

THE TWO WITNESSES

Revelation 11:1-19

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Bible has some unclear parts.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 15:29** “Otherwise what will they do who are being baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, then why are people baptized for them?”
 - ii. One of the things that makes unclear passages so difficult is that there are very few, if any, cross-references to clear things up. There are no cross-references on being baptized for the dead, so it’s impossible to arrive at a firm interpretation.
2. This is why I prefer to spend the bulk of my time as a Christian studying the parts of the Bible that are clear.
 - i. It’s like somebody said, “It’s not the parts of Scripture that I don’t understand that bother me, it’s the parts that I do understand.”
 - ii. **Ephesians 4:29** “No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.”
 - iii. This is a verse that is very clear; very easy to understand; with plenty of cross-references. I can sum it up with one word: Build. Only say what builds others up.
 - iv. This is why I prefer the clear parts of Scripture. They are easy to understand, simple to apply.
3. Unfortunately today we are going to look at one of the more unclear parts of Scripture.
4. **Sam Storms** “This chapter is generally the subject of more interpretive disagreements than any other in the book of Revelation.”
5. Let’s begin with a recap of Revelation.

II. RECAP OF REVELATION

1. In the first three verses of Revelation we are told that it is about things that “must soon take place,” because “the time is near.” For this reason, we are looking for a near-time fulfillment of Revelation, rather than an end-time fulfillment. I have been interpreting Revelation from a preterist (past), rather than a future perspective.
2. Before Jesus died, in a sermon called the Olivet Discourse, He prophesied about the impending destruction of Israel, and He said it would occur in that generation (Mt 24:30). This was fulfilled about forty years later in AD 70 when the Romans completely destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.
3. There is strong evidence that the book of Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem (perhaps around AD 65). If that is the case, then it could be

that Revelation is talking about the events leading up to and including the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and that is the interpretation we are taking. Revelation is about God's judgment on Israel for rejecting the Messiah and persecuting His followers, and then taking a new bride for Himself, the church.

4. In Revelation 5 God is seated on the throne as judge, holding out a scroll with seven seals. The scroll is believed to be God's divorce certificate against Israel.
5. As Jesus opens the seals of the scroll one at a time, John sees visions of terrible judgment to be poured out on Israel.
6. When Jesus opens the seventh seal, John sees seven angels are given seven trumpets. When each angel blows a trumpet, John sees another vision of impending doom for Israel.
7. The last three trumpets are called woes. A "woe" is a pronouncement of God's judgment. It means you are about to experience the terrible wrath of God.
8. Before the seventh trumpet is blown, we have an intermission; a pause. The same thing happened before the seventh seal was opened. The purpose of the pause is to provide more context, more meaning to the action.
9. The pause before the seventh trumpet begins in Revelation 10. A mighty angel told John that there would no longer be a delay. A delay of what? In Revelation 6 the Christian martyrs in heaven were praying, "Lord, ow long until you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood? (Rev 6:10)." When the seventh trumpet sounds, there will no longer be a delay in God's judgment on Israel.
10. Then the mighty angel says when the seventh trumpet sounds, the mystery of God will be completed. What is the mystery of God? In Christ, God was doing away with the old categories of Jews and Gentiles and was creating one new people for Himself, the church. This mystery was begun with the death and resurrection of Christ, but it would be completed with the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the ensuing destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.
11. Now the intermission continues in chapter 11, and toward the end of this chapter, the seventh trumpet will sound.
12. Revelation 11 has three events: The measuring of the temple; the two witnesses; and the sounding of the seventh trumpet.

III. THE THREE EVENTS OF REVELATION 11

1. The measuring of the temple.

- i. **Revelation 11:1-2** "Then I was given a measuring reed like a rod, with these words: "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count those who worship there. 2 But exclude the courtyard outside the temple. Don't measure it, because it is given to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months."
- ii. Four things happen here:
 1. John is given a measuring reed like a rod. Think of a yard stick.
 2. John is told to measure two things:

- a. The temple of God. The word here refers to the temple proper; the holy place, and the most holy place.
 - b. The altar. This refers to the golden altar of incense inside the temple, not the altar of burnt offerings outside.
 - 3. John is told to count those who worship in the temple.
 - 4. John is told to exclude (not measure) the courtyard outside the temple. And he is told why?
 - a. It (the courtyard outside the temple) is given to the nations.
 - b. They (the nations) will trample the city for forty-two months.
- iii. What does this passage mean?
 - 1. The temple and those who worship in it refer to the church – Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus.
 - 2. The temple courtyard represents those who are not true worshipers – apostate Israel.
 - 3. To measure the temple was to set it apart for preservation. That which is measured will be preserved. That which is not measured will be destroyed.
 - 4. While God will soon destroy the nation of Israel and Judaism, He will preserve the church.
 - 5. The nation of Israel, and specifically the holy city (Jerusalem), will be trampled by the Romans for forty-two months, or 3.5 years, or 1,260 days.
 - 6. **David Chilton** “The message of these verses, therefore, is that the Church will be saved through the coming Tribulation, during which Jerusalem is to be destroyed by an invasion of Gentiles.”

2. The two witnesses.

- i. Three things are said about the two witnesses:
 - 1. Their authority.
 - a. **Revelation 11:3-6** “3 I will grant my two witnesses authority to prophesy for 1,260 days, dressed in sackcloth.” 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 If anyone wants to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and consumes their enemies; if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. 6 They have authority to close up the sky so that it does not rain during the days of their prophecy. They also have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every plague whenever they want.”
 - b. Five things are said about their authority:
 - i. Two witnesses are given authority to prophesy.
 - 1. They are two Christian preachers.

2. The number “two” is significant because Jewish law required at least two witnesses to establish testimony.
- ii. They prophesy for 1,260 days (three and a half years).
 1. They preach to Jerusalem all throughout the Jewish War, which lasted three and a half years.
- iii. They wear sackcloth.
 1. The OT prophets wore sackcloth as a sign that their message was one of repentance or destruction.
 2. The witnesses preached a “turn or burn” type of message.
- iv. They are the two olive tress and two lampstands who stand before the Lord.
 1. This is a reference to the two men in the prophet Zechariah’s day who were anointed by the Lord to lead the people, Joshua and Zerubbabel (Zech 4).
 2. Zechariah’s vision was of a lampstand that was supplied with an unlimited flow of oil from two olive trees.
 3. The point was that Joshua and Zerubbabel were empowered by God.
 4. The two witnesses are appointed and empowered by God.
- v. They have supernatural abilities (four).
 - a. They can destroy those who want to kill them (with fire from their mouths).
 - b. They prevent the sky from raining.
 - c. They can turn the water to blood.
 - d. They can strike the earth with every plague at will.
 2. These are the same abilities that God gave to the OT prophets Elijah and Moses.
 - a. Both Moses and Elijah caused fire to break out and consume their enemies (Num 16:35; 2 Ki 1:9-12).
 - b. Elijah caused a drought for three and a half years in 1 Kings 17.

- c. In Egypt, Moses caused the water to turn to blood, and struck the land with nine other plagues.
 - 3. The point is that these witnesses have supernatural abilities.
 - c. Who are the witnesses?
 - i. They are likely two apostles who continued to preach to the Jews in Jerusalem during the three and a half years of the Jewish War.
- 2. Their martyrdom.
 - a. **Revelation 11:7-10** “7 When they finish their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war on them, conquer them, and kill them. 8 Their dead bodies, will lie in the main street of the great city, which figuratively is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9 And some of the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations will view their bodies for three and a half days and not permit their bodies to be put into a tomb. 10 Those who live on the earth will gloat over them and celebrate and send gifts to one another because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.”
 - b. Three things are said about their martyrdom.
 - i. They are murdered by the beast.
 - 1. This is our first introduction to the beast in Revelation, but we will learn much about him in the pages to come. He is Satan.
 - 2. Satan doesn’t necessarily personally kill them, but inspires people to kill them, just he inspired Judas to betray Jesus.
 - ii. Their dead bodies will lie in the main street of Jerusalem for three and a half days for public viewing.
 - 1. The text doesn’t say “Jerusalem.” Instead it calls it the “great city,” “figuratively” Sodom and Egypt.
 - 2. But verse 8 says, “where also their Lord is crucified,” so that gives it away; it is Jerusalem.
 - iii. The Jerusalemites will celebrate their death.
 - c. One scholar, James Stuart Russell, believes the two witnesses to be the apostles James (the brother of Jesus and author of the epistle of James) and Peter.

- i. They were the two main leaders of the church in Jerusalem throughout Acts.
- ii. All through Acts, Jerusalem was their main headquarters, and probably their residence.
- iii. They were both apostles, and had power to perform great miracles.
- iv. They both lived until the destruction of Jerusalem, not before.
- v. They both were martyred.
- vi. We know that Peter was martyred because Jesus predicted it (Jn 21:19).
- vii. We have two ancient historical sources that point to James' martyrdom as happening in Jerusalem, right before Rome surrounded Jerusalem (Josephus and Hegesippus, a Christian writer of the second century).
- viii. Hegesippus says that James was such a good man that many people, even among the Jews, considered this to be the final straw that led to the siege of Jerusalem.
- ix. While we don't have firm evidence that Peter was there at the end with James, it is very possible.
- x. We know that one apostle was there, preaching Christ to the end; and it is highly possible that there was a second apostle who was witnessing with him to the end.

3. Their resurrection.

- a. **Revelation 11:11-14** "11 But after three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet. Great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." They went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies watched them. 13 At that moment a violent earthquake took place, a tenth of the city fell, and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake. The survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14 The second woe has passed. Take note: The third woe is coming soon!"
- b. Four things are said about their resurrection.
 - i. After three and a half days, people saw the two witnesses come back to life and stand up.
 - ii. The people watched as they ascended into heaven.
 - iii. A violent earthquake struck, destroying a tenth of the city, and seven thousand people died.

- iv. The survivors glorified God.
- c. We don't have any historical record of two preachers in Jerusalem before the end dying and coming back to life, but that doesn't mean that it didn't happen.
- d. As for the earthquake, there is a possible fulfillment referenced in the works of Josephus. During the Jewish war with Rome, there was also a bloody civil war waged in the city of Jerusalem. One group, the Zealots, had control of the temple. When they heard that the high priest Ananus was about to hand the city over to the Romans, they called for army from Idumea, a land to the south, and strongly anti-Roman, to help prevent the betrayal. The Idumaeans arrived at the gates of Jerusalem with 20,000 men. But the high priest had the gates locked, so they couldn't enter. That night, there was a fierce thunderstorm, and an earthquake. During the storm the Zealots cut the bars of the gates, which allowed the Idumaeans to enter. Once inside they went crazy and killed thousands (8,500 according to some sources).

3. The sounding of the seventh trumpet.

- i. Three things happened when the seventh angel blew his trumpet.
 - 1. An announcement was made about the kingdom of Christ.
 - a. **Revelation 11:15** "The seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever."
 - b. In Revelation 10, the angel told John that when the seventh trumpet was blown, the mystery of God would be complete. The mystery of God is His plan to create a new people for Himself, made up of both Jews and Gentiles who accept Christ as Lord and Savior (Eph 3:4-6).
 - c. This mystery was inaugurated with the work of Christ. In other words, that is when it officially began. However, in the first few decades of the church, perhaps the primary challenge of Christianity was making a clear break with Judaism. As long as the temple stood, there was this temptation to follow not only Christ, but also the Jewish Levitical laws.
 - d. But when the seventh trumpet was blown, and the temple and Jerusalem were destroyed, Christianity was able to make a clean break from Judaism. Christians were no longer tempted to be Jewish as well as Christian.

- e. Revelation 11:15 is saying the same thing in a different way. “The kingdom of the world” – all the people of the world, not just Jews – “has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.” Now that the temple has been destroyed, the kingdom of God is opened up to everyone – not just Jews, and it exists everywhere – not just in Palestine.
2. Praise was given to God in heaven.
- a. **Revelation 11:16-18** “The twenty-four elders, who were seated before God on their thrones, fell facedown and worshiped God, 17 saying,
 - We give you thanks, Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was,, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.
 - 18 The nations were angry, but your wrath has come. The time has come for the dead to be judged and to give the reward to your servants the prophets, to the saints, and to those who fear your name, both small and great, and the time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth.
 - b. We were first introduced to the twenty four elders in Revelation 4:4. They are a symbolic representation of all Christians in heaven because their description matches what Revelation says of all Christians: 1) they sit on thrones (Rev 3:21); 2) they wear white garments (Rev 3:5); they have golden crowns (Rev 2:10).
 - c. The elders (Christians in heaven) give thanks (*eucharisteo*). This word has been used throughout Christian history for the Lord’s Supper, or communion.
 - d. They give thanks for five things:
 - i. You have been to reign. This is an echo of verse 15. “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord.”
 - ii. Your wrath has come. It is time for God to punish Israel.
 - iii. The time has come for the dead to be judged, and to reward your servants. Both of these phrases refer not

to the final judgment, but to God judging and rewarding the Christian dead; the servants of God who have been martyred by the Jews.

- iv. To destroy those who destroy the earth. The time has come for God to destroy the Jews, who have brought destruction on the earth (land) by their rebellion against God.

3. The temple in heaven was opened.

a. **Revelation 11:19** “Then the temple of God in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant appeared in his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder, an earthquake, and severe hail.”

b. Three things happen in this last verse:

- i. The temple of God in heaven was opened. The old temple was just a symbol of the true temple, which is the church. The temple is “in heaven” because many in the church are in heaven, and our worship rises to God who is in heaven. This temple, the church, is now open to everyone, both Jews and Gentiles.

1. **Douglas Wilson** “The shadow of the temple on earth was flattened so that the temple in the heavens could be opened up to all mankind.”

- ii. The ark of his covenant appeared in his temple. In the old temple, the ark represented God’s presence, and it was hidden from all except the high priest, and only he could view it once a year. But now the old temple has expired, and the new temple has opened. In Christ, all Christians are priests, and we all have access to the inner sanctuary. We can all enter God’s presence through the blood of Jesus, and not just annually, but constantly.
- iii. There were flashes of lighting, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and severe hail. This is a sign of the coming destruction upon the Jews that is about to take place because of the seventh trumpet.

IV. CONCLUSION

- 1. While this is one of the most unclear chapters in the Bible, hopefully you have a better understanding of what it means.