

Chart: The Second Parenthetical Visions: #14

PREFACE

Look at Chart #14.

Once we examined Chapter Ten and I began work in earnest on Chapter Eleven, I sensed that something had changed; something was different about the material before us. For a while I couldn't explain it, but then I realized that with Chapter Eleven, and the opening of the second parenthesis at the end of the sixth trumpet, our perspective had shifted—perhaps subtly, but sufficient for me to notice that something had changed.

So far in our march through the Tribulation, we have uncovered a systematic series of judgments: plagues and eruptions and crashing stars and fantastical beasts that would terrify Frankenstein's monster. In one sense the narrative's very ferocity has held us at arm's length; no one reading or hearing these words can claim any similar experience with such things. *So far it is as if we have been viewing this from afar through a wide-angled lens.* Now, however, things are starting to get real; with this series of parentheses, and especially with Chapter Eleven, it is as if we are now seeing these passing events up close and personal—as if we could be experiencing them ourselves, or that we are reading history, rather than future prophecy. Oh, there will be more fantastical prophecies, but now, in a sense, we are no longer just viewing prophecy from afar; now it is as if we are on the ground, experiencing very real events.

TAKING A STAND

Perhaps more than any other portion of the Revelation, Chapter Eleven requires that we take a firm stand on our interpretive position. Every commentator agrees with—and almost always cites specifically—Henry Alford's remarks at the beginning of his notes on Chapter Eleven, found in his famous *Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary* (1863-1878):

Alford: This passage may well be called, even more than that previous one, 10:1ff, the *crux* of interpreters; as it is undoubtedly one of the most difficult in the whole Apocalypse.

One of the reasons I so seldom refer to the commentary of Alan F. Johnson (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*; Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor) is that he cleaves to no one interpretive method: one passage he interprets literally, the next he interprets figuratively. His position on Chapter Ten was pretty much right in line with a literalist approach, whereas his position on Chapter Eleven runs screaming *away from* the literalist approach; for example, his position is that the “temple” located in the “holy city” in vv1-2 figuratively represents the Christian (universal) church.

This is why I say that Chapter Eleven (which most agree continues the narrative from Chapter Ten) forces us to choose sides—especially with our position regarding Christians and Israel during the Last Things: Do we say that the church has become the new Israel and, by extension, the new “chosen people” of God, or do we say that the two remain separate and are treated differently during the Last Things? As stated in the third session of this class, ours is a *dispensational* approach, meaning, as summarized by Michael J. Vlach,

Vlach: Dispensationalism is an evangelical theological system that addresses issues concerning the biblical covenants, Israel, the church, and end times. It also argues for a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies involving ethnic/national Israel, and the idea that the church is a New Testament entity that is distinct from Israel.

If that is our well-reasoned approach to the church and Israel, and the study of the Eschaton, then we cannot conveniently change sides willy-nilly whenever things become difficult. So we will bravely soldier on through these challenging passages in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, and I'll permit Dr. Walvoord to describe our approach:

Walvoord: The guiding lines which govern the exposition to follow regard this chapter as a legitimate prophetic utterance in which the terms are taken normally. Hence, the great city of 11:8 is identified as the literal city of Jerusalem. The time periods are taken as literal time periods. The two witnesses are interpreted as two individuals. The three and a half days are taken literally. The earthquake is a literal earthquake. The seven thousand men who are slain by the earthquake are seven thousand individuals who die in the catastrophe. The death of the witnesses is literal as are their resurrection and ascension.

MEASURING THE TEMPLE

vv1-2

Read Revelation 11:1-2.

As in Amos 7, for one example, there are times when the Lord God measures things in preparation for their destruction. At other times, however, He measures them for the purpose of claiming, or authenticating them.

When we purchased our property outside Winterset thirty-one years ago, part of the process was to order a survey to determine precisely what we were paying for, and to establish, for the public record what would subsequently be called “our land.” This is what either the strong angel of Chapter Ten or God (or Christ) commands John to do with the temple in Jerusalem as Chapter Eleven opens. **Only the KJVs identify the voice with the angel; the better manuscripts do not include this.** Note that nowhere are the *results* of his measurements mentioned, because that’s not the point; the point is establishing ownership, not dimensions.

This then raises the obvious question: *Which temple is it?* Some say the temple in heaven—but that makes no sense whatsoever, considering the second part of v2. There are a total of five earthly temples mentioned in God’s word (not counting the tabernacle):

1. Solomon’s temple
2. Zerubbabel’s (built after the exile)
3. Herod’s temple (begun in 19 BC)
4. The temple built and/or used during the Tribulation
5. The Millennial temple built by the Lord Himself (Ezekiel 40-48)

The temple in Chapter Eleven is the fourth temple, the one built after (or just prior to) an agreement with Antichrist, where he permits them to restore temple sacrifices. The operative text is found in Daniel 9:27, at the end of his prophecy regarding the “Seventy Weeks”:

And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

To paraphrase, Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for seven years (**i.e., one week of years, the span of the Tribulation**), for them to restore the temple worship and sacrifices. But after only three and one half years (**i.e., “the middle of the week” of years**), Antichrist will renege on his agreement and put a stop to the sacrifices and offerings.

This raises a second question, one we discussed back in Session Ten: *Why would there be blood (atoning) sacrifices during the Tribulation?* There are two reasonable possibilities: First, according to Gleason Archer, a well-respected biblical scholar, “this refers to Messianic Jews newly in Christ (since the rapture). Since these Jewish believers trust in Jesus as their Messiah, it may well be that the sacrifices will be conducted as memorial services like the Lord’s Supper, rather than for atonement purposes as in OT times.”

A second possibility is that, since this agreement between the Jews and Antichrist will be established during the earlier period of the Tribulation, these may just as well be Jews clinging to their ancient traditions, celebrating the reestablishment of the temple as God's sanction of a revival of the Mosaic Law and its sacrifices. This is John Walvoord's position. I lean toward the latter, but either is possible.

There is a final question: Some might wonder, *How can a new temple be built in such a short period of time?* After all, Herod's temple took eighty-three years to build. But who says that a new temple for the Tribulation must equal the size and grandeur of Herod's? The temple began as a modest tabernacle (*literally, tent*) carried about in the desert; this one might resemble in appearance something like a local community center. Who can say; God's word does not.

John is handed a measuring rod (*literally, reed*) for the measuring. In the Jordan Valley grows a very tall reed (15-20 ft.), hollow and lightweight—yet sufficiently rigid to be used as a walking stick—which was commonly used as a measuring device.

At the end of v1 we see that God is also measuring His possession of remaining Israel: "measure...those who worship in it."

MacArthur: It is best to see it as God's measuring off Israel, symbolized by her temple, for salvation and for His special protection, preservation, and favor. The prophecies yet to be given to John will thus distinguish between God's favor toward Israel and His wrath on the pagan world.

v2

"Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months."

In v2 the instruction includes what John is *not* to measure. The word translated "temple" in v1 and v2 is not *hieron*, which would refer to the entire temple complex, but *naon*, which refers to the sanctuary only: the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. And here we have our first time stamp for this prophecy.

...for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months."

There is healthy debate over whether these forty-two months refer to the first or second half of the Tribulation; however, not just the placement of the vision itself but its content seems to indicate the time of the *Great Tribulation*, the *second* half.

[Turn over to Chapter Twelve.](#)

Just for the moment, for time consideration, I'm going to lift out a brief supporting reference without giving full context. We will shortly be studying this passage in-depth, so let me, for now, just point us to vv5-6. Here Israel is presented as a woman who has given birth to a son—Christ Jesus, the Messiah—whom the red dragon—Satan—is trying to destroy. At God's direction and preparation, she flees to a place of safety for a period of time.

And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

What strikes me first about this passage is how artfully and succinctly the first sentence summarizes, in just a handful of words, the entirety of the gospel, including Christ's ascension, and the Millennium! But that's not what we're here for.

As v3 in our passage confirms, forty-two months equals “twelve hundred and sixty days,” or three and one half years. Around the middle of the Tribulation, when Antichrist removes his mask, takes over the temple sanctuary and openly turns against Israel, God will conduct Israel to a place of security in the wilderness—a “sanctuary,” as it were. There this remnant will be “nourished” (literally, made to grow) for three and one half years. [Back to Chapter Eleven.](#)

This means that Gentiles—“the nations,” anyone not Jewish—will “tread under foot” not just the outer courtyard of the temple, but the entire city of Jerusalem for forty-two months. Why that marker? Because then Christ returns, and everything will change.

THE TWO WITNESSES

vv3-14

Now, just as when the sixth trumpet sounded and abruptly out of nowhere an army of two hundred million appears, in v3 the “someone” speaking declares the working orders for “my two witnesses”—as if we are supposed to already know who they are.

Read Revelation 11:3-5.

Sidebar: Though it is demonstrably true from the following verses that these two individuals have indeed been granted special powers, the word “authority” in the NASB and ESV, and “power” in the NIV and KJVs are not in the original text (thus the NASB sets “authority” in italics). The NIV2011 changes this to “And I will appoint my two witnesses...”

The first thing that catches my eye is that the text says “*my witnesses.*” In our previous session we did not conclusively identify “the voice which I heard from heaven” (v8), which orders John to seal up the words of the thunder and to take the book from the angel, and here (probably) dictates the first three verses. Here, however, seems to be good evidence that it is indeed either Christ or God the Father. Yet, softening that conclusion is that none of our common versions which do capitalize pronouns do so here—even the NASB, which is rather generous in its capitalization. Nonetheless, I think the voice is that of Deity.

...clothed in sackcloth.

Their apparel of sackcloth is a sign of mourning over the doom which is to come, as well as a sign of humility before God.

I will not take up time trying to identify these two mysterious figures; trust me, much ink has been spilled and many trees murdered by scholars and commentators in their vain attempt to put names to these two men. God’s word is silent on this, and there is no good reason to speculate. Absent names, we conclude that they are, like Melchizedek ([Genesis 14:18](#); [Hebrews 7:1-4](#)), mysterious yet human, two male individuals (the nouns used to speak of them are all in the masculine) who probably emerge from the general population of post-Rapture believers, empowered by God to dramatically present the gospel with not just words but signs and wonders. MacArthur adds, “The two witnesses will proclaim to the world that the disasters occurring during the last half of the Tribulation are the judgments of God. They will warn that God’s final outpouring of judgment and eternal hell will follow.”

v4

God’s word does, however, identify them by a different manner.

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

This is a reference to the prophecy of Zechariah—here the “not yet” portion of a “now” closer to his own time. [Keep your finger in Revelation and turn please to the prophecy of Zechariah](#) (the next to last book before the NT). In Chapter Four of Zechariah we find the pertinent text.

Read Zechariah 4:1-3.

When the prophet asks the angel to explain these items, he is told,

“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.”

Zerubbabel was the governor, or political leader, leading some of the exiles back to Judah to rebuild the temple. Zechariah then asks the angel about the two olive trees, which, in the vision, are connected to the lamps, thus permanently supplying them with oil.

Then he said, “These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.”

In the “Now” of this prophecy, God is graphically demonstrating to the prophet that it would be His Spirit alone, working through the two leaders Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua. The setting is one of spiritual revival, and the restoration of the temple—i.e., worship of Yahweh—solely through the working of the Spirit of God.

In our Revelation passage, the “not yet” of this prophecy is fulfilled in the two witnesses, empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring revival and the national conversion of Israel to the Messiah, and, after the upheaval of the Tribulation, the building of the Millennial temple. As you return to Chapter Eleven, note that both visions end with the same statement, identifying these individuals as, “These are...[the two anointed ones/the two olive trees and the two lampstands] that stand before the Lord of the [whole] earth.”

DEFENSE

v5

Verse five reveals some of the supernatural powers God has given these two prophets.

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.

Here is a primal force that has always been in God’s arsenal for dealing with enemies of His righteousness and sovereignty.

- In Genesis 19 it is fire and brimstone with which the Lord God dispatches Sodom: “Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven, and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.”

- In 2 Kings 1, Elijah calls down fire upon the soldiers sent by Ahaziah (ah-hah-zee-ah); “Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. And he said to him, ‘O man of God, the king says, “Come down.”’ Elijah replied to the captain of fifty, ‘If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.’ Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.” This happened twice (the captain of the *third* group of soldiers not surprisingly tried a different approach).

- It was fire with which the Lord dealt with Korah’s rebellion in Numbers 16, and it was how He dealt with the sin of unauthorized fire and essence from the two sons of Aaron in Leviticus 10.

Here, however, the fire—just as with that launched from the “horses” under the sixth trumpet—emanates from (flows, proceeds, goes forth, pours from) the mouths of the two witnesses. This fire serves as both protection and manner of judgment upon anyone attempting to harm God’s messengers.

The narrative later in this chapter that describes the celebration when these witnesses are finally killed illustrates how very much they were hated by “those who dwell on the earth” (v10)—*and* had need of this rather dramatic and lethal means of protection.

It is not at all difficult for us today to imagine the extraordinary level of animus leveled against these two. Their message will not be one that is welcomed; it will be a time very much like our own—only worse. MacArthur describes a societal environment not too different from our own when he writes,

In the Tribulation time when the world is overrun by supernatural demonic activity, false religion, murder, sexual perversion, and rampant wickedness, the supernatural signs performed by the two witnesses will mark them as true prophets of God.

Their supernatural abilities will be intimidating and feared. Since it is hard to imagine that technology by then will have taken a *backward* turn—since even today the entire civilized world can know in seconds what is happening on the other side of the globe—no doubt a similar and even more instantaneous means of communication will ensure that, except for those few who accept their message, everyone globally will hate them.

From time to time in this study we need to be reminded that the days described in the Eschaton are not our days—and these two witnesses are a good example of that. It will be a far different dispensation than our own—the Church age, the age of Grace. Let me close by reading some of what Dr. J. A. Seiss writes about this.

Seiss: “The two olive trees” appear, but the golden candlestick is gone, and in its place is nothing but two lone lamps—the two Witnesses themselves. Ministers of God are present, but their spirit and method are entirely different from what pertains to ministers of the Gospel in the present dispensation. These witnesses kill, torment, deal out fiery judgments upon their enemies, and avenge and resent the very wish to injure them, even before it is outwardly manifested in act.

This is not according to the Christian spirit, and very unlike the commands which are upon us now. We are not to avenge ourselves, not to render evil for evil, not to smite and kill our enemies, but to love them and do good to them, and to be “harmless as doves.” Even Jesus himself, who had all power, refused to exercise it after the style of these Two Witnesses, and has given us commandment to follow his steps. He tells us that he came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them; and in this spirit his servants have ever acted. Stephen is stoned, James is beheaded, Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned, Peter is crucified, Polycarp is burned, Antipas is put to death; but neither of them resists, nor attempts to defend himself by miracle, or to avenge the wrong inflicted.

But here are ministers of God of another order. “Fire issueth out of their mouth and devoureth their enemies; and if any one willeth to injure them, thus must he be killed.” The preaching of the Gospel is a thing of joy and gladness. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation!” (Is. 52:7.) But these Witnesses are arrayed in sackcloth, and their very garb betokens calamity and judgment. Nature itself is joyful over the course of the messengers of grace. The prophetic word was, “The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree.” (Is. 55:12, 13.)

But here the heavens are shut up that no rain falls, the waters are turned to blood, the earth is smitten by many a plague, and they that dwell on it are tormented. “Peace on earth and good will toward men” is the keynote of the Gospel; but the ministry of these Witnesses is one of the three great apocalyptic woes. It is simply impossible, therefore, to find place for these Witnesses as Gospel ministers of the present dispensation. They have quite another commission, and operate for quite other ends.

They remind us rather of the old theocratic order, when Jeroboam’s hand was withered by the unnamed “man of God” when put forth to lay hold on him, and fire from heaven consumed the soldiers of Ahaziah that came against Elijah on the hill.

(J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Revised Text*, Eighth Edition., vol. 2 (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1901), 211–213.)