

Revelation 11:2-6. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part I



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

Early History Of The Eastern And Western Lines. A.D. 600-1000

[2] But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

[3] ¶ And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

[4] These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

[5] And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.

[6] These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. (Rev 11:2-6)

WE NOW COMMENCE an account given by the Covenant Angel of certain witnesses, who throughout the long-continued apostasy would have kept up a testimony for him and his truth. The review is brought before the Evangelist just after his receiving the reed for the measurement of the mystic temple. And on looking to history, we find that it was precisely at the period following the actual reconstitution of the Church (so symbolized) that the attention of the Reformers was directed retrospectively to the investigation of the same subject. Many learned researches began then to appear, unfolding the history of the martyrs of the past dark ages, – how they had maintained the truth with fidelity and boldness, and sealed their testimony with their blood. So chronologically accurate is the agreement of the facts with this wonderful prophecy.

In the Angel's description of the two witnesses we may remark –

First, Both the term designating them and the actions ascribed to them, imply that they are persons, and not merely things inanimate. There can be no reasonable doubt that living confessors were intended.

Secondly, The speaking of them by the Angel as "My witnesses" points out that the Lord Jesus himself was the subject of their witnessing – his glory, his grace, his salvation; even as it is said of the faithful seed in the end of the 12th chapter, "Which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus."

Thirdly, They are described as "the two olive-trees, and the two candlesticks, or lamp sconces, that stand before the Lord of the whole earth."

The candlesticks are explained by Christ himself to symbolize Christian Churches, i.e., communities, large or small, whether as nations or families, which unite together in true Christian profession and worship. In the present instance the description indicates paucity of number and depression.

The olive-trees are the emblems of all faithful ministers and preachers who supply the needful spiritual nourishment to the Churches, inasmuch as from the olive was derived the oil that supplied the temple lamps. To this effect is the explanation given of the emblem in the Prophet Zechariah. (Zech. 4:11-14) From the union of lamps and olive-trees in this vision we may infer that both preachers and Churches were alike included in the Apocalyptic witnesses.

Fourthly, The number, two, would seem to indicate, in accordance with the requirement of the Mosaic law of testimony, that while their witness would be sufficient to bear evidence to the truth, their number would be the smallest that was admissible for such evidence. As in other parts of the Apocalypse the representative system is followed; not two individuals, but two separate lines of witnesses being intended.

Fifthly, "They shall prophesy clothed in Sackcloth," i.e., in suffering and tribulation; sackcloth being with the Jews the universal emblem of mourning. We may well suppose that their righteous souls would be vexed with the prevalent apostasy and irreligion around them: besides which, the cruel persecution they would suffer from the enemies of Christ's truth might properly give occasion for a garb of woe.

Sixthly, We may observe also the averaging power given them against their enemies. Like the supernatural power that attached to God's eminent prophets of old, – as to Moses and Aaron, who turned the Nile waters into blood; and to Elijah, who commanded fire from above, and who stayed the clouds of heaven that they gave no rain for three years and a half, – so these figures apply to the spiritual, and perhaps national judgments, which should, sooner or latter, follow upon the rejection and persecution of Christ's witnesses.

Seventhly and lastly, The commencing time of their 1260 days-testifying in sackcloth, coinciding as these evidently do with the forty-two months of the apostasy and treading under foot of the Holy City, must be dated from the rise or establishment of that dominant system of error, viz., about the close of the sixth or the opening of the seventh century. Which having premised, we turn from the figures of the vision to the facts or real history. And first of the historical notices of –

I. The Earlier Western Witnesses.

A.D. 600. – At or about this date we properly begin our search for the true apostolical succession of “faithful men,” who should continue Christ’s witnesses throughout the dark-fated period of 1260 years. Sufficient, though detached, evidence remains to prove that the doctrines of God’s free grace which AUGUSTINE had advocated, and the firm protests which VIGILANTIUS had maintained against the encroachments of error, exercised a powerful influence in favor of truth in Western Christendom. After the failure of the Gothic scourge to induce repentance or amendment, it needed to unite, in a measure, the doctrine and the spirit of these two eminent men of God to give a character to the testimony of after-years; – the clear Spiritual discernment of Scriptural truth which Augustine so richly experienced and exemplified, and the godly jealousy of evil which induced Vigilantius to denounce the fast-multiplying abuses of the Roman apostasy. The principles of the former had taken deep root in the south of Gaul: the Gallic Churches of Languedoc (probably extending eastward to Dauphiny and the Cottian Alps beyond, so famous afterwards as the seat of the Waldenses), were the sphere of the latter’s bold protestation.

Nor were there wanting men of high position in the Church to uphold their tenets. About a century after Augustine we find CAESARIUS, Bishop of Arles, in Dauphiny, uniting with twelve other bishops in laying down, on the ground of inspired Scripture, as the healing doctrine for man’s soul, the truth as held by Augustine. His Christian excellence did not exempt him from trial and persecution. At one time he was calumniated as a traitor, and imprisoned; at another he was suspended from his bishopric; in either case his innocence was soon acknowledged. He spoke of the world as a wilderness, and thirsted for a draught from the water of life.

Nor should we omit the similar cotemporary witness of FULGENTIUS, and many other African bishops and ministers. On occasion of the Arian persecution by the Vandal Hunneric, from their exile in Sardinia they wrote a letter of joy, they said, and sorrow. Joy, because those they addressed held fast the true view of God’s grace in Christ; sorrow, because others exalted against it man’s free will. They concluded with urging the study of Augustine, and asserting his doctrine, – that God gives his elect grace and perseverance, so that in the way of grace they receive eternal life. We do not hold up all the views of these men as perfect, but in these essential doctrines they maintained a witness for Christ amid prevailing darkness.

Proceeding with the seventh century, at the outset we meet SERENUS, Bishop of Marseilles, protesting against image-worship, and ordering the destruction of the images set up in the churches of his diocese. From this time we find this species of worship becoming the popular error of the apostasy; as if Satan had discovered how the presenting distinct human forms to the eye of the worshipper would serve better than relics to gratify the imagination, to turn the thoughts from the disembodied and the spiritual, and to chain the affections to earth. Images likewise gave to the priesthood the opportunity of playing off their juggleries on credulous devotees, even as did Pagan priests before.

As by Serenus in Southern France, so by the ancient Church in Britain was a long protest kept up against this particular innovation. After that the Anglo-Saxons had received the form of Christianity reintroduced from Rome, the Britons refused either to eat or drink with or salute them; "because they corrupted with superstition, images, and idolatry the true religion of Christ."

A.D. 650. – We have certain obscure but interesting notices of heretics (?) from beyond the seas, convicted of that crime by the bishops near Orleans, although with difficulty, and finally expelled. The progress of opinions opposed to the image-worship of Rome had made such progress about Chantilly, near Paris, some time after, that a Council was there convened expressly to discuss the subject.

A.D. 794. – In this year was held the great Council of FRANKFORT, under Charlemagne, when, in opposition to the Popes, no less than three hundred bishops joined with the Emperor in protest against image-worship. Nor was this all. By the Council's reception amongst its members of Alcuin, preceptor of the Emperor, and its eulogium upon him contained in its canons, it identified itself with his published opinions; in which there was set forth, says Bishop Newton, "doctrine respecting the sufficiency of the Scriptures, the worship of God alone, prayers in the vulgar tongue, the Eucharist, justification and repentance, pretended visions and miracles, and other like points, such as a Papist would abhor and a Protestant would subscribe;" adding that in his writings, and in those of Louis the Pious, there was enjoined the reading of the Scriptures as the sole rule of faith, without regard to human and apocryphal traditions, and the forbidding of private masses and other similar superstitions. With these sentiments, therefore, we may consider the bishops of Western Christendom to have admitted their agreement at this Council of Frankfort. One of these, Paulinus of Aquileia, had previously set forth the true doctrines of Christ, after the model of Augustine; and several others are also named, all of whom, seeing that the errors they opposed were upheld by the power and influence of Rome, must have exposed themselves to persecution. The witnesses must needs have prophesied in sackcloth.

A.D. 810 – 841. – The testimony of AGOBARD, Archbishop of Lyons, is worthy of record among the witnesses of Jesus. His protestation against image-worship was but a small part of his evangelic Protestant doctrine. An able treatise against the invocation of saints, in which he supports the dogma that "there is no other mediator to be sought for but he that is the God-man," has long received the distinction of a place in the Roman *Index Expurgatorius*. In one treatise, "Against Antichrist and the Merit of Works," he combats error with the zeal and force of Calvin. Of another, "On the Truth of the Christian Faith," it has been well remarked: – "It has CHRIST for its subject." His general uprightness, abundantly evidenced, could not save him from the consequences of his faithful reprovings of the growing apostasy. He experienced, as he himself declared, the truth of Scripture, that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution."

A.D. 817 – 839. – But the most conspicuous of the witnesses of that age was CLAUDE, Bishop of Turin, called by way of eminence the Protestant of the ninth century. Charged by his enemies with the accustomed crime of heresy, he

has left writings sufficient not only to refute the charge, but to prove him a true, fearless, enlightened, and spiritual witness for Christ's truth and honor against the superstition and the wickedness of his times. "It is no marvel," writes he, in the bold style of Luther long after, "that Satan's members should say these things of me, since they proclaimed our very Head himself to be a seducer and a demoniac. I, who hold the unity, and who preach the truth, am teaching no new sect... Sects and schisms, superstitions and heresies, through God's help, I will never cease to oppose... But when, finding all the churches at Turin stuffed full of vile and accursed images, I alone began to destroy what all were sottishly worshiping, therefore it was that all opened their mouths to revile me. And, truly, had not the Lord helped me, they would have swallowed me up quick." But while he declaimed against all the leading errors of Romanism, the written Word was, with him, the one standard of truth. The least departure from a simple and spiritual interpretation of it was the essence of heresy in his sight. On that Word he wrote several commentaries. From that Word he loved, and labored beyond all things, to set forth Christ, and divine grace through him, as the all in all in man's salvation. He constantly represented Christ as very God, and as the one Head of the Church. The great doctrine of justification he taught with clearness, fulness, and unreserve. At the same time he enjoined the duty of practical godliness. "Christ Jesus did not command us to worship the cross, but to bear it – to bear it by renouncing the world and ourselves." Nor has his own personal holiness ever been questioned. Opposed as Claude was by bitter and powerful foes, which marked his prophesying as in sackcloth, he yet escaped the extremity of death, which in a later age, and in a country more exposed than Turin was to the tyranny of Rome, had been the unfailing attendant upon the faithful martyr. Perhaps too, under God, the protection of the French court saved him from violence. Whatever it was, he died in peace. But the effect of his labors and the influence of his ministry were felt, as said his opponents, through Italy, Germany, and France, and survived, we have reason to believe, centuries after in the Waldensian Churches of Piedmont.

A.D. 846. – It was in or about this year that GOTTESCHALCUS left his monastery at Orbais with the object of preaching the Gospel. Born in Germany, he had been from early life a monk, and had devoted himself to theological studies. The writings of Augustine deeply interested him, and under the teaching of the Holy Spirit he cordially embraced the doctrines of grace. On his return from a missionary expedition in Pannonia, he seems to have given free expression to his sentiments before certain ecclesiastics, who unfortunately possessed the power to persecute what they had not the wisdom or the grace to value or understand. Willfully or in ignorance, they charged Gotteschalcus with opinions which he never held, and these obtained his condemnation. Sent back to the North of France to answer before his own bishops to the heresies which were laid against him, he was again condemned, degraded, beaten with rods, and imprisoned. Here this faithful witness of his Lord endured further tortures and trials, and lingered for twenty years, constant amid his sufferings to the truths he maintained. In vain his persecutor, Hincmar, urged him to retract when at the point of death; the cruel Archbishop's only satisfaction was in denying the martyr Christian burial. It is of this period that the historian Milner writes, – "The spirit of Christianity was much decayed, but there were doubtless a number of

persons to whom Christ and his grace was precious, and the influence of evangelical truth was still so strong, that all the cruelty, activity, and artifice of one of the most subtle politicians of that age – for such was Hincmar – were not able to extirpate it.”

A.D. 855. – While Gotteschalculus lay in his prison there were many who remonstrated loudly against the barbarity with which he was treated. His doctrine gained him followers. Many distinguished ecclesiastics espoused his cause, among others REMIGIUS, Archbishop of Lyons, who with his whole church vindicated his opinions. The controversies to which this gave rise led to the assembling of the COUNCIL OF VALENCE in Dauphiny in this year, where and when the Augustinian doctrines of grace and election were solemnly reasserted and approved. And the subsequent Councils of Langres and Toul seem to have confirmed the same, and to have supported the cause of the persecuted Gotteschalculus.

A.D. 909. – It is worth remarking that at the Council of Trosly, near Soissons, in the year specified, a confession of faith was set forth which included none of those superstitions which constitute the essence of Popish doctrine.

A.D. 945. – About this time also there is mention made of certain heretical (?) teachers, popularly known by the name of prophets, who, as Atto, Bishop of Vercelli, near Turin, complained, “Taught diabolical error, inducing men to forsake their priests and their Holy Mother, the Church.” In the estimate of divine truth how very different was probably the judgment concerning these maligned persons, witnesses, it may have been, faithfully dispensing to the multitudes in heathen darkness the light of that Gospel which had made its way to their own hearts; possibly the followers of Claude of Turin, scattered in the rural districts of Piedmont and Lombardy.

A.D. 1030. – Such likewise we may with yet more probability consider to have been the sect which we read of as discovered a century later at Turin; of which it is said that they received the Holy Scriptures alone as the rule of doctrine, rejected the formal observances and rites of the Romish Church, followed a strict rule of life, and suffered even unto death in witness to their faith. Nor must we overlook such men of discernment as ARNULPHUS of Orleans, president of the Council of Rheims, who feared not to affirm that the Roman Pope, when elated with pride on his throne of state, was Antichrist sitting in the temple of God. Of these in most cases their Romish enemies have been the only historians; and careful are they to set down the sore punishments inflicted upon the heretics. But what were these but the cruel persecutions which marked how truly and constantly the witnesses prophesied in sackcloth?

Having thus brought down our notice of the early Western witnesses to the close of the tenth century – a period which has been sometimes styled the ultimate point of Christian depression – we shall return to take a view of that separate line of confessors for evangelic truth, who, during the same time, had kept up a testimony for Christ and God’s Word in the East, and who, about the eleventh century, appear to have migrated and intermingled with their brother witnesses in the West.

II. The Earlier Eastern Witnesses.

It was in the year 653, soon after the Saracenic conquest of Syria, that an Armenian named CONSTANTINE of Samosata received from a deacon to whom he had showed hospitality the present of two volumes, then very rare, the one containing the four Gospels, the other the Epistles of St. Paul. The perusal wrought in. total change in his principles and course of life. Separating from the Manichean heresy, to which, as some say, he was attached, as well as from the now apostate Greek Church, he applied himself to form a distinct Church of such as, like himself, might be willing to found their faith and practice on the simple rule of those sacred books. In his indefatigable missionary labors he likened himself to a disciple of St. Paul. Hence the name, which his disciples thenceforth assumed, of PAULIKIANS. It was a noble purpose: we can readily conceive how it must have exposed him to persecution. But the bitterest trial was to have his sincerity impeached, to be deemed a hypocrite, and to have it asserted that his secret object was to propagate the more easily his former heretical principles. Nevertheless, his enemies admit that while he burnt his old books he made it a law to his followers that they should read no other than the New Testament Scriptures; and, moreover, that these were preserved amongst them perfect and unadulterated.

For thirty years Constantine continued his ministrations. Then at length the increase of the sect attracted notice. An edict was issued against him and his followers, the execution of which was entrusted to an officer by name Simeon. Constantine was stoned to death, an apostate from his Church giving the mortal blow. He prophesied in sackcloth. But observe the providence of God! As from the stoning of the first martyr, Stephen, so now from that of Constantine a new witness arose to fill his place. SIMEON returned to his home deeply impressed with the evidences of divine grace in the sufferer; and, after three years of retirement, presented himself as a new head to the Paulikians, under the name of Titus. After some time, during which he ceased not diligently to teach, the cry of heresy was again raised; and, not far from a heap of stones which marked the spot where his predecessor suffered, Simeon and his disciples, refusing to renounce their opinions, were burnt alive!

Again, as from the ashes of those martyrs, the heresy, as it was called, revived. One PAUL, who with his two sons contrived to escape, and after him other teachers, perpetuated the sect through the eighth century, during which it is worthy of remark these Paulikians originated the great movement against image-worship, which soon became general. At the close of this century a teacher appeared more eminent than any before, named SERGIUS. His conversion from the established, but now apostate religion, is attributed to the pointed appeal and arguments of a woman, who, accosting him while yet a young man, inquired of him why he read not the sacred Gospels, and boldly charged upon the priests the willful perversion of Scripture and the putting themselves in the place of the Saviour. "In this way, running through sundry passages of the Gospel," says the historian Petrus Siculus, his bitter enemy, "she gave a perverted sense, and so corrupted his mind as to render him in a little time an apt instrument of the devil." The same writer says of him: – "His worst point was his semblance of virtue, – the wolf disguised as a sheep, a tare

like wheat."

For thirty-four years did Sergius, by the name of Tychicus, expound and propagate the doctrines of truth. So laborious were his missionary exertions that in one of his letters, written in later life, he thus expressed himself: – "From east to west and from north to south I have run preaching the Gospel of Christ, laboring upon my knees." This expression his enemy adduces as a proof of his boasting; at the same time that he bears this testimony, that the object of Sergius was to deliver his countrymen from what he considered their fatal error, and that success attended his laboriousness in that the sect multiplied greatly.

A severe persecution now began against these Christians by the imperial command and instigated by the patriarch. Retiring into Cappadocia, the Paulikians, now grown numerous, resisted. In this they derived protection from the Saracens, who, be it remembered, were designed to be a scourge only to those who "had not the seal of God upon their foreheads." (Rev. 9:4) Sergius earnestly dissuaded his followers from resistance; but he was himself accidentally killed by the axe of a woodcutter – "a just punishment," observed the bigoted Petrus, "for one who led divided the Church of Christ, besides the greater punishment of being sent into unquenchable fire." This happened in A.D. 830.

The trials which the Paulikians endured from the death of Constantine have been acknowledged by Milner in his History of the Church: – "For an hundred years these servants of Christ underwent the horrors of persecution with Christian patience and meekness; and if the acts of their martyrdom, their preaching, and their lives were distinctly recorded, there seems no doubt but this people would appear to have resembled those whom the Church justly reveres as having suffered in the behalf of Christ during the three first centuries. During all this time the power of the Spirit of God was with them; and they practiced the precepts, as well as believed the precious truths, contained in the doctrines of St. Paul."

Again, a persecution yet severer visited this people after Sergius's death. By direction of the Empress Theodora, the great patroness of image-worship, Asia Minor was ransacked in search of them; and she is computed to have killed by the gibbet, by fire, and by sword, 100,000 persons. Then, at length, their faith and patience failed. They fortified themselves on Mount Tephrike in Armenia, and maintained a war of various success, until at length reduced by Basil I. And is it to be wondered at if they sometimes retaliated the cruelties of their injurers? Multiplied, as they had now become, into a powerful community, there were doubtless very many among them who had lost the spirit of true religion. They only can be properly set down as Christ's witnesses who still acted, like Sergius, in the true evangelic spirit.

The subsequent history of the Paulikians is European. From time to time they had detached colonies with missionary objects to Thrace, where "they still corrupted many with their heresy." At length the rest, about A.D. 970, were removed by the Emperor Zimisces across the Bosphorus, and the city and district of Philippopolis was given to them in possession. There they are described as residing in the twelfth century, when attempts were vainly made

to reconvert them to the apostate Church. There in A.D. 1204 the Crusaders found them, under the name of Popolicanì. There, about the valleys of Mount Haemus, a part of them existed even to the end of the seventeenth century; but others of them, migrating to the West, had already, at the commencement of the eleventh century, under the appellation of Publicani, begun to excite the attention and to draw on themselves the persecutions of Western Europe. Of these persecutions, says Gibbon, "the flames which consumed twelve canons at Orleans (A.D. 1022) was the first act and signal."

Thus have we brought down this sketch of the two lines – of the Western and the Eastern witnesses – to the same epoch. We shall now have to trace, in the records of these lines conjoined and intermixed, the further history of Christ's two witnesses – still prophesying in sackcloth.

Continued in [Revelation 11:3-6. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part II](#)

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