

Witnesses, Warfare and Worshipers: Part 3

Revelation 11:15-19

ANNOUNCEMENT - FAMILY BUSINESS

The height of hypocrisy is to have a higher focus on the sin around them rather than the sin within them.

1 Peter 4:17 (NKJV)

For the time [has come] for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if [it begins] with us first, what will [be] the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NKJV)

“if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Romans 12:20-21 (NKJV) 20 Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[Mat 5:44-48 NIV] 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

PROPHECY UPDATE

This morning before we dive into Revelation, I wanted to give you guys some information that I find very compelling. As most of you know by now, I am a futurist when it comes to Revelation. I believe one of the many things that sets the Bible apart is its prophetic nature. The prophets foretold of the coming of Christ as Messiah all the way down to His birthplace, that He would be born of a virgin, that His people would reject him, that he would die for the sins of the people, that he would be buried, and that he would rise from the dead.

All of these things came to pass as prophesied.

- They also prophesied that the Son of Man would come from on clouds, that He would rule and reign on the earth, and that His rule would be everlasting.

Regarding future prophecy, there is a prophecy in Ezekiel regarding Israel and a great battle in that region that has not yet come to pass in history. It's found in Ezekiel chapters 38-39.

- These two chapters outline a great war that is waged between a united force of nations against Israel. The nations listed go by their ancient names, and some are not easily identified, but much scholarly work has gone into interpreting these nations as coming from the region of modern-day Russia, Turkey, and Iran (Gog, Magog, Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal).
- They get an idea implanted in their head that they will invade and take control of Israel, most likely to gain access to their natural resources, trade, and economic wealth, as well as gain military advantage in the region.
- It doesn't end well for them because God divinely helps His people. Their invasion is a massive failure. Israel will spend seven months in the cleanup effort of bodies, and the burning of the weaponry used will go on for seven years.

No one knows the timing of this war. Some speculate it happens prior to the tribulation period; some suggest it happens at the beginning of the tribulation, and some suggest it doesn't happen until the end of the millennial reign. I personally believe it could happen at any time once the players are in place. Why bring this up now? Because of one verse and how it correlates with something that is currently in the works.

[Eze 38:13 NKJV] 13 "Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions will say to you, 'Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your army to take booty, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to take great plunder?' "

So here we have three regions that are questioning this combined force that is coming against Israel. Notice they are not participating in the invasion but rather are protesting the invasion. They are challenging the motives of the invading force, more than likely because it will affect them negatively. These are nations that probably have some economic interests with Israel. So who are they?

- Tarshish - no one knows. It was a real place in ancient times, but its location is lost to antiquity. It's where Jonah tried to flee because, in his time, it was the furthest place you could travel. Some scholars equate it with Crete, others with the southern coast of Spain.
- Sheba and Dedan - these are easier to trace because we have abundant secular sources throughout history. Dedan is modern-day Saudi Arabia, and Sheba is either the southern end of Saudi Arabia or Yemen.
- Wait, Josh, aren't those both ardent enemies of Israel? Well, historically, yes, but when relations between the UAE and Israel normalized under Trump's administration, it opened the door for nations such as Saudi Arabia, which could have a lot to benefit from a normalized relation with Israel, to start moving toward that direction.

In a 2022 interview, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia stated, **"We look at Israel as a potential ally, but before that, it should solve its problems with the Palestinians,"**

Well, in August, 2023, all of the sudden we are seeing these headlines: **" Saudis Agree With U.S. on Path to Normalize Kingdom's Ties With Israel: Officials are negotiating details of agreement they hope to cement within nine-to-12 months, though obstacles remain."**

People are motivated:

- The Biden admin desperately needs some sort of foreign accomplishment under their belt.
- SA has much to gain: Billions of dollars of revenue and trade, extra military protection against Iran (No, Saudi and Iran are not friends), and a branch of connection into the Western world.

Nearly 3000 years ago, God spoke through Ezekiel and told us that when this massive war takes place against Israel, Saudi Arabia will be challenging the other nations that are seeking to make war with Israel. Why? Because relations with Saudi Arabia and Israel will be normalized. After that takes place, there's already talk that south Yemen may be next.

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Rev 11:15-19 NKJV] 15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" 16 And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. 18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth." 19 Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

INTRO

In chapter 11, we studied the temple and the two witnesses. We left off last week with the sounding of the final, seventh trumpet, decreeing the final transfer of power between the kingdom of this world, under the control of Satan, to the kingdom of heaven, under the control of Christ. While there are still events and judgments to finalize this deal, there is a great cause in heaven to rejoice as time sprints toward the finish line.

Verses 16 - 19 describe a scene in heaven that is a direct response to the rule and reign of Jesus, His authority, and His judgment.

As the trumpet blasts and the declaration is made, we once again pan over to a familiar sight and sound... the 24 elders bursting forth in humble worship before the throne of God.

4:41



1 The Worship

THE 24 ELDERS

In the book of Revelation, we have six separate appearances of the twenty-four elders joining together in song to praise the Lord at various points of His judgments.

I believe there is a strong argument that the 24 elders represent the raptured and pre-tribulation church in heaven.

- **They are clothed in white robes** - (Chapter 4) White robes signify righteousness. The Christian is clothed in the presence of God with the righteous robes of Christ.
- **They have crowns - stephanos, the victor's crown. [1Co 9:25 NKJV] 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.**
- **Seated on thrones that surround God's throne** - which indicates a place of authority and kingship. The Bible tells us that we as believers have become a royal priesthood and that we are kings and priests to our god. Paul tells us that we will rule and judge the earth and the angels in Christ's kingdom. **[Eph 2:6 NKJV] 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**
- **They are engaged in worship** - Every time you see them, they are bowing, facedown before the throne, engaged in worship to God, declaring His worthiness, holiness, justice, and awesome power. That's a great posture for every believer!!! We were created to glorify, worship, and honor God. I believe that worship will be a significant preoccupation of the believer in heaven, and when we are there, in the presence of God, there is nothing else we would rather do!

Now, it's possible that these 24 elders could be identified in a number of ways. Some suggest that they are the 12 apostles and a representative from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. That would certainly fit a picture of God's two covenants being under one banner.

- **Song 1 - the worthiness of God as Creator of all things.**
- **Song 2 - The worthiness of Christ to release judgment because of His completed work of salvation.**
- **Song 3 - The worthiness of Christ to be exalted above every other name and authority.**
- **Song 4 - The worthiness of God to receive all blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might forever and ever!**
- **Song 5 - (This song, the longest song) is a song of thanksgiving for God's righteous judgment.**
- **Song 6 - (The shortest song) Amen, Hallelujah! Because the end had arrived, and Jesus has defeated every enemy.**

A MODEL OF WORSHIP

When I look at these heavenly worship sessions, I can't help but find some strong applications that can help guide our worship here and now. For instance:

1. If we take the themes of each of the songs, we can understand the reasons why we should worship the Lord. We worship the Lord because he is the creator. We worship the Lord because He is the Savior of mankind. We worship the Lord because He is the rightful and coming King of all creation. We worship the Lord because he is worthy of worship. We give thanks to the Lord because He is a righteous judge. We worship the Lord because He has won the victory.
2. Worship is a responsive act - whenever we see the elders falling down to worship, it's because they are responding to a revelation of God. Whether it's what they see, what God does, or something that is said about God in heaven, the elders are always responding to God's character or actions with praise.

1. There will be no authentic worship where there is no clear view of God.

2. Sadly, I believe that many of us experience deadness and dreariness in our praise and worship because we are failing to gaze upon the Lord in the rest of our lives.

3. If we don't spend time in His word, we won't see Him or hear Him. If we aren't fellowshiping in prayer, we won't see him. If we aren't actively serving others, we won't see Him. If we aren't taking steps of faith that require dependence on God, we won't see Him. If we are not loving and forgiving one another, we won't see Him. ***And if we don't see Him or hear Him, we will not worship Him as He deserves.***

APPLICATION

17 saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. 18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth."

I could do an entire sermon on this song!

- Here's what strikes me. Those who belong to Christ are praising God for His justice and wrath.
- When it comes time for God to roll up His sleeves and declare His time of judgment upon wickedness, the people of God will rejoice.
- In Judgment, there is weeping. The thought of people we care about being judged by God is one that causes me to tremble and makes me sick.
- But one day, I will see everything without the veil of my humanity. I will see everything and everyone as God sees.
- This means that when God, the Father, and the Son, take the throne, come against the nations that mocked and derided Him, judge the dead in fairness and righteousness, reward those who faithfully followed and served Him, and destroy those who have corrupted the world with sin, violence, immoralities, and destruction, it will be a moment of powerful praise and worship to the justice and righteousness of God.

HYMN

I found a 17th-century hymn that was once a Christmas Carol entitled, "O Fearful Thought of endless Doom."

*1 Fearful thought of endless doom—
Skies are rent, the Judge is come;
Clouds His throne; around Him stand
Angel guards, a countless band.*

*2 Hear the voice from shore to shore,
Tells that time shall be no more;
See the dead from dust arise,
Summoned to the great assize.*

*3 On His right are placed the just,
To the left the wicked thrust;
Well to Him are sinners known—
Known, but severed from His own.*

*4 These a blest retreat have won,
Earth's delights who learned to shun;
Chose affliction, pain and loss,
Followed Him who bore the cross.*

*6 Deeper still their shame and dread,
Seeing Him whose blood they shed;
Lord, from sin Thy people keep,
Lest its dreadful fruit they reap.*

*7 Mingling joy with holy fear,
Praise we Him whose day is near;
Bless alike the Father's name,
And the Spirit's praise proclaim.*

BIBLE PASSAGE

19 Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

APPLICATION

The earthly temple scene opens to the heavenly scene.

- Hebrews tells us that the earthly temple is merely a shadow of heavenly realities.
- In heaven, there is ark of the covenant in His Holiest place.
 - Maybe sometime I'll take you guys down a fun rabbit trail about the Ark of the Covenant.
- But for time's sake, we need to see the big picture of what's happening here.

QUOTE

“The appearance of the Ark of His covenant emphasizes that which will be used as the standard for judgment. It is because of man’s

willful disobedience and rebellion in the light of the standard of the law that God's righteous judgment is required. His wrath is measured by the distance between the contents of the written requirements in the ark versus the actions of sinful men."

Bruce Hurt

APPLICATION

In other words, everyone will be judged according to God's perfect covenant and law. Judgment directly proceeds out of the nature of who God is and what God has said. There will be no partiality.

What about mercy? Doesn't mercy triumph over judgment?

- Yes, and those who come to God now by Christ come under the banner of Christ's righteousness and not their own. They find mercy through sacrifice.
- But those who reject God's mercy in Christ will be judged by the perfect law of God's covenant and will be found guilty according to that perfect standard.

[Heb 10:28-29 NKJV] 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on [the testimony of] two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

APPLICATION

You see, the man or woman that comes to God through the sacrifice of Christ has access into that heavenly temple. The way into Holiest place of God's presence has already been paved by our forerunner.

[Heb 6:19-20 NKJV] 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus...

However, to reject the sacrifice of Christ, which gives us entrance based on His qualifications, means that one will be judged based on the covenant of God's law, that which is within the ark of God.

- The beauty of this moment, with all the craziness in the world, and all the wickedness running amuck, is that you and I have the opportunity to enter into the covenant of Grace in Christ Jesus through faith in Him. But the frightening aspect of that is that to reject that is to put yourself under the covenant of God's perfect moral law, by which you will be found guilty before the righteous judge and creator.

Come to Jesus today, and if you are in Christ, worship Jesus today. Follow Jesus today. Serve Jesus today. Draw near to Jesus today!