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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 13

REVELATION 11:6-14

The Martyrdom of the Witnesses

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REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART THIRTEEN

THE MARTYRDOM of the WITNESSES

Revelation 11:6-14

“These have power to shut heaven that it rain not in the days of their prophecy”
Verse 6

As with the fire, so with the rain, this is a frequent and highly significant figure in the Holy Scriptures.

Isaiah, the evangelical prophet ‘par excellence’, tells us,

“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” Isaiah 55:10-11.

Likewise Paul in Hebrews 6:7-8:

“For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:

But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.”

The rain is the Word of God. The cessation of the rain can only mean the withholding of the means of grace from those who willfully reject and oppose the truth.

Famine, which must ever follow the withholding of rain, is one of the most dreadful of all calamities to fall upon man. Spiritual famine is much more to be dreaded than the natural, and it is of this that Amos prophesies (Amos 8:11-13):

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord:

And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.

In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.”

We have no reason to suppose that the cessation of rain in the Apocalyptic prophecy is any the less spiritual than in the ancient prophecy of Amos. We dare not affirm conclusively, but neither dare we ignore, the strong possibility that the day in which we now live is developing all the characteristics of a similar famine of the Word of God. In the older parts of the Western world (so long the sphere of the greatest triumphs of the Word of God) the rain has almost ceased to fall, and there are ominous signs across the Atlantic, in what we are still pleased to call the New World, that the same dire process is at work. True, the evangelical testimony in America has a much more prosperous appearance than in the Old World, but discerning men there perceive a decline. Even where the evangelic, cause outwardly appears to flourish, the ‘message’ is more and more being emptied of its emphasis upon the true DOCTRINE OF GOD, in favour of the picture of a trivial deity who has no real control in His own world. Hence the quality of worship suffers grievously.

A change is coming over the evangelical scene, and good men on both sides of the Atlantic are perceiving it. It could well be that the course of this present century, following the great triumphs of the Word of God throughout the world in the previous hundred years is leading rapidly to a situation in which the Word of God is sinking into contempt.

The streams which feed our nations are becoming more and more polluted at the source. The raw material of the nation - its childhood - is being sacrificed on heathen and rationalistic altars. No long are there thunders from a thousand pulpits to warn the ‘authorities’ of the consequences of their madness. The god of evolution is up and the God of the Bible is rejected. Sin, ugliness, unbelief, and moral pollution stain our society and make us contemptible. Four centuries of

divine mercy have been succeeded by apostasy extending far beyond the boundaries of any one nation. We are not dismayed, but we try to be discerning. Is this not a withholding of rain? Is this not a famine of the Word of God? Is this not such an age wherein good and faithful men, like the prophets of old, fearlessly proclaim the old and unchangeable truths, but without seeing any considerable impression made on their generation?

Is this not the judgment of God, withholding from an apostate age the means of life? “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient....”
(Romans 1:28-32)

So it was in the days of Noah, and again in the days of Sodom, and now, perhaps, in our day. How trivial in the face of the present situation are the interpretations of so many who regard this Apocalyptic judgment as having to do with a temporary disruption of normal meteorological processes, to be over and done with in less than 3 ½ years!

WATER INTO BLOOD

Verse 6 (cont'd) “And have power over waters to turn them to blood and to smite the earth with all plagues as often as they will.”

The figure is taken from the first of the ten plagues of Egypt in turning all rivers and pools into blood - and expanded here so as to imply the entire series of the plagues- ‘to smite ... as often as they will’.

We have already seen from the preliminary example of Rev. 8:8, that there is a decided symbolic meaning intended. In Rev. 8 it is the sea which is turned into blood through the fall thereinto of ‘a great mountain burning with fire’. The great mountain, symbolising the power of this world, falling into the sea of humanity - the sea of the wicked - meets the fate it has chosen for others, and this is always the history of the world. On the other hand the pollution of rivers and fountains must refer to those sources of life and refreshment represented in the preaching of the Word.

Blood symbolises death. Water to drink is the first of man’s natural requirements. The turning of the waters into blood can only mean that the pure water of the Word of God, when rejected by the world turns into the instrument of their eternal death. “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters” says the Lord through

Jeremiah (2:13). “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters...(Isa. 55:1). “Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink” (John 7:37). “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ... it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”. (John 4:13-14)

The church in her constant witness for Christ points to Him as the fountain of life (Ps. 36:9), but where the fountain is despised and rejected, there remains only death. “And the third angel poured his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous O Lord, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets and thou hast given them blood to drink”. (Rev. 16:4-6)

So are all the judgments of God. There is a perfect recompense observed in all God’s righteous judgments. Those who seek Christ as their fountain of living waters, obtain that which they seek. Those who delight in blood (that is, in those things which only minister death receive that which they have chosen.

THE MARTYRDOM OF THE WITNESSES

“And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them and overcome them.” Verse 7

The death of the witnesses means the silencing of their voice of testimony, for as we have seen in our last chapter, these witnesses have a representative value only and are not real persons. Their ‘death’ is not a solitary event in history at the end of time but rather an oft-repeated crime in the annals of the church. The church’s voice has often been silenced and her testimony quenched in her own blood, but the gates of hell cannot prevail against her; as often as she is ‘slain’ she rises again from the dead and is exalted above her foes, to the terror and dismay of those who rejoice over the silencing of her tormenting witness.

The public suppression of true religion by evil powers can never silence the voice of God. His Word endures for ever. “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh” when the powers of this world take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed; He shall have them in derision (Psalm 2).

Where Christ is cherished and worshipped in humble and obscure hearts, there is the church, though for the time the world may rejoice, supposing that the Word they feared and hated had been banished from the earth. The history of the church

contains many examples of the slaying of the witnesses and the early revival of their testimony, as the torch is passed from one to another.

Martyrdom is not defeat - it is victory. Hengstenberg has this magnificent comment: "They shall only be overcome when they shall have finished their testimony; when God has no further need of their service; when their death can produce more than their life. They die only to rise again and go to heaven. Their overthrow is but a concealed victory, like the corn of wheat which dies in the earth in order to bring forth much fruit. Only one danger is really to be feared namely, that our heart be overcome; that faith, which is the inner-most life of the soul, should be slain. What is here said of the witnesses of Christ was exemplified in Christ Himself. The world hated Him, and yet the enemies could accomplish nothing against Him, till their hour came and the power of darkness. Then only did the darkness receive power, when He had finished His testimony; and His death was followed by His resurrection and ascension into heaven."

SATAN AND HIS ABYSS

"The beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit"

The abyss, or bottomless pit, is the region to which Satan was banished when first in heaven he fell. But it is not an actual location, it is a condition of restraint, strictly prescribing and controlling Satan's power to do evil. When the demons cried out to Christ that He should not cast them out 'into the deep' - the bottomless pit - their concern was that they should not be subject "before the time" to the final restraint which they knew awaited them at the last judgment. (Matt. 8:29)

"The beast that ascendeth from the bottomless pit" is a description of the activities of Satan. He comes forth from his lair again and again in history in accordance with the liberty allowed him. The two outstanding instances of this release of Satan from restraint are Eden and Calvary. The Evil One was permitted to enter the Garden and tempt our first parents. Likewise he was permitted to put into the heart of Judas the intention to betray the Lord (John 13:2), and he (Satan) was the arch-plotter of the death of Christ: "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53); "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23) Zechariah sees Satan standing at the right of the high priest (that is, Christ) to resist him. (Zech. 3:1)

In Rev. 20 we see Satan bound in the abyss for a thousand years, and afterward loosed from his prison. This does not mean that for the duration of the thousand

years he is totally deprived of liberty, but rather that he is under a special restraint during that millennium of years - which we regard as the present Gospel age. We see the token of this binding of Satan, in the mighty triumphs of the gospel against all opposition throughout the history of the church. How soon the ancient heathenism was cast down! Greeks and Romans (with their highly developed and sophisticated systems of idolatry, beyond anything which the more ignorant peoples of the earth practised, flowering even to the dizzy realms of poetry and philosophy) -- Greeks and Romans, we say, lived to see their idols, cast down, their temples abandoned, and their mystic rites silenced for ever. The anvil gods of the fierce Norsemen, the pagan deities of the Germanic tribes, fell before the testimony of God's poor servants. Satan fled before the power of the simple Word and retired to the Bottomless Chasm to lick his wounds. The Celtic and Pictish deities of the British Isles could not stand before the fiery ministry of Patrick, and Columba, or prevent the victory of the humble Culdee saints. Japhet, who had served the devil so long and faithfully, threw off his chains and Europe was flooded with light and truth.

In vain Satan raised up Mahomet, the False Prophet of Islam, who borrowed his fire originally from Christian altars and propagated his false doctrine with the sword: "Death or the Koran!" Satan is dragged with chains at Christ's chariot wheels, and all is made to serve the immutable counsel of God in bringing redemption to full fruition. Islam, through the secret counsel of God, only succeeded insofar as it set limits to the kingdom of antichrist.

In all phases of the liberty granted to him by divine sovereignty to "ascend out of the bottomless pit" to match himself against Christ and His kingdom, Satan finds that he is still but the frustrated slave of providence, the architect of his own shame and the cause of his own eventual and final destruction.

SATAN'S "LITTLE SEASON"

At the end of the days, we are told (Rev. 20) Satan will again ascend from the abyss, being loosed by God for his last "little season" of transient liberty to try for the last time to extinguish gospel light in the earth. He will gather the remnant forces of the old paganism, new-shaped to meet the hour, "Gog and Magog" (the old heathen principle always slumbering in the hearts of unregenerate mankind), and there will then be a revival of the ancient paganism, perhaps in its refined form of philosophic unbelief and denial of the existence of a Creator or a creation. In other words, there will be born a new and atheistic paganism which worships no god, but makes a god of the human reason and so man worships himself and makes

himself into God. Man becomes subject to no-one and to nothing – only to find himself more of a slave than ever he was before, because this is the divine law of creation which no-one can escape.

It could be (though we dare not assert it as a fact) that we are even now coming into such a time. The western world is throwing off the last shreds of its Christian history and tradition, and is turning to atheism in philosophy, science, art, letters, music, and politics. Marxism is spreading from pole to pole because the modern apostasy from vital Christianity provides a congenial field for atheistic political and scientific theory with its plausible offer of a liberty and a prosperity founded largely on hatred and envy. In that field from which God is altogether banished, there arises spirit of revolt against all that is called God. We see it spreading to all lands. The mosques of Islam and the temples of India are trembling under the impact of the same materialistic onslaught. Even the jungles of Africa as well as the campuses of the modern universities, are ringing with the sound of this revolt. And it may be there is no remedy left now - except judgment: the Last Judgment.

The nearer the end, the clearer becomes the view. It was easy for great and good men, during last century, to become “postmillennialists” - that is, believers in the gradual conquest of the world by the gospel till all is subdued to the sceptre of Christ, and evil is finally put down. They lived and died before the year of the great earthquake, 1914, and would not even have guessed at the collapse of all moral values which began then. Nor could they have guessed at the rise of a nuclear science which now bids fair to destroy the very planet itself - though we as Christians know that the Almighty has reserved that prerogative for His own power and decree.

Since 1945, world developments especially in the decay of the arts - the toleration of the social degeneracy of Sodom and Gomorrah - the subversion of all moral principle in education - the degradation of the holy purpose of scientific investigation; and the consequent exaltation of EVOLUTION to the throne of the Almighty - assures us that this COULD be a time when the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit is at large once more - maybe for the last time.

Satan is represented here as a wild beast because, as the description suggests, he specialises in wild, destructive power, ferocity, cruelty, implacable hate, deceit, lies and pollution. We have already seen him in chapter 9 emerging from the bottomless pit to lead his devouring and destroying armies of the great Locust Woe. His name there is DESTROYER. Here he comes without name, but as THE BEAST THAT ASCENDETH OUT OF THE ABYSS. In chapter 12 he

becomes the great red dragon; in chapter 13 he, as the dragon, introduces yet another beast who, like himself sports seven heads and ten horns and is therefore a replica of himself through which he works. But this belongs to another chapter.

THE WORLD'S CITY

“And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.”

Verse 8

The earthly Jerusalem though shadowed in the last clause, is not named and we must be cautioned against coming to quick conclusions. Literalism and Futurism do not have the qualifications to interpret this verse correctly. Throughout the Book of Revelation we ought to remember the sevenfold warning of the messages to the, Seven Churches – “He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”. (Rev. 2:11, etc.) Often in the Saviour’s ministry this caution was uttered. (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, etc.) Parables and prophetic utterances are not to be comprehended except by the hearing ear, the seeing eye and the understanding heart. The key to the understanding of the Word of God does not lie in the dictionary but in the heart - the heart consecrated, humble, meek, inquiring, and ready to receive and to do the will of God. (Matt. 13:11-17) The Apocalypse is part of the prophetic Word, rich in mystery, clothed in the language of symbol, preserved from the prying eyes of the curious and the ungodly, and all whose appetite for prognostication is insatiable. The Lord, when referring to the profound prophecy of Daniel said, “Whoso readeth let him understand”. (Matt. 24:15)

Let the Lord’s cautionary word arrest us before we put quick and convenient interpretations on that which is presented in the hidden language so essential to prophecy.

In our verse now being considered, “the great city”, “Sodom”, and “Egypt”, are equated with “the place where our Lord was crucified”. Our Lord was certainly crucified at, if not in, Jerusalem, outside the city wall. But the fact that John does not mention the name of the city as being Jerusalem but uses three enigmatic terms to describe it, should direct our attention to the meaning which is hidden. The term “Jerusalem” is reserved in Revelation to describe the church in her heavenly state (see chap. 3:12; 21:2; 21:10). In each case it is referred to adjectivally: “The city of my God, the new Jerusalem”, “The holy city, the new Jerusalem”, “That great city, the holy Jerusalem”. Never is the earthly Jerusalem mentioned by name. The Spirit of prophecy carefully avoids in the Apocalypse any description which would give

that sacred name to the ancient site in Palestine. Even the Mount Zion, on which the city was built, is reserved in Revelation for mystic purposes which have nothing to do with geographical location: chap. 14:1, “A Lamb stood on Mount Zion and with him 144,000 having his Father’s name written in their foreheads”. The mystic Zion, the church, is clearly in view, as in Hebrews 12:23: “Ye are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ... the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven”.

The earthly city is “great” as the “place” where the vital history of creation was brought to its climax. In this case we have before us a picture of something which though great, has written over it the defiling names of Sodom and Egypt. The ominous addition, ‘where our Lord was crucified’ marks this mysterious place as the centre of this world’s apostasy from its God.

THE TWO CITIES

What we have therefore in this description of the ‘great city’ where the Two Witnesses pursue their testimony for God and Christ is nothing other than the City of this World – Satan’s kingdom in opposition to the City of God, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The description, ‘the great city’ is used throughout the Apocalypse as descriptive of that system which sets itself up in opposition to God and truth.

Augustine perceived this long ago and wrote his “City of God” to describe how throughout history God was the preserver of His people, even though (as in his own day) the city of Rome upon which, in its Christianised state, the hopes of many people sincerely rested, had been taken and destroyed by the barbarians. The City of God (Augustine argued) was invisible, indestructible, and eternal.

In contrast, the city of this world is ever changing in form and name. In our chapter it is described as “the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified”. Hence in chapter 14, v.8, “Babylon is fallen, THAT GREAT CITY, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication”. The figure goes back to the original Babylon (Babel) founded by Nimrod, the grandson of Ham, as the centre of his usurpation of power in the ancient world. Idolatry was first established in Babel after the Flood and ‘all the world’ with the exception of the seed of Abraham came ultimately to drink of the “wine of the wrath of her fornication”. Adultery is used throughout the Scriptures to describe idolatrous worship.

There was no Babylon on the earth in John's day, and there is not one now - geographically; nor will there ever be again, despite the curious interpretations of some prophetists who foretell Babylon must be rebuilt for the purpose of being destroyed again: Babylon is ever with us, 'that great city', in its spiritual form, the instrument of Satan's reign of deceit, fraud, and false religion.

“And the woman which thou sawest is THAT GREAT CITY which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” Rev. 17:18

The shameful fall of Babylon at the last is fully described in chapter 18 where she is designated in verse 2, “Babylon THE GREAT” and again in subsequent verses, THAT GREAT CITY (see verses 10, 16, 18, 19, 21).

There can be no doubt therefore that here in our verse in chapter 11 we are dealing with nothing geographical, but something mystical - not an earthly city at all, but a system of idolatry and evil which throughout history changes the axis of its power continually, but it remains the same old Babel and Babylon, sometimes exhibited in Sodom, sometimes in Egypt, and again, “where our Lord was crucified”.

THE CITY OF GOD

In contrast we have in Revelation the history of another great city, which inspiration carefully identifies so as to safeguard its integrity - it is the City of God, the Eternal City, which rests the axis of its power on the very throne of God. This city is fully described in Revelation 21 where she appears as “the holy city, the new Jerusalem” which John sees in vision, ‘coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’ (verse 2). Fearful of being driven to a symbolic interpretation of the entire Apocalypse, literalism makes a late effort to maintain that what John sees is an actual city, coming out of heaven and being lowered on to some appropriate site on earth, furnished with gates, walls and foundations, its walls composed of jasper, its foundations, enormous individual stones, each one of precious nature - emerald, sardius, etc. The street is of gold, every gate an actual pearl - and Christians are seriously asked to accept this as literal!

Truly the symbolic interpretation needs no apology. If the city of this world is to be spiritually understood as John suggests in our chapter and as the history of that city can only be understood in those terms, then there can be no dispute that in “that great city, the holy Jerusalem” which descends from heaven we have a picture of the heavenly, eternal state of the elect people of God, the church, built upon the

foundation of Christ's divinity (Matt. 16:18), and brought at last, from her long pilgrimage in the desert of this world, to holy beauty and perfection as the bride of Christ, eternally His, the partner of His peerless and endless glory.

We return to that hideous picture of the devil's bride, that other 'great city' which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified, and have no difficulty henceforth in understanding the figure presented.

Our Lord was crucified by man in man's city, which at the time was the Jerusalem to which He came and which rejected Him and cast Him out. It was (Hengstenberg notes) an apostate church which crucified the Son of God, and we must therefore search and find the solution of these mysteries not in the geographical sphere, but in the realm of the spirit where, in all the infinite variety of human rebellion and apostasy, in all its changing forms and adaptations, it wages war against the Two Witnesses who testify against its evil deeds.

Therefore we conclude that the names and titles given to the world's city in our chapter are not geographical but spiritual, describing one great city which is in perpetual opposition to that other city, the CITY OF GOD, the church. Cain, who built the world's first city, drenched its walls in his brother's blood (Gen. 4:17). The founder of Rome did the same. Romulus first murdered his brother Remus to ensure that the city of Rome should bear his own name and that he should be its ruler. Thus it ever is with the city of this world, for in it "our Lord was crucified" - who came unto His own, but His own received Him not.

SODOM AND EGYPT

The dead bodies of the Two Witnesses, representing the martyred church, lie in the street of the city. But if, as we think has now been proven, the Two Witnesses are not individuals but the witnessing church of the Redeemer, they cannot be thought of as lying in the street of any city of this world.

Literalism delights to forecast that two men - probably Moses and Elijah - must come down from heaven to witness in Jerusalem against the monstrous tyranny of antichrist. But are we to suppose that the Jewish citizens of that Jerusalem are to rejoice over the death of two of the greatest and most venerated figures in their history? By no means, say our literalists. It is Satan, or Satan's agents who do the bloody deed, the usurpers of the forlorn city of Jerusalem. Why then call the place 'Sodom and Egypt'?

If, as these friends ask us to believe, the earthly Jerusalem is to be the centre of affairs again and that this privileged position is part of the divine plan for the restoration of Jewry to its ancient privileges, exalted to an eminence never before exemplified, why call it Sodom and Egypt?

Our Literalist friends tell us, the ancient city is to be usurped by the antichrist as the centre of his world dominion. But why call it Sodom and Egypt - the two foulest place names in prophetic history?

Antichrist, they tell us, will have but 3 ½ years for his undisputed reign - a mere bubble of time on the ocean of history. Why then call the place of his usurpation, Sodom and Egypt?

We might consider Jerusalem in these circumstances as the virgin daughter of Jehovah, brutally and scandalously oppressed and abused by a wicked tyrant, but why add to her undeserved shame by calling her Sodom and Egypt?

The theories of literalism are of course quite untenable and self-contradictory. Historically, Sodom and Egypt acquired a most important prophetic meaning in the history of the Lord's people. Lot, Abraham's nephew, was the witness in Sodom of the righteousness of God in an ungodly world (see 2 Peter 2:6-9), while Israel in Egypt, the victim of the scorn and spite of this world, becomes the symbol of the suffering church and her great deliverance through the Passover sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

Israel in her apostate condition in the days of the prophets came to be described in these hated terms, "Sodom and Egypt". Isaiah writes to the rulers of Jerusalem, "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah" (Isa. 1:10). Of Jerusalem, he inquires, "How is the faithful city become an harlot?" (v.21). Again, in the same chapter, "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (v.9).

MOSES TOO

Moses had earlier warned Israel of her impending fate when in Deuteronomy he declared,

"The generation to come of your children that shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the Lord hath laid upon it;

And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath.”

(See Deut. 29:22-28)

Again in Isa. 3, verses 8-9 the prophet writes of the ruin of Jerusalem and compares its sin to the sin of Sodom.

“They are all unto me as Sodom and the inhabitants as Gomorrah”.
(Jeremiah 23:14)

“The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom”. (Lam. 4:6)

In Ezekiel 16, the prophet is instructed to make known to Jerusalem her abominations (v.2). She (Jerusalem) is accused of adulterous intercourse - that is, idolatry - with both Egypt and Assyria (Babylon) and the prophet goes on to affirm, “Thou art thy mother’s daughter ... and the sister of thy sisters ... your mother was an Hittite, and your father an Amorite. Thine elder sister is Samaria and thy younger sister is Sodom ...” (verses 44-47). This terrible chapter of Ezekiel proceeds to accuse Jerusalem of even greater abominations than her sisters Samaria and Sodom, and (postmillennialists and pre-millennialists take note) it is only when Sodom and Samaria ‘return to their former state’ (Ezek. 16:55) that Jerusalem can be restored to the divine favour - which means never, for Jerusalem's two ‘sisters’ have long ago disappeared in the maelstrom of history. We have not seen so far any comment on this chapter by those who follow the restoration theory of prophecy.

Yet there is a positive, if covered, meaning to Ezekiel’s prophecy. The reappearance of Sodom and Samaria clearly indicates the symbolic nature of the restoring of Jerusalem. “I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant ... thou shalt receive thy sister (i.e. , Sodom and Samaria), thine elder and thy younger, and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant’. (Ezek. 16:60-61) Neither of the two ‘sisters’ can ever be found, for the simple reason that they have long ago disappeared from the earth. Prophetically they still exist however, and this shows that they have only a representative value. If that be the case with them, Jerusalem

also must have only a representative value. That value in each case is a gospel value and refers to the elect of Israel along with the elect from amongst the heathen who in the gospel are gathered to the heavenly Zion. For this reason it was essential for the gospel to be preached first to the Jew and to find its first triumphs in Israel, that it might be seen that the TRUE Israel, in her historical continuity (that is, the elect in the fallen nation) receives her heathen sisters into the same living fellowship. Here, Sodom and Samaria stand for all the heathen who ever have been or ever will be rescued by the gospel from sin, shame and death. The spiritual meaning of prophecy is always the only consistent interpretation. See Acts 1:8 for the SAVIOUR'S LAST INSTRUCTIONS TO HIS APOSTLES in terms of Ezekiel's prophecy. See also Amos 4:11; Matthew 10:17; Romans 9.29.

Returning to our chapter in Revelation we see that the earthly Jerusalem ("where also our Lord was crucified") is identified with 'the great city' and Egypt and Sodom, and must represent the apostate church. Therefore the Jerusalem which John points to but does not name, cannot be the Jerusalem of geography, but must be that which the earthly Jerusalem at the time of the rejection of Christ represented, namely, the apostate church or the city of the world. The name Jerusalem is withheld because in Revelation it is only used of the spiritual Jerusalem, the church, the bride of Christ.

A PAGAN DEVIL

The "beast arising from the abyss" is Satan in his antichristian character emerging again from his temporary eclipse as a pagan devil to reconstruct with consummate art and deceit, a new paganism baptised with the Christian name. We shall see in the chapters following how he accomplished this seemingly impossible feat, and how this only prepared the way for a yet more terrific overthrow. Apostate Christendom was his masterpiece, with himself at the head, the same pagan devil but in new garments. This is the true - and only - ANTICHRIST.

NO FUTURE PERSONAL ANTICHRIST

We do not wait for some future antichrist to appear in order to fill this role. He has already been here long enough. Before the last Book of the Bible was written, he was already in full career. John in his epistles assures us that antichrist was already come in his day, and indeed, there were many antichrists. He was referring to no particular individual but to that "spirit of antichrist" which assumes the Christian garb, masquerades as the Christian church, and turns oppressor of the true church.

Satan's policy down the ages has always been to raise up the power of this world against the people of God, to enslave or destroy them. The coming of the kingdom of Christ in its full New Testament glory dealt a fearful blow to his dominion. The death of heaven's King upon the cross was to be the signal of Satan's triumph, but it was in fact the means of his doom. The Saviour rose from the dead victorious over all, to establish on the rock of His own divinity a kingdom which should never pass away. The death knell of the ancient heathenism, by which Satan perpetuated his dominion over the minds and souls of men, had sounded. Now Satan raises up all the remaining strength of heathenism to crush the church.

John in Patmos, the prisoner of Caesar, was the sign that the great purpose of Satan had begun. It was to last in its Pagan form till the time of Constantine the Great - the first Christian emperor of Rome. Heathenism received its death blow, and Satan must needs change his method. His new aim was to make himself the invisible head of the church by creating a new heathenism baptised with the Christian name and calling itself the true church, arraying itself in Christian garments and reviving the old heathenism garnished with a Christian vocabulary. This new 'mystery' is the subject of much which remains in the Apocalypse.

THE EXPOSURE OF THE SLAIN

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

The world's intemperate triumph over the silencing of the Word of God is mistimed and transitory as the sequel is shortly to show. The description, “people and kindred and tongues and nations” proves that this 'city' and its inhabitants is commensurate with the entire world; we are not dealing with an isolated episode of history but a world event on a world time-cycle. The sentence is taken from the Book of Daniel where it occurs several times as descriptive of the universality of the Babylonian kingdom, and indeed of the Persian Empire which succeeded it. See its first occurrence in Dan. 3:4 where the herald of Nebuchadnezzar cries, “To you it is commanded, O people, nations and languages.” (See same chapter v.7 and 29, also chap. 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; and 7:14). John has three similar references in the Apocalypse; chap. 5:9; 6:25; 7:14.

In Revelation the high significance lies in the fact which cannot be denied that “the street” where the bodies of the two witnesses lie is the street of this world, common to all the dwellers on the earth and not to be confined to one city or one

street. There can be no gainsaying that in the light of this fact the city is symbolic, and so are the “witnesses”, and so is their “death” and their “dead bodies”. The vision is of universal application, belonging to all places and times, right up to the final event when for the last time the Word of God will be rejected by the world and reddened in the blood of its witnesses.

“EARTH DWELLERS MAKE MERRY”

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

“They that dwell upon the earth” - These who make merry are the same as those already described as “they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations”. To “dwell upon the earth” in the prophetic sense means to be “of the earth, earthy” - those who live for this world and who reject the life eternal which is from above, as the Saviour said, “Ye are from beneath; I am from above. Ye are of this world; I am not of this world”. (John 8:23)

In contrast with the worldly multitudes who “dwell on the earth” are true believers, those who “dwell in heaven” (see Rev. 12:12 and 13:6). That believers on the earth are in fact a heavenly people, already dwelling in heavenly places “in Christ” is assured by Paul in Ephesians 1:3; 2:6, etc. Likewise the immense difference which grace has made in the status of the believer is described by Christ in His last dedicatory prayer in the Upper Room, “They are not of the world even as I am not of the world”. (John 17:14, 16). Again in John 15:19 the Lord says, “If ye were of the world the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”.

The rejoicing of them that “dwell in the earth” over the slaying of the witnesses is anticipated by the Saviour in those further words spoken in His Upper Room discourse “Verily, verily I say unto you, ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy”. (John 16:20)

The reason why the “dwellers on the earth” rejoice over the silencing of the witness of the Word of God is because their conscience is tormented by the truth of that witness. “These two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth” (see our text above). The Lord tells the unbelieving Jews, “The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil”. (John 7:7)

Again, to His disciples in the Upper Room, “If ye were of the world the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”. (John 15:19)

In his high inspiration John always walked in the sayings of the Saviour, and here are those sayings transposed into figure and action and parable in the Apocalypse.

The world has often celebrated the end of the Christian testimony, but the silencing of public witness does not mean the death of the church. The preachers may be slain and the church suppressed, but the church cannot die because her springs of eternal life take their rise in the heavenly sanctuary (Ezekiel 47). Never can the church perish, for it is written, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against her”. (Matthew 16:18)

It may be that such a period of the silencing, in part or in whole, of the church’s testimony is drawing near to us today and we must be prepared for such a demonstration of the world’s hatred and scorn of the Word of God. The Book of Revelation was written to prepare us for such times, and always, in days of suppression and persecution, the church has recognised her enemies from these graphic descriptions in the last Book of the Bible. Long ago King David wrote, in language from which these verses in Revelation 11 could well have been borrowed:

“O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; Thy holy temple have they defiled. They have laid Jerusalem on heaps.

The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven; the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth.

Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem, and there was none to bury them.

We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us.” Psalm 79:1-4.

Again, in the warning words of the Saviour Himself:

“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.” Matthew 24:9

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.... He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” Matthew 10:28, 34, 39

The ‘torment’ inflicted upon the enemies, by the Two Witnesses (v.10), is well explained by Hengstenberg – “They have no weapons other than the Word. Their word, weak and contemptible in itself, has an ally in the hearts and consciences of those against whom it is directed.”

THE WITNESSES REVIVED

“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.”
Verse 11

Elijah the prophet disappeared from public view during the 3 ½ years of the great famine in Israel, and the 3 ½ years correspond with the 3 ½ days here and with the other symbolic numbers contained in this chapter. The 3 ½ days are not intended here to be a measure of time but are to be understood prophetically, though based as to their significance on the disappearance of Elijah during the famine. The figure can relate to any period of time, long or short, during which the testimony of God lies trodden and despised in this world’s street. But the end is always the same, culminating in the final judgment when the “peoples, nations and languages” of this world shall suddenly, in a moment not expected be summoned to judgment. It will surely be at such a moment, as in the days of Noah, and the days of Lot: “When they shall say, Peace and safety: Then sudden destruction cometh upon them ... and they shall not escape”. (1 Thess. 5:3)

The testimony which the world thought to be dead, and over the passing of which the world rejoiced, is suddenly and unexpectedly revived.

Until the very latest hour of this world’s long history, we may live in the expectation that the God of all the earth and the only Governor of the nations (as Nebuchadnezzar learned to respect and to acknowledge Him) - may, and will, raise again the standard which has fallen and confound the world and its prince of darkness.

HISTORIC EXAMPLES

On May 5th 1514 an orator addressed the Pope at the Lateran Council in Rome, declaring that all so-called heretics had been silenced by fire and sword throughout all the Pope's dominions. The orator proclaimed, "The whole body of Christendom is subject to one hand, even to thine; no-one now opposes; no-one now objects." Lollardry had been suppressed in England and the Hussites in Bohemia, and antichrist's triumph seemed complete.

But on November 1st 1517 Luther nailed his 95 propositions (or theses) on the gospel, to, the Cathedral door in Wittenberg, Saxony, and the blows of his hammer roused all Europe and shook the universal crown from the head of the Pope. It has not been replaced since.

Almost precisely to the 3 ½ days (3 ½ years, or 42 months) of the enumerations in this chapter, the Reformation was born after the boasted triumph proclaimed in Rome.

* * * *

On January 31, 1686, the Duke of Savoy issued his edict for the complete and final suppression of the Waldensian Christians in the Alpine valleys where, since time immemorial they had preserved their gospel witness. With incredible cruelty and frenzy the Savoyan soldiery accomplished their bloody task.

On August 16, 1689 - almost precisely 42 months after the Edict was promulgated, Henry Arnold with 800 men returned from Switzerland, sword in hand, and cleared the ancient valleys; the Waldensian survivors returned to their blasted homes. The Duke of Savoy the following year, having quarreled with the French, was compelled to accept the presence of the Waldenses, and there they have been ever since.

* * * *

So remarkably have these facts been seen to fit into the 11th chapter of Revelation, that historical interpreters in their enthusiasm have not hesitated to proclaim that the Reformation was in fact the fulfillment of the prophecy.

The temptation to agree with them, is strong; but it must be resisted, because our Apocalyptic Book was not written to cover isolated events but to apply to the

whole church at all times. The historical examples quoted may be used as confirmatory of the Lord's decree for the preservation of His testimony in the earth, but they are only timely illustrations of that greater and universal providence of God which in every age, and in all circumstances, preserves the church so that Paul's words are always valid –

“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:

To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?”

- 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

Bengel:

“In all circumstances God still has His glory; and if it should appear that the evil gains the mastery over the good, the evil is still very limited; it cannot break forth sooner than its timely nor rise higher nor last longer than God permits it.”

As with the Saviour, who rose the third day after He was put to death on the cross, so with His people. Apparent defeat is swallowed up in victory. The triumph of evil is short-lived. “The victory of the world is always a transitory one”.

(Hengstenberg)

THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

The spirit of life from God entering into the fallen witnesses so that they stand upon their feet once more to the terror of those who had been rejoicing in their death, has an obvious connection with the prophecy of Ezekiel 37 - the resurrection of the dry bones of the house of Israel after the Babylonian captivity: “Come from the four winds O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live ...” The word used for “breath” here is the same as for Spirit in Genesis 1:2, “The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters”

As Ezekiel prophesied “the breath came into them and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army”. (chap. 37:10) Compare the words in verse 11 of our chapter in Revelation, “the spirit of life from God entered into them

and they stood upon their feet.”

As the OT church was given into the hand of the Babylon foe till God’s time of deliverance came, so in the history of the Christian Church, the power of this world is often permitted for a season to appear to triumph over the church of Christ, until in the pleasure of God the church is revived and stands upon its feet once more. The same expression, “the Spirit of life” is used by Paul in Romans 8:2 – “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

In short we have here the resuscitation of the gospel testimony in the world after it has been apparently extinguished.

The ascending to heaven in a cloud is symbolic of the elevation of the Lord’s people and their testimony above the power of this world, and is an emblem of the final triumph of the kingdom of Christ at the end of time when the redeemed church is completed, and exalted with Christ to the eternal throne.

See Revelation 4:1. The voice “Come up hither”, is the voice of Christ. The church and her witnesses will “ascend to heaven in a cloud” and their enemies will behold them - seated in glory around the throne, clothed in white raiment and palms in their hands, singing the new song of eternal redemption accomplished. “And there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” The tables are turned and the world’s verdict upon Christ’s people is reversed. The “ascending to heaven in a cloud” is similar to the ascension of the LORD.

THE RUIN OF SATAN’S CAUSE

“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.” Verse 13

The earthquake, the fall of the tenth part of the city of this, world, and the slaying in the earthquake of 7,000 men, to the terror of the survivors who accordingly “give glory to the God of heaven,” is scarcely a description of the end of the world, but neither is it to be taken literally, for we have already seen that this “city” is not as any earthly city.

THE EARTHQUAKE AND ITS 7,000 SLAIN

The earthquake symbolises the divine judgment upon the nations at any time when there is need to arrest the progress of evil. The tenth part of the city looks back to the prophecy of Daniel concerning the fourth monarchy of chapter 2 and the more detailed prophecy of the ten-horned beast (Rome) of chapter 7. The fall of one section of the city signifies (in the opinion of Hengstenberg) the ruin of the whole. The slaying of 7,000 men requires a closer attention. The number is not great but it is symbolic, signifying completeness (as also does the number 10). The marginal reading in the AV is to be followed here – “names of men”. This is a peculiar expression, and is similar to the usage in Revelation 3:4: “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis ...”; also in Acts 1:15, “the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty.” In the Hebrew Scriptures names are of the utmost importance and are often used to denote character and office. They enter largely into the meaning of the prophetic portions of scripture, and the names of the prophets generally signify the nature of their prophecy.

In our verse we have no doubt that ‘names of men’ indicate that these are to be regarded as men of eminence and power. The verse appears to be linked with 2 Kings 24:16 where we are told that 7,000 ‘men of might’ who were strong and apt for war, were carried away captive in the first transport of prisoners of war captured at Jerusalem in Nebuchadnezzar’s first invasion, 12 years before the final destruction of Jerusalem. The policy of the Babylonian monarch was to destroy the capacity of the nation for any further resistance to his imperial conquests.

The destruction of the 7,000 ‘names of men’ in our verse in Revelation 11 would therefore indicate such a judgment of God on the world’s city and would cripple its power to do further injury to the divine cause. These are to be regarded as principal men, men of power to do evil, leaders who had taken an eminent part in the persecution of the Lord’s witnesses. Their removal in the judgment of the earthquake would give respite and rest to the persecuted church.

“And the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.”

The terror which fell upon the inhabitants of Egypt the night the firstborn were slain, is a primary example of the effect upon the wicked of the sudden judgments of God. The Egyptians gave glory to Israel’s God and sent away the tribes laden with spoil, whom a short time ago they despised and cruelly treated. How quickly God can reverse the world’s verdict and reduce the foe to impotence.

A theology which does not see God in His Almightyness, as the only Lord and Governor and Ruler of the nations, is a defective theology- and a dangerous one to boot. Nebuchadnezzar knew better:

“And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:

And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”

- Daniel 4:34-35.

“THE SECOND WOE IS PAST: BEHOLD THE THIRD WOE
COMETH QUICKLY.” Verse 14