

## The Two Witnesses

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Since the Book of Revelation became available in the early second century AD, its interpretation has been subject to much controversy. The basic issue has to do with how to deal with the obvious symbolism that is pervasive throughout the book. Should the symbols and images described in the book be understood literally or figuratively, and to what extent should each approach be used? Even the identity of the author is subject to great controversy, but that is, in a way, a different issue that doesn't necessarily bear on the interpretation, other than to recognize, perhaps, that it was considered not unusual at the time the book was written for authors of certain Scripture to write pseudonymously and use the name of a well-known individual. This was particularly true for the genre known as apocalyptic.

"An appreciation for the rich diversity of literary genres in Scripture is one of the positive features of evangelical scholarship in recent decades." ~ David M. Howard Jr, the editor of *Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook*, by: Richard A. Taylor. In discussing the concept of genres, Taylor says "...their language does not always work in exactly the same way." For more information on the apocalyptic genre, I refer you to Taylor's book. For a book more specifically about The Revelation, consider *Interpreting Revelation and Other Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook*, By: C. Marvin Pate and John D. Harvey.

Revelation is clearly of the apocalyptic genre, as it uses imagery of various types to deal with issues of the end times. In fact, the Greek word translated Revelation is *apocalypse*. I agree with many scholars that it is important to identify properly the genre of a writing and to use that understanding in the interpretation of the writing. To ignore the genre gets one "off kilter" from the very beginning. For example, one could say that the genre of Revelation is prophecy and interpret the symbolism as literal prophecy. In my mind, that tends to take one down the wrong path. Unfortunately, this has been the path taken by numerous scholars over the centuries, with what I feel are disastrous results.

Once one accepts that the genre of Revelation is apocalyptic, one is more open to how symbolism is used to portray Scriptural truth. It is clear that Revelation contains prophecy, because it attempts to portray truth about future events and situations, but the symbolism also pertains to the past and the present as well, and caution is advised in using literal interpretations. After all, the book was written by a man with a Hebrew mindset, which is quite comfortable with symbolism. It is somewhat more concrete to understand symbolism when it seems clearly to point to past and present events or situations, but it become more problematic when the symbolism appears to point to the future. A well-known example of this is the symbolism of the locusts in Chapter 9 of Revelation. One modern interpreter sees these as pointing to helicopters, where a more conservative scholar understands that the symbolism points to a well-known source of natural or God-led destruction (locusts!) described in Scripture and used a a symbol for human enemies of God's people.

The book of Revelation is thoroughly based on Old Testament Scriptures. There are allusions to some writings that are not normally included as inspired works, such as the book of Enoch. These writings were known to First Century Christians; some New Testament passages refer to them. The book of Jude is an example; verse 6 contains a quote from the Book of Enoch. "The original story of the disobedient angels occurs in [Gen. 6:1-4](#). The highly embellished account of the book of Enoch, however, led Jude to use it (cf. [1 Pet. 3:19-20](#))." (Interpreter's Bible, The - Exegesis - Volume 12.) In what follows, I will refer to a few specific OT citations, but for sake of brevity, I am leaving out numerous citations and commentary from many Biblical scholars on whose shoulders I stand.

With that somewhat simplistic background discussion, I want to focus attention on a section of Revelation Chapter 11, where the symbolism of The Two Witnesses is presented. The pertinent Scripture passage reads as follows:

**Revelation 11:1-12 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> *Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.*

<sup>2</sup> *"Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.*

<sup>3</sup> *"And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."*

<sup>4</sup> *These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.*

<sup>5</sup> *And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way.*

<sup>6</sup> *These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.*

<sup>7</sup> *When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.*

<sup>8</sup> *And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.*

<sup>9</sup> *Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb.*

<sup>10</sup> *And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.*

<sup>11</sup> *But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.*

<sup>12</sup> *And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.*

The writer is told to take a measuring rod and measure the temple. If taken literally, this seems like a silly instruction. (Recall that at the time Revelation was written, it was most likely that the temple lay in ruins, having been destroyed by Titus in 70 AD.) Symbolically, it means that the temple represents God's people who are being protected during the events which are about to be described. (Hendriksen, 4c) The outer court of the temple, which was called the Court of the Gentiles, was allowed to be "trampled under foot" (NIV, also see Luke 21:24 NASB) for 42 months. Next, he is told that two witnesses, clothed in sackcloth, will be empowered to prophesy for 1,260 days. To prophesy means to speak God's message. The time period of 1,260 days is the same as that during which the court is to be tread upon - 42 months, using the Scriptural month of 30 days each, This is equivalent to 3.5 years.

This time period has a rich Scriptural history. We learn from Luke 4:25 and James 5:17 that 3.5 years was the time of famine prophesied by the prophet Elijah (1 Ki. 18:1). Perhaps the best known reference to this 3.5 year time period comes from The book of Daniel. In Daniel 7:25, the time frame is given as "time, times and half a time" during which a beast which will *wear down the saints of the Highest One.*

**Daniel 7:25 (NASB)** *He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.*

The 42 month time period also occurs in Rev. 13:5, where the Beast from the Sea is given authority to blaspheme and wage war against God's people in heaven and earth for 42 months.

**Revelation 13:5-7 (NASB)**

<sup>5</sup> *There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.* <sup>6</sup> *And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.* <sup>7</sup> *It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.*

This verse in Revelation appears to be a restatement of Daniel 7:25, so “time, times, and half a time” equals 42 months. This 3.5 year time frame also happens to be the time during which Antiochus IV Epiphanes waged war against Jerusalem from 168 to 164 BC. (Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.19, 32–33). He captured and desecrated the temple by erecting in it a statue of Zeus around 167 BC. The statue was destroyed and the temple rededicated in December 164 BC by Judas Maccabeus. The Books of Daniel and Macabees describe these events.

**1 Maccabees 3:45 (KJVApocrypha)** *Now Jerusalem lay void as a wilderness, there was none of her children that went in or out: the sanctuary also was trodden down, and aliens kept the strong hold; the heathen had their habitation in that place; and joy was taken from Jacob, and the pipe with the harp ceased.*

This 42-month period also occurs in Daniel 12:7, where it refers to *a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time.*

We also find this same time period in Rev. 12:6, where a scene *in heaven* shows a multi-headed red dragon persecutes a pregnant woman who, after giving birth, is protected in the wilderness by God for 1,260 days. In Revelation 12, this dragon, who we learn is Satan, is thrown to earth where he again persecutes the woman. In 12:14, after giving birth, the woman is again protected and nourished in the wilderness for “a time, times, and half a time.” Thus it seems that the events described in the second part of Chapter 12 are seen as previously known in heaven.

**Revelation 12:5-6 (NASB)**

<sup>5</sup> *And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.* <sup>6</sup> *Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she \*had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.*

The woman in these verses is certainly the nation Israel. (Isaiah 66:7-8, for example.) Verse 5 clearly refers to Christ and His ascension. So the 1,260 days occur *after* his ascension. The most devastating event involving the nation Israel after Christ's ascension was the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 AD. (See below.) This appears to be prophesied by Jesus in Matthew Chapter 24, where He also explicitly mentions Daniel the Prophet and also quotes other Old Testament Scripture in speaking about future events. (See Kostenberger Chapter 2 for a detailed interpretation. 4j)

### **Revelation 12:13-14 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup> *And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. <sup>14</sup> But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.*

Thus, it should now be apparent that this 3.5 year time frame is a symbolic way of speaking about a limited time during which God allows His people to be persecuted. It is a way to say that the powers of evil are limited. Another way to view this is to understand that 7 is the number for completeness, If that be the case, what does 3.5 represent?

It is used in several instances in Scripture, In some cases, such as in Daniel, it represents an approximate 3.5 year period of time, but in Revelation 12 it appears to refer to a much longer time frame. While much of the detail given by John comes from Daniel and pertains to the time of Antiochus, other details reflect verses from Isaiah and elsewhere. For example, the “rod of iron” is from Psalms 2:9. The woman in pain of Chapter 12 comes from Isaiah 66:7. Moreover, these images are augmented by other imagery that clearly reflects events and political figures of the time of the Roman empire. One scholar has suggested that what John describes in Chapters 4 through 19 is a description of events depicted in the Arch of Titus. (C Marvin Pate, *Interpreting Revelation and Other Apocalyptic Literature - An Exegetical Handbook*) Another suggests that Revelation 17 uses images from the Dea Roma coin of AD 71. (David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5* (Dallas: Word, 1997).

In Revelation 11:3, John introduces the concept of The Two Witnesses. They are given authority to prophesy for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth. Sackcloth was symbolic of a time of terrible distress and calamity (See Jer. 4:8 and 6:26, for example.) The time period is the same as the 42 months discussed previously, so during the entire time of the conflict the two witnesses are presenting God's message. John gives several clues as to the identity of these two witnesses.

**Revelation 11:4 (NASB)** *These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.*

This refers to Zechariah Chapter 4, a somewhat enigmatic passage that has been interpreted in many ways.

“The two olive trees then represent Zerubbabel and Joshua, the **two anointed ones**, who stand under Yahweh's protection and are filled with his spirit.” (Interpreter's Bible, The - Exegesis - Volume 6.) “The trees are **the two anointed who stand by the LORD of the whole earth**. The Lord is to be the direct inspiration of both the secular and the religious arms of the government. Zerubbabel the king and Joshua the high priest are to carry jointly the responsibilities of rule.” (Interpreter's Bible, The - Exposition - Volume 6.)

“Olives produce oil; oil supplies light to the candlestick, and all the oil of the Holy Spirit flows, by the medium of his Messiahship in its twofold functions of King and Priest, into the Candlestick of the Universal Church”. (Preacher's Complete Homiletical Commentary on the New Testament: Volume 25: The Minor Prophets.)

An example of another interpreter's view brings us into the modern view of this passage:

"In Zechariah the olive trees supply the lamps with oil, and in [v. 14](#) we learn that the Old Testament symbolism pictures "the two sons of oil (anointed ones) [*referring to Zerubbabel and Joshua* (added by author)] that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." The Lord's prophet-witnesses are filled with the Holy Spirit who is the divine *source* of their prophecy and testimony; they are true prophets of the Lord. As "lamp pedestals" they bear the light of the Lord's Word just as in [1:13](#) the churches are such "lamp pedestals." (Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*.)

A similar view is voiced by Beale:

The witnesses are identified as "the two olive trees and the two lampstands". . . . . "lampstands" refer to the church, since that was the repeated meaning of "lampstands" in chs. 1-2. It would be "a defiance of common sense to use the same distinctive symbol for two different ideas, within the compass of one book". [Kiddle, quoted by Beale, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary - The Book of Revelation*.]

**Revelation 11:5 (CSB)** *If anyone wants to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and consumes their enemies; if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way.*

This is a clear reference to verses such as **Jeremiah 5:14 (CSB)** *Therefore, this is what the Lord God of Armies says: Because you have spoken this word, I am going to make my words become fire in your mouth. These people are the wood, and the fire will consume them.*

"The Word in the mouth of the Lord's prophet-witnesses may be scorned but it is not an empty sound. Its judgments are fire that devours its enemies." (Lenski *New Testament Commentary - The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*.)

**Revelation 11:6 (CSB)** *They have authority to close up the sky so that it does not rain during the days of their prophecy. They also have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every plague whenever they want.*

This clearly refers to Elijah (1 Kings 17:1, Luke 4:25) and Moses (Ex 7:20). Many scholars use this literally to say that these two men will return bodily in the Last Days. They had appeared in a theophany during the ministry of Jesus (See Luke 9:28-36)

These witnesses have power to lock up the very heaven so that (ἴνα, result) rain may not wet for the days of this prophecy. This symbolism is taken from Elijah as he is presented in I Kings 17:1 (James 5:16). They likewise have power from the Lord to turn the waters to blood and to smite the earth with all kinds of smiting, "as often as they will" to do so. This symbolism is drawn from Moses as he is presented in Exod. 7:19, and from the ten Egyptian plagues. (Lenski *New Testament Commentary - The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*.)

"Traditionally, the presence of Moses and Elijah in the Transfiguration has been read as summarizing "the Law and the Prophets" now being fulfilled in and by Jesus' life, the Messiah. Moses is obviously representing the Law, while the Prophets are represented by Elijah." (<https://aleteia.org/2019/03/17/moses-elijah-and-jesus-why-are-they-all-together-at-the-transfiguration/>)

**This concept, that the Two Witnesses of Rev. 11 refer to The Law and The Prophets, was the conclusion I reached myself as I studied a number of years ago.** Let me explain this concept by first quoting a few Scriptures. A very telling example is from Luke 16. This contains a parable about a rich man who called from hell to Abraham in heaven, asking him to send Lazarus to warn his brothers of the terrible place in which he was.

**Luke 16:29-31 (NASB)** <sup>29</sup> *"But Abraham \*said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'*  
<sup>30</sup> *"But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'"*  
<sup>31</sup> *"But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"*

Jesus Himself said something similar:

**John 5:39-40 (NIV)** <sup>39</sup> *You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me,* <sup>40</sup> *yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*

**John 5:45-47 (NIV)** <sup>45</sup> *"But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set.* <sup>46</sup> *If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.*

When Jesus said "Moses accuses you," he clearly meant that the Torah was their accuser.

**Zechariah 7:12 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup> *"They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.*

Jesus Himself used this expression several times:

**Matthew 7:12 (NASB)** *"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

**Matthew 11:13-15 (NASB)** *"For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. [The Baptist]"*

**Luke 24:27 (NASB)** *Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*

**The expression *The Law and The Prophets* was a standard euphemism in Jesus' day for the whole Old Testament.**

To have Moses and the prophets is to have the Old Testament Word. Moses wrote the Torah or Pentateuch; the prophets, in the broad sense of that term, wrote all the other books of the Old Testament. This Word is the all-sufficient means of salvation. (Lenski New Testament Commentary - *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel.*)

When Jesus referred to the law, the prophets, and the psalms, He was speaking of the entire Old Testament. (David Reagan at <http://www.learnthebible.org/law-and-the-prophets.html> )

He was, of course, using this expression in the sense the Jews routinely used it to designate the entire Hebrew Bible. (Mark Johnston, <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/%E2%80%98-these-hang-law-and-prophets%E2%80%99> )

Thus, **The term “Two Witnesses” as used by John means that the message is true, being corroborated by two testimonies as required by The Law (Dt. 17:6) and represents the witness of the entire Old Testament as presented (witnessed) by God's people.** The teachings of Moses and The Prophets have always been presented by God's faithful ones - prophets, priests and other members of The Elect. It was the primary message of Jesus and His Apostles, and these teachings became the New Testament. The repository and source of this message is now God's True Church. (cf. Lenski, Hendriksen, Wilcock, Beale, Wright, cited below)

One other scholar who states that John's reference is to The Law and The Prophets is Eugenio Corsini in *The Apocalypse: the Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 1983 and 2019

Craig Keener says “The most common view is that the two witnesses represent the prophetic witness of the church” and gives several references and reasons for this, concluding “The case for the two witnesses being the church is debatable, but it seems the best of available options.” (NIV Application Commentary, *The - Revelation: From biblical text...to contemporary life.*)

Beale says this:

The two witnesses also do not represent concepts like “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus” because they are portrayed as people who perform actions and speak words. ....Rather, they represent the whole community of faith, whose primary function is to be a prophetic witness. Just as John the Baptist was not a literal reappearance of Elijah, but came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” ([Luke 1:17](#)), likewise the witnesses are not Moses and Elijah reincarnated. Nevertheless, the two witnesses are patterned after these two OT figures (see on [vv 5-6](#)). The witnesses are called “lampstands” because their word is to burn like a lamp, just as Elijah’s “word burned like a lamp” ([Sir. 48:1](#)) and as John the Baptist’s word was like a “lamp that was burning and was shining” ([John 5:35](#)). The witnesses have the prophetic mantle of these two prophets. (Beale, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary - The Book of Revelation.*)

Personally, I feel that Beale, perhaps others, sort of begs the question when he says that “The two witnesses also do not represent concepts like “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus” because they are portrayed as people who perform actions and speak words.” Well, of course, people are involved, but what is the content of their witness? The Law and The Prophets, for John and the people to whom his letter was originally addressed, The content for God's witnesses today now includes the New Testament, as well as “mountains” of scholarly work based on these Scriptures. But clearly, the most powerful witness is the lives of the people who were willing to suffer and die because of their faith in and allegiance to God. During the reign of Nero, in particular, Christians were persecuted and killed in horrendous ways.

Most modern readers of the New Testament are not at home with ancient apocalyptic literature, so our sense of Revelation's alien-ness can make us feel hedged in, frustrated because this book doesn't deliver its message in the form to which we are accustomed, a form accessible to reading strategies that have proved tried and true elsewhere. One way through the impasse, however, is to pay careful attention to Revelation's biblical precursors, "the Hebrew prophets." As Stuart recognized, the visions of Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and others provided not only a fertile field from which the images of Revelation have been harvested but also a genre..... such study of the prophets as well as other Old and New Testament precedents will repay our effort many times over, (Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of The Lamb.*)

N. T Wright put it this way:

What John is saying is that the prophetic witness of the church, in the great tradition of Moses and Elijah, will perform powerful signs and thereby torment the surrounding unbelievers, but that the climax of their work will be their martyr-death at the hands of 'the monster that comes up from the Abyss'.

„„„For three and a half days (there we have the half-of-seven symbol again) the world will celebrate a victory over the church. But suddenly God will act in a new way. The vision of [Ezekiel 37](#), of God's breath coming into the dead corpses, will come into reality. And the vision of [Daniel 7](#), of God's people coming on a cloud to heaven, will also come to pass. The vindication of the church after its martyrdom will complete the prophetic witness. (N, T, Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*.)

F. F. Bruce says something similar: “The two witnesses become symbolic figures for the church in its royal and priestly functions, as suggested by the two metaphors by which the witnesses are designated in verse 4.” (NIV Commentary, p. 1612)

Other comments:

**Two witnesses**—Not to be regarded as actual persons; compare [Zech 4:6-7](#). The idea is that there should always be some, even in a decaying, imperiled Church, who, in the special power of Divine grace, should witness against prevailing evils. In every age God has His specially appointed and sustained witnesses. “As God raised up prophets in the ancient Church, to witness against the idolatrous corruptions of religion, so there should be some in every age to testify against the iniquity and idolatry of their times. (The Preacher's Complete Homiletical Commentary on the New Testament: Volume 35: 1 Peter to Revelation.)

The two witnesses make Moses and Elijah contemporary. The advancement of religion gathers up and makes applicable to the present all of God's dealing with men in the past.(Interpreter's Bible, The - Exposition – Vol. 12).

Thus the victims of the beast's violence are identified with each other: the "two witnesses" in Revelation 11:7 are "the saints" in 13:7.(Dennis E. Johnson. *Triumph of the Lamb*)

Jesus said the following:

**Matthew 24:14 (NASB)** *"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. "*

In Rev. 11:7-11, John vividly tells us that God's message and the people who share it will be persecuted severely and many killed. The language clearly indicates that people are involved here, not just written words or even just the message being destroyed. However, the death of the Two Witnesses lasts only 3.5 days, meaning God is in control. We have this promise from Jesus Himself, echoing words from Isaiah,

**Matthew 5:17-18 (NASB)** <sup>17</sup>*"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.* <sup>18</sup>*"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

**The reason why I feel it is important to understand that the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11 are The Law and The Prophets is that this is the content of the witness of the church. While it is not necessary to have a working knowledge of God's Word in order to be saved, it is highly unlikely that a Christian will be effective as a witness without it.**



Louis Berkhof, when speaking on faith, says this:

When the Bible speaks of faith, it generally refers to faith as an activity of man, though born of the work of the Holy Spirit. Saving faith may be defined as a certain conviction, wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, as to the truth of the gospel, and a hearty reliance (trust) on the promises of God in Christ. In the last analysis, it is true, Christ is the object of saving faith, but He is offered to us only in the gospel. (Systematic Theology—L. Berkhof, 1938, 1979)

Another reason why I deem it important to recognize this reference to The Law and the Prophets is that the weapon that Christ uses to slay His enemies in Chapter 19:11-16, 21 is a “sharp sword” in His mouth. Although the battle (which is recapitulated several times in Revelation) is described as very bloody, it actually is most likely bloodless! This “sharp, two-edged sword” was first mentioned in 1:16 and recalls the words of Isaiah 11:4 and 49:2.

The picture of the “sharp, two-edged sword proceeding from his mouth” (see also on [1:16](#); [2:12](#), [16](#)) is based on [Isa. 49:2](#), where the figurative language refers to “servant Israel’s” ([49:3](#)) ability to accomplish his mission of restoring the nation of Israel and saving the nations ([49:6](#)) by means of his word (Beale, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary - The Book of Revelation*. He has a rather extensive commentary on the symbolism used here.)

In his book about Antichrist, Kim Riddlebarger shows how Jesus used words from Deuteronomy to defeat Satan when He was tempted in the desert - "Jesus opposes Satan with God’s Word, the same weapon the saints must use in their struggle with Antichrist." (Riddlebarger, Kim. *The Man of Sin : Uncovering the Truth about the Antichrist*, pp. 68-69).

This concept is stated clearly in Heb. 4:12.

**Hebrews 4:12 (NASB)** *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

A couple of other allusions to God's word as the source of judgment in Revelation:

- The “little book” mentioned in 10:8-11 is probably the Scriptures, referring to Jer. 15:16 and Ez. 2:8-10, 3:1-3
- The judgments announced in 19:2-3 come directly from the OT

The true enemy was the dark power that stood behind Rome and all other pagan empires. Jesus spoke about fighting a battle with the real enemy, the satan. the one who had led all humanity, Israel included, into rebellion against the creator God. And Jesus seems to have believed that the ultimate way to fight this true battle was by giving up his life. ... The victory here is a victory *over* all pagan power, which means *a victory over violence itself*. The symbolism is appropriate because it is taken directly from the passages which speak most powerfully, and are most regularly referred to in the New Testament, of the triumph of the Messiah: Isaiah 11, where the Messiah will judge the nations with the sword of his mouth; Psalm 2, where he will rule them with a rod of iron; Isaiah 63, where he will tread the wine-press of the wrath of God. As John's readers know well by now, the actual weapons which Jesus uses to win the battle are his own blood, his loving self-sacrifice. (N. T. Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*.)

The vivid description that John gives for the end of the battle in 14:20 might seem to suggest a very

bloody ending, but as Bishop Wright points out, the only blood actually shed was Christ's, and though it was sufficient for the entire human race, it is only appropriated by the True Church,

**Matthew 24:35 (NASB)** *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."*

This is the message of the Book of Revelation: God's enemies constitute an evil empire, then represented by the Roman Empire, that is controlled by Satan, This empire, which still exists throughout the world today, will fight against Him and His people, and they will seem to have some degree of success, not realizing that killing God's people just hastens the day that they get to be with the Lord for all eternity. At a time known only by Himself, God will end the present creation and create a new one where His people will live with Him in perfect harmony. His Witnesses have told us of this truth. What is the source of this witness? The Law and The Prophets and the New Testament.

### *An addendum and Notes*

I have only scratched the surface, even of Chapter 11, of the *Apocalypse of John*. If you want to dig deeper, let me make the following suggestions:

1. Stay away from all works that reek of millennialism. All such authors miss almost entirely the real message of Revelation. While they may present a host of interesting topics, they go down an erroneous path. (See 3i and 4e below.) Authors that understand and espouse amillennialism go down the better path. (Normally, I don't give such biased recommendations. As a scientist, I try to examine all aspects of a problem and consider many and varied opinions on a subject before coming to a conclusion. I have done that with respect to Revelation. I'm just giving you some reasoned advice to save you a lot of time and get you started on the right path. "It is not likely that the author of *Revelation* intended that the thousand years be taken literally. Consensus of scholars by no means amounts to proof, but at this point critical scholarship is virtually agreed...." (Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, 1962, p. 317). Ask yourself this question – If the millenium were literally true, why did Jesus, Paul, or any other of the Apostles, even the OT prophets, fail to mention it?)
2. Consider some modern books on Revelation that incorporate the concept of Empire. While some authors who emphasize this view stray into liberation theology, they do combat the erroneous views of most millennialists. Here are some:

a. *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now (Bible & Liberation)* by Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, 2013. This book may give pause to conservative theologians, but the book is a worthwhile read. "As is true throughout Revelation, many passages from Hebrew scripture are echoed in these scenes, although most are modified to fit John's theological goals grounded in his visionary experience. The most frequently used source for John's forms and content of worship is the book of Israel's praise, the Psalms. In particular, John has reworked themes from Psalms 95-100, a collection of songs celebrating the victory and enthronement of the divine warrior in heaven over all the gods of the earth."

b. *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation*, by Michael J. Gorman, 2017. He wrote the original *Reading Revelation Responsibly* in 2011. He has an excellent table that details common errors in interpreting *Revelation*.

"Revelation is not about the antichrist, but about the living Christ. It is not about a rapture out of this world but about faithful discipleship in this world."

"An early fascination with Revelation is not necessarily harmful. Another teenager read Revelation from beginning to end at school one day. He writes about the experience:

'The funny thing is I am quite sure I didn't understand what on earth it was all about, but I can still remember the explosive power and beauty of it, the sense that the New Testament I held in my hands had a thunderstorm hidden inside it that nobody had warned me about.' Some years later, that young man became an Anglican bishop and the world's most prominent contemporary biblical scholar: N. T. (Tom) Wright."

c. *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*, by Steven J. Friesen, 2001. Ray Summers (*Worthy is the Lamb*, 1951) points out the the False Prophet of Revelation Chapter 13 (The Second Beast) is the Roman Imperial Cult.

3. Read *Apocalypticism Explained, The Book of Revelation* by James Tabor, This online PBS article presents a fair though secular overview of Revelation and its history. Theologically limited, of course. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/explanation/b Revelation.html>
4. It is difficult to recommend scholarly commentaries on Revelation, as there are so many of them. As I indicated earlier, I feel that the approach called amillennialism is the most appropriate way to understand Revelation, so here are a few commentaries I suggest:

a. *Revelation, a Shorter Commentary*, by G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, 2015. This is a somewhat condensed version of a longer work titled *The Book of Revelation* in The New International Greek Testament Commentary series, 1999. The shorter version does not have his citations of other works.

b. *I saw Heaven Opened: The Message of Revelation*, by Michael Wilcock, 1975. This book shows clearly the Progressive Recapitulation (or Parallelism) concept used by the author of Revelation.

c. *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, by William Hendriksen. First published in 1935 and revised in 1962, this book influenced many later authors, including Wilcock and Beale. Hendriksen translated *Revelation* for the NIV Bible.

d. *Worthy is the Lamb*, by Ray Summers, 1951. A very readable book that shows clearly the symbolism used in the numbers and images of *Revelation*.

e. *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*, by Dennis E. Johnson, 2001

"Through teaching, preaching, or reading you have probably been exposed to one or more of the three perspectives on the thousand years spoken of in Revelation 20 and to one or more of the four views concerning the relationship between Revelation's visions and the events to which they refer. It is an advantage to begin reading with a pattern in mind, but if the paradigm is so deeply embedded in our minds that it cannot not be corrected by what we find in particular passages, our framework work may obscure rather than illumine the message."

f. *Revelation*, J. P. M. Sweet, 1979. Sweet also contributed the article on Revelation in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 1993. What John hears is often described differently from what he sees (e.g., 5:5-6, 11-13; 9:1, 13, 16-17, etc.).<sup>21</sup> In this case, it suggests that there are not two groups present but one seen under two different aspects.

g. *The Bible and the Future*, by Anthony A. Hoekema, 1994. This author provides detailed analysis of various views of Revelation. "The book of Revelation is full of symbolic numbers. It would seem rather likely, therefore, that the number "thousand" which is used in this passage ought not to be interpreted in a strictly literal sense."

h. *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times*, by Kim Riddlebarger, 2013 “Given the fact that Revelation is apocalyptic in character, prophetic in authority, and epistolary in style, it is apparent that its symbols will be intelligible only against the backdrop of the broader biblical revelation of the Old Testament. , , Not only is it problematic to interpret the symbols used in apocalyptic literature literally, but it is also problematic to read the book of Revelation chronologically.”

i. *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, R. C. H. Lenski. First published around 1943 after the author's death (1864 - 1936). A new paperback became available in 2008. Excellent analysis of Greek as it relates to interpretation of the Scriptures.

j. *Jesus and the Future: Understanding What He Taught about the End Times*, Andreas Kostenberger, 2018. Though focused on what Jesus said regarding the End Times, this book provides some historical information pertinent to a study of Revelation. An appendix cites most of the OT passages regarding cosmic upheaval quoted by Jesus and alluded to in Revelation. A pertinent excerpt:

Jesus doesn't explicitly teach about a personal anti-Christ, a rapture, a seven-year period of tribulation, a millennium, or the restoration of the Jewish nation after the events of the year 70. Interpreters may point to hints of these things but they are nowhere explicit. We aren't claiming that these ideas are absent from the entire Bible but that one will not find explicit references to them in Jesus' teaching.

5. Be sure to read *Revelation* thoughtfully for yourself from a modern Bible translation, such as the NASB, the CSB, the NIV, and the NLT. Unfortunately, if you are not well-versed in the rest of Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, know little of the history of ancient Rome and Israel, or are uncomfortable with symbolism, you will definitely have problems understanding *Revelation*. However, there is no substitute for reading the Bible yourself.
6. For an easy to read modern translation, I suggest a new translation by Bishop N. T. Wright, a preeminent New Testament scholar of the Anglican tradition. He combines his own translation with an easy to read commentary based on excellent scholarship in *Revelation for Everyone*.