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A0605 – January 29,2006 – Rev 11:3-14 – The Two Witnesses

As I said last week, we are working with the parenthesis between the 6th and 7th Trumpets. There are parentheses between the 6th and 7th Seal, 6th and 7th Trumpet, and 6th and 7th Bowl.

Seals	Trumpets	Bowls
1-6 () 7	1-6 () 7	1-6 () 7
Rev 7:1-17	Rev 10-11:15	Rev 16:13-16

The parenthesis we are now in describes three events.

1. The Little Scroll (10:1-11) Heaven
2. The Measuring of the Tribulation Temple (11:1-2) Earth
3. The Two Witnesses (11:3-14) Earth

To review “The Measuring of the Tribulation Temple” in Rev 11:1-2 John is given a rod to measure the inner court but he is told to exclude measuring the outer court. The Temple being measured is the Tribulation Temple which will be built and operational by the mid-point of the Tribulation. Those permitted within the inner court are the Jews and the significance of the measuring of this court is that they fall under God’s purview of favor during the 2nd half of the Tribulation until the times of the Gentiles is fulfilled. As such he will purge Israel and bring them to faith in Jesus as their Messiah. The outer court is the court of the Gentiles and since it is not measured the Gentiles do not fall under God’s favor. Instead, they fall under His wrath and will be punished for their mistreatment of Israel. Today we continue this line of thought with the Two Witnesses who will witness and prophesy to Israel for the 2nd half of the Tribulation.

Revelation 11:3-14 "And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ And

if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. ⁶ These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. ⁷ When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. ⁸ And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. ⁹ Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations *will* look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. ¹⁰ And those who dwell on the earth *will* rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. ¹² And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. ¹³ And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. ¹⁴ The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

The Two Witnesses (11:3-14)

Who are they, what is their function, and when do they carry it out?

Revelation 11:3 And I will give My two witnesses and they will prophesy a thousand two hundred and sixty days clothed (perfect middle participle) in sackcloth.

The first word ***And*** signifies a connection with verses 1-2 as does the fact that verse 3 mentions ***1,260 days***. Recall that verse 2 mentioned ***forty-two months*** which is the equivalent of ***1,260 days***. For this period of time which is 2nd half of the Tribulation God will graciously give ***two witnesses***. Who are the ***two witnesses***?

1. *The Church*. Some say they symbolize the Church but there is no hint of symbolism in this passage. Further, the Church is already gone to heaven to be with Christ before the Tribulation begins.
2. *Enoch and Elijah*. The ancient church consistently identified these two witnesses as Enoch and Elijah. The principal reason for choosing Enoch and Elijah is that

they were caught up to heaven without dying and the Scriptures say, “It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes the judgment” (Heb 9:27). Thus, they must return to earth to die. There was also an early Jewish tradition that Enoch and Elijah would join and minister together (1 Enoch 90:31; 4 Ezra 6:26). However, tradition does not carry scriptural authority. Further, it is not true that all must die. Those alive at the pre-trib Rapture will not die but will all be changed and caught up to the Lord. Further, those who live through the Tribulation will enter the Millennium without ever having to die. As a result, the reasons behind claiming the two witnesses are Elijah and Enoch are not conclusive.

3. *Moses and Elijah.* Many claim that the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah. The principal argument for this identification is that the miraculous signs performed by the two witnesses are similar to the miraculous signs performed by Moses and Elijah. Elijah called down fire from heaven and shut off rain from heaven. Moses turned water into blood and struck the earth with plagues. However, it was not Moses and Elijah who performed these miracles but God through Moses and Elijah. There is no reason God could not perform such miracles through two other witnesses of His choosing. Even so, there is additional Scriptural data indicating that Moses and Elijah may be the two witnesses. At the Mount of Transfiguration, where a preview was given of the coming Kingdom, Moses and Elijah stood beside Christ. But it must be remembered that this was a preview of the kingdom and not of two witnesses in the Tribulation. The objection that Moses already died once and can't die again because it is appointed for a man once to die is easily overcome by the fact that Lazarus died twice. Lastly, Mal 4:5 predicts the return of Elijah before the “great and terrible day of the Lord”. This, to me, is the best evidence that Elijah may be one of the two witnesses. “the great and terrible day of the Lord” is the day of the Second Coming (See Revelation: Lesson 28 “The Day of the Lord”). Elijah *must* play a role in earthly events before this day. Thus, Elijah's *may* be one of the two witnesses. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that Elijah may be a third personality other than the two witnesses, whose role it will be to prepare the way for the King's Second Coming as John the Baptist prepared the way for the King's First Coming.
4. *Two New Individuals.* There is always the possibility that God would use two new individuals to accomplish such miracles. Such is not beyond the power or wisdom of God.

Most likely either the two witnesses are two new individuals or one of them is Elijah and the other is a new individual.

Whoever they are, it is not as important as their two-fold function. First, they are *witnesses*. So, they will preach the eternal gospel. The gospel is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He died for our sins and was raised from the dead conquering sin and death. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ

alone. Faith is the sole human condition for salvation. Their second function is to **prophecy**. They will foretell the future. During the 2nd half of the Tribulation these **two witnesses**, one of which may be Elijah, will combat against the deceptions of the Antichrist and the False Prophet. No doubt they will be a thorn in the side of the Antichrist.

The manner in which they will **witness and prophecy**...is **clothed in sackcloth**. They are clothed in **sackcloth** because they are in mourning for the nation of Israel and because of judgment and evil all around. Jesus the Messiah came and presented Himself and Israel rejected Him. As Jerusalem is tread under foot by the Gentiles (11:2) their lamentation over the nation will no doubt be a vivid witness for the nation to turn to Jesus as Messiah.

Revelation 11:4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing (perfect active participle) before the Lord of the earth.

Verse 4 gives a brief description of the **two witnesses**. They **are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the Lord of the earth**. The **two olive trees** are mentioned in the OT.

Zechariah 4:12-14 "What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden *oil* from themselves?" ¹³ So he answered me, saying, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." ¹⁴ Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth."

Olive trees are reminiscent of peace, prosperity, and wealth. The two witnesses mission will be one of preparing Israel for peace, prosperity, and wealth in the Kingdom. They are also **lampstands**. **lampstands** would be filled with oil and lit to give off light. So, the **two witnesses** are like **two lampstands** that give forth light which will be instrumental in turning the Jews to Jesus as Messiah. The mission of the **two witnesses** is similar to that of Joshua and Zerubbabel. Both sought to restore Israel to her land. The **two witnesses** will do the same. Yet, just like Zech 4 indicates, they will not fulfill their mission in their own power but by that of Holy Spirit.

Revelation 11:5 And if anyone wishes to harm them, fire comes out from their mouths and consumes their enemies; and if anyone wishes to harm them, it is necessary in this way for him to be killed (aorist passive infinitive).

Any attempt to harm them will meet with ***fire coming out of their mouths*** and killing the perpetrator. This is similar to Elijah's calling down fire in 2 Ki 1:10-12. Even if anyone has a slight desire to harm them, they too will be killed by fire. The breathing of fire out of their mouths is needed for their protection in the city of Jerusalem which will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles during this same time period. They must kill those who seek to kill them in order to finish their ministry on earth.

Revelation 11:6 These have the authority to shut the heaven, that it may not send forth rain (breko) during the days of their prophesy (propheteia), and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every plague as often as they wish.

A second ability will be the ability to ***shut up the heavens so that it will not send forth rain***. Elijah once accomplished the shutting up of the heavens by prayer (1 Kings 17:1, 7; 18:1) and it covered the same period of 3 ½ years (Luke 4:25; Js 5:17; cf 11:3). They will do this to inflict punishment on the earth dwellers.

A third ability will be to ***turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every plague as often as they wish***. Moses had the authority to turn the Nile into blood (Exod 7:17) and these witnesses will have the same authority. They will also be able to ***strike the earth with every plague as often as they wish***. ***every plague*** probably refers to plagues similar to those God accomplished through Moses in Egypt. The ***two witnesses*** will be so in tune with God's will that they will be able to call upon these plagues ***as often as they wish***. No consultation is necessary; they are fulfilling the will of God.

Revelation 11:7 And when they finish their witness, the beast coming out of the abyss will make war with them and will conquer them and kill them.

when they finish their witness refers to their allotted time. At such point in time ***the beast coming out of the abyss will make war with them and will conquer them and kill them***. This is the first of 36 references to ***the beast***. He is further described in detail in Rev 13 and 17. He is the future end-times Antichrist. He is described as ***the beast***, a word which refers to a terrible animal with a ravenous appetite. It connotes a cunning of unreasonable violence. He is the archenemy of all who oppose him in Revelation, particularly Israel.

Who is ***the beast***? He is not Satan because Satan is symbolized by a "dragon" in Revelation 12:9; 20:2. At some point ***the beast*** is mortally wounded but the wound heals.

He also sets himself up to be worshipped. He is therefore an individual human who presents himself as Christ.

However, his true origin is *the abyss* (Rev 13:1 Beast out of the sea Rev 17:8 Beast out of the abyss). We met with demonic locusts from the *abyss* in the 5th Trumpet. Thus, the source of all his actions is demonic. Ultimately, the *two witnesses* will be such a thorn in his side that he *will make war with them and will conquer them and kill them*. He will also make war with the saints and overcome them (Dan 7:21; Rev 13:7).

Revelation 11:8 And their corpses upon the wide city the great, which is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

As an insult, he will leave their *corpses upon the street of the great city*, unburied. The city where these corpses will lie *is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt*. Note that we do not have to guess what city is being spoken of. The author tells us that *Sodom and Egypt* are to be understood spiritually. Whenever the Bible is speaking “spiritually” or “allegorically” it tells you (cf Gal 4:24) and then it interprets the spiritual language for you. Here *Sodom and Egypt* are *spiritually* Jerusalem because that is where *their Lord was crucified*. *Sodom* is a picture of blatant public immorality (Isa 3:9; Jer 23:14). *Egypt* is a picture of oppression and slavery (Gen 15:13). The one thing *Sodom and Egypt* had in common was their hatred and enmity toward God and His people. The enmity toward God and His people will reach unparalleled levels in Jerusalem during the 2nd half of the Tribulation.

Revelation 11:9 And from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations see their corpses days three and a half and their corpses are not permitted to be placed in a grave.

For 3 ½ days *their corpses* will lie in the streets of Jerusalem. Ps 79:2 indicates that unburied bodies are a disgrace. All *peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will see* this spectacle. The world will have become so numb to such violence and gruesomeness that their bodies will be put on display for the whole world to see. No doubt the Antichrist is the one who does not permit their being buried. No doubt his motive is to warn any who would oppose him. If he can kill these two fire-breathing witnesses then he can kill anyone.

Revelation 11:10 And the one's thoroughly settled (katoikeo) upon the earth rejoice over them and celebrate and will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those thoroughly settled upon the earth.

The world's response is very interesting. Your Bible says, "And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate" but the Greek says ***And the one's thoroughly settled upon the earth***. These are those earth-dwellers who have not set their hearts on things above but on things below. They assume that the earth is their possession. They are deeply rooted in the world and have attached themselves to it as their everlasting possession. Because of the hardness of their hearts these are those who can no longer believe and are in a state of judicial blindness. Little do they know that the earth they cling to is not theirs but the Lord God's who is returning to take it. We ought to recall that the Tribulation is designed to test those who are thoroughly settled on the earth (Rev 3:10).

The world's response to the death of the two witnesses is rejoicing, celebration, and gift giving. The two witnesses carried a message of life but in their death the world's rejection of that message is exposed. Such a celebration is extremely wicked. Their hatred for God and those aligned with Him is clear. Rejoicing and celebration are fit only for a victory of good over evil. This celebration shows the hardness of their depraved hearts.

Why such a celebration? Verse 10b says ***because these two prophets tormented those thoroughly settled upon the earth***. The ***two prophets*** had ***tormented*** them. They had ***tormented*** them by killing all who tried to kill them with fire but probably the way they really ***tormented*** them was by troubling their consciences by showing them their sinfulness. The gospel message seared them and when this torment was lifted a celebration ensued. The world is always trying to silence those who proclaim a convicting message, even if the message is a good one.

Revelation 11:11 And after the three and a half days spirit of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell upon those seeing them.

The celebration lasts only 3 ½ days when suddenly the ***spirit of life from God entered them*** and what was once dead decaying flesh ***stood on their feet***. Christ was the first to conquer death by receiving a resurrection body and here this resurrection follows as a demonstration of the power of God. Even the Antichrist does not have the keys of death

and life. God does. This resurrection is reminiscent of the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 37).

The result, ***great fear fell upon those seeing them***. This was totally unexpected. The ultimate weapon of mankind is murder. If the two witnesses overcame murder what else could they inflict upon them? The world will be fearful of what terrible thing could happen to them next in light of such power.

Revelation 11:12 And they heard a great voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies saw them.

The voice from ***heaven*** is the voice of God saying ***Come up here***. This is similar to God telling John to "come up here" into heaven to see this vision (Rev 4:1). It also recalls Elijah being caught up in a whirlwind. More than that, that ***they went up into heaven in the cloud*** recalls Christ's ascension in Acts 1:9-11 when He was received up into a cloud as He rose to heaven. When the church is complete she will be caught up to the Lord in the air amongst clouds (1 Thess 4:13-18).

That ***their enemies saw them*** shows that the ascent is slow enough for humans to watch them and is similar to Christ's gradual ascension. But it is not like the rapture which will happen privately and in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:51-52)

Revelation 11:13 And in that the hour came a great earthquake and the tenth of the city fell and seven thousand names of men were killed in the earthquake and the rest feared what had come and gave glory to the God of heaven.

There is no reason not to take this literally. In the very ***hour*** that the ***two witnesses*** ascend to heaven ***a great earthquake*** will come ***and a tenth of the city*** of Jerusalem will fall. The catastrophe will ***kill seven thousand names of men***. This odd phrase is built to show precision. ***seven thousand*** will be killed ***in the earthquake***, no more no less. Those who survive will ***fear what had come and give glory to the God of heaven***. This is a difficult saying. Some commentators say this is only a short lived giving glory to God and that such men hardened to the things of God could not truly be converted. These liken them to the magicians of Egypt who said, "This is the finger of God" but later rejected. But I am inclined to another opinion. Rev 14:7 commands men to fear God and give Him glory. This seems to be the response God is looking for. I think the light of such a catastrophe could pierce the darkness of their hearts and result in a true repentant faith. There are also those in Revelation who did not repent so as to give Him glory (Rev 16:9, 11). So, to give

Him glory must imply a repentant faith in Jesus. It is very likely that this event will happen near the end of the Tribulation and since the majority of Jerusalem's populace is Jewish this could very well be the future repentance of Israel that will stimulate Christ's Second Coming (Rom 11:26).

Revelation 11:14 The second woe has gone away; behold the third woe comes quickly.

This is the end of the ***second woe***. Oh, how horrible it will be. But ***behold, the third woe comes quickly***. And in it the seven bowls.

Conclusion

This morning we have seen two witnesses, perhaps Elijah and some other or perhaps two new individuals carrying out the works of God. They have the power to bring plagues upon the earth at any time they wish. Their mission is to witness of the eternal gospel and to prophesy of things to come. The mission will be carried out in the city of Jerusalem while it is being trampled by the Gentiles. Because of the turmoil they will be protected by fire that comes out of their mouth to kill those who seek to destroy them. Many Jews will turn to Jesus as Messiah as a result of their mission. When their mission is complete God will permit them to be killed by the beast. He will disgracefully leave their bodies in the street for 3 ½ days during which the world will celebrate and give gifts to one another. However, the two witnesses will then rise from the dead and ascend to heaven after which a great earthquake will strike killing exactly 7,000. The rest will fear and give great glory to God.

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