

The Two Witnesses, part 2

Revelation 11:3-7, part 2

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2017-03-05

The Two Witnesses, part 2

Revelation 11:3-7, part 2

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2017-03-05

Text

11:1 I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who are worshiping there. 2 And leave out the outer court of the temple and do not measure it, because it has been given to the nations; and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

3 And I will give authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” 4 These are the two olive trees, even the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 And if anyone wants to harm them fire comes out of their mouths and consumes their enemies. So if anyone wants to harm them he must be killed in this way. 6 They have authority to shut up the sky so that no rain falls during the days of their prophecy; and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they wish.

7 When they finish their witness, the Beast of prey that comes up out of the Abyss will make war with them, overcome them and kill them 8—and leave their corpses in the street of the great city! (which is called Sodom and Egypt, spiritually speaking), even where their Lord was crucified.

9 And those from the peoples, tribes, languages and ethnic nations look at their corpses three-and-a-half days, and will not allow their corpses to be buried. 10 And those who dwell on the earth rejoice over them, and they will enjoy themselves and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

11 And after three-and-a-half days the breath from God entered them and they stood on their feet, and a great fear fell on those who were watching them. 12 And I heard a loud voice from the heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13 And in that day there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city fell, and seven thousand individuals were killed in the earthquake. And the rest became fearful and gave glory to the God of heaven.)

14 The second woe is past. Look out, here comes the third woe!¹

1 Translation of the Majority Text by Wilbur M. Pickering - [The Sovereign Creator Has Spoken](#).

I. Introduction - review

A. We saw that the measuring of the temple (v. 1) took place three and a half years before the temple was burned.

B. We saw that the Roman occupation of the city and the temple grounds (v. 2) continued for exactly forty-two months after the temple was burned.

C. These two three and a half years represent the seven year war by the Romans against Israel (AD 67-74).

D. We saw that the two prophets (v. 3) were two literal prophets who lived in the first century.

E. Their ministry ended with the destruction of the temple (AD 70), and represents the end of inspired apostles and prophets.

F. We saw that verses 1-2 is an introduction that gives an overview of the entire seven year war, and that verse 3 goes back to AD 67, when the last 1260 days of prophetic ministry of these two prophets began in Jerusalem.

G. We saw that these two prophets started their ministry just after the rest of the Christians abandoned the city.

Let me give you a tiny bit of review of the last two sermons. We saw that verse 1 deals with the measuring of the literal first century temple in Jerusalem, measuring what would be cut off and what would be preserved. The court outside the temple would be preserved for Roman use, but the temple itself (the part that was measured) would be destroyed so completely that not one stone would be left upon another. And we saw that this measuring took place three and a half years before the temple was burned.

Verse 2 deals with what will happen after the temple is burned in AD 70. The Gentile Romans would occupy the city and the courtyard outside the temple for exactly 42 months - in other words, from AD 70 to the beginning of AD 74. And then they would leave. And they did.

So verse 1 is introducing the first three and a half years and verse 2 is

introducing the second three and a half years. Those two verses are an overview of the seven year war by the Romans against Israel. You can think of those two verses as kind of an introduction to the whole chapter.

Then verse 3 goes back to AD 67 and shows that God did not leave Jerusalem without prophetic warning during that period. In February of AD 67, God sent these two prophets into Jerusalem to testify against that city and to offer the Gospel. It's amazing that even at that late stage God is still calling a nation to repentance. He is so gracious! So about the time that all the other Christians were bailing from the city, these two prophets were entering the lion's den.

And that these were two literal human prophets who literally prophesied in a literal Jerusalem during the first century was adequately proved in the last two sermons. I won't cover that material again.

Their ministry ended just before the temple was destroyed, and that too had been prophesied in the Old Testament. Daniel, Isaiah, and Zechariah said that prophetic activity would continue all the way up to the destruction of Jerusalem, and then it would permanently end. So that gives the context of where we are at today. I don't want to have to prove any of those points all over again. Instead, I want to dive into the nature of the prophetic work of these two witnesses.

II. The nature of prophecy according to Revelation is identical to prophecy in the Old Testament - i.e., it is infallible, authoritative, binding, and is God speaking.

Verses 3-7 are almost totally ignored in the debates over the nature of New Testament prophecy. And it is unfortunate, because I think it is very important material. I already dealt with the complete cessation of New Testament prophecy in chapter 1:3 and again in chapter 10:7. Chapter 10 says that just before the seventh trumpet will blow in the near future, all prophetic mystery revelation would cease. Well, the seventh trumpet blows in verse 15 of our chapter. So this chapter is looking at the last of the New Testament prophets. And if Revelation 10-11 would be taken seriously in the debates on cessationism versus continuationism, I think the debate could be settled. I really do.

And the reason I say that is that this chapter conclusively overturns Wayne Grudem's view of the nature of New Testament prophecy. He has written a few books trying to theologically salvage the charismatic movement. He

claims that New Testament prophecy is utterly different from Old Testament prophecy. Where Old Testament prophecy was inspired, he says New Testament prophecy is not. Where Old Testament prophecy was the very Words of God given verbatim, he claims that New Testament prophets can make mistakes without being false prophets and that they do not speak God's very words and therefore have "no absolute divine authority."² Those are his words, not mine.

And I can appreciate why Third Wave Charismatics play down the authority of New Testament prophets. They have seen the incredible abuses of modern so-called prophets, and they know that these abuses have the potential of completely undermining the authority of the Scripture. I've seen that happen. The reasoning of some of the self-proclaimed prophets in Kansas City and Omaha (who claim to be authoritative but not infallible) is that Scripture is authoritative but not infallible and that the apostles were authoritative but not infallible. They point to so-called mistakes in the New Testament to justify mistakes in their own so-called prophecies. I can give you the specific names of these so-called prophets and how their faulty view of New Testament prophecy has completely messed up their view of Scripture.

So Third Wave Charismatics have seen this and they are understandably gun-shy of that, and their claim is that New Testament prophecy has no resemblance to Scripture, to the apostles, or to Old Testament prophets. And if prophecy continues, they have to either say that or say that modern prophecies are infallible. There really is no middle ground.

I praise the Lord that they are trying to protect the integrity of Scripture. But we have already seen that it is much better to see that Scripture itself predicted that apostleship and prophecy would cease in AD 70 and that the Bible would be the completed, perfect, final word of God. Everything that we and charismatics experience is on a much lower plane than that and should not be called prophecy. It doesn't make those experiences wrong. But what I am trying to do this morning is defend the integrity of Scripture. So we are going to look at the nature of the prophecy of these two New Testament prophets. This is kind of a case study to see which theory of prophecy is correct.

A. *It is authoritative (v. 3a)*

The first point in your outlines says that the prophecies of these two

² Wayne Grudem, [The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today](#), (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), p. 90.

witnesses were clearly authoritative. Verse 3 begins by saying, "And I will give authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy..." The Greek grammar indicates that the two clauses mirror each other and interpret each other, or as Lange's commentary words it, "What He gives them, is declared by what follows."³ It's a kind of Hebraic construction.⁴ So giving them authority is explained by "they will prophesy," and their prophecy is seen as God's direct gift or His direct authority. It is an authoritative prophesying. As Beale's commentary points out, "They are to be prophets like the great prophets of the OT (like Moses and Elijah, vv 4–6)."⁵

But even if you don't know Greek, the language of these verses is crystal clear that Beale is right - these prophets are being likened to Old Testament prophets over and over again. Let's look at a few examples:

B. Like Old Testament prophets (Jer. 2:4-9; Ezek. 22:1-2; Hos. 4:1ff; Mic. 6:1-6), and like the apostle John (1:2) these two are God's representatives (witnesses) in a covenant lawsuit (v. 3b - μάρτυς)

These two are called "my witnesses." This word is a legal term used over and over to refer to either the prosecutors or the witnesses being brought against an accused in a court case. And many books have pointed out that this was a central function of every Old Testament prophet. Let me give you a definition of the Greek word μάρτυς, which is translated as here as "witness".

The Greek word is μάρτυς and all of the related nouns and verbs deal with court room drama. And you will hear the sound of that word (μάρτυς) in each of these words. μαρτυρία is court testimony, μαρτυρέω means to testify, μαρτύριον is the evidence presented to the court, διαμαρτύρομαι is the solemn charge given to a witness that he must tell the truth, καταμαρτυρέω is the testimony or charges brought against someone, συμμαρτυρέω is the opposite - the supporting testimony for a defendant, ψευδομαρτυρέω is to bear false witness in court, and ψευδομαρτυρία and ψευδόμαρτυς refer to false witnesses or a prosecutor who is bringing false charges. You can see

3 John Peter Lange et al., A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Revelation (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 230.

4 Dusterdieck explains the Hebraism in the grammar this way: "The object of δώσω follows here, not in the form of the infin., but is described, according to the Hebrew way, in the succeeding clause, καὶ προφητ." Friedrich Dusterdieck, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John, trans. Henry E. Jacobs, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 313.

5 G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 572.

that the word μάρτυς is at the heart of all of those words. They are all inter-related. Concerning the classical Greek definition of those terms, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology says,

The original setting of the word-group in the Gk. world is clearly the legal sphere. Witnesses appear to give evidence in a trial in respect of events now lying in the past ...or are called in as so-called formal witnesses in order to provide substantiation in the future, for legal transactions...⁶

And in your outline I have given you some examples of Old Testament prophets acting as witnesses of the prosecution against the accused in the courtroom of heaven. Actually, the apostle John starts this book by saying that the whole book is his courtroom evidence (μαρτυρία) that he is bringing against Israel and against the nations in the name of the Lord. So that is a word that ties these prophets in with the function of Old Testament prophets. And of course, it shows that these two prophets are similar in function to the apostle John.

C. Like the prophets Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), Isaiah (Is. 20:2), John the Baptist (Mark 1:6), and other prophets (Zech. 13:4), these two prophets wore sackcloth (v. 3)

But verse 3 goes on. It says, "and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." I dealt with the 1260 days in the last sermon. But why mention that they are clothed in sackcloth? You could argue that they are simply in mourning, but that does not appear to be the case with these two. So commentaries point out that this is deliberately likening these prophets to Old Testament prophets like Elijah, Isaiah, and John the Baptist. I've given you references to prophets wearing sackcloth, and Zechariah 13:4 assumes that all prophets wore sackcloth for certain times of prophesying. It was symbolic of their office. To have these prophets wear sackcloth ties them in with Old Testament prophets. They appear to be of the same class.

D. They are likened to the inspired prophets Zerubbabel and Joshua (v. 4a)

In verse 4 they are said to be "the two olive trees." That is a clear symbolic reference to Zechariah 4 where God called the prophets Zerubbabel and Joshua His olive trees. The olive tree was a symbol of the Holy Spirit speaking because olive trees produce olive oil, and olive oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit. So the words that flowed from Zerubbabel and Joshua were unadulterated prophetic words of God. It is the Holy Spirit speaking through

⁶ NIDNTT, s.v. "WITNESS, TESTIMONY," 3:1,041-1,042.

them.

But the point I am making is this: if John wanted to distance the New Testament prophets from Old Testament prophets and say that they are utterly different (like Wayne Grudem does), why keep likening them to Old Testament prophets? And you might, say, "Well, maybe they were apostles." But he could have said that. He is emphasizing the prophetic by making them nameless prophets. He is defining the nature of prophecy, not apostleship. And he does so several more times.

E. They are said to be the two lampstands (λύχνος) that represent the Lord (v. 4b)

In the second part of verse 4 they are said to be "the two lampstands" that represent the Lord. The word "the" at the beginning of the phrase indicates that they are the only ones left. They are the only olive trees left in AD 70 and they are the only lamp stands left. That's another way of saying they are the only ones giving God's prophetic word to the population by AD 70. And that the phrase "the two lampstands" refers to prophets can be seen by the subpoints in your outline which show other places where the same Greek word is used. These are not general lampstands that represent the Bible. These are lampstands that stand before the Lord and directly represent the Lord. They are the givers of God's revelation.

Like John the Baptist: "He was the burning and shining lampstand (λύχνος), and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. But I have a greater witness than John's..." (John 6:35-36)

Exactly the same word is used of John the Baptist. John 6:35-36 says, "He was the burning and shining lampstand (λύχνος - exactly the same Greek word), and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. But I have a greater witness than John's..." So Jesus is a witness and a lamp that is much greater than John's, yet John too is a witness and a prophetic lampstand.

Like the prophetic Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:19-21 - "but we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as to a light (λύχνος - lampstand) that shines in a dark place...")

2 Peter 1 likens the prophetic Scriptures to a lampstand. It says, "but we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as to a light (λύχνος - lampstand - so you can see the authoritative nature of a lampstand) that shines in a dark place..." So the apostles who gave prophetic Scripture

are lampstands who give the prophetic word.

So if these two witnesses are God's two last lampstands that stand before His presence, they are like John the Baptist, and their words are just as much the light of God as Scripture is called the light or lampstand of God. That argues so strongly against Grudem's thesis.

F. Like the prophets in the Old Testament (see 1 Kings 17:1; Zech. 4:14; etc.) these two witnesses stand before the Lord (v. 4c - notice that the masculine for "standing" modifies the masculine "witnesses," not the feminine "olive trees" or the feminine "lampstands.")

The next words in verse 4 indicate that the witnesses themselves stand before the Lord of the earth.⁷ Well, that would immediately bring to the mind of the Jews who read this the numerous Scriptures that speak of prophets as entering into God's heavenly council and as regularly standing before the Lord and representing the Lord. These are not general "I think the Lord is saying" kind of people. These function just like Old Testament prophets. They get prophetically caught up to stand before the Lord just like the apostle John earlier in this book was caught up to heaven in a vision to enter into God's council. And with all the other allusions to Elijah (and especially the drying up of rain), most commentators believe that this is likely cluing us into Elijah's statement to Ahab, when he said, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word." He says, "before whom I stand." Prophets like Elijah stood before the Lord.

G. Like the prophets Elijah (2 Kings 1) and Jeremiah (Jer. 5:14), these witnesses consume their enemies with fire directed from their mouth (v. 5)

Verse 5 says that like the prophets Elijah and Jeremiah these witnesses have the power to consume their enemies with fire directed from their mouths. "And if anyone wants to harm them fire comes out of their mouths and consumes their enemies. So if anyone wants to harm them he must be killed in this way."

Virtually every commentary that I have read says that this is comparing

⁷ Usually a Greek verb would have the same gender as the words immediately before it. But the problem is that both lampstands and olive trees are feminine in the Greek, so they don't match the verb. The antecedent has to be witnesses. So God uses a masculine gender for the word "that stand" in order to make it clear that the witnesses (who are also olive trees and lampstands) are themselves standing before the Lord.

these prophets to Elijah. I don't think there is any disagreement on that. In 2 Kings 1 Ahab sent out groups of fifty soldiers to arrest Elijah, and Elijah would prophetically call down fire and the moment the words came out of his mouth fire fell from heaven and consumed the soldiers. But it was Elijah's words that caused that fire. Why? Because they were God's words spoken through him. Now whether these two witnesses called down miraculous fire from heaven (like Elijah did) or whether their prophetic word guaranteed that Rome would burn Israel (just like Jeremiah's words), commentators are divided. In one sense it doesn't matter because both are just as clear in showing the authoritative nature of prophecy. But in Jeremiah 5:14 God says to Jeremiah,

...“Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.

His prophetic words were called fire. Now, obviously with Jeremiah it was a metaphor, but that verse says that Jeremiah's words were fire and Israel was the wood that would be burned up by it. The prophetic words of Jeremiah powerfully brought Babylon to do the burning.

But in both cases (the miraculous and the non-miraculous), the power to consume was in the prophet's mouth, and in both cases, the prophetic word was likened to fire. Are you beginning to get the point? These two last prophets are New Testament prophets, yet their prophecy has exactly the same character as the prophecies of Old Testament prophets.

H. Like Elijah (1 Kings 11), these prophets have the prophetic ability to turn off the rain (v. 6a)

Verse 6 continues: "They have authority to shut up the sky so that no rain falls during the days of their prophecy..." All commentaries see that as an obvious comparison to the same power that Elijah had to prophesy drought and the rain dried up, and to call for rain, and it began to rain.

I. Like Moses (Ex. 7:17-25), these prophets have the prophetic ability to turn the waters into blood (v. 6b)

Verse 6 goes on: "and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood..." Almost everyone compares this prophetic power to the prophetic power of Moses to turn the waters of Egypt into blood. In past sermons I gave testimony from history that the water was turned to blood in the first century. I believe all of these miracles happened. My point today is not to show fulfillment of these prophecies, but to show that charismatics cannot claim that New Testament prophecy is any different from Old Testament

prophecies, like those of Moses. The prophecies themselves are equivalent in nature, power, and effect.

J. Like Moses (Ex. 6-11) these prophets can strike the earth with a variety of plagues as often as they wish (v. 6c)

Verse 6 continues: "and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they wish." So again, these prophets seem to have power very similar to the prophet Moses, whose words and actions brought the ten plagues.

And when you take all of the testimony together, you can see that the Third Wave Charismatics are wrong in trying to downplay the authority and infallibility of New Testament prophecy. Revelation 1:3 calls the whole book of Revelation "the words of this prophecy." He is using the term prophecy the same way the Old Testament did - as being inspired and infallible revelation from God. And since the book of Revelation uses the terms "prophecy," "prophesy," and "prophet" 21 times, we ought to allow Revelation to inform the debate of what New Testament prophecy really is.

But Grudem does not. He just dismisses the book as irrelevant to the debate. He claims that Revelation uses the terms differently than the rest of the New Testament does. He claims that since John was both a prophet and an apostle, it was only His apostleship that made his prophecy infallible. If he had been a non-apostolic prophet, then his prophecies would not have been infallible. But this chapter shows that even nameless prophets are treated as having the same authority as Old Testament prophets and are lumped together as doing the same things that Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zerubbabel, Joshua, John the Baptist, and all the other Old Testament prophets. And the objection might be, "Maybe these witnesses were apostles." But Revelation doesn't call them apostles. It calls them prophets, and we are looking at how this book defines prophecy.

And another person might object, maybe these two prophets are the church corporate. Well, then, you have the church corporate continuing to speak infallible, inerrant, authoritative revelation. And others might respond that maybe these two prophets are Old and New Testaments. But none of those theories work, and that is why I spent an entire sermon just looking at all the theories and point by point ruling every other possibility and demonstrating that they had to be two literal New Testament prophets. And they are deliberately left as nameless prophets because they represent the end of a prophetic era. And if you take all of the textual clues that I gave last time, there is no other possibility. These are the last of the New Testament prophets.

So the question is, if New Testament prophets do not directly speak for Christ (as Grudem claims - he denies they speak directly for Christ), why are they called His two witnesses for His covenant lawsuit? To me it seems that they are directly speaking for Christ. And if they were not inspired, why are their words compared to Zechariah's two olive trees that pour forth the pure unadulterated oil of the Holy Spirit's revelation? And if they are supposedly so different from Old Testament prophets, why does he go to such lengths to compare them to ten other inspired vehicles of God's revelation? Grudem never addresses the two witnesses, and I can see why: they totally destroy his thesis.

And of course, I have already demonstrated in chapter 1:3 that this is consistent with the usage of the term for "prophet" and prophecy in the book of Acts and in the book of Romans. Romans 16:26 calls all the New Testament Scriptures that had been written so far, "the prophetic Scriptures." Prophecy and Scripture are clearly linked. Now, Grudem says that passage must be a reference to the Old Testament (which still begs the question of why he would use that word "prophetic" to describe it if prophecy has taken on a brand new meaning in the first century - that doesn't make any sense). But Paul is quite clear that the revelation he is talking about is, "the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known..." It was not until now that prophets and prophetic Scriptures made this mystery known. It is clearly talking about New Testament Scriptures. So Romans 16:26 declares that every book of the New Testament was indeed written by New Testament prophets just like every book of the Old Testament was written by prophets. It's not just the book of Revelation that was written by a prophet; every book of the New Testament is a prophetic revelation. Yet Grudem has the audacity to claim, "To my knowledge, nowhere in the New Testament is there a record of a prophet who is not an apostle but who spoke with absolute divine authority attaching to his very words."⁸

Wait a minute - was Luke an apostle? No he was not. Does he speak with divine authority? Absolutely, yes he does. Was James an apostle? No he was not. You see, Peter defines prophecy for us in a way that completely contradicts Grudem's statement. Let me read Grudem again, and then I will read 2 Peter 1:21. Grudem said, "To my knowledge, nowhere in the New Testament is there a record of a prophet who is not an apostle but who spoke with absolute divine authority attaching to his very words." Well, I have already shown that that is false. But let me show how Peter contradicts

8 Grudem, *the Gift*, 1988 version, p. 56.

Grudem's thesis as well. Peter insists that "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2Pet 1:21). Notice the word "spoke." You can't just dismiss 2 Peter 1:21 as only dealing with Scripture. Peter is talking about even oral prophecies. He said that even oral prophecy never came by the will of man. There are no exceptions. He is defining what New Testament prophecy is. According to Peter, there simply are not two different kinds of true prophecy. Prophecy was always inspired without exception. That's why in Matthew 7 Jesus told his hearers that they could test true New Testament prophets from bad prophets on whether they had any failed prophecies. He claimed that New Testament prophets were good trees that never bore bad fruit. Good prophetic trees never bear bad prophetic fruit. They were always 100% inerrant in their prophecies. And I demonstrated in a previous sermon that Agabus was inspired and perfectly accurate in his prophecies.⁹

I won't cover that material again. It would take too long. But if only apostles could write Scripture (as Grudem claims), how on earth did Mark, Luke, Acts, James, Jude come into existence when they were very clearly not written by apostles? And the answer is easy for me - they were prophets. Romans 16 says that all the New Testament Scriptures were written by prophets. Grudem disagrees. He insists that each of those authors wrote something true under apostolic oversight, and once the apostles read what they wrote and approved the writing, it became inspired. But that's not how inspiration works according to 2 Peter 1:21. Inspiration works on the author of the book, not on the supposed overseer of the book. It was Luke, James, Mark, and Jude who were moved by the Holy Spirit so that nothing of their prophecy was moved by their will. This is so important to understand. The integrity of Mark, Luke, Acts, James, and Jude comes into question if you take the "apostolic-only" view of New Testament Scripture. But 2 Peter 1:21 and Romans 16:16 make it crystal clear that every New Testament book was a prophecy and that even oral prophecies of those prophets was 100% inspired.

But there are other ways in which the book of Revelation contradicts Grudem's thesis. Where Grudem claims you can safely ignore a New-Testament-era prophecy (because it is not authoritative), anyone who ignored the prophets in chapter 11 got in deep trouble. Where Grudem claims over and over that modern prophecy is not the very words of God or

⁹ See sermons on [\[\[web/Sermons/New Testament/Acts finished/Acts 20_22-25.md|Acts 20_22-25\]\]](#), [\[\[web/Sermons/New Testament/Acts finished/Acts 21_1-14.md|Acts 21_1-14\]\]](#), [\[\[web/Sermons/New Testament/Acts finished/Acts 21-4,11-14.md|Acts 21_4,11-14\]\]](#), and [\[\[web/Sermons/New Testament/Acts finished/Acts 21_27-40.md|Acts 21:27-40\]\]](#).

of Christ, this book claims the opposite. It speaks of the words of prophecy and claims that those words of prophecy constitute the very testimony of Jesus Christ. For example, Revelation 19:10 says that other prophets (other than John) had the testimony of Jesus, and the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. He is defining what all prophecy is characterized by. He says, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Mounce's commentary says of the second phrase, "John's readers would certainly understand his reference to 'the spirit of prophecy' in terms of the Holy Spirit as the one who inspired all prophecy."¹⁰ So that is the meaning of the second phrase. What about the first phrase? In a previous sermon we saw that the phrase, "the testimony of Jesus," found in chapter 1, verses 2 and 9, is a reference to the very words of Jesus. What the apostle John wrote, was Jesus' testimony. That's what testimony of Jesus means.

The inescapable conclusion of these two facts means that Revelation 19:10 teaches us that the Holy Spirit who inspired prophecy brought the very words of Jesus Christ. Now, here is where it gets interesting. We have already seen that the whole book of Revelation is also the testimony of Jesus. Yet Revelation 19:10 says that all prophecy of all prophets is the testimony of Jesus. Logic tells you that this makes all prophecy equal to Scripture in nature. Oral prophecy was just as much the words of Jesus (or the testimony of Jesus) as written prophecy was. It is God's very word to man through Christ's witnesses. Grudem says that he doesn't know what that verse means. Well, that's convenient. But pleading ignorance is not good enough. The verse makes prophecy clearly parallel with the rest of Scripture.

Where Grudem says that a modern prophet can be 20% in error, or 30%, or even 40% wrong and still not be a false prophet, and whereas he says, "there is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the charismatic movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure, and will contain elements that are not to be obeyed or trusted,"¹¹ all true prophecy in the book of Revelation claims to be authoritative (including the unnamed prophets in chapter 11) and all prophecy in this book claims to be true. For example, Revelation 22:6 says of the words given by the angel to John, "These words are faithful and true." But the reason given in the rest of the verse that the words are faithful and true is not that they are given through an apostle. The reason he gives that they are faithful and true is that God controls the spirits of all prophets - not just of John himself, but of all prophets. The verse says, "These words are

10 Mounce, R. H., [The Book of Revelation](#), (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 350.

11 Wayne Grudem, [Systematic Theology](#) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 1055.

faithful and true. The Lord God of the spirits of the prophets sent His angel to show to His slaves the things that must shortly take place."¹² Notice the plural. It's not just John who had these things (the things of this book) revealed to him. There were other prophets who were part of God's council and who were in on these truths. The words he is talking about in that verse are not faithful and true simply because they were given to an apostle. They were faithful and true because God is the Lord of the spirits of all prophets.

So hopefully you can see that New Testament prophecy is never moved by man's will, but is instead infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and transformational. There is a unity of definition throughout the Bible on the nature of prophecy. You cannot drive a grand-canyon-sized wedge of division between Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets as Third Wave Charismatics have done - and have to do.

III. When they die, their prophetic witness is finished (v. 7) and as anticipated in 10:7, all prophetic activity would cease (see sermon on 10:7 for details)

Well, we have already seen that they are the last of the prophets, and verse 7 says, "When they finish their witness, the Beast of prey that comes up out of the Abyss will make war with them, overcome them and kill them..." We will look at the details of that in a later sermon, but the first phrase needs to be interpreted in light of chapter 10, which prophesied the imminent closing of the canon and the imminent cessation of all mysteries. Chapter 10:7 says, "but in the days of the blast of the seventh angel, when he is about to trumpet, the mystery of God that He declared to His slaves the prophets would be finished." I won't repeat what I said when I preached on that text, but it was anticipating the ending of revelation just like Daniel, Isaiah, Amos, Zechariah, and others did. Once the book of Revelation was finished, the canon of Scripture was finished, and there was no more need for prophets. The Bible was perfect and completed and sufficient for life and godliness. By AD 70 there were only two witnesses, two lampstands, two olive trees left. And their witness was finished because the Scriptures were finished. And this book ends by saying, "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18). And to get more details on other Scriptures that deal with the ending of prophecy, I would encourage you to re-read my sermon on Revelation 10:7.

¹² "spirits of" is in two of the three main lines of transmission of the Majority Text. See Pickering's translation.

So the obvious application that we can take home with us is that we can delight in the sufficiency of Scripture. And another application is that we should not call our premonitions, our guidance, our dreams, etc "prophecy." They may be from the Lord, but they are on an altogether different plane from prophecy. Though useful as guidance, they are not authoritative. I'm not denying the experiences that some charismatics have had; I am just denying that they are prophetic in any sense of the word. We need to allow Scripture to define its own terms, and New Testament Scripture clearly defines prophecy as being on a par with Old Testament prophecy and with the Scripture.

IV. Further lessons we can learn from verses 3-7a)

A. While God calls some to flee persecution (cf. 12:6,,14-17), God calls others to enter the lion's lair (11:1-7)

Let me end by quickly giving some further applications. First, while God calls some to flee persecution, He calls others to enter the lions lair, and we should not judge either group of people. Obviously these two witnesses were called by God to go into Jerusalem. But just as obviously Jesus called most Christians to flee the city in Matthew 24 as soon as they saw the Roman armies surrounding it. And in Revelation 12:6 they flee. And in Revelation 12:14-17 you see a lengthy description of how God blesses their fleeing from Jerusalem.

The Puritans who stayed behind in England when the American colonies were forming were tempted to criticize those who left. They felt abandoned. "We need you here in England!" And those who braved dangers to establish God's city in America felt like everyone should join them. "We need you here in America!" And there was tension that was felt even within families, with parts of families staying in Great Britain and parts moving to the Americas. But when you read the history, you can see how God was calling both groups to a different calling for good reasons. Both America and England needed them. So this application is just a call for charity and non-judgmentalism between preppers who flee the city and preppers who feel called to stay in the city. There is a place for both actions.

B. It is God's will to bring the prophetic Word (the Bible) into the public arena (11:1-10)

The second application is that this chapter shows that it is God's will for the Word to be brought into culture even when the culture doesn't want to hear

it. We know from history that the Christians who fled brought God's word to bear at Pella (the region they fled to), and these prophets brought God's word to bear in Jerusalem. And after AD 70, the 144,000 spread the Bible message all over the world. God does not call for pluralism or neutrality in the public sphere. He calls for all things to submit to King Jesus. And we must not be embarrassed of His Word.

C. If even prophets had no authority except the authority of God's revelation (v. 3a), then we have no authority except that which is received through God's revelation (the Bible)

The third application is that if even prophets had no authority except the authority of God's revelation, then we have no authority except that which is received through God's revelation, which for us is the bible. One Puritan said that the only voice that should be speaking from the pulpits of the church is the voice of Christ speaking through the Scriptures.

Unfortunately, the church has not done that. The church has abandoned the prophetic Scriptures for the wisdom of man on issue after issue. Rather than defining leadership by Scripture, they define it by our cultural standards, including egalitarianism and feminism. Even some Reconstructionists are now becoming egalitarian. Some of you are reading their articles on Facebook - but they are getting their ideas, not from Scripture, but from Ayne Rand. I just read a book by a so-called Reconstructionist that is thoroughly egalitarian - even to the point of anarchism.

But there are so many other areas in which people speak authoritatively without referring to Scripture to back it up. Rather than counseling by Scriptural methods, goals, and patterns, they counsel by psychology. Rather than worship regulated by the Word of God, they shape the worship to appeal to the seeker. On marriage, child rearing, economics, politics, science, and so many other areas Christians choose an authority from the kingdom of Satan to regulate their life. And Jesus said that if we are ashamed of His Word, He will be ashamed of us. Even the book we are discussing on Tuesdays has many Scriptural gaps. Let's submit to the authority of Scripture over every area of our lives.

And if we are authority figures ourselves, such as parents, deacons, elders, civic officers, etc., let's recognize that we have no authority beyond what God gives us in His inspired revelation. We must represent Christ, not just ourselves.

D. The safest place to be is in the center of God's will (vv. 3-6) and we cannot die sooner (vv. 1-6) or later (v. 7a) than God wills us to die. So forget about fearing death; get about the business of doing God's will.

The fourth application is that the safest place to be is in the center of God's will. It is true that these prophets had entered into Jerusalem, which was one of the most dangerous places to be during that war. Yet despite that fact, no one could harm them. The Jewish leaders tried, but it backfired. Anybody who harmed them found God's curses coming upon them. They were protected in the heart of the most dangerous area of the world at that time. Yet the moment they finished their witness, God allowed the enemy to kill them.

My take home from that is that you can't die one minute before it is God's time for you to die. Don't fear death. Be bold as a lion as you get about doing God's will. He can protect you in the city or in the country, in a war zone and in a peace zone.

But if you are rebelling against His will, then no place you flee to is safe and no amount of prepping will save you. The safest place to be is in the center of God's will, and if you know what God is calling you to do, then rest at peace. Now, that doesn't excuse you if you are failing to prepare. The Bible commands you to. It is part of God's will. That is part of being in the center of His will. The bible commands us to try to prepare for God's judgments. But ultimately your trust must be in God, not your prepping.

E. All things in God's creation (fire, rain, water, plagues) are servants to His will, and we should not fear creation as if it was independent of His will.

The fifth application is that all things in God's creation are servants to his will. These prophets spoke, and fire destroyed the enemy. They spoke, and rain no longer blessed them. They spoke, and water that was previously drinkable was turned to blood. They spoke, and various kinds of plagues affected their enemies. Perhaps some of the plagues may have been insects, or germs and disease.

When you speak the imprecatory Psalms against God's enemies, that prophetic word continues to have that kind of power. And that by itself is encouraging. God's Word (the Bible) is powerful for tearing down strongholds.

But this application is that all of creation is a servant to God's will, and we

should not fear tornadoes, earthquakes, famines, or other things as if they were independent of God. You can have a total faith that God controls the world that you step on.

F. When the Word comes clearly into culture, antithesis happens, and Satan wars against us (vv. 5,7b,9-10,12). Our tendency is to want to withdraw, but we are called to be faithful soldiers of the cross who always hold forth the sword of the Spirit (the Bible).

The last application is that we can count on conflict when God's Word comes into an anti-God society. Do not be surprised by hatred and opposition. Verse 5 has Jews who were trying to harm them. Verse 7 has the demon from the pit finally succeeding in killing them. Demons are behind the opposition anyway, right? It is to be expected because the light of prophecy reveals the ugliness of Satan's kingdom, and there is always backlash when you expose their evil. You can count on it.

My application is to not withdraw from society in order to avoid hostile reactions, but to see yourselves as soldiers of the cross who are responsible to be faithful witnesses to the Scripture. We aren't direct witnesses of Christ who bring new revelation, but we are witnesses to the Scripture who are called by God to not be ashamed of Him or of His Word. See the boldness of the two witnesses as a good paradigm for your own boldness in our ungodly culture. And may God use your prophetic witness (in other words, your Scriptural witness - that's our only prophetic message today) to bring about His will. Amen.