

## Lesson # 36 The War on the Two Witnesses Revelation 11:7-14

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**Revelation 11:7-14 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup>And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, <sup>8</sup>and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. <sup>9</sup>For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, <sup>10</sup>and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup>But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. <sup>12</sup>Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. <sup>13</sup>And at 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.

<sup>14</sup> The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

**I. The Adversary**

vv. 7-8

①

The time of the ministry of the 2 witnesses was decreed by God to be 3 ½ years – or more specifically, 1,260 days. They have been able to successfully defend themselves against attacks by the wicked people for that length of time, because God has decreed that they would do so. Once that time has expired, and God's purposes for them have been fulfilled, God allows the Beast ( the Antichrist ) to conquer them and kill them.

This is the first mention of this Beast in Revelation, but we will not get a real description of him until chapter 13 & then later on in chapter 17. Although he is the subject of OT prophecy in Daniel, and his actions are predicted by Christ in the Olivet Discourse, and Paul mentions him in II Thessalonians 2, this is the first of 36 references to him in Revelation & this momentary picture of him shows how his career overlaps that of these 2 prophets. He is not Satan himself or he'd be called the Dragon, but he is Satanically inspired and empowered to oppose God and to terrorize God's people for the 7 years of the Tribulation.

He is said here to rise from the Abyss – demonstrating a demonic connection, but we are provided with no specific time mark as to when during the Tribulation he rises to attack & kill these 2. He is in full power at the beginning of the 7 years, and likely rising to power for a few years prior to the Tribulation, and if these 2 witnesses begin at the start of the Tribulation too ( which I believe they do ), they are killed by him at the 3 ½ year point of the 7 years. This would coincide

with the Abomination in the Temple, Satan's expulsion from heaven ( Rev. 12 ) and it is possible that the Antichrist's victory over these 2 prophets emboldens him to enter the temple and declare himself to be God...and his success where others have failed miserably to kill and therefore silence God's 2 witnesses may be a further impetus for the people to follow him. Or it may also be that his first action upon leaving the Temple after defiling it is to kill these 2 men, and thus demonstrate his power and "divine" nature. ②

The dead bodies of the 2 prophets will lie in the street, unburied. This is a grave insult in any culture – something akin to what we sometimes see on news broadcasts from war zones where dead soldiers from the USA are dragged through the streets in celebration by the enemy. It is a demonstration of power and control, as well as defiance of a hated enemy, most often carried out by uncivilized cultures.

Verse 8 provides a cryptic location for their demise – calling the city symbolically "Sodom & Egypt", neither of which is the city's real name. These names are symbolic to show the nature of the real city in which their lives are taken. The picture is of utter degradation, as in OT Sodom, and a hatefulness of God & His people as in Egypt before the Exodus. Both Isaiah ( Isa. 1:9ff ) and Ezekiel ( 16:46 ) referred to Judah as Sodom during the years of her worst rebellion and idolatry. These 2 places had 1 thing in common in the OT – they hated God and rebelled against Him.

Although many stray away from what follows in v. 8 to identify the actual city and attempt to make it mean any ungodly city because of what follows in v. 9, the meaning of John is pretty clear that this is Jerusalem. Another faction sees the city as Rome, assuming that Babylon means Rome in Revelation because it is referred to as the "great city" elsewhere<sup>i</sup> in Revelation, but is uncertain whether Babylon refers to Rome in Revelation at all. If the city is Rome in a spiritual sense, then these 2 people may not be individuals but rather the church opposing the Antichrist. That does not fit the facts, and is a good example of where subjective interpretations of passages can lead to nonsensical results. ②

However, verse 8 leaves no option for a subjective interpretation. The city must be Jerusalem, "the city where our Lord was crucified." Otherwise, words really have no meaning and we can come up with our own ideas to suit our own theological positions anytime we feel it helps make our case. Jerusalem is also called the "great city" in Jeremiah 22:8, and was a part of the context of this chapter right from v. 1. When rightly considered, the geographical and historical aspects of the Bible, especially the OT, but also the NT is Jerusalem-centric.

## II. The Celebration of the Ungodly vv. 9-10

The witnesses have been killed & remain unburied for 3 ½ days, and in the heat of Jerusalem, would begin to decay and stink ( cf. John 11:39 ). Verse 9 indicates that "some from...nations will gaze at their dead bodies". This will either be

people from those nations who happen to be in Jerusalem, watching via TV or internet newscasts, or on social networks like Facebook & Twitter and they gloat over this victory against God for the full 3 ½ days.

It says, “they refuse to let them be placed in a tomb”, could be an indication that there are some who wanted to give these men a decent burial, but the majority or an edict of the Antichrist would not allow that to take place. It could be there were Christians there too, but in insufficient numbers or without the courage to do what Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had done with Jesus’ body. The word “them” in v. 9 refutes those who say that this is merely symbolism for the Antichrist’s attack on the church.

This victory ( v. 10 ) over these 2 pesky prophets is a cause for great rejoicing and even gifts are exchanged to celebrate the death of these 2. Here is another reason I believe this is the first 3 ½ years. If it were at the end, no one would be foolish enough to celebrate a small victory like this, and would have little time to celebrate it. It appears that the torment of the preaching and plagues had been more than local – it had been “a torment to those who dwell on the earth”, not just in Jerusalem.

The exchange of gifts and glee accompanying these deaths reveals the deranged, petty, childish, sin-soaked & evil nature of the people who hate God and His servants. On top of these plagues and fiery defenses of these men, it is likely that the bruised consciences of the unsaved majority that inspired the most hatred of them. No one likes to be called a guilty sinner and there is no question that this sort of rebuke will be a big part of the gospel these 2 will preach for 3 ½ years. ③

### III. Resurrection & Ascension

vv. 11-12

The celebration of the wicked is cut short by another one of those refreshing “buts” of the bible. This “but” reveals that God breathes life back into these 2 prophets after the 3 ½ days and they stand up! ( cf. Ezek. 37:5,10 ) This resurrection is in full view of all the partiers and strikes them with terror. Since murder is man’s final answer to any problem, and the most powerful weapon he possesses, and since that has now been overcome, imagine the horror as these 2 now stand up, alive and well to face those who had opposed them & God! They were unkillable for 3 ½ years, and now, even when killed, are not killable.

They have not been resurrected to continue their ministry though. Just as John was summoned to heaven in Rev. 4:1, these 2 are summoned with a voice from heaven. “Come up here!” They ascend to heaven in a cloud as their enemies watch dumbfounded and are unable to do a thing about it. This ascent will be gradual, not “in the twinkling of the eye” as the Rapture is. God will want everyone to see where they are going.

It is possible that these 2 are being brought to heaven because the judgments are now about to begin in great intensity – the 2<sup>nd</sup> seal has been opened and war, and what follows is about to begin– they will be safe in heaven, their warnings given to the people for the most part, unheeded, as is evidenced by the glee followed by terror.

## IV. The Earthquake

vv. 13-14

In order to allow people to make the connection between these events and God's wrath, an earthquake is triggered – a great earthquake. A tenth of the city falls and 7,000 are killed. This seems to be a localized earthquake, not like the huge ones in the 6<sup>th</sup> seal ( Rev. 6:12 ), & the 7<sup>th</sup> seal ( 8:5 ) due to the limited scope of the geographic destruction and the fact that only 7,000 people die.

The fact that the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven does not mean the rest were saved, although some may have been. This may have been a knee-jerk reaction and not real repentance – just as the Egyptian magicians responded to the plagues in Egypt ( Ex. 9:19 ). Giving glory to God can be synonymous with repentance ( cf. Josh. 7:19; Isa. 42:2; Luke 17:18; JN 9:24; Acts 12:23, etc. ), but judgment is not stalled here as a result of it. It is still possible that some here are part of the Jewish converts who will make up the 144,000 and who, if they survive the next 3 ½ years, will enter the Millennial Kingdom.

In any case, if this event coincides with the defilement of the temple, the proclamation of godhood by Antichrist at the very center of the Tribulation's 7 years, note Jesus' warning in **Matt. 24:15-28**. This signals the start of the Great Tribulation- the last 3 ½ years. Satan is about to ratchet up his efforts to persecute Israel and the saints, and God is ratcheting up the judgments on earth. ④

Verse 14 describes this event as the 2<sup>nd</sup> woe ( 1<sup>st</sup> woe – 5<sup>th</sup> Trumpet; 2<sup>nd</sup> woe – 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet, followed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> woe – 7<sup>th</sup> Trumpet – cf. 8:13 ). The contents of the 3<sup>rd</sup> woe will not be recorded for us until Rev. 16:1ff because the 7<sup>th</sup> Trumpet contains the rest of the judgments, and now 5 chapters of explanation are needed before the Bowl judgments are described in detail.

Next lesson – Lesson # 37 The Seventh Trumpet – Rev. 11: 15-19

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<sup>i</sup> Robert Thomas, Revelation 8-22; p.94 – Rev. 16:19; 17:18; 18:10,16,18,19,21