

Glory in Resurrection, Rapture and Redemption of Israel (Rev 11:7-14)

Please turn to Revelation 11 and as you do I want to share a memorable line from the life of missionary John Paton. John was a faithful witness for Jesus in the reformed church of Scotland, but he had a passion to proclaim Christ to the heathen of New Hebrides. In the 1800s 2 missionaries who first tried to reach those islands in the South Pacific, those 2 witnesses were killed by savage cannibals, in a most barbaric fashion. But it didn't kill the gospel as John Paton would write of the 2 witnesses dying there: "Thus were the New Hebrides baptized with the blood of martyrs; and Christ thereby told the whole Christian world that he claimed these islands as His own." Many thought such a pagan place could never be saved and tried to stop the young minister from going. Old Mr. Dickson said 'you will be eaten by cannibals!'

Listen to John Paton's famous reply: 'Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my Resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.'

In Rev 11:7 one like a beast attacks and kills 2 witnesses who came to his heathen empire. It was the most pagan of places, as v. 8 calls it symbolically Sodom, like that OT city doomed to destruction. Surely this place is beyond the grace of God, some still think theologically. In barbaric savage fashion they don't even put them in graves, they leave them in the street, celebrating in v. 9-10. But all that didn't kill the gospel. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, and it seems these are its last martyrs, and the very place where their blood is spilt is claimed by Christ as His own for that Great Day

¹¹ *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.*

¹² *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.* ¹³ *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 [or feared, worshipped?] and gave glory to the God of heaven*

By a miraculous movement of God's sovereign grace, Paton's witness saw what had seemed impossible theologically to the stodgy theologians back in their ivory towers: there was a massive conversion among that entire nation.

It was a pagan place that practiced euthanasia of widows, slaughtered babies (sound familiar?), with demonic worship, human sacrifice, and cannibalism. But Christ built His church in that wicked place, the gates of hell could not prevail against His church. Like life from the dead, a revival broke out and many former pagan persecutors of Christianity fell on their faces in worship of the true God of heaven. John Piper records: ‘In the next fifteen years, John and Margaret Paton saw the entire island of Aniwa turn to Christ.’¹ It was estimated nearly 100 years later than nearly 90% still professed Christ.

Here in Rev 11, it may be and seems to be that in this sin city like Sodom in this scene, 10% are judged but the rest, the 90% give glory to the true God of heaven, which many scholars of many traditions say means true worship like it does in the rest of the book of Revelation. I know many theologians say today the mass conversion of a city is impossible and say miracles don’t happen anymore like in Bible times (like Nineveh’s mass conversion) but it says in Rev 7 many Jews and an innumerable multitude of Gentiles will be saved before the end during the great tribulation (7:14). 11:13 may be part.

But we need to start with the first part of this prophecy for a running start. If you weren’t here this morning you’ll want to listen to that later to get the whole picture, but some concepts that will help make sense of this complex book is to recognize it uses past images for present and future realities. John sees images that he would recognize from past scriptures and past history to portray the future, but also with application to the present. An apocalypse is a Jewish writing rich in symbols from the OT and focusing on the end time. That’s the Greek word describing this book in Rev 1:1, *apocalypse*, and so we need to realize this isn’t a video, it’s a vision that communicates reality.

So in Rev 19 when John sees Jesus has a long sword coming out His mouth, that doesn’t mean when we see Jesus to expect a reverse sword-swallowing trick with a 4-foot-blade on His tongue. John knew the sword was a symbol for judgment and slaying enemies, so John would think that’s what the word of Jesus will do at His 2nd coming. The same may be true here in v. 5 as fire comes out the mouth of the witnesses to consume their enemies. Fire is like a sword in Scripture, it’s another metaphor for deadly judgment, so the idea may be that they represent Christ in prophesying judgment. Maybe a literal fire called down from heaven like in the OT when enemies came against the prophet Elijah, actual fire destroyed soldiers who tried to make war against him. If so, it would fit the picture of v. 5 also like OT Elijah, power to stop rain in the sky for the time of their prophesying (literally same time as v. 3)

Or the OT image behind fire from the mouth in v. 4 might be Jeremiah 5 as God tells him metaphorically: *I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them* (v. 14). The point is Jeremiah's words bring judgment to destroy sinful Israelites, and did, not that Jeremiah would literally breathe fire like a dragon. It's not liberal to not take everything literal. We should interpret NT prophecy like OT prophecy. Scripture interprets Scripture. Use older revelation, not newer speculations.

[in v. 4 olive trees and lampstands don't talk, it's a symbol from earlier]

In the context of the book of Revelation, look at chapter 8 for another way it may be fulfilled as fire consumes the enemies of the saints. Look at Rev 8:4 *'and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.* ⁵ *Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth ...* [so in this case saints pray and in response, He sends down fire to earth in judgment called down]

The power of prayer may be behind Rev 11:5-6, even as apostles/prophets had to pray, it wasn't their own power (Jas 5:16-18). In Rev 8:9 plagues of water turning to blood are part of God's answer to the prayers of saints. It also describes other plagues. Rev 11:6 mentions water to blood and plagues. Rev 16 also mentions plagues, water to blood in this same time (last 3.5 yrs) so it may be the heaven-sent plagues of Rev 8-9 happen at the same time as Rev 11, 16, through human agency, like with Moses (note 11:8 says *Egypt*).

[Elijah and Moses appear w/ Jesus on Mt. to talk about His Jerusalem departure]

To understand Revelation, don't watch the news, watch John's OT imagery:

- the symbolic name *Egypt* with 2 witnesses reminds of Moses and Aaron
- in v. 8 the symbolic name *Sodom* reminds of 2 warning Lot to flee wrath
- or remember the 2 faithful witnesses Caleb and Joshua, another parallel if you remember the great city Jericho fell with 7 trumpets and great voices and the ark of the covenant. Here in Rev 11 the great city falls (v. 8, 13), there's a 7th trumpet, great voices (v. 15), the ark of the covenant (v. 19)!
- I don't know about you, I find OT parallels more amazing than new ideas
- The 2 olive trees of v. 4 comes from the OT prophet Zechariah, a twofold witness with King Zerubbabel his high priest rebuilding the temple (11:1)
- But that's not all the parallels! These 2 witnesses are a lot like Elijah and Elisha in calling down fire, shutting the sky from rain for 1,260 days and bodily resurrections and Elijah went up to heaven bodily as men watched.

[with Elisha one resurrection uses identical phrase to 11:11]

Elijah and *Enoch* are the only 2 in history to be raptured up to heaven alive, so some have wondered if these 2 are sent back from heaven in because Heb 9 says it's appointed unto man to die once, and so in Rev 11 these 2 men die

But many passages say there will be many Christians alive as Christ returns who will go to heaven without dying after the dead in Christ rise and those who remain will be caught up to meet in the air, translated and glorified in a twinkling of an eye. The point of Heb 9 is there's no coming back, you die, then face judgment, but those alive at the 2nd coming face it without dying.

Is this the 'rapture' (Latin word for *caught up in the clouds* in 1 Thess 4)? It certainly isn't a secret rapture, as v. 9-11 says the world watches this. Rev 1 v. 7 say as Jesus comes, every eye will see Him, but it doesn't say they see Jesus at this point. The *lampstand* image of v. 4 is explained in Rev 1:20 as representing churches, so it's possible this represents the raptured church or the dead in Christ rising first to meet up in the clouds, and a mighty voice of command (1 Thess 4:16). But Rev 11 is a difficult text and it's always safer to not build doctrines off less clear passages but to look to the clearer ones.

It's clear the dead in Christ rise before the rapture in Thessalonians and in 1 Cor 15:52 Paul clearly says the resurrection comes before the rapture which he puts at '*the last trumpet*'; you'll have to study for yourself the timing of the last trumpet of Revelation (11:15) or when the resurrection is in the book (v. 18, 20:4). The timing of 11:11 may not be the resurrection of all, but v. 18 seems to be and if so, is parallel to Rev 20 you can study for resurrection/rapture timing. It seems to me v. 11 is before the end but for me timing and sequence isn't a hill to die on, the only hill for dying on is at the end of v. 8, and Jesus already died on it. If we keep the cross central we don't have to get cross with each other about smaller and secondary things.

The late Dr. Ironside of Moody Church wrote: 'I do not know that we need limit the witnesses to two individuals. Two is the number of testimony, and...two witnesses might well symbolize the witnessing remnant...as a whole. But I would not be dogmatic as to this, for it might be the mind of God to send two individuals, as here described, to herald the near coming of His Son ... some have drawn the conclusion that the two witnesses would be Moses and Elijah sent back to earth ... I admit the possibility of this, though it does not seem to me probable; but just as John the Baptist came of old *in the spirit and power of Elijah*—and, to those who would receive it, he *was Elijah which was to come*—so these witnesses...will be in the spirit and power both of the prophet who came to restore Israel to the true God, and the great prophet who first led them out of Egypt ... [he interprets v. 11 as] another rapture—another cohort of the 1st resurrection [Rev 20:4] ...And it would seem as though this visible rapture will have some effect.'²

I don't know what kind of effect all this is having on you, but I want to look for the rest of our time at the effect this event has on those who see it. Let's not get too caught up with when we'll get caught up, but notice that Rev 11 ends with believers caught up in worship, lost in wonder, love, and praise. What is it that makes Paul caught up with '*O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable His judgments, and unfathomable His ways...to Him be the glory forever.*' Is it this event?

I think v. 13 is exciting: *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*

What does it mean? Every time the same Greek root for *fear* is used in the book of Revelation for fearing God it's reverent faith. Same with *give glory*

- v. 18 here in context, the middle of the verse, saints are those who fear
- flip over to Rev 14 for the next example. To fear and give glory means to be saved, to be converted, it's part of what 14:6 calls the eternal gospel as 14:7 has the same phrase: '*fear God and give Him glory*' with '*worship*'
- so as 11:13 says they *feared and gave God glory*, the idea is *worshipped*
- Rev 19 has the same idea: '*Praise our God...His servants...who fear Him ...let us rejoice...and give Him glory*' heaven's worshippers say (v. 5, 7)
- Look at 15:4 for another where it asks: *Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?* [clearly salvation, parallel in 2nd half with worship]
- Look at 16:9, end of the verse: *...they did not repent and give Him glory.*

So with all that in mind Rev 11:13 should blow our mind when most of the city fear and give God glory (in other word, repentance, salvation, worship). Remember when the city of Jericho fell, there was a small remnant saved in Rahab's family because she feared the God of heaven (similar language in Josh 2:9-11). In the context after Jericho falls, to '*give glory to God*' meant conversion, saving faith (7:19). The original 2 witnesses Caleb and Joshua only saw a tiny remnant believe, but John sees the reverse image here after the final 2 witnesses: in this scene the remnant is the majority who believe, repent, worship. The minority is judged, and only a portion of the city falls.

This would amaze John. The mention of 7,000 would remind him of Elijah (already alluded to in v. 6) when there was a remnant of only 7,000 in Israel who hadn't bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). By amazing grace this reverses that story as well, only 7,000 perish, the rest bow the knee to Jesus.

Where does this take place? The end of v. 8 says it's in the city where Jesus was crucified. It's Jerusalem. It's figuratively or spiritually called Egypt and Sodom but not symbolically called Jerusalem. It's the place where the Lord was killed, but in v. 8 Jerusalem is so sinful it's given the symbolic name of *Sodom* (the OT city destroyed for its sin) and *Egypt*, that nation persecuting Israel in the OT. That image and prophecy is turned upside-down and on its head, as Jerusalem now receives plagues from 2 witnesses in v. 5-6 and the holy city where the temple once stood persecutes true Israel in v. 7. Wow!

[Jerusalem deserves fire/brimstone like Sodom and plagues like Egypt]

John might think of Isaiah 6, the famous holy, holy, holy vision where God shows him a temple (much like the vision of Rev 11 begins with a temple). He's told Israel will be trampled (like v. 2) and judged but a tenth remain, a remnant. The rest of Israel the prophecy of Isaiah calls *Sodom* like Rev 11:8 (Isa 1:9) but in Rev 11 a tenth is judged, the rest remain, giving God glory!

All those OT images and prophecies are turned upside-down, on their head. John had seen in his lifetime Jerusalem reject Christ and kill His witnesses in the streets like Stephen and James, but now he sees grace for Jerusalem!

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets," Jesus said and no doubt John who was there remembered it well. Jesus said in the context of the temple and coming judgment like John sees in Rev 11, Jesus said to the leaders of wicked Jerusalem: *I send you prophets...some of whom you will kill...O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets...who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'* (Mt 23:34-39)

Is that no longer the heart of Jesus to gather the children of Jerusalem? The very next chapter uses the same Greek word for a future time when Jesus will *gather* His people after things are shaken and *the sign* appears in the sky, whatever that means, all the tribes mourn and see Jesus in the clouds, and there's a loud trumpet call as the elect are gathered in the heavens (Mt 24:29-32). He said when you see all these things, know He is near (v. 33). But first He said to Jerusalem *'you won't see me until you say blessed is He'*

Rev 11 may indeed be when Jerusalem, at least a major portion of the city, says *blessed is He*, blessed is Jesus, sometime before they see Jesus return?

Some would tell John this is impossible, a mass conversion in Israel, maybe the same types of theologians who told John Paton that was impossible with the New Hebrides. Eze 37 describes dead bodies that rise and stand on their feet (same phrase) that I think Spurgeon rightly interpreted as Israel's future salvation,³ and Ezekiel then mentions 'a great earthquake in...Israel' (38:19, order of Rev 11). Zech 12:10 promised grace on Jerusalem at the end (14:4)

Some say the great city in Rev 11:8 is Rome, but *the great city* in prophecy was Jerusalem (Jer 22:8) and the population in v. 13 (70,000 since 7,000 is a tenth) matches Jerusalem in Bible times, not Rome or Babylon. And in v. 2 the phrase 'holy city' is never used in Revelation or anywhere else for the city of Rome, that's a later Catholic idea. The '*holy city*' is Jerusalem in the parallel prophecy of Dan 9:24. In Revelation, it can be heavenly Jerusalem or the earthly, but in v. 2 it's trampled by Gentiles, so it's earth, not heaven.

Turn back to Luke 21 where Jesus spoke of Gentiles trampling Jerusalem. It also begins with the temple and its judgment like Rev 11:1-2 and temporary trampling of the city of Jerusalem. Rev 11:2 is the same phrase as Lk 21:24. Jesus said of that Jewish generation, 21:24 *They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled ...*^{...27} *And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory...* But first, v. 24 says the times of the Gentiles must be fulfilled.

R.C. Sproul writes: 'the times of the Gentiles are related to the occupation of Jerusalem by non-Jewish people. But this Gentile occupation of Jerusalem will not endure indefinitely. There is a crucial "until" mentioned here. This word fixes a temporal point of completion. This text figured prominently in eschatological expectations that were rekindled in 1967 when Jews wrested control of Jerusalem from the Arab Gentiles who had controlled it.'⁴

Dr. Lloyd-Jones at the end of his life saw that as one of the most important prophetic events in his lifetime, when old Jerusalem was taken back by the Jewish people for the first time in almost exactly 2,000 years after the city was continuously trampled by Gentiles. He cited Lk 21 as possibly setting the stage for the 2nd coming of Revelation.⁵ 3 centuries ago J.C. Ryle wrote 'at last will the Jews be converted, and Jerusalem restored...[as the times of Lk 21:24] end the conversion...and restoration of Jerusalem will take place'⁶

Iain Murray, reformed historian in his book *The Puritan Hope* says this was a key part of it, the mass conversion of Israel before the end. Not as separate peoples of God, but as the Jewish Christian church. He says of the Puritans:

"two gospel texts, Matthew 23:38-39 and Luke 21:24 were sometimes cited ...Another passage more often quoted by the Puritans was 2 Cor. 3:15-16: *'But even to this day, when Moses is read [in synagogue] the veil is upon the heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.'* ...Increase Mather [wrote]...What is this? I answer...the Jewish nation, or the words may be read, *"They shall turn"* (i.e. the blinded minds of the Jews shall turn) *"unto the Lord."* Another NT text sometimes cited by 17th century divines was Revelation 16...[Murray quotes a 1642 Puritan sermon from Isaiah as prophesying] privilege to the literal Jerusalem beyond other people...Undoubtedly, that people of the Jews shall once more...*arise*... [he quotes another] the end of this world shall not be till the Jews are called.¹⁷

Earlier in Luke's gospel, Lk 2:38 describes with approval faithful true Israel as *'looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.'* Rev 11 may be looking at it. If you turn to Rom 11 to close, let's let a more clear passage help the less clear

For those who think God is through with the Jews, that there's no covenant promises for Israel anymore, Paul says in Rom 9:3-4 of unbelieving ethnic Jews, in his words *'my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption...the covenants...and the promises.'* Paul's argument is not that the covenant promises *used to* belong to Israel, or that God adopted them then un-adopted them by some replacement theology, he says in Rom 9:4, present tense, to Israel belong adoption, covenant promise

11:1 *I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!* [look at v. 2]
 ...² *God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of **Elijah**, how he appeals to God against Israel?*
³ ***"Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars***

Sounds like Rev 11, trampling the temple courts where the altars were, killing the prophets. Look at v. 4]...*But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself **seven thousand men** who have not bowed the knee to Baal."* [same phrase as Rev 11:13]⁵ *So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.* [Israel always had a remnant, but Rev 11:13 reverses that imagery as seven thousand are judged, the rest repent by sovereign grace!]

... ¹⁵ *For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, [i.e., Israel rejected Christ and persecuted Christians so they had to spread to the world, good news for us], what will their acceptance mean but **life from the dead**?* Israel's acceptance will be as miraculous as 'life from the dead.' Rev 11:11 is a vision of life from the dead as Jerusalem in Israel seems to accept Jesus!

Rom 11:16 calls Israel *firstfruits*, same term for the 144,000 of the 12 tribes in Rev 14:4, a harvest term, and Rev 14 describes the full harvest before the 2nd coming (v. 14-16). In v. 24 Paul gives the analogy of 2 olive trees with branches taken off one grafted into the other (Rev 11:4 has 2 olive trees).

²⁵ *Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.* ²⁶ *And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";* ²⁷ *"and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."* ²⁸ *As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved...[they=gospel-enemy Israel]*

Israel is only partially hardened now, till the times of the Gentiles complete, when Zion's deliverer, Jerusalem's Savior saves all Israel and a fullness of Gentiles. The Israel of v. 28 that presently hates and opposes the gospel is still beloved to God who has a future for them as His called church the elect because, v. 29 says: *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable ...* ³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* ³⁴ *"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"* ³⁵ *"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"* ³⁶ ***For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.***

Whatever may or may not be clear in Rev 11 is clear in Rom 11 to His glory

¹ <http://www.desiringgod.org/biographies/you-will-be-eaten-by-cannibals-lessons-from-the-life-of-john-g-paton>

² H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1920), 192–196.

³ Spurgeon, Charles, "The Restoration and Conversion of the Jews," sermon on Ezekiel 37 preached 6/16/1864, *MTP*, Vol. 10, No. 582: "The meaning of our text, as opened up by the context, is most evidently, if words mean anything, first, that there shall be a political restoration of the Jews to their own land and to their own nationality; and then, secondly, there is in the text, and in the context, a most plain declaration, that there shall be a spiritual restoration, a conversion in fact...').

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

⁵ As cited by Barry Horner in *Future Israel*, 1980 Christianity Today interview.

⁶ J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, p. 374.

⁷ Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy*, p. 60, 75-76.