

Charts: The Second Parenthetical Visions: #14, with reference to Chart #2

PREFACE

Look at Chart #14.

In our last session we were introduced to the “Two Witnesses,” two mysterious men, prophets of doom, evangelists with extraordinary supernatural powers. They may just be the most obscure characters in this eschatological drama; my guess is that many even in the church have never heard of them. Yet in them we see echoes of John the Baptist—fiery speech, prophet of doom, abnormal attire—and even Christ Jesus—death, resurrection, and ascension (vv11-12). These two men—whoever they are—play an important role in the progress of the Tribulation, and the Eschaton as a whole: they foretell the approaching holocaust of the Third Woe—the Seventh Trumpet with its Seven Bowls of Wrath.

Read Revelation 11:5-6.

Look at Chart #2. These are powerful prophets and evangelists—and it is clear from what we know of them that they are not from the “turn the other cheek” school of evangelism. Remember, as I discussed last week, this is a different time from ours—specifically, a different dispensation from the Church Age, or dispensation of Grace. The period of the Tribulation is not generally demarcated as a specific dispensation; in my own chart the sequence moves from Grace to Kingdom—i.e., the Millennium. But whether or not one includes the Tribulation as its own dispensation (there is no “official” list), clearly once the Tribulation is inaugurated after the Rapture, the Dispensation of the Church Age has been closed. The church is gone; for a moment at least, every Christian on planet earth has been removed. Which means the rules have changed. Yes, some can and do acknowledge Jesus as the true Messiah during the next seven years, and many of them will be killed as a result. But it is painfully obvious to anyone left behind, that God is dealing with mankind in a different manner than He did before. [Look at Chart #14 again.](#)

v6

These [[i.e., the two witnesses](#)] 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.

A three-and-one-half year drought is not new in God's word. James gives us the *Reader's Digest* version of it occurring when Elijah was prophesying.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. (James 5:17)

Sidebar: Between that similarity and the same Elijah calling down fire on his enemies, some have surmised that the prophet Elijah is one of the two witnesses in Revelation. And some surmise that the other witness may be Enoch, based on their other powers listed in v6 and that they were taken up without dying. I leave that conclusion to whomever may wish to entertain it.

Let's back up a minute before we proceed. I am usually reluctant to dig too deeply into punctuation, but here perhaps it is worth a moment of our time. All of our common versions—except the KJV, which does not insert quotation marks—place quotation marks in the text beginning in the middle of v1 with, “Get up and measure...” with the closing quotation marks at the end of v3. Yet the text that follows (vv4-10) does indeed *sound* as if the narration by God or Christ Jesus is continuing. This may be why it *feels* different to us: This is not a vision being played out before John, with him dutifully describing it to us, but is something being *told to* John. Only the YLT (which I doubt anyone carries with them to church services) places the closing quotation marks at the end of v10.

Whether we call it “the gospel” or not, these two men are “witnessing” (telling of) Christ to a world that has become a swamp of evil and depravity. Because this is no longer a period of God's forbearance of sin, the tools with which these witnesses deliver their message are instruments of wrath.

- If they stand before someone who even *wishes* to harm them, they roast him on the spot to a condition of well-done.
- Apparently not in reaction to attack, but just because, they command that it will not rain during their time of ministry.
- Like Moses, they can turn flowing water to blood, and call down plagues of any and all sorts at will, and as often as they like.

Not surprisingly, these two men are hated with a passion. For three and one half years they can say what they like and no one is able to get rid of them. They can't be “canceled,” their social media accounts cannot be censored or shut down; no one can shut them up, even though every word from their mouths is as abrasive as sandpaper to everyone in this depraved society. They will be hated with a passion, so that when they *are* finally killed, the world will celebrate as the democrats would with dancing in the streets if Donald Trump were assassinated. But how will they be killed?

Read Revelation 11:7-8.

v7

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.

We had better pause for a moment and get our bearings; just who is this “beast that comes up out of the abyss” who kills the witnesses? You are not alone if you are a little confused. As always, commentators do not agree: Walvoord says this is Satan; MacArthur says this is Antichrist; Guzik says “most likely” Satan; Robertson says Antichrist; Seiss doesn’t say. Let me show you why I say it is Antichrist—even though later (13:1) he is described as “a beast coming up out of the *sea*.”

First don’t confuse this with the reference from 9:11 where the king of the locusts is described as the “*angel* of the abyss.” That “angel” we concluded was one of Satan’s (the fallen “star” of 9:1) archons, or lieutenant angels. Here in our passage the potential confusion arises because the individual is referred to as a “beast,” and there is more than one beast in the Eschaton. The question we need to answer is, *Is the beast here, who is out of the abyss, different from or the same as the beast out of the sea in 13:1? Let’s first look at Chapter Thirteen, beginning with v1.*

And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

The dragon is clearly identified with Satan. Then John sees a beast coming out of the sea; he describes him as “having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems.” It should not be surprising to us that “the beast’s” description matches that of the dragon in 12:3, since Antichrist is the “son” of Satan, just as Christ is the Son of God (John 14:9). Even though the physical—albeit fantastical—description is the same, we know that they are not the same individual because here it says that “the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.” Thus the beast out of the sea is not the dragon, but receives his power from him. [Now turn to Chapter Seventeen, v7.](#)

Here we have a different woman: not Israel, but Babylon, sitting on “a scarlet beast.” We’ll not take the time now to dissect this prophecy; we are only concerned for the time being with the identification of the beast.

And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. And the angel said to me, “Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, **which has the seven heads and the ten horns.**”

At this point we know the beast is either Satan or the beast out of the sea, but as we read on, it becomes clear that it is Antichrist, who will rule over ten kingdoms.

But note the next verse.

“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up **out of the abyss** and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.”

Here Antichrist is referred to as “the beast... about to come up out of the abyss.” Finally, in the OT a correlation is expressed, metaphorically, between the sea and the realm of satanic activity. [Look at Isaiah 27:1.](#)

In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent,
With His fierce and great and mighty sword,
Even Leviathan the twisted serpent;
And He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea.

Thus we conclude that “the beast that comes up out of the abyss” in 11:7 is Antichrist.

MacArthur: The abyss is the prison for certain demons. Though he is a man, the beast is energized by the demonic presence and power coming from the abyss.

The purpose of the verse, however, is to state that, “When they have finished their testimony...the beast...will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.” Just how Antichrist kills them is not stated, but we know that he likes to behead his enemies ([20:4](#)).

Here is a picture of God’s sovereignty, and I love what David Guzik has to say about this verse.

Guzik: ...their ministry is not cut short. They fully accomplish their task (when they finish their testimony). Praise God, we cannot be taken off of this earth until we finish our testimony. The devil does not have power over our lives. We are witnesses of the Lord, and He will protect us until our testimony is finished. This passage illustrates the difference between being a *witness* and giving *testimony*. *Witness* is not something we do; it is something we are. Giving *testimony* is what a witness does.

As to the time frame for this v7 episode, even I can do the math. Verse 3 says that the two witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days—that is, three and one half years. If, as v7 states, they have now been killed, then in the narrative timeline, the curtain is coming down on the Tribulation and the return of the Lord is imminent. But some of you may be saying, “Wait a minute; we’ve still got the seven bowls left.”

J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was a saga masterfully told, but the author had a rather odd way of organizing and writing some parts of the story. In some portions of his trilogy, especially in the middle third, he could follow the trek of a couple or few characters for a hundred pages or more. Then he would fall back in time, pick up a couple other characters and follow just *their* trek for another hundred pages over the same period of time. Then do it again for a *third* group.

That is what is going on here. From Revelation 11:3-12 the last half of the Tribulation *from the perspective of the two witnesses* is told to John. Then the seventh trumpet sounds (11:15) and a series of visions are given to the apostle, followed by the outpourings of the seven bowls of wrath—only then followed by the return of Christ. Obviously the text folds back upon itself, covering the same period of time more than once from multiple perspectives.

v8

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.

They would not even bury the two men. J. A. Seiss helps us grasp the immensity of this outrage.

Seiss: This is so intense an outrage upon common decency and humanity, that it is full of significance here. Even to the worst of criminals the law awarded burial on the same day of their execution (Deut. 21:22, 23); but all law and right feeling is set at defiance with regard to these prophets of God. The exposure of their dead bodies tells of a most extraordinary malignity and spite, and attests the extraordinary potency and effectiveness of the objects of it. It shows at once a devilishness of unwonted intensity in the people, and a terribleness of efficiency in the Witnesses in provoking a fiendishness and resentment so monstrous and unrelenting that it could not be placated by their death, but continued to reek and vent itself upon their lifeless remains after they were dead.

The principal territory for the testimony of these two witnesses was in and around Jerusalem (not insignificantly, at the same time the center of Antichrist's power). Yet commentators have done their best to mishandle this verse, saying, well, it could be Rome or Egypt or... The term translated "mystically" in the NASB is better rendered, as in the KJVs, "spiritually," since the Greek is *pneumatikos*. In other words this "great city" had sunk so low in its wickedness that it could be mistaken for Sodom, or the land of Egypt. The capper, of course, is that this city is identified as one "where also their Lord was crucified." End of discussion.

Read Revelation 11:9-10.

v9

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.

Someone from the first century—or even the first half of the twentieth century—might read this and wonder how “the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations” could possibly—in just three and one half days—attend this gruesome visitation. But then, this is prophecy, isn’t it. And those of us today—a time when people from all over the world can watch a nest-full of bald eagle fledglings grow up in Decorah, Iowa in real time—can well imagine how the entire world could be watching two corpses lying on a street in Jerusalem. And v10 explains why this perversity of leaving exposed the two corpses was so important.

v10

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.

John Walvoord brings out an interesting aspect to the first phrase of this verse: “those who dwell on the earth,” which is repeatedly used in the Revelation. We would read that as simply referring, literally, to all who reside on planet earth. But in the Revelation it means something more, and all we need do is revisit a verse we just looked at to see what Walvoord is referring to. [Look again at 17:8.](#)

“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. **And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world,** will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.”

Repeatedly this phrase is used in Revelation—twice in this verse alone—to refer “to those who are not only dwelling on the earth in their physical bodies but whose hope is limited to the present life”—that is, the persistently unregenerate, the lost, those who worship something other than the God of heaven and His Son. And it is not hard at all for us to understand this, for we are surrounded by such a culture: those who place all their trust and hope in this present world, rather than the next, ruled by Christ Jesus.

And here in this prophesy we see such people turning the death of these two witnesses into a perverse second Christmas, with dancing in the streets and even celebrating by the exchanging of gifts!

Just as today, it would seem that what comes along with such a worldview is a healthy dollop of stupidity. People without the Spirit of God think that killing the messenger will also destroy the truth of the message itself. *If we can just kill those spouting this gloom and doom, then the gloom and doom will not occur!* But no; killing the messengers does not kill the message. In this instance, however, it backfires on these depraved simpletons even more than that. Yes, the wrath of God will proceed; the judgment to come *will* occur; those whose names have not been recorded in the Book of Life *will* spend an eternity in the lake of fire. But God has not forgotten His faithful witnesses. Their testimony is not yet over.

Read Revelation 11:11-14.

v11

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.

Father God knows how to do this. After roughly the same amount of time He had done it for His own Son, and now He raises back to life those who have carried and delivered His word during these final days. Before a world-wide audience, seeing it happen in real time, these two who had been slaughtered and left to rot in the streets for three and a half days will take to their feet. They will stand up and let everyone get a good look at what the Sovereign God can do for those He loves and who love Him. And the hearts of all the viewers around the world will be filled with fear.

v12

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.

In a scene that reminds us of both the baptism and ascension of Jesus, the Lord God speaks—audibly, so that everyone in the world can hear—His affirming invitation. In point of fact, it is less an invitation than an imperative command: “Do this now!” (as reflected in the ESV). This moment and the Father’s sentiment is not that different from what the voice said at Christ’s baptism. Both express approval; both are in public so that others will see and hear. The difference between the two is that with Jesus it was an affirmation to send Him off for the beginning of His ministry, while in *this* scene it is the Lord declaring, “Well done, good and faithful slave[s]. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21).

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.

Whenever I read this verse I wonder if it reflects the warfare that overwhelms Jerusalem just before Christ's return and the geographic turmoil that occurs when He stands atop the Mount of Olives—that is, *Does this verse represent a condensed version of the events of Zechariah 14?* Since I can find no one else who even considers the point, I am, apparently, a solitary voice—and almost certainly this is *not* describing the same event.

So Father God lifts out His faithful witnesses and punctuates the moment with a powerful earthquake that levels a tenth of Jerusalem, with seven thousand fatalities. It is hard not to see retribution in this; as before, witness the godly behavior of a different dispensation. This is not a period of grace and forbearance. God retrieves His servants then punishes the city that would so hate and abuse them—even after their death.

...and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The typical scholarly response to this (MacArthur and Johnson excepted) is voiced by M. R. Vincent: “The phrase signifies not conversion, nor repentance, nor thanksgiving, but *recognition*.” But Alan F. Johnson offers a fairly convincing argument for this describing true repentance and conversion.

Johnson: The earthquake is God's further sign of the vindication of His servants. But unlike the earthquake under the sixth seal, this one produces what appears to be repentance: “The survivors...gave glory to the God of heaven..” The opposite response in 16:9, “they refused to repent and glorify Him,” seems to confirm that [this verse] speaks of genuine repentance.

So once again we can only conclude that we don't know whether the resurrection and ascension of the witnesses, followed by God's retribution, sparked true faith, or just an acknowledgment that, “By golly, there must be a real God up there after all.”

Now, if this were our only narrative thread, in our next session we would be celebrating the return of Christ. But it is not. As it says in v14, we have recounted the first two woes (trumpets five and six), and the third is “coming quickly.” And sure enough, in the next verse the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. But then, before the events of the bowls of wrath (i.e., the third woe) we have a long list of parenthetical visions—which we will begin to investigate in our next session.