

The Two Witnesses

December 17 – Revelation 11:1-19

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Day 351 – 14 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We continued the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments. After John's interaction with the angel and the little book (10:1-11), he records three events — that of the measuring rod, the two witnesses, and the seventh trumpet. Let's look briefly at each of these events.

First, John is given a rod, or stick, to "measure the temple in the holy city, and those who worship in it" (11:1, 2). These details indicate a physical temple in Jerusalem, perhaps one to be built in the end times. However, the temple here could also be figurative, as a symbol of the Church (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). Either way, **John's measuring is symbolic of God's recognition and protection of His people. He knows those who are His.**

John is also told not to measure the outside of the temple, referring to the court of the Gentiles, which is "given to the nations" (v.2). These people do not worship the Lord but rather "tread underfoot the holy city for 42 months" (v.2). This statement is a reference to the second half of the great tribulation, the three and a half years during which the Anti-Christ will desecrate Jerusalem (and the temple) and kill the followers of Christ.

Second, John notes the rise of two witnesses during this time (v.3-14; Ezek. 4). Again, we don't know for sure if these witnesses are to be taken literally or figuratively. Those who believe that these witnesses are individuals liken them to Moses and Elijah because they have the power to stop the rain (like Elijah, Jas. 5:17), turn water into blood (like Moses), and strike the earth with plagues (like Moses). Also, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus at His transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-3); and it was prophesied that Elijah would return for "the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5, 6).

Those who believe that the two witnesses are figurative liken them to the Jews and Gentiles who are saved during the great tribulation (Rev. 7:4-17). Though they are spiritually saved during this fiery trial, they will be physically killed for their faith, and the unbelieving world will rejoice over their death (v.7-10). However, halfway through the tribulation, the martyrs will be resurrected and taken to heaven (v.11-13).

Third, John hears the seventh trumpet blast, which initiates the return and reign of Christ (v.15-19). At that time, Christ defeats His enemies, judges the living and the dead, and rewards His faithful followers. John writes more about the reign of Christ later in his letter.

Daily Reflection

Whatever the identity of the two witnesses, it's important to note that **God always has someone to represent Him on earth, even during those difficult days in the end. They will be faithful to proclaim Jesus as Lord.** However, they will pay a high price for their faithfulness, perhaps even their lives. But the good news is that they are resurrected and rewarded in heaven.

I'm also encouraged by this statement, **"The time came to reward Your bondservants, the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great..."** (v.18).

You may think, at times, that no one cares about you. You are a small person in a big world. No one sees what you do, or don't do. You might think that your actions and words, even those in private, are lost and forgotten.

However, the truth is that God has an ever-watchful eye and an ever-listening ear. All that you have done, publicly or alone, has been logged, and the Lord will reward you for your faithfulness. **Whether you are great or small, if you are a servant of the Lord, He knows your name. He knows your deeds, and you will be rewarded someday for your faithfulness.**

The Woman, Dragon, and Child

December 18 – Revelation 12:1-17

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Day 352 – 13 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We continued the unfolding of the seventh trumpet judgment (11:15), which set events in motion for the return and reign of Christ. But before Christ's return, there is a great tribulation on earth. Today's passage built up to that tribulation period, first by looking back at history, then by looking forward to the future.

John records a vision, a sign that takes place in the heavens (outer space), like Joseph's dreams (Gen. 37:9, 10). **The sign includes a woman, a dragon, and a child (Rev. 12:1-6). The woman is Israel, who wears a crown of twelve stars for the twelve tribes (v.1).** She is radiant, like the sun, a symbol of her glory as God's chosen people (v.1). The woman (Israel) is pregnant, and she cries out in pain, waiting for her baby, or Messiah, to be born (v.2).

The red dragon is Lucifer, or Satan, who is thrown down to earth with the angels who follow him (v.4). In the context, this event seems to have occurred before the scene in the Garden of Eden (note "the serpent of old," v.9). The dragon has seven heads and ten horns, symbols of nations he controls, past and future (Matt. 4:8, 9). The nation he did not possess was Israel (the woman), God's chosen people. So, Satan "stands before her," to devour the promised child (Messiah, Rev. 12:4). If he could not destroy Israel, at least he would destroy her savior. He gave it his best shot when King Herod killed all the babies of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1-16).

The child, of course, is Jesus (Rev. 12:5). He is the Messiah King who will rule all nations one day. After birth, the child is protected from the dragon, and He is eventually "caught up to God and His throne," referring to Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Meanwhile, "the woman (Israel) flees into the wilderness" because of worldwide persecution, even up to the great tribulation in the last days (v.6).

Next, John witnesses another war in heaven, between Satan and his demons and Michael and the angels. God's forces are triumphant, and the dragon is thrown down to the earth, never again having access to heaven (v.9, 10). As a result, the dragon persecutes God's nation, Israel (the woman), but God protects His people (v.13-16). The dragon is so enraged, since he knows that his time is short (v.12), that he turns his attention to those "who hold the testimony of Jesus," meaning Christians (v.17).

Daily Reflection

John's vision (and the remainder of *Revelation*) is a recap and fulfilment of *Genesis 3:15*. After the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden, God told the serpent (Satan), "I will put enmity (strife) between you and the woman (Israel), and between your seed and her seed (Jesus). He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." **This epic contest between the woman, the dragon, and the child, was prophesied at the beginning of time.** We stand here today near the end of that battle, perhaps near the last days, when the prophecy will be completed.

However, as Satan knows his days are numbered, he seeks to do as much damage as possible. Christians will suffer greatly in the last days, but John encourages us with these words, "They overcome him (the dragon) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death" (Rev. 12:11).

Though Satan may harm us physically, even kill us, that is all he can do. The worst persecution that he can muster cannot and will not phase the Church. We are forever forgiven by the blood of the Lamb. Our faith in Him protects us against any spiritual harm. Even death, which Satan has held over mankind for a long time, does not phase us. Because of Christ, death has no sting, and the grave has no victory (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 15:55).

The Two Beasts

December 19 – Revelation 13:1-18

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Day 353 – 12 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Our passage is a continuation of the previous one, regarding the seventh trumpet judgment (12:1-17). We are observing the development of the end times, or the great tribulation, before the return and reign of Christ. Today, John sees two beasts rise to prominence. Who are these beasts, and how do they relate to us today?

The first beast comes out of the sea (13:1-10).

It is a hideous monster having ten horns and seven heads (notice it's in the opposite order of 12:3, referring now to the future). It looks like a leopard, with feet like a bear, and a mouth like a lion, a mixture of the beasts in Daniel's dream (Dan. 7). John's vision also affirms King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue with ten toes (Dan. 2). **What's being described here is the Anti-Christ, a powerful political leader who will dominate all nations,** a one world government broken into ten sections or districts, having ten leaders under his authority.

This Anti-Christ has Satan's authority. He is arrogant and blasphemous, speaking against God and His people, even waging war against them (Rev. 13:2, 7). This is "the man of lawlessness, the one destined for destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2 Thess. 2:3-5).

The second beast comes up out of the earth (Rev. 13:11-18). He is more appealing than the hideous monster. He looks like a lamb, but he speaks like a dragon (v.11). He also has Satan's authority, but his responsibility is to make the first beast (Anti-Christ) look good. "He makes all the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast" (v.4, 8, 12). **The second beast is the false prophet,** a master deceiver. He is a professional propagandist who tickles the ears of the world and causes them to follow after the Anti-Christ (v.3).

Another responsibility of the false prophet is to set up a world economic system, all under the control of the Anti-Christ. To participate in this global economy, one will have to swear allegiance to the first beast (the Anti-Christ). That allegiance will be symbolized by a mark. Without that mark, no one will be able to buy or sell in the marketplace. One's economic survival will be tied to participation in this evil system.

Those who refuse to obey and worship the Anti-Christ, or take his mark, will be persecuted and/or killed (v.10). He will "make war with the saints and overcome them" (v.7). Of course, all non-Christians will gladly surrender their rights and liberties to the Anti-Christ (v.3, 8).

Daily Reflection

While people have speculated over the centuries who these beasts are, were, or might be, we just don't know for sure. When the Bible was written, Christians believed the Anti-Christ to be Emperor Nero. Later, people thought it might be Hitler, the Pope, or even a U.S. President. Since Satan does not know when the end times will occur, he must always have someone on the sideline, ready to play the part. Rest assured, when the time is right, he will have his man.

That raises another important point. **This Anti-Christ, although he acts with satanic authority, is just a man.** Even his number is 666, the number of man (v.18). Man was created on the sixth day. Therefore, six represents mankind. The greatest man to ever live (in the world's eyes, at least) will be represented by three sixes. But even at his best, this "great man" falls short of the glory of God, whose number is seven, that of perfection or completion.

Someday, there will be a one world government, religion, and economic system. With the speedy development of modern technology, that day may be sooner than later. But "we must persevere and demonstrate the faith of the saints," even as we suffer (v.10).

The Great Separation

December 20 – Revelation 14:1-20

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Day 354 – 11 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

John continues the seventh trumpet judgment (11:15), which prepares for the return and reign of Christ, as well as the final destruction of the earth and its inhabitants. Much of what John sees in this chapter overlaps with events we've already covered or will cover soon.

First, **John sees a vision of Christ returning and rescuing the 144,000 Jews who believe He is the Messiah (14:1-5; 7:4-8)**. He is standing on Mount Zion (Jerusalem) with them, and they have been given His mark, meaning they belong to Him. They have not tainted themselves with the immoral world system of the Anti-Christ (14:8); rather they are undefiled and loyal to the Lamb. Together, they sing a new song of salvation and worship before God.

Second, John sees two angels who proclaim messages (14:6-8). The first angel proclaims the gospel to the whole earth, to every nation, tribe, tongue, and person. **The second angel proclaims the fall of Babylon the great, a reference to the evil and immoral system of the Anti-Christ**. Babylon was the original scene of worldwide idol worship and rebellion to God (Gen. 11:1-9). The Anti-Christ will repeat what took place there. This vision fulfills Jesus' prophecy, "The gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14).

Third, **John sees another angel proclaim the destruction of those who worship the Anti-Christ and receive his mark (Rev. 14:9-13)**. They will "drink of the wine of the wrath of God" and be tormented day and night with fire and brimstone forever. This angel is describing hell, an awful place of judgment for those who do not repent of their sin but, instead, choose to be loyal to God's enemy. Notice that their torment is continual. It's not annihilation, but rather ongoing, conscious agony. God will have his revenge, and justice will be served.

Finally, **John sees the Son of Man and several angels swinging their sickles and gathering a harvest of grapes for the wine press (v.9-13)**. In a wine press, grapes are trodden under foot. The imagery here is that of the final battle between Christ and the forces of the Anti-Christ at Armageddon (19:11-21; Zech. 14:1-5; Ezek. 39:8-16). The Lord will deliver His people from the ultimate war that stretches 200 miles across the Holy Land.

Daily Reflection

Jesus prophesied this great winnowing or separation of His people from the ungodly (Matt. 13:39-43; 25:31-46). Those who are His followers, who keep His commandments and keep the faith will be preserved from eternal destruction (Rev. 14:12, 13). They will "enjoy rest from their labors, for their deeds will follow after them" (v.13).

Though it may not occur in our time, the great separation will happen, just as God said it would. There will be a day when it will be revealed whose side we're on. We will reap what we have sown. In that moment, there will be people who proclaim to be Christian but who are really imposters. They talked the talk, but they didn't walk the walk. They will say, "Lord, didn't we do all these things in your name? But He will say to them, 'Depart from Me, for I never knew you'" (Matt. 7:22, 23).

Where will you be on the day of the great separation? Are you certain whose side you are on? Does your life give evidence of it?

What about those around you who do not know the Lord? Where will they be when that day comes? To whom does the Lord want you to share His "eternal gospel" (v.6)? **Don't waste time. The great separation is coming soon.**

The Song of the Lamb

December 21 – Revelation 15:1-8

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Day 355 – 10 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

John sees a scene in heaven, in which preparations are being made for the last of God’s judgments — seven angels with seven plagues. “In them the wrath of God is finished” (v.1). These judgments indicate that we are near the end of the great tribulation period.

The seven angels came out of the temple in heaven (v.5). The tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon were earthly copies of the heavenly version (*Heb. 9:23*). They represented God’s presence on earth, both to save people from sin and to judge those who remain in it.

One of the four living creatures gives a golden bowl to each of the seven angels (*Rev. 15:7*). The bowls are “full of the wrath of God” (v.7). The angels will pour out the bowls’ contents in the next chapter, which will complete the judgment of the seventh trumpet and the seventh seal (*8:1; 11:5*).

Meanwhile, John also sees a large group of people standing on the floor of heaven (which looks like a sea of glass mixed with fire). “They are the ones who had been victorious over the beast (Anti-Christ) and his image... (*15:2*). No doubt, this group has been persecuted and killed for their loyalty to Christ, but John refers to them as “victorious.” While they may have lost their earthly lives, they gained a great standing before the Lord in heaven. Their earthly death opened the door for them to experience this heavenly scene.

As John observes this moment, he records that **these servants of God are holding harps and singing two songs — the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb** (v.2-4). The people of Israel sang the song of Moses after they were delivered from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea (*Ex. 14:23-31*). When they witnessed this great redemptive act, they couldn’t help but to lift their voices to God and praise Him for His wondrous deeds.

Take a few minutes to read the song of Moses recorded in *Exodus 15:1-18*. Why would this song have been appropriate to sing in heaven?

The Israelites sang, “The Lord is my strength and song. He has become my *salvation*. In your lovingkindness, He has led His people whom He *redeemed*. In His strength, He has guided them to His *holy habitation*” (v.2, 13). **Little did they know that they were singing of Christ, the redemption or salvation that He earned them at the cross, and their (and our) future eternal life in heaven, the holy habitation!**

Then, the saints standing on the glass sea sang the song of the Lamb (*Rev. 15:3, 4*). They, too, have just experienced this great redemptive act — God’s deliverance from a powerful earthly enemy (the Anti-Christ) — and they could not help but to praise Him for His wondrous works.

Daily Reflection

Take a minute to read the song of the Lamb again, slowly. What words or phrases are meaningful to you? Explain why.

As followers of Christ, we have all experienced the Lord’s redemptive work in our lives. How can we hold back singing of His wondrous works? One day, we will sing to Him together!

Seven Bowls of Wrath

December 22 – Revelation 16:1-21

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 356 – 9 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

John sees the seven angels pour out seven bowls. **These bowl judgments will complete the wrath that God has stored up for the wicked people of the earth (15:1).** Remarkably, the bowl judgments mirror the Egyptian plagues that God sent to judge Pharaoh and his people during the time of the exodus (*Ex. 7-11*).

For example, when the first angel pours out his bowl, the people who worship the beast (Anti-Christ) are smitten with “loathsome and malignant sores” (*Rev. 16:2*). God did the same thing to the Egyptians (*Ex. 9:8-12*). Then, when the second and third angels pour out their bowls, the earth’s water turns to blood, and everything living in water dies (*Rev. 16:3, 4*). Moses did the same thing to the Nile River (*Ex. 7:14-24*). Imagine the sight and smell if every water source in the world is filled to the brim with dead fish and other floating sea creatures. Furthermore, there is no clean water to drink, to wash, or anything else. Notice the people gnaw their tongues in pain from the sores and lack of drinking water (*Rev. 16:10*).

Next, when the fourth and fifth angels pour out their bowls, strange things happen to the sun (*Rev. 16:8-10*). At first, the sun scorches people with fire. With such extreme heat, all the snow and ice on earth will melt, which will cause catastrophic damage to coastal cities. Then, the sun is darkened worldwide, which is similar to what God did locally in Egypt (*Ex. 10:21-23*).

Then, when the sixth angel pours out his bowl, the Euphrates River dries up (*Rev. 16:12*). This great river has served as a protection for the nations of the Middle East, including Israel. Once it is gone, armies can easily assemble and mobilize to attack. The Anti-Christ and the false prophet (both under the influence of the dragon, Satan) convince the nations of the world to invade Israel, to gain revenge on them for these plagues from their God (*v.13-16*). Notice the mention of frogs, again like Egypt.

Their armies gather in the plain below Mt. Megiddo. The people in the region call this plain Har-Magedon (Armageddon), meaning “mountain of slaughter” (60 miles north of Jerusalem). The great French Emperor Napoleon said of this plain that it was the greatest battlefield he had ever seen. It is at Armageddon where the last and greatest battle on earth will take place.

When the seventh and final angel pours out his bowl, the greatest earthquake of all time occurs, and with it 100-pound hailstones fall from the sky (similar to the hail in Egypt, *Rev. 16:17-21*). The combination of earthquakes and hail cause unprecedented devastation and death. The great cities of the nations are destroyed (*v.19*). In fact, the seismic shifts in the earth’s topography eliminate the islands and mountains (*v.20*). After this seventh bowl is released, a voice says, “It is done” (*v.17*).

Daily Reflection

When God sent the plagues on the Egyptians, Pharaoh did not relent and let God’s people go, but rather he hardened his heart toward God. Likewise, notice that, during the bowl judgments, the people of earth harden their hearts toward God and blaspheme Him (*v.9, 11, 21*). They are so deluded and blinded by the beast that they are unwilling to confess their sin and repent of their ways. Their hard, rebellious hearts justify God’s wrath.

Even the angel who pours out the third bowl affirms God’s judgments. He says, **“Righteous are You, O God, because You judged these things, for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets... They deserve it”** (*v.5, 6*). The people of God, who are under the altar in heaven, also shout, “Yes, O Lord, true and righteous are Your judgments” (*v.7*). **“Though God may not judge or repay His enemies in our timing, He will have His day, and justice will be served.”** “Vengeance is Mine,” declares the Lord. “I will repay...” (*Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30*).

The Mother of Harlots

December 23 – Revelation 17:1-18

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Day 357 – 8 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After the seven bowl judgments (16:1-21), John sees a snapshot of the last things (Rev. 17-22), beginning with the judgment of the great harlot (mentioned in 14:8). The great harlot, or prostitute, is clothed in purple and red and is adorned with jewelry (Rev. 17:4). **Her name is "Babylon the Great – Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth"** (v.5). "In her hand is a gold cup, full of abominations, the unclean things of her immorality" (v.4). The harlot sits atop a red beast with seven heads and ten horns (the same beast from 13:1-10).

Remember, Babylon the Great (the harlot) is a reigning world system (political, economic, and religious) that "sits on many waters," or nations (17:1, 15). This one world system is directed by the Anti-Christ, promoted by the false prophet, and empowered by the dragon, Satan, and the global leaders corrupt themselves with the harlot's immorality. Simply put, they indulge themselves with her (or the great city, v.18) for wealth, power, or even survival.

The beast on which the harlot sits has seven heads and ten horns (v.3, 7). John is told that the seven heads are seven mountains or kings, and the ten horns are also kings who will receive power (v.9-13). His vision is like Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream in *Daniel 2*. While the body of the statue represented major kingdoms or empires of history, the ten toes of the statue represent nations or districts that will arise in the end times. Likewise, here the beast with the seven heads are major ruling powers of history, but the ten horns form and rule in the end times.

The traditional interpretation of the seven heads or mountains is that they represent the seven hills of Rome, and that the ten horns or kings will be headquartered in, or revolve around the leadership of, a reborn Roman Empire (hence the toes mixed with iron and clay, "the iron legions of Rome," in *Dan. 2*).

Whatever the interpretation, this woman (harlot) and her global system will be "drunk with the blood of the saints" (v.6). While the world has killed Christians for thousands of years, the harlot will seek and destroy those who refuse the mark of the beast but remain loyal to Christ (the Lamb). They are the ones that John sees honored in heaven (7:9-17).

Daily Reflection

Notice what happens when the ten rulers wage war against Christ — the Lamb (17:14). **"The Lamb will overcome them," and the rulers will turn on the harlot and devour her** (v.16). In other words, they completely abandon and destroy the corrupt system of the beast.

Why would they do that? John writes, "Because He (the Lamb) is Lord of lords and King of kings..." (v.14). **As "great" as these rulers might be on the earth, they are puny in the sight of God, who is the sovereign of heaven and earth.** These many waters (nations) are nothing in His hands. They are "a drop from a bucket" (*Isa. 40:15*), and "like a river in His hands, He can turn it wherever He wishes" (*Prov. 21:1*). Notice that these rulers once have the purpose to glorify the beast (*Rev. 17:13*), but after they are overcome by the Lamb, they execute God's purposes, so that His words are fulfilled (v.17).

Take a minute to read *Daniel 2:27-45*. Pay close attention to the ten toes that are destroyed by the stone that comes out of heaven (v.44, 45). "The God of heaven will set up His own kingdom which will never be destroyed" (v.44).

As great as rulers and nations appear, they are just men, weak in the hands of God. How does knowing His sovereignty affect how you live?
