

The Seventh Vial Chapter VIII. The Measuring Of The Temple



Continued from [Chapter VII. The Oath Of The Angel](#)

WHEN we open the eleventh chapter of the-Apocalypse we find ourselves in presence of a new and striking symbolization. Before us rises the temple on Mount Moriah. We are shown the court of burnt-offering within the sacred edifice, and the spacious outer court which runs round it on the outside. At the altar is a little company who offer sacrifice to Jehovah. But while this peaceful scene is proceeding within, a frightful tumult rages in the outer court. A promiscuous crowd have burst into it; and although they profess to have a relation to the temple, for they are here in its courts, they neither show reverence for it, nor do they offer worship to God. On the contrary, they proclaim their essential paganism, by profaning with their noise, and defiling with their impieties the sacred precincts within which they are assembled.

And now comes the Apocalyptic seer, with a measuring-rod in his hand, and he proceeds to measure the temple, and them that worship therein. In other words, he draws a line of separation and protection between the worshippers, and the profane and disorderly crowd in the outer court. "Henceforth," as if John had said, passing on with his measuring-rod all round the edifice, "henceforth these shall be the limits of what is holy." The scene is manifestly symbolic. It is a picture of times that were approaching. Let us investigate its import.

We here behold John entering on the execution of the task assigned to him. "Thou shalt prophesy again," said the angel to him. Having digested the contents of the little book he begins to prophesy; but like Ezekiel, who, having eaten the roll, and been commanded to prophesy to the house of Israel, began to do so by signs, so John opens his new prophetic mission by the exhibition of signs.

The first and most prominent sign before us is the temple. It cannot be the literal temple which John is commanded to measure: for the "holy and beautiful house " in which his fathers had praised God was now razed to the ground, and the Roman plowshare had been drawn across its site.

In the Old Testament, to which we must go for the key of the symbol, the temple and Mount Zion are used as types of the gospel and the gospel dispensation. The coming of the gospel dispensation, and the privileges and blessings to be enjoyed under it, are all shadowed forth in the prophets by

imagery borrowed from the temple. The symbolization then carries us into gospel times, and puts us down in presence of the gospel Church. Whatever we see John do in the case of the type we are to regard as prophetic of an analogous event to happen in the case of the antitype—the gospel Church.

The instrument which John wields is a “reed like unto a rod.” “There was given me a reed” (Greek word) – Revelation 11:1. The (Greek word) or reed was put to three uses among the Jews—a walking-staff, a measuring-rod, and a pen. Its size varied according to its use. To show in which of these senses the (Greek word) or reed is here to be taken, it is added, that it was “like unto a rod.” It was a measuring-reed, then, that was now given to John.

As there is so obvious a reference here to the plan and arrangements of the ancient Jewish temple, it becomes necessary, in order to the clear apprehension of what John now did, and the precise significance of the act, to describe briefly the arrangements of the ancient temple. The sacred buildings occupied the summit of the hill. In the center was a noble and spacious edifice, divided into two chambers—the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies—with a court in front, in which stood the altar of burnt-offering. This formed strictly the temple. Running round it, in an oblong form, was the court of the Israelites; and, running round it again, was the spacious court of the proselytes to the Jewish religion. John was commanded to measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. It is not said whether the court of the Israelites was included or left out in the measurements of John. We are disposed to think that it was left out, and that nothing was included by the measuring-reed of John but the sacred buildings, with their three-fold division of holy of holies, holy place, and altar-court where the priests and such of the people as had sacrifices and offerings to present were assembled.

But it is of more importance to inquire what the action symbolized. Sometimes the measuring-rod is employed to denote construction, as in the case of Ezekiel (chap. 40:3, *et seq.*), where the angel uses his measuring-reed to mete out the proportions of a new temple to be erected. Sometimes it is the symbol of destruction. In 2 Kings 21:13, and elsewhere, it is so used: a part was to be preserved, and a part was to be destroyed. It is plain that here the measuring-reed is used in a sense somewhat analogous to its last mentioned meaning. That it was not used for the purpose of construction, is very evident; for the temple measured was represented as already built. It was used for the purpose of dividing between what of that temple was to be kept holy, and what was to be accounted profane. That this was the design of the measuring is certain, from the reason assigned: “For it” (the outer court) “is given unto the Gentiles; and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.” The action gave warning that a great apostasy was to take place, and that the limits of the true Church were, from this time forward, to be greatly curtailed.

John now predicts in symbol what Paul had already foretold in plain language. “Let no man deceive you by any means,” says he, in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, *et seq.*; “for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that Man of Sin be revealed, the Son of Perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped: so that

he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

This passage, is the key to the right interpretation of the measuring of the temple. The vision is evidently placed at the commencement of the forty-two months; for why was the temple measured, but that its inviolability might be secured during the time—the forty-two months—that the outer court would be trodden under foot of the Gentiles? If from the page of the Apocalypse we lift our eyes to the page of history, and survey Christendom at the beginning of the fifth century, what a sad verification of the symbolic foreshadowings of John! We behold the great predicted apostasy, or "falling away" begun. It sets in with the steadiness and irresistible strength of an overflowing tide. The professors of the gospel are divided into two classes, and the distinction between them is marked and deep, and destined every century to become more so. The vast majority retain nothing of Christianity but the name; in heart, in life, and in creed they are manifestly pagan. The disproportion between the two in point of numbers, as in point of character, is steadily progressive. The one company, the evangelical, grow smaller every age, and at last drop well-nigh altogether out of view: the other prodigiously augment (larger); and by and by appear to cover the whole face of Christendom. The area once occupied by the gospel, "the Holy City," they tread under foot by their persecutions, and defile, by their idolatrous fanes (church buildings) and ceremonies. Paganism, in the guise of Christianity, has a second time triumphed.

During the fifth century the Church underwent a great change for the worse in her doctrine and worship, and, of course, also in her practice. The great body of her members were grossly ignorant, and her clergy wallowed in wealth and luxury. Magnificent churches were erected, in which ministers officiated attired in richly decorated vestments. True piety lay buried under a load of pompous rituals, and burdensome and superstitious ceremonies. Pilgrimages began to be made to the tombs of martyrs, where tapers (candles) were kept burning at mid-day. Miracles were wrought by the efficacy of relics; the saints and the Virgin were invoked; and, amongst other pernicious inventions, fatal to morality as well as to religion, the confessional was introduced; and the pagan doctrine of the purification of departed souls by fire was more amply explained and confirmed in this century than it had previously been. The grand doctrines of Christianity were lost, especially those pertaining to the great atonement and the one Mediator.

The true temple, which God had pitched, and not man, was abandoned: the true altar was forsaken—not, indeed, entirely—a few there were whom the growing corruptions and superstitions had not carried away. These now formed the true Church—they were the altar worshippers; but they formed no greater a proportion to the multitudes which filled the courts without—Christians in name, heathens in reality—than did the priests at the altar of old to the assembled congregation of Israel that thronged the courts without. Thus the great apostasy rose, whose swelling tide lifted the "Son of Perdition" to his lofty seat in the temple of God, where through successive ages he showed himself as God, by arrogating the powers and assuming the names and attributes of God.

In Vitringa's exposition of the passage we, on the whole, thoroughly concur.

"The interior temple," says he, "means true Christians; the exterior, false Christians, heretics, &c.; the altar means Christ; measuring the temple and worshippers is scrutinizing the character of Christians, real or professed; the casting out of the outer court is excommunicating false professors; the heathen who are to tread down the temple and city are Christians in name only (and therefore called heathen), who are to form an external Church, and have dominion over it, suppressing at the same time the true worshippers of God, until at last God shall exclude them from even the external pale (area they are allowed in) of His Church."

The Gentiles were not merely to possess the court which was without the temple;—they were to tread under foot the holy city. Jerusalem is here used as the symbol of the Christian Church. The term "treading under foot" denotes the subjection in which the Church would be held, and the indignities with which she would be treated. Like Jerusalem when taken by the Chaldeans, or when sacked by the Romans, its wall broken down, its stately palaces demolished, and the foe walking in triumph over its ruins, the Church of God was to exhibit during this long and calamitous period a spectacle of desolation.—Her rights and privileges were to be taken from her; her ordinances were to be profaned; her members were to be persecuted and slain; and her adorable Head was to be affronted by having His office arrogated by His pretended Vicar. These oppressions she should suffer forty-two months, which is the precise length of time that the Witnesses were to prophesy in sackcloth; the only difference being, that the period of the witnesses is given in *days*, and that of the treading under foot of the outer court by the Gentiles, in *months*. This to our mind is completely satisfactory that the profanation of the outer court and the prophesying of the witnesses were to be contemporaneous; and that it is the same event that is prefigured by both symbols—the apostasy of the heathenish and persecuting Church of Rome, and the indignities and oppressions to be endured by the true Church during the continuance of that apostasy.

We cannot but admire the appropriateness of the symbols, and the exact and lively picture which they exhibit of the leading events of the grand apostasy. John receives a measuring-reed; the angel commands him to rise and measure the temple. He does so. On the authority of his Divine commission, and in the application of a Divine rule, he draws a line of separation between the pure and holy worshippers at the altar, and the unclean and idolatrous multitude in the outer court. We behold Christendom divided into two ecclesiastical confederacies, vastly dissimilar in point of numbers, as well as in point of character. During one period of the forty-two prophetic months we behold the one company grown so small, that the inaccessible cliffs and caves of the Piedmontese Alps sufficed for their dwelling; and though driven by the rage of men to dwell there, yet they were beloved of God, and enjoyed access to Him through the one Intercessor—kings and priests unto God; while the other company were so numerous, that the wide plains and populous cities of the rest of Europe could scarce contain them. John, in measuring the temple, acted, we have said, on a Divine commission, and by the application of a Divine rule; plainly though symbolically teaching us, that everything about the Church—her government, her worship, the admission of her members— is to be regulated by the Word of God.

Civil rulers have sometimes arrogated the power of making laws for her, and of saying who were to be admitted and who excluded from her offices and privileges. The self-righteous pride and the superstition of men have led them to invent pompous rites and burdensome ceremonies; but when brought to the test of Scripture—the rule which Christ has put into the hands of His servants, for the purpose of regulating the affairs of His house on earth—they are discovered to be unwarranted and superstitious; they must be discarded; and such as persist in the observance of them must be cast out of the Church as profane.

The measuring of the temple forms a grand epoch in the Apocalypse, as it did in the history of the world; for now the Man of Sin was to be revealed. A dark night was at hand—darker than any that had overtaken the world hitherto, and bringing with it to the Church sorer trials and more protracted sufferings than any she had ever passed through. At this crisis of the drama the great Administrator of it appears before John. He is seen encompassed with all the glorious symbols of universal dominion, almighty power, absolute unchangeableness, and covenant faithfulness. How opportune this revelation of Himself. He comes to comfort His Church, by giving her assurance of His presence during the trials of her protracted night. He comes to bid her be of good cheer; that, this last trial over, all would be over; and, to show that the mystery of Providence was now drawing to a close, and that it should assuredly be finished in the destruction of that enemy who was now on the eve of being revealed, he renews the oath which had been sworn in the hearing of Daniel, at the beginning of that course of mystery, so long before, and which bore upon the certain overthrow of that great foe. He comes to deliver his last prophecy to the Church, and to commission his last prophet to the nations.

What a seasonable appearance! How like to His last interview with His disciples before His first departure! The language of this manifestation was in effect the same as that which fell from His blessed lips on that memorable occasion: "A little while, and ye shall not see me. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that 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) I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." (John 16:22) The cloud was again to receive Him out of their sight. It was expedient that He should go away. He had not yet brought to a close that wonderful series of glorious dispensations which was to introduce the final triumph and universal establishment of His Church. But the end was nigh.

One other dispensation, more full of terror to His enemies, of mercy to His friends, and of mystery to both, than any that had preceded it; and then, oh what a blessed realization of what Daniel had seen in the night-visions!—

"One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." — Daniel 7:13,14

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