

Happy Dead Witnesses Day

Revelation 11:1-19

Introduction

- 1) Imagine that God had a prophets, a preachers Hall of Fame. Who do you think would be inducted? Who would be certain shoo-ins? From the Old Testament I believe we could be confident Elijah and Elisha, Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos would make the cut. In the New Testament era, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul and Apollos no doubt would find their way in. Jesus, of course, would lead the list! Surveying Church History men like John Chrysostom, Bernard of Clairvaux, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Edwards, Wesley, Whitefield, Spurgeon and Billy Graham are sure things. However, if God were to establish His Hall of Fame today, there are at least 2 additional inductees who would certainly receive unanimous selection and yet, they haven't even preached a single message up until this time in history. I am talking about the 2 witnesses of Revelation 11. Coming in the power and spirit of Moses and Elijah these 2 servants of God will rock the world with their preaching. So convicting will their message be that when they are murdered by Antichrist, the whole world will celebrate, send gifts and proclaim a new holiday. It will be known as "Happy Dead Witnesses Day."
- 2) Revelation 11 is an important and also difficult chapter to interpret and understand. It is a continuation of the interlude that began in 10:1 and continues through 14:20. It provides additional insight into significant events which occur during the Tribulation. In this passage 5 important truths are highlighted.

I. Watch: God's temple will be rebuilt. 11:1-2

No plot of land in all of the world is more famous than the temple mount in Jerusalem. Historically 2 temples once occupied its sacred soil: 1) Solomon's temple – destroyed by the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. 2) Zerubbabel's temple – which was later enlarged to magnificent proportions by Herod the Great, and then destroyed by the Roman general, Titus, in AD 70. Eschatologically 2 temples as well will occupy this spot in the Holy City: 1) A Tribulation temple – yet to be built which will be desecrated by Antichrist. 2) The millennial temple – described in Ezekiel 40-47.

Interest in the temple mount is not in peril in our own day. 1) *U.S. News & World Report* (Dec. 27, 1999) noted that, "Israel is concerned that a few *fringe doomsday cultists* will slip into the country and attack Islamic mosques on Jerusalem's Temple Mount. In their twisted theology, destroying the *Al-Aqsa Mosque* or the *Dome of the Rock* would bring on the building of a "Third Temple," which some evangelicals believe would be the springboard to the Second Coming." 2) Early in 2001, Sheik Ikrema Sabri, the mufti of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Authority's leading Islamic leader, told *Die Welt*, the German newspaper, that "...there is not the smallest indication of the existence of a Jewish temple on this place (the Temple mount) in the past. In the whole city (Jerusalem), there is not even a single stone indicating Jewish history." (*RNS*, 7-20-01). 3) Further a bill was introduced in congress on July 19, 2001 by U.S. Representative Eric Cantor, R-VA entitled the "Temple Mount Preservation Act" (H.R. 2566), which would bar all aid to the Palestinian Authority, chaired

by Yasser Arafat, as long as it continues unauthorized excavations that have destroyed artifacts on the Temple Mount.

Some Bible scholars do not believe there will be a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. They argue that the temple and the witnesses in Revelation 11 should be spiritualized to refer to the Church and its witness. Now it is true that Christ used the image of the temple to refer to Himself (John 2:19-22), that the Church is called the Temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21-22) and believers are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). However, it is both unnecessary and unwise to spiritualize this text for the simple reason that the other texts clearly and precisely identified the symbolism involved while this text does nothing of the sort. Indeed, this passage goes into significant detail, unlike the other texts, that makes sense only if a literal, physical temple structure is in view. What is said in our text about this rebuilt temple?

1. The temple will be under God's protection. 11:1

John receives a hollow, bamboo-like cane that served as a measuring device, like our ruler, yardstick. Rise and measure are imperatives of command. Temple is *naos* and refers specifically to the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place, not the entire or greater temple complex. Measuring it signifies God's ownership and possession. This is His property. God will watch over what belongs to Him. Interestingly, this area could only be entered by Jewish persons. Could the reinstatement of temple worship renew interest in Messiah? This temple is yet to be built, but when it is, nothing will happen to it and those who worship within without the permission of God.

2. The temple is a part of God's plan. 11:2

The court outside – refers to the court of the Gentiles. In the time of Jesus, Gentiles who attempted to move out of it and go further into the inner temple area were threatened with the death penalty.

Do not measure – those in this area do not belong to God. It is the possession of Gentiles, lost unbelieving pagans. This is God's plan and harkens back to Luke 21:24 where Jesus said, "and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Gentiles, following Antichrist, will tread (trample) the Holy City (Jerusalem) for 42 months. Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, the Turks, the British and the Arabs have all occupied and controlled Jerusalem. In the end, Antichrist too will reign, but his reign will be short (the last 3 ½ years). This is God's plan.

II. Listen: God's truth will resound. 11:3-6

During the Tribulation God will have His prophets, His servants. 144,000 are listed in chapter 7. Two more are noted here, and what superlative witnesses they are.

1. God's witnesses receive His power. 11:3-4

Who – 2 witnesses

What – Prophecy in sack cloth, a rough, heavy, coarse cloth, worn as a sign of repentance, mourning, humility, grief. They mourn the world's sin and call all to repentance.

How long – 3 ½ years.

Verse 4 is crucial. It looks back to the vision of Zechariah 4. Olive trees provide oil for lamps. Lamp stands give light. Together they speak of the power of God working in His witnesses to bring the light of His Word.

*Who are they?

- 1) Old Testament and New Testament
- 2) The witnessing Church
- 3) Witnesses in general
- 4) Elijah & Enoch
- 5) Elijah & Moses
- 6) Zerubbabel & Joshua
- 7) Elijah & Elisha
- 8) James & John
- 9) Peter & Paul
- 10) Law & Prophets
- 11) Law & Gospel
- 12) Israel & Church
- 13) Israel & the Word
- 14) Church of Smyrna & Philadelphia
- * 15) Spirit of Elijah & Moses

These two come in the spirit of Elijah and Moses and in the likeness of Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor of Zechariah 4.

*Their miracles: similar to Moses and Elijah

- Consume enemies with fire (2 Kings 1:10ff).
- Shut heaven so that it does not rain (1 Kings 17:1).
- Turn water to blood (Exodus 7:14-18).
- Strike the earth with all plagues (Exodus 8:12).

*Their expectations: Many believed Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18) and Elijah (Malachi 4:5; cf. Matthew 11:14) would come at the end of history. Jesus said in Matthew 17:12-13 "Elijah is already come ... He spoke of John the Baptist." (cf. also Matthew 11:14).

Those two stand before the God of the earth on the earth of God preaching in His power, but also preaching in His protection.

2. **God's witnesses receive His protection.** 11:5-6

Verse 5 is comprised of 2 statements which are parallel or synonymous in meaning: 1) If you try to harm them you will be devoured; 2) If you try to harm them you will be killed. We came across fire-breathing demons in chapter 9, now we encounter fire-breathing prophets in chapter 11. As fantastic as it sounds, there is no reason not to take "fire from their mouth" as literal, though the main idea is they cannot be harmed while on mission for God.

Verse 6 summarizes their ministry of misery. Reminiscent of the ministries of Moses and Elijah, these prophets of doom terrify the earth in word and deed, in their witness and in their work. Though the world would love to kill them, they are invulnerable in their service for God.

Application

The same is true for you and me. We are invulnerable and unstoppable for the duration of the ministry God has for us. What confidence. What peace!

III. **Understand: God's testimony will be rejected.** 11:7-10

In John 15:18 & 20, Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also." After their 3 ½ year ministry is complete, God's 2 witnesses will discover the harsh reality of what our Master said.

1. **God's witnesses may be killed.** 11:7-8

Finished their testimony – God's plan for them comes to an end.

The beast – 1st of 36 references in Revelation. This anticipates the more detailed description of him in chapter 13 & 17. He is the Antichrist of 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7. He is the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians 2. He is the beast out of the sea in Revelation 13. Here the origin of his mission and power is emphasized: it is the Abyss. He is a Satan possessed and demon driven superman who will rule the world for a brief time. He will also kill and humiliate God's 2 servants at his first opportunity.

Make war and overcome (cf. 13:7).

Dead bodies in the street – ultimate shame and dishonor in the ancient near east.

Indeed Deuteronomy 21:22-23 said, "And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance."

Place of death: Sodom – a city symbolic of vile immorality and wickedness.

Egypt – a nation symbolic of oppression, slavery and idolatry.

Jerusalem – where our Lord was crucified (no other identification than literal Jerusalem makes sense.)

Jerusalem in this day will be no better than Sodom or Egypt. A Jew hearing this would be shocked, scandalized, sent into a rage! Yet, her wickedness in that day will approach her wickedness when she crucified the sinless Son of God. These 2 superlative witnesses will be treated in the same shameful fashion as their Lord. A slave is not greater than his master.

2. God's witnesses will be hated. 11:9-10

Peoples, tribes, tongues and nations (note again the all-encompassing 4-fold division) will 1) see their dead bodies left in the street and exposed in shameful humiliation for 3 ½ literal days. 2) They will rejoice (cont.) and make merry (cont.) and send gifts! A new holiday will be established in order to celebrate the deaths of the 2 men of God. What an incredible indictment of human depravity, wickedness, sinfulness and evil. How low we can go! How repulsive we can act!

*Incredibly, this is the only mention of rejoicing in the book of Revelation. Men will hate God so much that only in killing His precious servants are they made happy. They hated Him. They will hate us.

IV. Know: God's terror will rage. 11:11-14

Those who dwell on the earth are in high spirits. "Life is good" as far as they are concerned. Those 2 problem prophets are toast! It is a great day to be alive again, or, is it? Heaven's take on all of this is radically different, and God steps forward and acts with unmistakable clarity. Get ready to "turn out the lights! The party is over!"

1. God honors His servants. 11:11-12

- 1) Breath of life (*pneuma zoes*) enters
- 2) They stand – resurrection!!!
- 3) Great fear – (*phobos megas*). Perhaps the greatest understatement in Revelation. This is the 1st of 7 "greats" in the remainder of the chapter. There is great fear (v.11), voice (v.12), earthquake (v.13), voices (v.15), power (v.17), names (v.18), and hail (v.19).
- 4) Ascended – ascension! In a cloud!
- 5) Enemies saw.

2. God deals with sinners. 11:13-14

Verse 13a records God's judgement on evil Jerusalem. 7,000 people (literally names of men 7,000) are killed.

Verse 13b records man's response – The rest (in Jerusalem): 1) were afraid and 2) gave glory to the God of heaven. I believe this speaks of a genuine conversion of a great multitude of Jews in Jerusalem. John MacArthur points out that giving glory to the God of heaven is a mark of genuine worship in Revelation and elsewhere in Scripture (cf. 4:9; 14:7; 16:9; 19:7; Luke 17:18-19; Romans 4:20). "This passage, then, described the reality of the salvation of Jews in Jerusalem, as God fulfills His pledge of blessings for Israel (Romans 11:4-5, 26)" (p. 305).

*God deals with sinners. Some are recipients of His wrath. Some are graced with His mercy. “The second woe (6th trumpet) is past. Behold (look), the 3rd woe (7th trumpet) is coming quickly.”

V. Rejoice: God’s timing is always right. 11:15-19

These verses are transitional, and they also summarize all that is yet to come. There is a sense of absolute certainty concerning the events that are just ahead. Two wonderful truths stand out in this doxology of praise and gratitude to our great God.

1. In the end the Savior will reign. 11:15-17

Vs. 15 – 7th angel sounding brings us to the end, not the last event, but the final act of God’s drama of retribution and redemption. Remember, the 7th trumpet contains the 7 bowls of chapter 16. The stage is cleared when this act is completed. “The 7th trumpet sets in motion the final consummation of God’s redemptive plan for the present universe” (MacArthur, 308). So certain is all of this that heaven can loudly proclaim that the world’s kingdoms have become (it is a done deal!) the kingdoms of our Lord (the Father) and His Christ (the Son) [cf. Psalm 2:2]. Furthermore, this kingdom will see no end: He shall reign forever and ever.

Vs. 16 – The 24 elders, representing the redeemed again fall on their faces and worship (cf. 5:8, 14; 7:11; 19:14). They also praise our wonderful Savior thanking Him as being 1) almighty, 2) eternal and sovereign.

2. In the end the saints will be rewarded. 11:18-19

God will reign supremely (v. 17). He will also judge righteously (v. 18) and reward graciously (v. 18).

Vs. 18:

- 1) The nations are defiant and enraged, angered and deeply hostile at the idea of God reigning. “Christianity is a religion for losers” (Ted Turner). Oh, how tragically wrong they are, and oh how they will realize it when His wrath comes and He judges the (spiritually) dead “and destroys those who dwell on the earth” (v. 18). How awful it will be for sinners. How wonderful it will be for the saved.
- 2) Those who serve Him and fear Him; prophet, saint, small or great, all shall be rewarded. In 22:12 Jesus says, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.” The reward Jesus promises to believers is peace, rest and an eternal home in His kingdom. We will reign with Him in His millennial kingdom (20:4-6) and we shall be His people in the New Heaven, Earth, and Jerusalem forever (21:3).
* Further: note the promise of 21:4-5!

Vs. 19:

- 3) Verse 19 is a response to the hymn of praise in verses 17 & 18. The temple of God in heaven (contra that on the earth of v. 1) is opened and the ark of the covenant is seen. This symbolizes God’s covenant promise in redemption. Believers are promised His presence and His blessings. Unbelievers in contrast

see only “lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.” Trouble is just around the corner and they, unlike us, will face it without Jesus. How great indeed is the lostness of any person who does not have Jesus as their Savior.

Conclusion

Another of God’s superlative witnesses was a man by the name of Felix Manz. Born in 1498, he lived a short 29 years.

Felix Manz was foremost leader among the *Swiss Brethren Anabaptist*. His noble life, eloquence, education, and enthusiasm for the gospel of Jesus and believers’ baptism made him extremely popular with the masses. It also put him in opposition to the leaders in Zurich who succeeded in having him condemned to death. Manz, according to the sentence, was taken bound from the Wellenberg prison past the fish market to the boat. All along the way he witnessed, praising God that even though a sinner he would die for the truth. Further he declared that believer’s baptism was the true baptism according to the Word of God and the teachings of Christ. His mother’s voice could be heard above the subdued throng and the ripple of the swift-flowing stream, entreating him to remain true to Christ in the hour of temptation. Anchored in the middle of the Limmat River, his arms and legs were bound. There he sang out with a loud voice, (Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit). A few moments later the cold waters of the river closed in over the head of Felix Manz. According to the Zurich chronicler, Manz’s execution took place January 5, 1527, at 3 o’clock Saturday afternoon. Manz wrote little, but he did leave a written testimony to his faith and a hymn.

*With gladness will I sing now;
My heart delights in God,
Who showed me such forbearance,
That I from death was saved
Which never hath an end.
I praise thee, Christ in heaven
Who all my sorrow changed.*

George Blaurock

Thanks be to God for His superlative witnesses. May we, by His grace, be counted among their numbers.