

Serial Number 047-12

REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 12

REVELATION 11:1-5

The Two Witnesses Identified

BY: CHARLES D. ALEXANDER

REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART TWELVE

THE TWO WITNESSES IDENTIFIED

Revelation 11:1-5

And there was given unto me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given to the gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months . Rev. 11:1-2

The angel is the one last spoken of in chapter 10, and that angel, we have endeavoured to show, is Christ in His office as Michael, the “great prince” who stands for the people of God as their Guardian and their Champion (Daniel 12:12).

“The angel stood ...” He had not been presented to us in the preceding chapter as having done anything other than stand, but the posture here is important as denoting preparation for activity on behalf of His people.

John has received “a reed like unto a rod” for the purpose of measuring, the reed being a unit of measurement. In the prophecy of Ezekiel there is a very elaborate description of the prophetic vision of the measuring of the ideal temple, and to this vision that of John is intimately related (see Ezekiel chapter 40).

In Revelation it is John who does the measuring; in Ezekiel it is the angel. In each case the temple is a picture of the church, and that church consists of the sum total of true believers who “dwell in the secret place of the Most High.”

Those who are committed to the idea that the temples of Ezekiel and of John are material structures yet to be built on the ancient site at Jerusalem, will find little to comfort them in either vision, for these temples have characteristics which exclude them from any material concept. That of Ezekiel has a river of living water and miraculous expansion flowing from its threshold. That of John has worshippers capable of being “measured” with a measuring rod.

Since Christ said to the Woman of John Four, that the centre of worship He came to establish would be neither in Samaria nor yet in Jerusalem, but the true worshippers would worship the Father 'in spirit and in truth' - since Christ said that, all imagination of a reconstituted temple is dissolved. His one true sacrifice has terminated all Mosaic ritual, and established a spiritual temple -the church - of which the apostle Paul wrote,

“Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together groweth into AN HOLY TEMPLE IN THE LORD: in whom ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit”. (Ephesians 2:20-21)

Let no unhallowed hand disturb those eternal foundations or recklessly plan to replace them on earth by ornamental stone and lime, with a revived sacerdotalism and smoking altar.

A VISIONARY TEMPLE

The temple which John was commanded to measure with his reed, exists only in vision, and is symbolic of that which the earthly temple at Jerusalem was always designed to foreshadow - the true worship of God, and our access to Him.

Hence the command to John to measure the temple, the altar and "THEM THAT WORSHIP THEREIN'. The worshippers are not to be considered separately from the temple: they ARE the temple. The symbol of the temple was used because of what follows - the treading down of the temple court by 'the gentiles'.

The figure of the temple therefore, with special reference to the altar and the worshippers, shows that we have here a presentation of the church and her worship and her access to God through Christ. By sacrifice only did the OT people have access to God, and that only through their appointed mediators, Aaron and his descendants, as high priests of Israel, who once a year on the Day of Atonement expiated ritually, with the blood of sacrificial beasts, the sins of the people. The rending of the temple veil at the crucifixion of Christ showed that the way to the divine presence is now open to all through the one sacrifice to end all sacrifices, offered by the one high priest (of the order of Melchizedek) whose priesthood extinguishes all other mediatorial priesthoods.

The temple visions of Ezekiel, Zechariah (chapters 3 and 4), and John, have much in common and are each to be understood mystically. The materialistic

interpretations stand self-condemned for they contain nothing of spiritual value. All were given - that of John in particular - to inspire faith and give consolation and assurance to the Lord's people in the midst of calamity and distress. They show that whatever may come and go the Lord is present with His people; He is enthroned to defend them and bring them through every trial which may come upon them in their journey right down the avenue of time till the end of the road is reached.

THE MEASURING

This figure of the measuring of the temple may be understood in prophetic terms in several different ways. It can mean the restoration of something which has been destroyed, as in the case of Ezekiel, when the temple lay in ruins. What Ezekiel sees is the rise of a new and more glorious temple - the New Testament version of the kingdom of God, described so mysteriously by the Saviour Himself in these words, understood only by the humble and meek - "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up - but He spake of the temple of His body".

(John 2:19-21) There was an assurance in Ezekiel's vision that the new temple would be complete and perfect - for you cannot measure that which is not completed.

Again, the figure "to measure", can mean to establish. What is measured is decreed to remain. It can also mean PRESERVATION, as in the case of John's temple which is measured to show that it will be preserved; no unhallowed foot will be permitted to tread therein; no threat against it can be carried out; it must remain throughout history undestroyed and indestructible. A long period of persecution, and of subtle, deceitful, plausible, counterfeiting, more dangerous than fire and sword, was to intervene between John's day and the final triumph of Christ in His church. The enemy would have no power to destroy, as God had measured His church for preservation. Nothing would hinder the completion of the divine task of redemption: all was measured in advance. Though two thousand years should intervene between John's vision and the end of the world, nothing would change essentially so far as the church was concerned. The church is always complete and undefiled in the sovereign purpose of God. She is preserved by a divine and unalterable decree. What God begins He will always complete- as in the six days of creation.

The Lord's words to Peter, "On this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" are the terms of the divine decree (Matt. 16:18). These terms clearly envisage that all would be put to the test. The gates of hell

would in fact endeavour to overthrow the work of Christ in His church, but all to no avail. The church has already been measured with the measure of the sanctuary, and no weapon forged against her can prosper. Every tongue that arises against her in judgment she shall condemn. “This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord”. (Isaiah 54:17).

John’s mystic reed measures not only the temple and altar but ‘those who worship therein’. We have already indicated that the worshippers are to be identified with the temple. That the people should be measured along with the building and the altar provides the clue to interpretation. We grow unto a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21) so there is no distinction between temple, altar, and people. The church, its people, and its worship are comprehended in the one true measurement, to be preserved, established and consecrated for ever.

THE COURT NOT TO BE MEASURED

John was commanded to leave out the court of the temple, and measure it not, for it was “given to the gentiles”.

The court of the temple was a vast enclosure within which the temple itself stood. It had many buildings and ‘porches’ used for administrative purposes or as places of public resort. Much business was transacted there, often of a dubious kind; twice the Lord drove out the moneychangers and those who through the buying and selling of doves, sheep and oxen, made the place a market for merchandise (John 2:13-17; Matt. 21:12-13). This area was not to be measured according to John’s vision, for it was to be ‘given to the gentiles’. In Zechariah 14:21 it is said that there should no more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord. In the Hebrew the term Canaanite also means ‘merchant’ hence the stricture of the Lord when cleansing the temple – “make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise”. Once more, in a most startling historic and mystical sense, the court of the temple was to be given over to gentilism - the making merchandise of holy things.

The word gentile, in John’s usage means heathenism – but heathenism in a very different sense from the common understanding. We have here heathenism in the sphere of historic Christian profession - occupying the very court of the temple as did the false Jews of Christ’s day who by implication of Zechariah’s prophecy and Christ’s use of the same, had become ‘Canaanites’. Likewise in the history of the Christian church there arose a new heathenism which occupied the entire field of Christian profession and called itself the bride of Christ, usurping all the privileges of the church in an outward form, yet in fact reproducing in itself the spirit of that

heathenism which was first overthrown by the gospel.

It is no new thing therefore for the temple court to be appropriated by the 'merchant', the Canaanite, the gentile. We all know what 'church' has made merchandise of the gospel and bought and sold its benefits for worldly gain; selling indulgence for sin and claiming the right to dispense the benefits of Christ's one true sacrifice, in return for silver and gold. We shall see - and are seeing - greater abominations than these in our own day. The gentiles still tread down the temple court, but (thank God) have no access to that inner sanctuary where the peace of God reigns, and the blood of the sacrifice is perpetually efficacious to the cleansing of the soul.

TREADING DOWN OF THE HOLY CITY

“And the holy city shall they tread underfoot forty and two months.”

The Holy City can only be a description of the true church the Bride of Christ. John sees her in this identity in chapter 21, v.2: “And I John saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” What will literalism make of this?

How then are we to understand the treading down by the gentiles, of the temple court, and the holy city itself, as though the one was distinct from the other? The answer must lie between the corruption of worship as shown in the treading down of the temple court, and the general oppression of the church as a whole, as symbolised by the “treading down” of the holy city. Throughout a vast period of time, the church was deprived of her very name by a usurping and antichristian power masquerading as the true church of Christ. There is only one phase of history answering to this description, and that is the period of papal ascendancy and tyranny. Contrary to all the expectation of our Historicist brethren, the fallen power of the Roman church since the Reformation has been wonderfully revived in recent times. There has also been a revival of heathenism in the Protestant region, altogether outside the wildest expectation of our brethren of the last century. The boundaries of antichrist's kingdom, so far from contracting, have actually been widened beyond all credence, as Protestantism itself - or rather the vast area formerly subdued by the pure doctrines of the Reformation - has fallen before the Rationalistic antichrist. Antichrist has changed his garments, though not his ways, and the devil comes forth as a rationalistic devil, confident that most of the world will now believe there is no God but Satan. Once again heathenism (this time without disguise) treads all things down in its triumphant path - all things, that

is, except that holy territory represented by the temple and its altar and those who worship therein. Spiritual religion, the true worship of Christ, is indestructible. There is a region from which Satan is barred, where he cannot and dare not intrude. The hour of his greatest triumph will prove to be the hour of his total defeat and destruction.

FORTY AND TWO MONTHS

All the numbers in Revelation are symbolic. They cannot be fitted into the framework of world history, though there are many startling coincidences which embolden the unwary and create an enthusiasm for chronological interpretation. The spiritual interpretation of this great book must be maintained at all costs, for the past history of chronological investigation is strewn with the carcasses of confident predictions which now have no relevance to contemporary events. Historicism has run out of time and has almost disappeared in the vagaries of post-millennialism presently revived by the contemporary situation in Palestine while ignoring the contemporary state of the church and the revival of heathenism. Some day soon, perhaps, many of our friends may awake to the realities of the Latter Day apostasy, and the realisation that the Millennium is past!

If not a measurable period of time in the realm of historical chronology, what then does the figure of 42 months signify? We have already said in a previous chapter that the numbers in Daniel and Revelation of 1260 days, 42 months, 3 ½ years and 'time, times, and half a time' all correspond with each other and are to be interpreted in terms of the most indefinite of them – 'time, times, and half a time'. Thus we are dealing with an indefinite period of time, known only to God and not intended to be measured by man. If it could be measured in advance what consolation would it be for those who were able to calculate that no deliverance was to be expected in their day or perhaps for centuries to come? Or what office would be left to faith, if it could be ascertained that in the period of one's own lifetime all would be consummated and the Lord would return? What becomes of the Saviour's warning that of the day and hour of His return no man knows, nor yet is it a part of the Son's commission from the Father to make it known?

THE BROKEN SEVEN

In place of these speculations we find it much more comforting to see all these strange figures in the Apocalypse as being signs of THE BROKEN SEVEN (the 3 ½ years). Seven being the number of divine completeness, and being so used throughout the Apocalypse, the broken seven must relate to judgment and is a

warning to the world and an assurance to the people of God of the steadfastness of the divine purposes in commanding a limited period only for the power of this world. The enemy will not endure one day beyond the divine decree.

The 42 months we regard therefore as the whole period of time from Patmos to the Second Advent of our Lord. It began with John's imprisonment, and the Book of Revelation is concerned with that event and the interpretation of it in terms of the prolonged sufferings and probation of the church typified in the afflictions of "John our brother".

During that immense period of time, the church is comforted in the knowledge that the onset and the termination of the 1260 days (and its other numerical equivalents) are fixed by the Lord's sovereign determination. The arbiter of time is the Mighty Angel of chapter 10: the true Michael, the Angel of the Covenant, Christ, the Son of God, the Conqueror of sin, death and hell, the Woman's Seed, the Bruiser of the Serpent's head. It is not for us to know the times and the seasons which forever remain in the Father's own power (Acts 1:7); our part is to preach the Word of God and hold forth the testimony of Christ in a hostile world in which all power appears to be given to the enemies of the kingdom of God.

ECCLESIASTES and the CHURCH'S SUFFERINGS

The Apocalypse shares with Solomon's "Ecclesiastes" the distinction of making clear this mystery of the divine providence in the world. Solomon writes, "So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter: and on the side of their oppressors there was power: but they had no comforter". (Eccl. 4:1)

Why does God permit His church to suffer in her weakness while power is given into the hands of her oppressors? The Lord does this for the refinement of her faith, the proving of her love, and the ultimate confusion of the foe. Satan's challenge to the righteousness of God is always the same – "Hast thou not made an hedge about him and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" (Job 1:10) Satan cannot be destroyed by verbal contradictions. He can only be destroyed by his own hand. Omnipotence withdraws its shield and exposes the afflicted to the full power of the Evil One. Then, as faith overcomes, and love and patience bow in meekness before the evil, Satan's power is destroyed and the Prince of Darkness flees. So it was, supremely, at the cross, where Omnipotence forsook Its shield and gave Itself into the hand of the terrible foe, scorning to take advantage of strength to destroy the strong, but submitting Itself in the extremity of human weakness and

suffering to the will of the foe. The Evil One was dared to do his worst. In accepting the challenge of meekness and self-surrender, Satan destroyed himself for ever.

So is it ever the way of Omnipotence. It is no credit to omnipotence to destroy by superior strength, for that leaves the original question unanswered: “Doth Job serve God for naught?” There is no other way of destroying evil than by enduring it. Supremely at the cross, this became the atonement. Subordinately that victory is ratified in the suffering faith and love of the redeemed who thus take up the cross in obedience to the command of their Lord, and follow Him.

The Apocalypse is one of the great exemplars of this principle, for it is the story of the church’s exposure to all the power of Satan, and the triumph of her testimony to her beloved Lord. “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death”. (Rev. 12: 11)

The destruction wrought by the Two Witnesses of chapter 11 against their foes, does not consist in literal fire proceeding from their mouths or in cosmic calamities brought down on the heads of their foes, but in what these figures represent, of the preaching of the Word and the testimony of Christ. Literalism is a dry and barren thing when it tries to interpret such a Book as this, which is designed to bring spiritual blessing to all who read and keep its sayings, no matter what the age in which they live.

What chapter 11 is telling us is that the triumph of the gospel in casting down the ancient heathenism does not mean the end of idolatry but only clears the way for its re-emergence in a new, more subtle, and far more dangerous form. This new heathenism moves in to occupy the region of the church’s triumphs. Nor will it be finally overthrown until the Lord Himself returns, according to the word of Paul in 2 Thess. 2:8 – “Then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming”.

A MONSTROUS RELIGIOUS USURPATION

The fact that the heathen occupy the court of the temple and usurp authority over the Holy City itself, shows this to be no ordinary heathenism. Futurism cannot appreciate this, for it treats this temple as a rebuilt shrine at Jerusalem, and the Holy City the geographical Jerusalem itself, whereas in fact this temple, its altar and court, and its Holy City have no factual existence but are representations of

spiritual conditions; not visible to mortal eye. The only way the heathen can occupy the court of this temple and tread down this Holy City is to assume falsely the name and the privileges represented thereby and suppress the people who in fact have the exclusive claim to those privileges and to that glorious name. Thus it is clear that we have in view a monstrous religious usurpation, crushing and all but extinguishing the true people of God represented in these figures. The true church appears to be swallowed up by the harlot church, and so would it be in fact were it not for the divine decree which bars the usurper from access to the temple itself. That temple, as we have already indicated is representative of the true church and her pure worship based upon that altar to which she only has access - the mediatorial work of the Redeemer.

This true church cannot be destroyed, though it may be cast out, repudiated, and barred. The secret of her worship and her access to the mercy seat, Satan cannot touch nor man suppress. She is at all times protected and preserved by that intercession of the Saviour which is so marvelously memorialized in John 17 - the prayer which Christ uttered in the presence of His disciples as they prepared to leave the Upper Room on that dark betrayal night:

“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” John 17:14-15

The secret life of the church cannot be touched either by the enmity of the world or by the power of the Evil One. The body they may persecute and slay, but the soul they cannot touch - it is the divine preserve. The measuring reed of the sanctuary has spanned the life of all true believers and they will be preserved unto everlasting life.

ANTICHRIST NOT A PERSON

The agelong enemy of the church is antichrist. Antichrist is of a person, but the personification of that gigantic masquerade which claims the title deeds of the church only to befoul and destroy them, to persecute the true heirs of salvation and to maintain in the Christian name, the same system of heathenism which differs in no essential way from the ancient idolatry, except in the subtle substitution of heathen errors under Christian names. Even modern theological rationalism conforms to the same antichristian principle, for it is skilled in the use of Christian

terms wrested from their originals, with fresh and subtle meaning, to perpetuate the outer forms of worship, while diverting that worship from the true God and giving it to the creature. We have therefore a perpetuation of the pharisee and the sadducee, who have been with us since the foundation of the world. They represent the religious extremes of ritualism and rationalism, or the religion of human merit on the one hand, and that of the human mind on the other. These extremes have nothing in common except their abhorrence of spiritual religion, and their aim is always to destroy faith and abolish Christ. Satan is equally at home in either camp.

The theologian who, like the sadducee, puts his own intellect in place of the Word of God, may have nothing but contempt for his fellow, the pharisee, whose reliance is upon the outward offices of religion without anything of the soul, but both equally serve the same master and are hastening to the same end. The Master-spirit behind it all is always that old Serpent, the devil and Satan, who is the true spirit of antichrist within and behind all the religious varieties which war against one another, but which like Herod and Pontius Pilate, are ever ready to make friends over the rejection of Christ. The spirit of antichrist which John declares (1 John 4:3) is identified by denial that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, is always marked by its treatment of the doctrine of the Father and the Son (see 1 John 2:22). It may be said that the present day doctrine of antichrist is not to be so identified, but this is a superficial judgment. The denial of Christ changes form with change of circumstances, adapting itself ever to the necessities of the moment, but its root is ever the same - to take from Christ His exclusive office as the righteousness of His people, either by denying His actual existence as the Son of the Father, or by confusing His unique mediatorship with lesser sanctities and driving the soul back upon the righteousness of its own religious works. Either way, the Son is denied, and to deny the Son is to deny the Father also. This is that antichrist which the subtlety of Satan imposes upon the 'Christian' world.

Perhaps in our day we are facing a new development of the antichristian error. Satan appears to be rapidly combining religious thought, in its limitless varieties, heathen and otherwise, into a world consensus of religion where the conflicting particles acquire a mutual respect for each other, a sort of recognition that all are really worshipping at the same altar, while the growing atheism of all classes in the old Christian regions of the world quarrels only with that religious conviction which manifests itself in the evangelical faith in Christ. It is this which Satan - who naturally a religious devil - cannot tolerate. It is the one religion which he himself has not invented, and it is the one faith which destroys him and his kingdom.

We are likely to see more and more evidence of this in the coming days. Spiritual

religion is the one thing which Satan fears and the world hates. But the days of Satan's kingdom are numbered. The 42 months rush on to their inevitable conclusion.

THE TWO WITNESSES

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

These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.”

A needless mystery has been created around the identity the TWO WITNESSES. There should be no difficulty, for John has solved the problem for us by telling us who they are: they are “the two olive trees and the two candlesticks standing before the God the earth”. Such a description can hardly lead to the supposition that the two witnesses are two individual men, when candlesticks and olive trees in the Bible imagery have always been consecrated as symbols of the church.

John takes the figure directly from the prophecy of Zechariah one of the two post-exilic prophets (the other is Haggai) whose mission it was to stir up the returned exiles from Babylon to build the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, then lying in ruins.

Thus in Zechariah 4:

“And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep,

And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof:

And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.”

* * *

“Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof?

And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?

And he answered and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”

John’s quotation of Zechariah is a general one, principally referring to the last verse of the Zechariah passage, but incorporating also the reference to the candlestick. The independent nature of John’s vision is shown in the fact that whereas Zechariah sees but one candlestick, John sees two. This is because since Zechariah’s time an important change has taken place in the status of the church. The kingdom of God has come, and the Old Testament church has now been fulfilled in the New Testament church. The doubling of the number indicates the combined testimony of Old and New. Thus in the Song of Solomon,

“What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies”.
Song 6:13.

THE SEVEN-BRANCHED CANDLESTICKS

Candlesticks are more properly to be understood as ‘lamp-holders’ the fuel of which is the pure oil olive. The candlestick is never used in Scripture as a symbol of an individual person, unless it be of Christ Him self. It is consecrated by Bible usage to represent the church as a whole, as she is imbued and replenished with the Spirit of Christ. In Revelation chapter 1, verse 20, we are told “The seven candlesticks are the seven churches”. It is recognised by all that we have here a representation of the Sevenfold Church. In the Hebrew temple the candlestick was seven-branched, denoting the same truth. In John’s vision in chapter 1 Christ moves in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, holding in His right hand the seven stars which represent the rulership of those churches. It is an impossible interpretation which has led many in our day to see the two candlesticks of Rev. 11 as individual men. It is contrary to the whole weight of Bible symbolism, and there can be no excuse for perpetuating it.

In Zechariah the figures of candlestick and olive tree are used to describe Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the prince as these two men represent not themselves but the two principal offices of Christ - priest and king of His people. In the exercise of these offices Christ is never to be separated from His church, as the head cannot be separated from the body. The Two Witnesses are therefore the church through whom the Spirit of Christ testifies to the world, and in whom the worship of God is sustained and perpetuated.

ZECHARIAH'S PROPHETIC TITLE

Zechariah stands between the two covenants of OT and NT. The outward apparatus of the old was already in ruins in his day, and its shadowy reconstruction or re-inauguration was only a veil behind which the reality of the New Testament temple - the body of Christ - shone in all its new covenant glory. The purpose of Zechariah was to prepare the minds of the people in those far off OT times for the revelation of the NT reality. It is sad and perplexing that so many of our prophetic venturers in these days fail to grasp this simple principle and hence continue to forecast the reconstruction of a temple at Jerusalem whereas it is the inner and spiritual reality of what the ancient temple stood for, which is the subject of the kindred prophecies of Ezekiel, Zechariah and Haggai.

Zechariah, whose name means, JEHOVAH REMEMBERS, introduces himself as "the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo". Now Zechariah was the son of Iddo, and there was no such person as Berechiah intervening. The intrusion is entirely of a prophetic nature of very great depth. There was, or had been, another Zechariah who lived before the Captivity and was (like our Zechariah) a priest of the temple.

The father of this earlier Zechariah was Jehoiada, that great high priest who restored the true monarchy in Judah and whose reforms and spiritual renewals earned for him the title "Berechiah" or "Jeberechiah", "the blessed one of the Lord" - as a title of honour. His son Zechariah withstood the avalanche of idolatry renewed after the death of Jehoiada (2 Chron. 24:15-22), and by the command of the king was stoned to death twixt temple and altar. So high was this crime and so terrible its consequences that it was never expunged from the history of Israel. Such innocent blood shed in the precincts of the holy temple became the symbol of the nation's perpetual and inextinguishable guilt, and was recalled by the Saviour when about to be betrayed and crucified:

“That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.”
Matt. 23:35-36

Zechariah’s description of himself therefore, as being the son of Berechiah is prophetic and not actual. It warned Israel of wrath to come, the rejection of the nation, and in its place the rise of a new order where instead of a temple would be a living church over which One should reign who would unite in Himself the offices of Priest and King.

The same inward significance attaches to the names of the two principal actors in Zechariah’s vision, Joshua the son of Josedech the high priest, and Zerubbabel the prince of David’s line and the progenitor of Christ (Matthew 1:12-13). And these are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks which stand before the God of all the earth.

In chapter 3, Zechariah perceives in Joshua the son of Josedech, Him who is the “high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 6:20). In chapter 4, under the figure of Zerubbabel we have the King Eternal who must subdue all power and dominion in this world and build the heavenly temple (verses 6-10).

In Joshua’s full name we find Christ revealed. Joshua is the son of Josedech (6:11). His own name Joshua is the Hebrew from which is derived the Greek form, JESUS. Josedech (“Jehovah-Tzedek”) is a contracted form of Jehovah Tzidkenu, “the Lord our righteousness” (see Jeremiah 23:6 and margin). We have therefore in this prophecy, figured in the person of the high priest who then reigned, none other than the mystic Joshua, Jesus the Son of God, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, and we are now ready to understand spiritually the hidden meaning of Zechariah’s vision.

Joshua stands before the angel of the Lord, and Satan also appears standing at Joshua’s right hand to resist him. The Angel (none other than Michael, Christ’s angelic name as the Head of the armies of heaven - see Jude 9) rebukes the Evil One with the words, “The Lord rebuke thee O Satan, even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem....:

THE CHANGE OF PRIESTHOOD

The prophet now notes that Joshua is clothed in ‘filthy garments’ and at the command of the angel the filthy garments are taken away and Joshua is clothed with new garments and crowned with a ‘fair mitre’.

Satan is present to resist the high priest in his ministrations, and Satan takes up legal ground, ‘the body of Moses’ (see Jude 9). The body of Moses here does not mean the actual body of the great Lawgiver, but that which his dead body represents, the **INABILITY OF THE LAW TO CONFER RIGHTEOUSNESS ON SINFUL MAN**. Satan stands on legal ground always as he disputes the right of the sinner to salvation. Joshua’s filthy garments represent the inability of the Mosaic dispensation to confer righteousness. There is required a change of priesthood, and this came about in Christ, ‘a high priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek’. (Hebrews 6:20 – 7:19) The change of Joshua’s garments therefore shows the passing of the old dispensation (the Law) and the coming in of the New Testament order (the Gospel). Christ becomes our high priest for ever, by the perfect atonement He made by His own sacred blood. By His own righteousness He justifies His people and places them beyond the power of Satan to condemn.

There is nothing which illustrates more vividly the incapacity of many of our expositors today, than their treatment of this glorious passage. They see in it only an allegory of the conversion of the sinner, whereas the prophecy is of the change of priesthood and the inauguration of Christ as the Mediator of His Church. From such misconceptions arises the inability of so many to expound the mysteries of the Old Testament, especially the **MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH**.

In the remainder of chapter 3 (verses 8-10) we see Joshua united with Zerubbabel, the **BRANCH**, or offspring of David’s line, in the laying of the foundation stone of the new temple. That we are in the spiritual realm is clear from the fact that the stone has seven ‘eyes’ (which as we well know is emblematic of the Spirit of God - see chapter 4, verse 10).

Joshua is seen sitting among his ‘fellows’ (v.8) who are in fact the brethren of Christ, the representatives of His church, the redeemed.

“I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day” declares the Lord of hosts (verse 9). That ‘one day’ is the day of the crucifixion of the Saviour - that awful day when our great high priest offered up His great life as a ransom for many.

The vision closes with a scene of God's redeemed people dwelling in the land of peace – "In that day shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree". And we would confidently challenge any to say that that land is the one bounded by the Jordan river. This scene of peace and security does not exist on earth, except in the soul of those for whom Christ has made peace by the blood of His cross.

THE TWO OLIVE TREES (chapter 4)

The vision is progressive. Zechariah describes in the first three chapters the deliverance and preservation of God's people, and the destruction of their foes. We have seen the appointment and the institution of the true Joshua as our everlasting High Priest, and now we move (chapter 4), into the sanctuary itself - but NOT the earthly sanctuary at Jerusalem with its golden candlestick and its daily replenishment of sanctuary oil. Here is a living thing to defy all literal interpretations. Here is what the Temple at Jerusalem only poorly represented - the intercession of Christ for His people. The mystic candlestick which the prophet sees, is fed by direct supply from two olive trees growing beside it - an impossible figure to be literalised. Here we are in the region of the mind and the spirit. Golden pipes communicate between the two trees and the lampholders. There is no intermediate process of gathering the olive berries and distilling the oil. The fuel of divine worship flows direct from tree to flame. No earthly temple this, either in Zechariah or John. Zechariah is an evangelical prophet. He holds forth the mystery of the gospel church and no true exegete would say otherwise.

THE PUISSANCE of ZERUBBABEL

Zerubbabel is first named in verse 6 of chapter 4. The problem to be solved is the opposition of the world-power to the building of the house of God. The helplessness of the Lord's people on the human side creates that problem, but the problem is solved not by human means but divine. "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel saying, Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." This is not (as often used) a prescription for a 20th century 'revival'. It is the proclamation of a divine decree that the heavenly Zerubbabel (Christ) must surely succeed in His task of building the temple of God, because the weapons of his warfare "are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds". (2 Cor. 10:4) The kingdom of God is set up 'not by might nor power, but by the Spirit of God' and whatever may be the implications of that in the daily experience of the church, we must always attend to the primary meaning of any scriptural statement. In this case assurance is given to the heavenly Zerubbabel in

the terms of a divine decree, that ‘the great mountain’ of the power of this world shall be reduced to the level of a plain, and the headstone of the temple will infallibly elevated in triumph to its place, with cries of “Grace, grace to it!” (Zechariah 4:6-10).

Those who read this passage with care cannot fail to see that we have to do here only with Christ in the destruction of His foes and the execution of His commission to build the spiritual house of God, the church. Things are said here which could never apply to any earthly prince, but are entirely in the realm of the Spirit.

THE SYMBOL of the OLIVE

The olive as a symbol of the church abounds in Holy Scripture. David sees himself as “a green olive tree in the house of God”. (Ps. 52:8) Isaiah sees the mournful ruin of Israel and the preservation of but a few elect souls therein as ‘the shaking of an olive tree’. (Isa. 17:6) Jeremiah likewise sees the ruin of the OT church (Israel) as a green olive tree, broken by fire and storm. (Jer. 11:16) Restored Israel is seen by Hosea as dressed in the beauty of the olive tree. (Hosea 14:6) Haggai, contemporary with Zechariah, sees the church in prospect as the olive tree awaiting the season of coming fruitfulness. (Haggai 2:19) In the New Testament Paul sees the continuity of the church in OT and NT in the form an olive tree from which the Jewish branches have been broken or by a divine judgment, and the gentiles grafted in to the old stem in their place, along with the regrafting of those Jewish branches represented by the true believers out of the old nation - a process which has never ceased nor will cease till the Lord’s return in glory and power. The dispossession of Israel because of unbelief opens the way for the ingrafting of the gentile to the holy stock, and the restoration of those of the old nation who believe in the Saviour whom they once despised. “And so all Israel” (Jew and gentile) “shall be saved” an ongoing process, not a single event at the end of the age. (Romans 11)

CHRIST IN THE OLIVE GARDEN

It is no doubt of high significance that on the same night of His betrayal, the Lord Christ entered into a garden on the Mount of Olives, called Gethsemane- a name which means, “The Oil Press”. There His precious soul was pressed and afflicted, under the burden of sins not His own; there was registered and affirmed His final consecration of Himself to the Father’s will, in the very place where the precious sanctuary oil which fed the holy flame in yonder temple on Zion’s Hill, was

prepared. Surely this was prophetic of the result of all His terrible suffering and sublime dedication of Himself; the oil of true worship would never fail on this earth, but would burn in the hearts of His people perpetually, a purer, grander flame than yonder poor flickering light in the dimness of the old temple. That light would soon be extinguished for ever for want of oil, and want of stone and lime to cover and protect it. But the light of this candlestick, kindled by suffering, nourished by pain, fed by the constant flow of the Spirit of God who is the Spirit of love and mercy, would never go out. “Ye are the light of the world”, He said to His disciples - who was Himself the only true light of the world. Their light would be Himself dwelling within them in the power of the Sevenfold Spirit of God. (See Matthew 5:19 and John 8:12)

Zechariah and John combine to describe God in this text as “the Lord - or God - of the earth”. This is unusual. We are carried back to Isaiah’s vision and the cry of the seraphim, “the whole earth is full of His glory”. (Isaiah 6:3) The meaning is that the Lord is the sovereign, undisputed God of all creation, to whom all things belong and from whom all proceeds. The church must suffer at the hands of a cruel world, but He who is the God of the earth knows how to preserve His people and destroy their foes.

THE DOUBLE ANOINTING

The marginal rendering of Zechariah’s two ‘anointed ones’ is ‘sons of oil’. Only priests and kings were anointed according to the OT ritual, and it is of high significance that Christ was the first - and the last - in Israel, to be anointed to both offices. As the priesthood was to Levi and the kingship to Judah, the two offices could never meet in one person. The anointing of Christ to both offices indicated therefore an entire change in the administration. The setting up of a new order to replace the old, is clearly shown and required, and we have therefore yet another proof of the finality of the office Christ assumed, and the unchangeable nature of that Kingdom over which He now reigns. It is repugnant to every spiritual sense that Christ can ever descend to the administration of an earthly kingdom (as non-spiritual millennialism teaches). The throne He now occupies in heaven is the only throne on which He will ever sit -and it will last for ever.

This double anointing of Christ was foreshadowed in the remarkable appearance to Abraham of MELCHIZEDEK, king of Salem, to whom even the great Patriarch of the church paid reverence and tribute. Melchizedek was no king or priest of this earth, but a theophany of Christ (a divine appearance in OT times) as his remarkable titles, King of Righteousness (Tzedek) and King of Peace (Salem)

clearly show. (See Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7)

THE TWO WITNESSES ARE THE CHURCH

To summarise therefore, the Two Witnesses are ‘the two olive trees standing before the Lord of the whole earth’ and we have now seen that they cannot be two individuals (such as a resurrected Moses and a translated Elijah), but can only represent the entire church of God in her age-long testimony in this world, sustained from within by the Spirit of God ever flowing from Christ. It is a grave rupture of Bible type and analogy to teach (as Dr. Scofield teaches – “Prophecy Made Plain” page 129) that the two witnesses are “Moses and Elijah, probably” - or any other two individuals. No-one who has seriously studied the chapters in Zechariah to which John directs us, could possibly avoid the conclusion that the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11 represent the church, bearing witness to Christ in the world, in union with her Lord. As husband and bride are ‘one flesh’, and as the Head is to the Body, one mystical unity, so Christ and His people are one, by the indwelling Spirit. The same Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, was sent into the world to witness to Christ, and that witness was to be borne by the church, according to that Word of Christ spoken to the apostles in the Upper Room:

“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify (bear witness) of me. And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.”
John 15:26-27

“THE SPIRIT and the BRIDE SAY, COME” Revelation 22:17

Need we any further proof as to the identity of the Two Witnesses?

THE CHURCH INDESTRUCTIBLE

The church is indestructible. The cause of Christ which she represents, must prevail. This is the message of these central chapters of the Apocalypse - indeed of the entire Book. But in particular these central chapters commencing with chapter 11 to which we are now addressing ourselves, all spring from the same fundamental vision of the Mighty Angel and the Little Book of chapter 10.

The reason why the church is indestructible is because the divine seed is in her. Like John, her brother and companion in tribulation and in testimony, she eats the

Little Book held out to her by the hand of her Lord. That Book is His Word, particularly as it relates to her testimony in the world. The Bible is a small thing but like the atom in the natural world of creation, it contains within itself the almightiness of God. They who have received and digested the living Word of God henceforth live by it. They have within themselves the principle of everlasting life, which by its nature as the veritable Word of God must prevail against all that the foe can do to destroy it and them.

The figure of 'eating' is important in the Holy Scripture as the figure used for participation in all the benefits of Christ's incarnation and redemptive work. In His great discourse on the Bread of Life (John 6) the Lord declares, "He that eateth me shall live by me" (see verses 48-58). Seven times in nine verses of this chapter (John 6) the Lord, in pursuance of His declaration that He is the Bread of Life sent down from heaven, refers to the eating of Himself as the only means of life eternal. Jeremiah 15:16: "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Matthew 26:26: "Take, eat. This is my body."

Yet though the church is indestructible because her food is the bread of life sent down from heaven, she is all the more on that account exposed to the full power and malice of the Evil One, whose business it is to test the faith of God's people.

Chapter 11 of Revelation proves that the church's testimony even unto death, cannot be shaken, because that testimony is the living Word of God by which she lives and endures. Even the article of death cannot destroy her. Though Satan prevails so far as to destroy the body he has no power over the inner life of Christ in the soul of His people. Hence, in our chapter, though the Witnesses are 'overcome' at length, it is only when they have "finished their testimony."

The church is the one enduring fact of history. She outlives all empires and kingdoms. No-one can understand world history who does not first understand Church History, for it is the existence of the holy seed in the world which makes history and gives to it its meaning.

As we now proceed to the detailed exposition of the remainder of our chapter we remind ourselves that we are in spiritual territory and must carefully avoid materialistic interpretations. If (as we think has been proved) the Two Witnesses are not individual men but the prophetic olive trees and lampstand of Zechariah (therefore the priestly and kingly offices of Christ as embodied in the testimony of His church), we must consistently explain the remainder of the prophecy in

spiritual terms. If the picture is of the church overcoming the world and its god (for Satan has from the beginning set himself up as the 'god of this world' to blind the minds of those who believe not - 2 Cor. 4:4) - then we must expect that the weapons of the church's warfare are not carnal (that is, material, tangible, as this world's wealth and power) but 'mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds'. (2 Cor. 10:4) The witnesses of the Lord overcome the dragon 'by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony' - Rev. 12:11. There is no room therefore in this prophecy for such cosmic prodigies as drought, bloody waters, plagues, and mouth-proceeding fire. These are figures to be spiritually understood.

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

We have already referred briefly to the word in Jeremiah 5:14: "I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood and it shall devour them." Need we any further proof that a spiritual interpretation is intended for this passage in Revelation, so obviously quoted from Jeremiah? Yet 20th century writers, their minds affected not by consistent scriptural investigation but by the dominating enthusiasm for turning the Book of Revelation into a repository of horrors and terrors unimaginable - have ignored the principle of interpreting scripture by scripture and passed over rich mines of Biblical knowledge and understanding.

The word in Jeremiah quoted above is joined by a formidable array of other quotations to the like purpose, as our friends would readily see if they would only make use of their CRUDEN, and their AV marginal reference system, contained in every reference edition since 1611.

Thus we find in Jeremiah 1:9-10:

"Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."

See also Jer. 25:15-17; 18:7-10; Hosea 6:5

Cruden (so much neglected) tells us in the Concordance, "Fire is a symbol of the holiness and justice of God: The Lord thy God is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24). Daniel says that a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him (indicating the speedy executing of his judgments for the terror of the wicked and the comfort of the godly). The Saviour is compared to fire: He is like a refiner's fire (Mal. 3:2). The Holy Ghost is likewise represented by the same figure of fire. The angelic creation is represented as 'a flame of fire' - Heb. 1:7".

See also Jer. 4:4; 20:9; Lam. 2:3; Dan. 7:9; Joel 2:30; Amos 5:6; Zech. 12:6.