The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 11**

* **11:3-14– The Two Witnesses**
  + **Verse 3**­­– It seems that God or The Lamb is speaking since authority is being dispersed to the “two witnesses.” These two witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days (same as 42 months or time, times and half a time) in sackcloth. The question is who are these two witnesses?
  + The two witnesses mentioned here are best understood as the church who must witness on behalf of Christ. The idea of witnessing is related to Christ’s testimony that YHWH is God and He reconciles man to Him through His blood by which we can be forgiven of our sins and have the hope of eternal life (cf. Jn. 1:18; 3:32-33; 18:37; 1 Tim. 6:13).
  + Christ is presented repeatedly in Revelation as the faithful witness (1:2, 5; 3:14) and the saints must, like their Lord, testify concerning God and the gospel (Jn. 15:27; Acts 1:8; Rev. 1:9; 2:13; 6:9; 12:11). This is further solidified in the statement that they are to prophesy. As long as human history continues, saints are called to preach and teach the word of God (cf. Joel 2:28-32).
  + If the two witnesses represent the church, why are they said to be two and not one? The use of the number two is drawn largely from the OT pattern of testimony that was given and accepted. The OT law required at least two witnesses to make judgment on an offense committed (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15).
  + This idea is carried over into the NT as well (Matt. 18:16; Lk. 10:1-24; Jn. 5:31; 8:17; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19). The proper understanding is that the testimony of two witnesses (or more) is to be taken as valid and binding.
  + That they wear sackcloth is indicative of the prophetic ministry of calling the evil to repentance. It is also associated with a time of mourning and death (cf. Job 16:15; Isa. 22:12; Jer. 4:8). These witnesses must preach repentance like Christ but they may also suffer for their faith (11:7-8).
  + **Verse 4**– The two witnesses (the church) are further identified as the two olive trees and the two lampstands. This imagery is taken from Zech. 4. That lampstands is mentioned here should not come as a surprise since it has been mentioned previously (1:12-13, 20).
  + The lampstand connotation is derived from the tabernacle and temple setup in the OT which gave light so that the ministry of the priests could be carried out. It was also symbolical of the presence of God (Num. 8:1-4; Ex. 25:31-40). The idea is further illustrated by Jesus’ words on the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5:14-16).
  + The two olive trees in Zechariah 4 are said to supply the lampstand with oil. These olive trees are identified in Zech. 4:14 as Zerubbabel (governor from royal line) and Joshua (high priest). The work of building the temple was halted by God’s enemies but through Joshua and Zerubbabel, they would overcome and complete the temple (Zech. 4:6-9).
  + It is God Himself who ensures that His plan is executed and completed via Joshua and Zerubbabel. In John’s use of the text, God will ensure that His people (the church) execute their role by supplying them with strength (oil; Eph. 6:10) to persevere in their witness (lampstand).
  + That the olive trees and lampstands represent the church and God’s presence among His people is indicated by the fact that in Zechariah 4, the image of a king and priest is present. In Revelation the church is described as a kingdom and priests to God forever thus amplifying Zechariah’s vision (cf. Ex. 19:6; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).
  + The entire scene is further amplified by the fact that they stand before the Lord of all the earth. It is as if the scene is in a courtroom where the saints are called to give testimony and God is the judge who keeps a careful eye on them (cf. Zech. 4:10).
  + This illustration is powerful since it does two things: (1) God keeps a watchful eye on His people and grants them the strength and the ability to persevere and (2) God is not far from His people indicating that nothing can separate them from Him except themselves.
  + **Verse 5**– The emphasis of God’s spiritual protection for His people is further touched upon here with the idea that if anyone wants to harm His people, fire will devour them. This picture is likely intended to invoke the ministry of Elijah and in particular the scenes of 2 Kings 1.
  + The point is that God will ensure His people are able to testify and proclaim the word of God. The enemies who are opposed to this will face the wrath of God which is often described in the bible in terms of fire (Matt. 3:11-12; Mk. 9:43-49).
  + **Verse 6**– The two witnesses (the church) is said to have the power to make the rain stop producing famine and turning the waters into blood creating the same idea. They are also able to strike the earth with plagues. This verse is intended to remind us of two major characters in the OT: Elijah and Moses.
  + Both men dealt with kings and people who were idolaters and hardened their hearts such that they would not repent. Both men were the embodiment of the word “witnesses” as they lived lives attesting to the fact that YHWH is God and He is to be feared.
  + When their audiences failed to listen and desired their harm, God brought judgment upon them in the form of drought and famine. Elijah’s ministry recalls the 3.5 years of drought (1 Kings 17; Lk. 4:25; Jam. 5:17) and Moses’ ministry recalls the plagues in Egypt including the first one of turning the waters of the Nile into blood (Ex. 7:17-25; Psa. 105:29).
  + The point is that the saints like Moses and Elijah are carrying out the will of God and in the process they will call judgment down on their enemies because of their evil and unrepentant hearts. The “power” they have is probably that of their prayers (6:9-11; 8:3-5).
  + It is good to notice that the judgments described in vv. 5-6 reiterate the trumpet judgments of chapter 8. God is the force behind His people during the good and bad times. He will ensure their mission is executed and then He will execute His judgment on the hard-hearted unbelievers.
  + **Verse 7**– The saints will be allowed to finish their testimony and the beast will then make war with them and overcome them (cf. Dan. 7:3, 21: Rev. 13:7). This is a physical overcoming over the saints since the beast cannot harm their souls because God has measured it and sealed it (7:1-8; 11:1).
  + The beast here in Revelation is talked about more in chapter 13 and it is clearly associated with the fourth kingdom Daniel sees in the vision of the four beasts in Dan. 7. The purpose of this beast/fourth kingdom is to persecute the saints. God allows this to take place as it works in conjunction with His sovereign timetable.
  + **Verse 8**– As the beast makes war and overcome, it will seem as if though evil has won and the enemy has gained the upper hand via the death of the saints. Their bodies are said to lie in the *“great city.”* In Revelation this is parallel to Babylon the great (14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18-19, 21). This would not fit with literal Jerusalem.
  + Babylon was a symbol for nations in which God’s people were merely sojourners or exiles having to live under ungodly regimes and principles. This meant that God’s people were often tempted to compromise their faith but they were to remain faithful and steadfast despite these advances by their enemies (cf. Dan. 1-6).
  + Further emphasis that the phrase “great city” is used symbolically as opposed to literally is given by the statement it is spiritually called *“Sodom and Egypt.”* In the OT, Sodom stood as an example of wicked, evil and unrepentant people who were destroyed by God (cf. Gen. 18:20-33; 19:1-29; Deut. 29:22-26; Isa. 1:9-15; Jer. 23:14).
  + Egypt is a symbol of nations that oppressed the people of God (Ex. 1:13-14; 3:7; Joel 3:19). The reference to Jesus’ crucifixion shouldn’t be taken as an argument that this is in fact speaking of Jerusalem. The point is that Christ died in a very much ungodly society that oppressed God’s people and continues to do so (Acts 2:23; 7:54-60).
  + **Verse 9**– The citizens of this ungodly city (cf. 10:11) will prevent proper burial for the saints even after their deaths. God’s enemies want to ensure that the persecution done to His people is that which can do the most damage and hurt the most.
  + The lack of a proper burial was always indicative of indignity and mistreatment (cf. 1 Sam. 17:44, 46; 2 Kings 9:10; Psa. 79:1-7; Isa. 14:19-20; Jer. 8:1-2; 9:22; 16:4-6). They observe their bodies for 3.5 days. This defeat seems great in the eyes of the enemies but it is insignificant.
  + The saints are contrasted are being able to proclaim their testimony for 3.5 years. 3.5 days is a significantly shorter period of time than 3.5 years and thus the conclusion is that the saints are far more victorious than their enemies ever will be.
  + The fact that 3.5 days is used also indicates that they are certainly dead. This extended time is enough for their flesh to undergo the stages of decomposition which in the eyes of the enemy is a great victory. However, 3.5 also indicates that they will not remain that way forever because 3.5 is a broken 7.
  + **Verse 10**– The enemies who are often referred to as the *“earth-dwellers”* (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2) are rejoicing because of the apparent defeat of the saints. They rejoice to the extent that it becomes a national celebration with the inclusion of gift giving.
  + Their celebration is prompted because they are no longer being tormented. This torment is a spiritual one which affects the guilty conscience of those who stand in opposition to God and commit evil acts. This was the same attitude professed by the Israelites in the OT when they killed or persecuted God’s prophets.
  + **Verse 11**– The celebration of these earth-dwellers is cut short as God’s raises His saints from the dead. The wording and imagery here alludes to Ezek. 37:1-14 in which those who are dead (exiled) will come back to life (return after captivity) showing the power God has to give life and renew the spirit (cf. 1:17-18).
  + God’s people will not remain dead forever since He has control over life and death. More precisely, the resurrected Christ has this power and authority and just as He arose from the dead, so will His faithful followers rise to glory (Jn. 11:25-26).
  + The verse states that great fear fell upon those who were watching. This phrase is used in the OT of those people or nation who hate God and His people and have persecuted them with the idea that they will win (Ex. 15:16; Psa. 105:38).
  + **Verse 12**– The resurrection imagery continues with a further description of what the saints undergo. A voice (presumably God or Jesus) calls them home and they ascend in a cloud. The cloud is a symbol of divine approval and God’s presence (cf. Psa. 104:3; 105:39; Acts 1:9; Rev. 1:8; 10:1).
  + The saints, like Elijah, after finishing their ministry, will go to where they truly belong (2 Kings 2:1-12; 1 Thess. 4:17). This is a powerful demonstration of God fulfilling His promises to His people and the reality that Christians must not make their home on earth but rather in Heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20-21).
  + **Verse 13**– The timeline here seems to be at the end when Christ returns and the final judgment takes place. The wording here is drawn from Ezek. 38-39 and Zech. 14 which pertain to the final judgment. That an earthquake occurs here and also in 6:12; 8:5 and 16:18 make it likely that this is referring to the final judgment.
  + A tenth of the city is said to fall. This could be historically true for Rome but it’s also true for all the nations when Christ returns. A tenth is only the beginning of the consummation in which 7,000 is said to fall. This is probably a symbolic number indicating God will bring everyone into judgment for what they have done.
  + The verse states that all those who didn’t fall as yet will observe the terror in fear and they will be forced to give God the glory He is due (Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Pet. 2:12; Rev. 5:13). All men will one day bow down to God whether they do it of their own free-will or because of the overwhelming fear on the last day.
  + **Verse 14**– The verse here serves as a reminder of where we are in the series of seven trumpets. The interlude has concluded and this verse picks up on the heels of 9:21 where the second woe is finished.
  + The verse announces that the third woe is now coming. The interlude has served its purpose in terms of reiterating that Christ will take care of His people and He will judge the idolaters and earth-dwellers in due time. In the meantime, we must look to Him and stand fast and remain faithful!