecy of the beast.

The chronological point where we would naturally look for it is precisely that which this vision of the hundred, forty, and four thousand on Mount Zion occupies. Without hesitation, therefore, we conclude that this vision symbolizes the Reformation. Then the cloud which had veiled the "sealed church" all throughout the long night of the domination of Antichrist was parted, and she looked forth "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners."

The several parts of the vision exactly agree with the various facts of that great event. These we shall briefly note.

The company appeared on the Mount Zion—the symbol of the true Church, in opposition to the city now trodden under foot of the Gentiles. They appeared with the Lamb—the true priest, in opposition to the false prophet, after which the world wondered. His Father's name was written on their foreheads, i.e., they made open profession of His truth. John heard a voice from heaven, "as the voice of many waters," symbolizing the nations that embraced the Reformed faith (waters being the symbol of nations)—Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, Geneva, England, Scotland.

He heard, too, "as the voice of a great thunder," the symbol of those mighty dispensations of Providence which attended and followed the Reformation. "And I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps." The wonderful unanimity of sentiment and harmony of confession which reigned among the Reformed Churches are brought finely before us in this symbol. Scattered throughout several of the countries of Europe, yet holding and expressing the same views of truth, they resembled a confederated company of harpers, whose sweet melodies filled the lands where they dwelt. And even in our days of division we perpetuate the recollection of that noble song which was sung upon their well-strung harps, by the general use of the phrase, the *harmony* of the Reformed confessions.

"And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders." -Revelation 14:3a

In the various places in Scripture in which reference is made to a new song being sung, we find that the occasion is some new and signal deliverance—a deliverance so great, marvelous, and complete, as to take precedence of all former deliverances, and supersede all former songs. Such was the song of Moses at the Red Sea; such was the song of Deborah when Sisera was discomfited; and such was that of the captives when they escaped from Babylon: "The ransomed of the Lord returned and came unto Zion with singing."

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.-Isaiah 35:10

So the new song sung by the hundred and forty and four thousand who had escaped from mystic Babylon is finely expressive of the stupendous character of the deliverance now wrought, and of the wonder, gratitude, and joy of those whom it redeemed from Antichristian bondage. They were like them that dream. Their mouth was filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing.

"But no man could learn that song, save the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth."- Revelation 14:3b

They only who had participated in the deliverance —been redeemed from the Papal earth—could join in the song of thanksgiving. Or if by that song be meant the truth professed with such singular unanimity by the Reformed Churches, then none but those who had been elected by God's grace, and illuminated by His Spirit, could learn that song. God had an "election in the various countries of Christendom; and they only, from the era of the Reformation downwards, have been able to profess the truth as held by the Reformed Church.

Several particulars of their life and character are added. "They are virgins," which intimates the care they would exercise to preserve themselves, both in doctrine and practice, from the pollution of the Romish idolatry. "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (Revelation 14:4)—the symbol of their steadfastness, self-denial, and patient endurance. Many and grievous accusations would be preferred against them: they would be regarded as rebels by the civil authorities, and heretics by the ecclesiastical. Nevertheless they should stand acquitted in the presence of Him whose judgment is according to truth:

"And in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without fault before the throne of God."-Revelation 14:5.

To these elected and sealed ones should attach the further interest of being the first-fruits of reformed Christendom. Like the sheaf presented of old in the temple at the beginning of harvest, the Reformed Church was the first sheaf of that glorious harvest yet to be gathered from all the countries of Europe. The Christians of the Reformation were a truly noble band, yet they were only the pioneers of that myriad host which was to follow them in the

ages to come, and which they were to lead up to the throne of the Lamb.

"These were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb."-Revelation 14:4b

The great apostasy was now drawing to its close, and by three grand epochs was the work of God on earth to be revived, and the millennial glory of the Church introduced. These three distinct stages are exhibited under the symbol of three successive angels seen by John flying in the midst of heaven. To each of these revivals in the Church there is a corresponding epoch in the downfall of the Papacy.

The first is thus described:-

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."-Revelation 14:6

This angel is the symbol of a body of faithful preachers of the gospel, to arise at the time referred to in the various countries of the Roman earth. To ascertain the epoch in question, we have only to inquire when was the first general promulgation of the truth in Europe after it had been suppressed by Antichrist? Undoubtedly at the Reformation. And what corroborates this opinion is the fact that the angel gave warning of the danger of continuing in the idolatry of Rome, and revealed to men the true object of worship-

"Saying, with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come ; and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters;" (Revelation 14:7) the very call which the Reformed preachers addressed to the Popish idolators.

The second angel, we apprehend, marks the epoch of the termination of the twelve hundred and sixty years. He proclaimed the fall of Rome.

"And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." -Revelation 14:8

It is not the final, but begun fall of Babylon that is here announced; for the second angel is followed by a third, who proclaims her consummated ruin. The reference here, we conceive, is to the tremendous blow which the first French Revolution inflicted on the Papacy, and from which there is no probability that it will ever recover. On the minds of Protestants that dispensation produced an impression that Popery was near its fall, just as if an angel had cried it from heaven. The third and last angel announces the completed overthrow of Babylon. This is plain, from the fact that the terms of the proclamation are the same with those which in other parts of the Apocalypse are employed to express the final and consummated doom of Antichrist—a cup of unmingled wrath and torment, with fire and brimstone, the smoke of which ascendeth up for ever and ever.

"And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in

his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.' And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name." -Revelation 14:9-11

Then follows an intimation, the import of which we take to be, that now, at last, the period of suffering allotted to the Church had terminated, and that henceforward the saints should enjoy a special blessedness.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth."-Revelation 14:13

Has the third angel—the herald of Babylon's final doom—yet appeared in heaven? We cannot confidently affirm that he has, neither are we prepared to maintain that he has not. When we look to the Roman earth, and contemplate the insurrections, massacres, intestine broils, and bloody wars, of which it is at this moment the theater—when we think of the fierce resentments and animosities which have sprung up, and which every hour is exacerbating, and which are now being directed in their full force against the members of that city whose capital is the seven hills—we are persuaded that we see the cup in the hand of Babylon, the fires kindled amid which she is to be consumed, and the smoke of her torment already ascending into the skies. It is not here only, but in other parts of the Apocalypse, and also in Daniel, that we find the three great epochs that will constitute "the time of the end" predicted. Daniel, as we have already said, adds a period of seventy-five years to the twelve hundred and sixty—the commencement of that period synchronizing, we conceive, with the second angel, who announces the begun ruin of Babylon; and its termination, with the third angel, who proclaims Babylon's completed destruction.

In chapter xviii. of the Apocalypse, which contains a lengthened and detailed account of the overthrow of the Papacy, we find that overthrow marked off into three periods. The first is that of an angel, with whose glory the earth was lightened, and who

"...cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." – Revelation 18:2

This angel seems to correspond with the era of Reformers, whose preaching lighted Europe, and who exposed the abominations of Popery in almost the identical words of the angel.

The next stage is that of the voice which gave warning of the approaching plagues of Babylon, and called on God's people to flee out of her, which synchronizes, we apprehend, with the French Revolution, when her doom began to be inflicted. The last is termed "a mighty angel:" power is his attribute, for he shall finish what the other two only commenced; and accordingly the act he performs strikingly symbolizes the sudden, fearful, and irretrievable ruin that shall then overtake Rome.

“And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.” – Revelations 18:21

There are yet other two prefigurations in the Apocalypse of “the time of the end,” fraught with more terrible import than even those to which we have just adverted—the HARVEST and the VINTAGE. These are terms of vast significance. They denote scenes of judgment, outstanding in terror, unique in character, inasmuch as they close eras, and concentrate, into a brief period, the punishment due for long ages of spiritual sorcery and bloody tyranny. The first—the Harvest, to wit—we are disposed to think synchronizes with the termination of the twelve hundred and sixty days, and was opened by the great event which marked that era, and which, breaking out in unprecedented horror in France, overspread Europe in a desolating war.

The last and more awful scene—the Vintage, to wit—is yet to come; but probably it will fall out at the termination of the seventy-five supplementary years. The intelligent reader can scarce fail to remark how strikingly this accords with the manner of Antichrist’s destruction, as foretold by Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2:8—

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming”

—*Consume* gradually, by the preaching of the gospel, as has been the case ever since the Reformation, and destroy suddenly at last by the lightning-like and exterminating judgments of the Seventh Trumpet.

It thus appears that not in a single day or year, but by three mighty and progressive dispensations, is Rome to be destroyed, and the millennial glory of the Church established. Rome must pass through long years of shame, disgrace, humiliations, sufferings, and torment. Awful horrors will crowd around the path that leads down into her tomb. Dismissed she cannot be from this earthly scene, till the world resound with her woes, as once it resounded with her crimes. The history of the past is filled with the record of her grandeur, and the history of the future must be filled with that of her disgrace. Most equitable and just, surely, is the sentence which has been passed upon her—

“How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her.” – Revelation 18:7

The justice that pronounced this sentence will infallibly execute it. And as the gloom deepens around the False Church, the glory of the True shall wax brighter and brighter like the day, till at length it shine in the full splendor of the Millennium. In this, as in everything else, God has provided for the full display of His wisdom, the ample vindication of His saints, and the signal punishment of His foes.

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