

THE TWO WITNESSES BEYOND THE SIXTH TRUMPET

Laurențiu Florentin Moț*

Abstract

The two witnesses of Revelation baffled interpreters for a long time and kept frustrating them for reasons related either to the book's approach or to prioritizing, in interpretation, external sources over Revelation itself. The article dialogues with expositors of historicist tradition and shows that, if there must be progress in understanding, the structure and interconnectivity of Revelation must be prioritized. The claim substantiated throughout the paper is that the narrative of the two witnesses has two parts: historical (Rev 11:3–6) and eschatological (vv. 7–12), the latter of which receives new meaning when interpreted from an end-time perspective and as a replica of Jesus's own destiny, which the two witnesses closely follow.

Keywords: Revelation 11, two witnesses, sixth trumpet, historicism

Revelation 11 is one of those passages in the last book of the Biblical canon which can easily frustrate the interpreter. This is partly because a significant portion of this section (vv. 1–13), alongside the entire chapter 10, forms what has come to be called the interlude of the seven trumpets. Three major sevenfold visions of the Apocalypse (the 7 seals, the 7 trumpets, the 7 bowls) are interrupted at their climax, more exactly within the sixth stage, by a vision that is meant to expand on the tension of the final moments of history. Exactly when the reader does not expect much else to happen in the world, during the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:20–21), John deviates the fo-

* Laurențiu Florentin Moț, PhD (laurentiu.mot@uadventus.ro), is associate professor of New Testament studies and the rector of Adventus University, 11–13 Decebal, Cernica, Ilfov 077035, Romania (<https://uadventus.ro>).

cus to an extensive overview (24 verses) about the prophetic worldwide mission of the church. Thus, the passage of the two witnesses gets complicated by its structural condition and locus and its descriptive language. The main question of this study is whether the time frame of the trumpets' interlude is restricted to the sixth trumpet, within which the passage appears, or extends beyond it. This issue is relevant for the interpretative endeavor, irrespective of the interpreter's approach. But my particular goal is to look at this problem from the perspective of the historicist interpretation of the two witnesses, which narrows the temporal span of this vision to the spectrum of the sixth trumpet. As the analysis unfolds, it will become progressively clearer that, for various reasons, it is advisable to alter this reductionist view and allow the interlude to carry the reader over the stage at which it is introduced. Because modern exponents of historicism today are mainly found within the Seventh-day Adventist confession, our task should begin with an overview of Adventist literature.

THE TWO WITNESSES – AN ADVENTIST OVERVIEW

Adventist Revelation scholars have been both attracted and puzzled by the two witnesses' passage. These interpreters fall into one of the following two categories. The first category confines the two witnesses' historical application within the context of 1798 (the end of the 1,260 days/years), primarily in the setting of the French Revolution. Representatives of this position are Uriah Smith,¹ Roy A. Anderson,² Jean Vuilleumier,³ Mervyn Maxwell,⁴ and Kenneth

¹ Uriah Smith, *Profețiile lui Daniel și Apocalipsul*, trans. Valerian Răileanu (București: Păzitorul adevărului, 1944), 533–47.

² Roy Allan Anderson, *Desfășurând cartea Apocalipsei*, trans. Octavian Coconcea (București: Viață și Sănătate, 1996), 127–32.

³ Jean Vuilleumier, *Apocalipsul*, trad. Dumitru Florea și Ștefan Demetrescu (București: Graiul literar, 1946), 115–136.

⁴ C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, 2 vols. (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1985), 2:280–305.

Mathews,⁵ all presented in Table 1, as well as Jacques Doukhan,⁶ and Ekkehardt Müller,⁷ described in Table 2. The last two authors are included in Table 2 for technical reasons (more information would not fit in the first table) but also because timid signs of interpretative innovation bring the two scholars near the second category (see Table 2). Both tables briefly highlight the interpretation of various textual notions by these authors.

Table 1. *Historical application of the two witnesses*

	Smith	Anderson	Vuilleumier	Maxwell	Mathews
two witnesses	OT and NT	OT and NT	OT and NT	OT and NT	OT and NT
abyss	atheism	atheism	disorder	de-Christianization	
beast	France	France	France	France	Revolution; France
city	(Paris?)	(Paris?)	French cities	French cities	French republic
death	1793–1797	1793–1797	1793–1797	1793–	1793–1797
resurrection	religious liberty	religious liberty	revivalism	revivalism	revivalism
ascension	Bible societies	Bible societies	Bible societies	Bible societies	Bible societies
earthquake	France = 10% papacy	-	France = 10% papacy	Revolutionary terror	France = 10% papacy
7000	-	-	nobiliary titles	-	victims
The rest	unbelievers	-	martyrs	-	repentant survivors

What stands out in the first perspective is that the two witnesses represent the Bible (OT and NT), which is why everything that they

⁵ Kenneth Matthews, *Revelation Reveals Jesus*, 2 vols. (Greeneville, TN: Second Coming Publishing, 2012), 1:546–76.

⁶ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Daniel și Apocalipsa*, Enigmele Bibliei, trans. Christian Sălcianu (Pantelimon: Viața și Sănătate, 2013), 295–303.

⁷ Ekkehardt Müller, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13.2 (2002): 30–45.

undergo (suffering, death, resurrection, ascension) must be taken metaphorically. The entire scenario is confined to the anti-religious insurgence in revolutionary France. Quite surprisingly, I would add, the three and a half days/years between the death and the resurrection of the two witnesses (1793–1797) are placed within (near the end of) the 1,260 days/years (538–1798) of prophetic activity. This seems strange since the correspondence between the the three and a half years of activity and the the three and a half days of death is thus impaired.

In Table 2, the second category is presented. Scholars of the new trend interpret all or some of the components of the passage in light of eschatological, not historical, events. For example, Jon Paulien interprets the reaction of the survivors of the great earthquake as the answer of humanity to the last gospel proclamation of Rev 14:7.⁸

Table 2. *Eschatological and historical application of the two witnesses*

	Doukhan	Paulien	Stefanović	Müller	Strand Waal
two witnesses	OT and NT Church	Rev 14:7, suggests that Rev 11:12–13	Bible Church	OT and NT	WG and TJ ⁹ Church
abyss	atheism	(ascension/ earthquake)	waters	de-Christianization	-
beast	France	represents the answer	the sea-beast	Satan/secular power	earth-beast
city	(Paris?)	of humanity	evil forces	French cities	-
death	1793–1797	to the last gospel pro- clamation	1 day/1 year	1793–	-
resurrection	religious liberty		church steadiness	revivalism	-
ascension	revivalism		last proclamation	Bible societies	-
earthquake	1798		6:12 (≠ 16:18)	≠ 6:12	-
7000	-		hardened unbelievers	-	-
The rest	-		martyrs	-	-

⁸ Jon Paulien, *Seven Keys: Unlocking the Secrets of Revelation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2009), 96–97.

⁹ These acronyms refer to “the Word of God” and “the Testimony of Jesus,” two prevalent phrases in the Apocalypse of John. John is on Patmos “for” (1:2) and

Ranko Stefanovic identifies the beast coming out of the abyss as the sea-beast and the great earthquake as the one in the sixth seal (Rev 6:12), which is not, according to him, the same as the great earthquake of the seventh plague in 16:18.¹⁰ On his part, in a more recent study, Kayle B. de Waal identifies the beast which fights the witnesses with the land-beast.¹¹ The new trends are salutary yet quite discrepant.

More than that, I have not encountered a thorough and consistent treatment of the two witnesses' vision from the perspective of the intra- and inter-textual connections between the concepts and motifs involved. Ian R. Brown has done an important service to scholars interested in the topic by carefully reviewing the main trends in Revelation studies with regards to the two witnesses. In his 2016 dissertation, after extensively reviewing literature from the 1700s to the present, Brown identifies the most important issues that divide expositors and which play an important part in deciphering the mystery of the two witnesses if one is to grasp the most probable meaning of their symbol. From the study plan he designs and proposes to Revelation scholarship, I extract the issues relevant to the present study. The explanation of the following issues makes a difference in interpretation: (1) interpretative framework: OT use in Revelation, the distinction between symbolic and literal, interpretative approach; (2) textual issues: use of the definite article, themes of testimony and prophecy, image of the olive trees and lampstands, the powers of the witnesses, the identity of the beast of Rev 11:7, the setting of the events portrayed in Rev 11:3–13, the fate

“because of” (1:9) the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Adherence to these can bring martyrdom (6:9; 20:4) and the rage of the dragon (12:17), but also victory against the dragon when the obedience to the Word and the Testimony is combined with the blood of the Lamb (12:11). So the two notions are a replacement of the traditional combination, the OT-NT.

¹⁰ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 345–46, 350.

¹¹ Kayle B. de Waal, “The Two Witnesses and the Land Beast in the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 53.1 (2015): 159–74.

of the witnesses (to which I also add the fate of the survivors of the great earthquake), (3) issues of literary context (before and after Rev 11:3–13).¹² In the following pages, I will address all these issues to clarify whether the conflict between the beast and the two witnesses is eschatological.

THE REV 11:7 CONFLICT: HISTORICAL OR ESCHATOLOGICAL?

In order to answer the question in the above subheading, we will first review the interludes of Revelation. The two witnesses episode is part of the trumpets' interlude; therefore, it matters how the other interludes of the book are located in the prophetic timeline. John seems quite consistent in this respect. This section prepares the way for the interpretation of the two witnesses' destiny (vv. 8–12) and of humanity's fate (v. 13) in the latter part of the passage.

Revelation Interludes

Now I make the following claim, which I aim at demonstrating: all Revelation interludes are essentially about the generation of the eschaton, even if the storyline sometimes drives us back in time, even before the sixth stage within which the interludes are introduced. Therefore, the parenthetic climax of the trumpets should also be viewed in similar terms, all the more so if one has in mind its considerable length. We will first review the seals, then the bowls, so as to return to the trumpets and test this hypothesis.

The question "who is able to stand?" (τίς δύναται σταθῆναι; Rev 6:17) is raised at the second coming of Jesus by the wicked who reason that nobody is able to resist meeting the returning King. The interlude (Rev 7) is meant to contradict the expected answer. The

¹² Ian R. Brown, "The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11:1–13: Arguments, Issues of Interpretation, and a Way Forward" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2016), 360–62, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dissertations/1616>.

group of the 144,000 is able to stand. This posture expresses spiritual victory: “stay alert at all times and pray that ... you may stand before the Son of Man” (ἀγρυπνεῖτε δὲ ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ δεόμενοι ἵνα ... σταθῆναι ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, Luke 21:36).¹³ This suggests that the 144,000 are victorious through the eschaton. The interlude turns the reader back in time, prior to their sealing (Rev 7:1–3), and then goes on mentioning their sealing (Rev 7:4–8), after which the great tribulation of the four winds may unleash (Rev 7:13–14; cf. 7:2–3). This is probably the tribulation concluding with the Parousia of the Son of Man. But the interlude possibly drives the reader beyond the moment of the Parousia. When John looks, he perceives a great multitude “standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (ἐστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου, Rev 7:9).¹⁴ Details such as palm tree branches (cf. 1 Macc. 13:51; 2 Macc. 10:7; 14:4¹⁵), white robes,¹⁶ post-tribulation doxologies,¹⁷ their continuous stay (proved by the use of the present tense) in the temple of God’s presence, etc. (Rev 7:–15),¹⁸ reveal that this

¹³ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, WBC 35C (Dallas: Word, 1993), 1013. For others, the image of standing before Jesus is the posture of standing in judgment (e.g., 1 En. 62:8, 13; 1QH 4:21). I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 783. However, it is about standing in judgment with the obvious prospect of innocence and victory.

¹⁴ Balmer Kelly suggests that the mention of both the throne and the Lamb declares the unique focus of the hymn, which is the divine presence. Balmer H. Kelly, “Revelation 7:9–17,” *Int* 40.3 (1986): 288–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096438604000307>.

¹⁵ W. R. Farmer, “The Palm Branches in John 12:13,” *JTS* 3.1 (1952): 62–66.

¹⁶ Ulrich Wilckens, “στολή,” *TDNT* 7:691. Wilhelm Michaelis, “λευκός κτλ.,” *TDNT* 4:249.

¹⁷ The phrase “out of the great tribulation” seems to refer to “the unprecedented period of end-time judgment.” Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 270.

¹⁸ Peter Kelly elaborates on the motifs in Rev 7:1–7 and finds the palm branches to be symbolic of a victorious crowd welcoming their king (John 12:13; cf. also 1 Macc. 13:51; 2 Macc. 10:7). Structurally, the passage Rev 7:9–17 represents a link between the throne room in Rev 4–5 and the eschatological opening of the temple (Rev 11:19; cf. 15:5) coupled with God’s dwelling with his people (Rev 21–22) in the aftermath of the final battle. Peter S. Perry, *The Rhetoric of Digressions: Revelation 7:1–*

gathering occurs after the question of the wicked – either at the Parousia or immediately after.

Moving to the seven bowls, during the sixth, it happens that amidst the development of the final fate of eschatological Babylon, John opens a parenthesis in which Jesus gives the following warning: “Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed is the one who watches and keeps his clothes so that he will not walk naked and see his shamefulfulness” (Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης. μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῆ καὶ βλέπωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ, Rev 16:15). The interlude clearly alludes to the preparation for the coming of Christ and to the coming itself.¹⁹ In other words, Rev 16:15 pictures actions that surround the sixth plague. The spiritual preparation happens prior to the close of probation/the beginning of the plagues (cf., Rev 15:8), while the Parousia concludes the seven plagues (cf., γέγονεν, Rev 16:17). “The faithful are admonished to be on the alert for this great event,”²⁰ but that preparation can only be possible before the final bowls plague unleash. The γυμνός-state recalls the peril of the Laodicean (Rev 3:18),²¹ but it also anticipates the fate of Babylon (Rev 17:16), to be fulfilled in the context of the return of the Lamb (Rev 17:14; cf. 19:19–21). Like in the case of the seals, the interlude of the seven bowls points initially backward (to the spiritual preparation), but its subsequent trajectory leads after the moment of the sixth stage in which it is introduced or presented.

Kenneth Strand does not feel obligated by the interludes of the

17 and 10:1–11:13 and *Ancient Communication*, WUNT 2/268 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 223.

¹⁹ Pieter G. R. de Villiers, “The Septet of Bowls in Revelation 15:1–16:21 in the Light of Its Composition,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 16.1 (2005): 196–222 (esp. 210).

²⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 300.

²¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 593–94.

seals and the bowls to infer that Rev 10:1–11:13 should also have some eschatological orientation.

Since we have now moved into the section of the Apocalypse that provides visions of the eschatological judgment, rather than pertaining to the historical era, it is obvious that a new sort of “interlude” can be expected, as is indeed the case here. The earlier interludes were somewhat detailed descriptions of events or conditions during a final portion of the historical era. The interludes that occur in visions V–VII are rather of a crisp, hortatory nature.²²

It is true that the bowls of wrath fall into the eschatological portion of the book, whereas the seals and the trumpets are more of a historical and recapitulative nature. Yet, Strand’s framework allows the interlude of the seals to “interrupt” the historical sequence and focus on the sealing of the 144,000 in the end-times.²³ Then why is this not also possible with the interlude of the trumpets? Rev 10:1–11:13 clearly has a historical focus but also points to eschatology. With these things in mind, the present study posits that the interlude of the seven trumpets should also be seen as bidirectional – pointing both to a time prior to the sixth trumpet and to developments after the sixth trumpet. The following two sub-headings are meant to prove the case furtherly.

Whenever They May Finish Their Testimony

Is “whenever they may finish their testimony” equivalent to the end of the 1,260 days period? The concept of the fulfillment of a time in Revelation is expressed once more beside 11:7. It is when John describes the post-millennial release of the dragon: “whenever the thousand years may be fulfilled” (ὅταν τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη,

²² Kenneth A. Strand, “The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 25.1 (1987): 107–21 (esp. 115). By visions V–VII, Strand refers to Rev 15:1–16:17 (V), 16:18–18:24 (VI), and 19:1–21:4 (VII).

²³ Strand, “The Eight Basic Visions,” 112.

Rev 20:7). There is no other place in the Greek Bible where the adverb ὅταν combines with any form of the verb τελεῖν. However, we have examples in Hellenistic Greek. One example is Philo's "then when [the fruit] is fully formed, [nature] provides nourishment" (εἰθ' ὅταν [καρπός] τελεσθῆ, [φύσις] παρέχεται τὰς τροφὰς, Philo, *Deus* 39.5). The second example comes from a magical papyrus and goes as follows: "whenever all that have been said before will fulfill, call out the spell" (ὅταν τελέσης πάντα τὰ προειρημένα, κάλει τῇ ἐπαουδῆ, PGM I. 295). In all these examples, "when it is finished" means "sometime after it is finished". Similar collocations (mainly with the verb πληροῦν) are found in the LXX and the NT: (1) "when what is perfect comes" (ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον, 1 Cor 13:10); (2) "when six years will be fulfilled, release your Hebrew brother" (ὅταν πληρωθῆ ἕξ ἔτη ἀποστελεῖς τὸν ἀδελφόν σου τὸν Εβραῖον, Jer 41:14); (3) "when your days will be fulfilled and you will fall asleep with your fathers" (ὅταν πληρωθῶσιν αἱ ἡμέραι σου καὶ κοιμηθῆσῃ μετὰ τῶν πατέρων σου, 1 Chr 17:11).

Revelation 11:7 tells us that the beast coming out of the abyss will make war against the witnesses sometime after their testimony is over. Some Adventist interpreters tend to read this in relation to the 1,260 days period of prophetization. However, the 1,260 days period does not indicate the *terminus* of the two witnesses' entire prophetic testimony, only the *terminus* of their in-sackcloth prophetic activity. As Bede reasons: "[John] clearly shows that all this will happen before the final persecution, for he says, 'when they have finished their testimony.' At least their witness will continue until the revelation of the beast."²⁴ For clarity, I would expect John to write "whenever they may finish their prophesying [not their testimony]" (ὅταν τελέσωσιν τοὺς προφητεύοντας [not τὴν μαρτυρίαν] αὐτῶν). But the writer of the Apocalypse mentions the

²⁴ Victorinus of Petovium, Apringius of Beja, Bede the Venerable, *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, ed. William C. Weinrich, Thomas C. Oden, and Gerald L. Bray, trans. William C. Weinrich, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 146.

end of their testimony altogether.²⁵ Even if we admit a certain semantic overlap between prophecy and testimony, the very fact that John uses in 11:7 the latter affects the meaning of their activity. To be clear, even the adverb ὅταν (whenever, indefinite when²⁶) seems to highlight that the testimony is independent of their 1,260 days suppression. This being said, it follows that the two witnesses have two significant phases of testimony: prophesying in sackcloth during the 1,260 days and bearing their prophetic testimony freely until they clash with the beast which comes out of the abyss, sometime after (not prior to!) the 1,260 days period.

The Beast Coming Out of the Abyss

John calls the enemy of the two witnesses “the beast coming up out of the Abyss” (Rev 11:7) long before mentioning any beast. However, the qualification τὸ ἀναβαίνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου anticipates the only beast described in these terms – the scarlet beast (Rev 17:8).²⁷ The definite article is either of cataphoric or of well-known type, thus either pointing to some further mention of the beast or

²⁵ The idea is that the witnesses “will have completed their divinely appointed task.” Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 92. The witnesses will be attacked “when they have delivered their message.” Henry Barclay Swete, ed., *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 2nd ed., *Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 134. See also Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 601. If this happened at the end of the 18th century, it would seem strange, given their call, similar to the one in Matt. 24:14, extending to the end of the world.

²⁶ The adverb ὅταν is indefinite both with verbs in the subjunctive and verbs in the indicative mood. Charles Francis Digby Moule, *An Idiom Book of the New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (1959; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 133; *EDNT*, s.v. “ὅταν.”

²⁷ The definite article before the noun θηρίον may prove that the recipients of Revelation were familiar with the identity of the beast, which at this moment is not fully disclosed. If we are to connect it with any of the beasts coming later, “there appear to be strong links between the figure in this passage and both the beast ascending from the sea in Rev. 13:1–10 and the beast of Rev. 17 (note verse 8, where it is described as ‘about to ascend from the abyss’).” Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (London: SPCK, 2005), 280.

expressing some sort of negative celebrity.²⁸ All three beasts in Revelation are coming out of somewhere. First, John saw “a beast coming out of the sea” (ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον, Rev 13:1). Second, John saw “another beast coming out of the earth” (ἄλλο θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς γῆς, Rev 13:11). Third, the prophet observes a θηρίον which “must come out of the abyss” (μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου, Rev 17:8). Note the different phraseologies. In the first two cases, the place of descent almost becomes a title of identification. The beast which comes out of the sea is the sea-beast. The beast which comes out of the earth is the earth-beast. Not the same for the third. “The beast coming out of the abyss” is not a title or a name. It is a temporal phase (the last!) of the scarlet beast. This is proved by at least two elements. The usual title of the scarlet beast is “the one who was, is not, and must come out of the abyss and goes to destruction” (μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει, Rev 17:8a) or “the one who was, is not, and will come” (ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ παρέσται, Rev 17:8b). Basically, this title is a parody of God’s denomination “the one who was, who is, and who is coming” (Rev 1:4; 4:8). Now, in Rev 17:11, this name is broken down into pieces in order to highlight the distinction between the temporal phases. Thus, “the beast who was and is not he himself is an eight [king] ... and goes to destruction” (τὸ θηρίον ὃ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστιν ... καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει, Rev 17:11). This going to destruction happens after the beast comes out of the abyss. This makes one wonder whether the description “the beast coming out of the abyss” (Rev 11:7) is descriptive of the whole monster (in all its phases) or only of its last manifestation after it comes out of the abyss. To me, the latter seems to be the case.

This seems further strengthened by one more thing. The dragon, the sea-beast, and the scarlet beast are all described by having “seven heads and ten horns” (12:3; 13:1; 17:3). This may suggest

²⁸ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 220–25.

that the three figures are one and the same entity in different phases.²⁹ These temporal differences are marked by the locus where the crowns are placed. The dragon has its seven heads crowned. The sea-beast has its ten horns crowned. The scarlet beast has no crown at all, but it will receive “authority as king” (ἐξουσίαν ὡς βασιλεὺς, cf. Rev 17:12) for one hour, together with the ten horns/kings. In other words, the entity with seven heads and ten horns has basically three phases: (1) the dragon phase – all seven heads crowned, (2) the sea-beast phase – one (initially crowned then uncrowned) head with ten crowns on its ten horns, (3) the scarlet beast phase – both the beast’s head and the ten horns will be crowned concurrently for an hour. The beast has an uninterrupted pathway across the seven heads (Rev 17:10). But at some point, during the seventh head, the beast must experience some sort of deadly punishment in order to be described in terms of “is not” (οὐκ ἔστω).³⁰ The coming out of the abyss represents its last (eighth) phase.³¹ The last coronation (of both the head/beast and the ten horns) clearly occurs after this resurrection moment. Therefore, “the beast coming out of the abyss” that kills the two witnesses in 11:7 must be the beast in its

²⁹ Something similar has been observed by Henry Alford: “This wild-beast is evidently identical with that mentioned in ch. 17:8, of which the same term is used, ὁ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου: and if so, with that also which is introduced ch. 13:1 ff., as ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίον ἀναβαίνον, seeing that the same details, of the seven heads and ten horns, are ascribed to the two.” Henry Alford, *Alford’s Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 4:660.

³⁰ Among other things, in the Greek culture (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 4.5 Crantor [27]), in the OT (Ps 71:20), apocrypha (Pr. Man. 3; Jub. 5:6; 1 En. 10:4) and in the NT (Luke 8:31; Rev 20:1–3), the abyss stands for the realm of the dead and/or the temporary prison of the evil spirits. Joachim Jeremias, “ἄβυσσος,” *TDNT* 1:10. See also Gary S. Shogren, “Hell, Abyss, Eternal Punishment,” *DLNT*, 459.

³¹ Victorinus states that this conflict, after the beast comes out of the abyss, will take place “in the end.” Victorinus of Pettau, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John* 11 (trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, *ANF* 7:354).

last/eighth/eschatological phase,³² not the beast during its previous history.³³

This is not to say that the beast coming out of the abyss has no past. It actually has, but John would clearly signal the differences between the past and the eschatological manifestations of the beast entity. The table below highlights the most significant markers of these distinctions.

Table 3. *Past and future manifestations of the beast entity*

The beast of the abyss (Rev 11)	The sea-beast (Rev 13)	The scarlet beast (Rev 17)
1. 1,260 days of in-sackcloth prophetic activity (v. 3).	1. "it was given authority to work for 42 months" (v. 5).	
2. "will make war against them, will conquer them, and will kill them [the two witnesses]."	2. "and it was given to make war against the saints and to conquer them."	"I saw the woman being drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of witnesses of Jesus."
ποιήσει μετ' αὐτῶν πόλεμον καὶ νικήσει αὐτούς καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς [τοὺς δύο μάρτυρας] (v. 17b).	καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ νικήσαι αὐτούς (v. 7b).	εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ (v. 6).

The description of the beast coming out of the abyss shares clear phraseology with the depiction of the sea-beast. However, they are also distinguished in two important respects. Both characters make

³² As George Ladd puts it, the beast in Rev 11:7 derives from the little horn of Dan 7–8 and "refers ultimately to the eschatological Antichrist." George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 156.

³³ In line with other ancient interpreters, Oecumenius and Andreas sees in the beast the eschatological manifestation of the Antichrist. Oecumenius and Andrew of Caesarea, *Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Gerald L. Bray, trans. William C. Weinrich, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 152. See also Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, trans. John N. Suggit, FC 112 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 103. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ed. David G. Hunter, trans. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, FC 123 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 132–33. Tyconius, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, ed. David C. Robinson, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock, FC 134 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 113.

war against and conquer God's people. Nevertheless, while the sea-beast fights with "the saints," the beast coming out of the abyss attacks "God's witnesses." The two categories might essentially be the same, but different denominations are not to be neglected within the overall meaning of the visions. The most important distinction between the beast in Rev 11:7 and the one in Rev 13:1–8 is that the former kills the witnesses, whereas the latter only attacks and conquers the saints.³⁴ Here is where the scarlet beast comes into play.³⁵ According to Rev 17:6, the prostitute who is carried by the scarlet beast is drunk with the blood of the saints, and of the witnesses. This seems to reflect the idea from 11:7 – the killing of the witnesses. From here it follows that the beast in Rev 11:7 is probably best understood as the scarlet beast in Rev 17, in its last phase. It is not an accident that the beast in the eighth phase is described in Rev 17:11 as follows: "and the beast, which was and is not, is itself an eight [king]" (καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστιν). The "will come" phase happens after the beast comes up out of the abyss – in the last phase of the eschatological events.

If the reasons above are convincing enough to suggest the possibility of interpreting the two witnesses eschatologically, then in the last section of this paper, I will explore the destiny of the two witnesses and of the wicked in eschatological perspective.

³⁴ However, some interpreters identify the beast coming out of the abyss as being entirely the sea-beast. E.g., Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Deichert, 1924–1926), 2:431.

³⁵ Other scholars see both the sea-beast and the scarlet beast as relevant to understand the beast coming out the abyss in Rev 11:7. E.g., Pierre Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, CNT 14 (Paris: Delachaux & Niestle, 1981), 168.

THE DESTINY OF THE TWO WITNESSES IN INTRA-
AND INTER-TEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

What Are the Two Witnesses?

In Revelation, a μάρτυς is a witness for God, who usually pays his faithfulness with his life. In this category, John mentions Jesus (Rev 1:5; cf. 3:14), Antipas (Rev 2:13), and the two witnesses (Rev 11:3). The cognate μαρτυρία (mainly in the phrase μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ) represents one of the two hallmarks of God's people (Rev 12:17; 19:10) for which some suffer (Rev 1:2, 9), while others pay with their lives (Rev 6:9; 11:7; 20:4). In other words, in Revelation, the concept of "witness" encapsulates God's people, in charge of the testimony of Jesus. The witness (human being) is not a symbol for the testimony (written message) but represents the group summoned to hold to and deliver the testimony in the world. Considering the parallelism of 42 months/1,260 days in Rev 11:2–3, the two witnesses in sackcloth correspond to the holy city trampled underfoot. Hence, the witnesses and the holy city seem to be two symbols of the same reality – the people of God. This is also true in light of the lampstand symbol (the two witnesses are two lampstands, Rev 11:4), which in Revelation is a symbol reserved for the church (Rev 1:20; 2:1). Therefore, the two witnesses represent the church,³⁶ but more specifically a part of it, since the whole church in Revelation is represented by seven lampstands, whereas in Rev 11 there are only two in view.³⁷

³⁶ See for example Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 497. Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary 20 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2001), 329. Ian Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 2/20 (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 198.

³⁷ "But as there are seven lampstands in 1:12 and but two here, it is only part of the church that is meant." Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 1/20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 144.

Outside Revelation, the Johannine language leads us to OT Scriptures. Next, the meaning of being clothed in sackcloth, the meaning of the two olives, and the actions of the two witnesses will be deciphered. To be dressed in *σάκκος* is an expression of grief (Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 3:31), of repentance (1 Kgs 20:27; Neh 9:1; Jonah 3:5), of subjection (1 Kgs 21:31–32), of adversity (2 Kgs 19:1–2; Isa 15:3), of mourning for the cessation of temple services (Joel 1:13), and of the search for God (Dan 9:3). In Rev 11:3, the symbol probably represents a cry in adversity, a cry for the temple court being trodden (11:2), and a search for God. The two witnesses are called by John “the two olives and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth” (αἱ δύο ἐλαῖαι καὶ αἱ δύο λυχναὶ αἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου τῆς γῆς ἐστῶτες, Rev 11:4). This is a direct allusion to Zech 4 vision.³⁸ The OT prophet sees one lampstand (not two!) with one olive tree on its right and one on its left side. The two olive trees (αἱ δύο ἐλαῖαι, Zech 4:11) are identified as “the two anointed ones standing by the Lord of the whole earth” (οἱ δύο υἱοὶ τῆς πιότητος παρεστήκασιν τῷ κυρίῳ πάσης τῆς γῆς, Zech 4:14). In the historical context of Zechariah, the two anointed ones might refer to the high-priest Joshua and the governor of Judea, Zerubbabel.³⁹ Joshua is seen standing before the angel of the Lord, denounced by the devil (Zech 3:1) but pronounced forgiven and justified by the Angel (Zech 3:3–5). The high-priest symbolizes the future Servant of the Lord, the Branch (Zech 3:8), who “will build the temple of the Lord” (Zech 6:12). Zerubbabel is also a key figure in the process of rebuilding the second temple (Zech 4:6–9). The Johannine allusions to Zech 3–4 in Rev 11:4 appear between the measurement of the temple in 11:1 and the opening of the heavenly temple in 11:19. What seems to be highlighted implicitly is the justification and the

³⁸ For all thematic relations between Rev 11 and Zech 4 see Kenneth A. Strand, “The Two Olive Trees of Zechariah 4 and Revelation 11,” *AUSS* 20.3 (1982): 257–61.

³⁹ R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:282.

formation of God's people (as worshipers in the heavenly temple) in its transition from history to the eschaton.

John depicts the reaction of the two witnesses when they are attacked: "fire comes out their mouth and consumes their enemies" (πῦρ ἐκπορεύεται ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῶν καὶ κατεσθίει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτῶν, Rev 11:5). Fire comes out of the lion-like mouths of the horses of the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:17; cf. the Leviathan spits fire out of his mouth, Job 41:19). But the meaning intended by John in 11:5 is to be drawn from elsewhere, from OT contexts. In the Davidic song of deliverance "from all his enemies" (τῶν ἐχθρῶν αὐτοῦ, 2 Sam 22:1), the poet invokes God as a Savior and a Deliverer (2 Sam 22:3–4) who answers from his temple (22:7). David expresses divine wrath by the phrase "fire [coming] out of his mouth devours" (πῦρ ἐκ στόματος αὐτοῦ κατέδεται, 22:9; cf. Ps 18:8). Another relevant context is Jer 5:14, whereby God talks about Jeremiah that his words in the mouth of the prophet will be like fire (πῦρ) which devours (καταφάγεται), that is, proclaims destruction to his disobedient people.⁴⁰ The two witnesses share with David's song the idea that the fire represents divine wrath against the enemies of Israel's anointed king (including Saul, the actual king) who attacked him. In Jer 5:14, the fire is directed towards disobedient Israel, who does not attack Jeremiah in the immediate context (cf., 18, 38). However, in Jer 5:14, the fire comes out of the prophet's mouth, as opposed to the Davidic song in which God's mouth is the source of the fire. A historical instance in which a prophet brings fire on his enemies by a verbal pronouncement is Elijah's story in 2 Kgs 1:10–12. It seems that the fire coming out of the mouth of the two witnesses is a message to the church but more a divine intervention on their behalf in relation to their enemies.⁴¹

⁴⁰ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 245. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 21A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 395.

⁴¹ See also Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC 39 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 245.

According to Rev 11:6, the two witnesses have the authority to stop the rain during their prophetic activity, to turn the water into blood, and “to strike the earth with every kind of blow, as often as they may want”. These are allusions to Elijah, who assures Ahab that by no means will it rain in the land “except by the word of my mouth” (εἰ μὴ διὰ στόματος λόγου μου, 1 Kgs 17:1). And it did not rain for three and a half years. The turn of water into blood echoes Moses’s mission of deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exod 4:9; 7:21). The last description is still related to Moses as he had stricken the land of Egypt with numerous plagues before the exodus (Exod 7–11). The gist of this description is that the two witnesses are God’s people possessing the gift of prophecy. They have worked marvelously during the 1,260 days and beyond.

The Death of the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:7–10)

These abilities are not tantamount to being untouchable, however. After coming out of the abyss, the beast will kill the two witnesses. Their death must be literal, for there is no indication in the text of a symbolic death (cf., ἔπεσα ... ὡς νεκρός, Rev 1:17; ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρός εἶ, Rev 3:1; ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, Rev 3:2). In fact, although one may suspect a metaphorical usage of the verb ἀποκτείνειν in some places (cf., Rev 6:8; 9:15, 18, 20; 11:5), there are at least as many literal killings in Revelation, conveyed with the same verb (Antipas in Rev 2:13; the martyrs of the fifth seal in Rev 6:11; those who do not worship the beast and its icon in Rev 13:15; the wicked humanity at the parousia, in Rev 19:21). Considering that it is the people of God in view, a metaphorical death makes little to no sense. In the absence of such markers, the death must be real, all the more so because of the many details (two verses!) regarding the aftermath of the martyrdom of the two witnesses. Before we tackle these verses, we probably must clarify that this is not to say that the entire people of God in the last eschatological phase is going to be martyred (I recall here that we have two lampstands, not seven). The two witnesses are representative of the whole

group. As Richard Bauckham well remarks: “It is not a literal prediction that every faithful Christian will in fact be put to death. But it does require that every faithful Christian must be prepared to die.”⁴²

After the two witnesses are killed, their bodies⁴³ lie in the street of the great city, spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where Christ had also been crucified (Rev 11:8). The phrase ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη appears seven times in Revelation (Rev 11:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18–19) and it is only here that the city is identified enigmatically with Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem. Everywhere else there are clear textual qualifications that equate the great city with the eschatological Babylon. Therefore, Rev 11:8 has the end-time Babylon in view and requires it to be interpreted through these three lenses: Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem. Oftentimes, from these names, interpreters draw different, negative characteristics about Babylon, which as a result, is seen to be immoral and atheistic,⁴⁴ as well as of a Judeo-Christian origin. However, common themes among the three should probably be looked for. These common themes might be (1) the persecution of God’s people, even unto death, (2) the salvation of the faithful (through liberation or resurrection), and (3) the destruction of the wicked (through fire, plagues, and sword).

The great city is a symbol with global valence, not a geographic

⁴² Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93.

⁴³ The literal “their body” (τὸ πτώμα αὐτῶν, Rev 11:8) is sometimes taken as proof in favor of the interpretation that the two witnesses represent the O and the NT as one book. Müller argues that the variation from “their body” (Rev 11:8–9a) to “their bodies” (Rev 11:9b) supports a sort of “unity in duality” – a good description of the Bible. Müller, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” 40. Yet, this is not a grammatical inference. The phrases in view (the singular “their body,” “their grave”) are distributive singulars, very regular in Greek, and have no contribution to meaning other than stylistic. The expression really means “their individual bodies.”

⁴⁴ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament* (Clarksville, TN: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), Logos Bible Software edition, Rev 11:8.

place.⁴⁵ What seems to be in view is a worldwide eschatological assault against the people of God. They are all condemned to death, some even being literally killed. The bodies of the martyrs, Rev 11:9 continues, are not buried for three and a half days, probably as a replica of the witnesses' three and a half years of earlier activity. Their corpses will be a spectacle for some from every people, tribe, nation, and language. The inhabitants of the earth even celebrate and send gifts to each other because they disposed of those who tormented them (Rev 11:10). In a Jewish context, in which burial happened on the same day someone died, this scenario is highly aggravating.⁴⁶ The OT presents rare exceptions. Jeremiah speaks against the unfaithful Judah and predicts that all, rich and poor, in the country, will die and "they will not be buried" (לֹא יִקְבְּרוּ, Jer 16:6). Later, Jeremiah projects this over the inhabitants of the earth (Jer 25:29). On the Day of the Lord, they will all be killed and by no means will any of them be buried (οὐ μὴ κατοργῶσιν, Jer 32:33). In one of his oracles against Egypt, Ezekiel warns that God's judgment will cause Pharaoh and his people to die and not be buried (οὐ μὴ περισταλήσ, Ezek 29:5). One particular example is that of the house of Ahab about whose members Elijah prophecies that all will die either eaten by dogs or by birds, therefore, not buried properly (1 Kgs 21:21–24). These images highlight the divine (historical and eschatological) judgment against his enemies (whether it be apostate Israel or the nations of the world). In Rev 11:10–11, the image might mean that the inhabitants of the world live with the impression that what happened to the two witnesses is a kind of divine

⁴⁵ "The setting of the story is cosmic rather than local." Koester, *Revelation*, 506.

⁴⁶ "To be deprived of burial was totally undignified in the biblical world (cf. 1 Sam. 17:44; Ps. 79:1–4; Isa. 14:19–20; Jer. 8:1–2; Tobit 2:3–8; *Pss. Sol.* 2.27; *Sib. Or.* 3.643–46; *Jub.* 23.23; et al.)." Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 281. "In the ancient world refusal to bury the dead showed utter contempt. One of the greatest of the classic Greek tragedies, *Antigone*, had this as a central theme. Thus, that their bodies will lie in the street unburied means extreme revulsion for the message of truth." Kendall H. Easley, *Revelation*, Holman New Testament Commentary 12 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 193.

retribution (cf., John 16:2). The exchange of gifts between the earth dwellers recalls various possible contexts. One is when the Jews in the Persian Empire were relieved from their enemies during Esther's queenship. "They observed a day of celebration during which they exchanged food and presented gifts to the poor (Esth 9:19, 22)."⁴⁷ Another context might be that of Christ's trial when Pilate and Herod befriended even though they were previously enemies (Luke 23:12). In conclusion of this section, the death of the two witnesses appears to reflect the eschatological, yet limited, martyrdom of God's people.

The Resurrection of the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:11)

Before the euphoria of alleged victory is complete, the earth's inhabitants encounter a frightful scene. The Spirit of God enters the two dead prophets after three and a half days and, as a result, they stood up, and great fear fell on those who were gazing at them (Rev 11:11). "It is difficult to think that John intends by these words anything less than a literal statement,"⁴⁸ states George Ladd. If the two witnesses represent the OT and the NT, it seems strange to describe its rehabilitation through this image. After all, the Spirit of God is already in the book, whether outlawed or not. More than that, if the resurrection is equivalent to the appearance of the missionary societies, it is hard to see in what sense the wicked were filled with great fear because of this. It is much more natural to read here about a real resurrection following an actual death. "The way the spirit of life enters the bodies means that this is a resurrection."⁴⁹ The final resurrection through the Holy Spirit is recognized in Scripture

⁴⁷ Kistemaker and Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 335.

⁴⁸ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 158.

⁴⁹ Koester, *Revelation*, 502–3. John refers to a "visible resurrection." J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, The IVP New Testament Commentary 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Logos Bible Software edition, Rev 10:11–11:14.

(Rom 8:11; cf. Ezek 37).⁵⁰ The perspective of the eschatological resurrection fits well within the other details of the passage. In the NT, the experience of “great fear” (φόβος μέγας) is always a result of the manifestation of God’s tremendous power (Mark 4:41; Luke 2:9; 8:37; Acts 5:5, 11). Matthew is the only one who reports, in the context of Jesus’s resurrection, that “from the fear of [the angel], the guards were shaken and became like dead men” (ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ φόβου αὐτοῦ ἐσείσθησαν οἱ τηροῦντες καὶ ἐγενήθησαν ὡς νεκροί, Matt 28:4). “This ‘resurrection’, therefore, could be taken as signifying a revival so great as to fill the world with awe; but in view of the apostolic instruction on the resurrection of the dead and transformation of the living (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Thes 4:14–18), it is more likely to signify the ‘first resurrection’ (20:5).”⁵¹ The two witnesses seem to replicate corporately in eschatological times what happened to Jesus.⁵² Therefore, after their resurrection comes the ascension.

The Ascension of the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:12)

Concurrent with their resurrection, the two witnesses hear a loud voice from heaven inviting them “come up here” (ἀνάβατε ὧδε, Rev 11:12). John heard this himself in the second person, singular (ἀνάβα ὧδε, Rev 4:1) and he was lifted up in the Spirit (ἐν

⁵⁰ Interestingly, a σεισμός is what introduces the resurrection of the bones in Ezek 37:7, the resurrection of Jesus (Matt 28:2), and that of the saints that raised up with him (Matt 27:52–53). In Revelation, the earthquake comes after the resurrection and the ascension of the witnesses, which tells the reader that it is not that shaking (that delivers God’s people from the captivity of death), but the destructive judgments of God’s fury. The relationship between Ezek 37 and the resurrection of the two witnesses has also been observed by Alfred Loisy. Alfred Loisy, *L’Apocalypse de Jean* (Paris: Nourry, 1923), 214. He argues that the prophecy is about the conversion of Jerusalem before the Parousia (p. 215–17). See also Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 323.

⁵¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, “Revelation,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1440.

⁵² Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 165.

πνεύματι, Rev 4:2). Yet, the two witnesses seem to go up in the body. We understand this because they go up “to heaven in the cloud” (εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ) and because “their enemies saw them” (ἐθεώρησαν αὐτοὺς οἱ ἐχθροὶ αὐτῶν, Rev 11:12) as they take off. The vocabulary of going to heaven in a cloud recalls eschatological backgrounds both in the Apocalypse of John (Rev 1:7; 14:14–16) and elsewhere in the NT (Matt 24:30; 26:64; Acts 1:9; 1 Thess 4:17).⁵³ The closest setting to the ascension of the two witnesses is what Luke reports about the ascension of Jesus, as he was covered by a cloud while his disciples were still looking at him (Acts 1:9).⁵⁴ In Rev 11:12 it is the enemies who are looking at the witnesses; therefore the background idea is not related to the actors involved, but to the represented phenomenon. Rev 11:12 seems to describe the eschatological resurrection,⁵⁵ most probably taking place during the seventh trumpet, as the NT testifies elsewhere, “at the last trumpet” (1 Cor 15:52). The saints are the beneficiaries, whereas their persecutors are the ones watching them being rescued.

The Great Earthquake (Rev 11:13)

With a safety belt around the saints, the interlude envisions in the end what the fate of Babylon will be. First, a “great earthquake”

⁵³ According to Swete, this public exaltation of God’s people will be fulfilled in the ascension of the saints raised up in 1 Thess 4:17. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 137. Swete believes 1 Thess 4:17 speaks about the rapture of the church, but the rapture is secret, whereas John envisions a public event, tantamount to the first resurrection. As Craig Keener contends, “ascension after resurrection refers in other Christian texts to Jesus (Acts 1:9–11) and the church (1 Thess 4:15–16).” Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Logos Bible Software edition, Rev 11:12.

⁵⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 97.

⁵⁵ Similar thoughts are expressed by Ernest Allo, according to whom the ascension of the church is shaped after the ascension of Jesus and expresses the glorification of God’s people at the first resurrection. Ernest Bernard Allo, *Saint Jean L’Apocalypse*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1921), 137.

(σεισμός μέγας, Rev 11:13) severs the apostate eschatological city. In Revelation, a “great earthquake” occurs at the Parousia (6:12), during the seventh plague (16:18–19), and during the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:19). The last one is not called “great,” but other parallels (see the table below) between the seventh trumpet and the seventh plague make the σεισμός in Rev 11:19 to be identical with the last great cataclysm on the Lord’s Day.⁵⁶

Table 4. *Parallels between the seventh trumpet and the seventh plague*

The seventh trumpet	The seventh plague
“the temple of God opened” ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (Rev 11:19)	“out of the temple, from the throne” ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου (Rev 16:17)
“there were lightnings, voices, thunders, an earthquake ...” ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός ... (Rev 11:19)	“there were lightnings, voices, thunders, a great earthquake” ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας (Rev 16:18)
“...and a great hailstone” ... καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη (Rev 11:19)	“...and a great hailstone” ... καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη (Rev 16:21)

All of the above make the earthquake of Rev 11:13 to be an eschatological “punishment for sin” (cf. Amos 4:11; Zech 14:5; Josephus, *Ant.* 9.10.4).⁵⁷ The OT prophets concur. For them, the earthquake is also a mark of divine eschatological judgment.⁵⁸ Jeremiah, for instance, depicts Judah’s invasion from the North as a “great earthquake” (Jer 10:22), which will desolate the land. In the mirror, Ezekiel describes what God will do when Gog invades the land of Israel still from the North. God’s wrath will mount up, and “on that day, there will be a great earthquake in the land of Israel” (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ἔσται σεισμός μέγας ἐπὶ γῆς Ἰσραηλ, Ezek 38:19). The

⁵⁶ “All three times seem to refer to the final earthquake at the eschaton.” Osborne, *Revelation*, 433. See also Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 602.

⁵⁷ James Moffat, “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament: Commentary*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: Doran, 1951), 5:419.

⁵⁸ G. A. Turner, “Earthquake,” *ISBE* 2:5. Günther Bornkamm, “σειώ, κτλ.,” *TDNT* 7:198.

whole creation “will shake from the presence of the Lord” (σεισθήσονται ἀπὸ προσώπου κυρίου, 38:20). The sword, plagues, bloodshed, hailstones, fire, and brimstone will judge and destroy the enemies of Israel (vv. 21–22). Here is how this plays out in the Johannine apocalyptic scenario, presented in the table below, where the conclusion of the interlude of the sixth trumpet is compared with the last bowl. Here is what the great final earthquake generates.

Table 5. *Comparison between the interlude of the sixth trumpet and the last plague*

Interlude (Rev 11:13)	The seventh plague
<p>“the tenth of the city collapsed” τὸ δέκατον τῆς πόλεως ἔπεσεν (Rev 11:13a) “and 7000 [lit. names of] people were killed in that earthquake” καὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῷ σεισμῷ ὀνόματα ἀνθρώπων χιλιάδες ἑπτὰ (Rev 11:13b)</p> <p>“the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven” καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἔμφοβοι ἐγένοντο καὶ ἔδωκαν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. (Rev 11:13c)</p>	<p>“the great city was split into three parts and the cities of the nations fell” ἐγένετο ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη εἰς τρία μέρη καὶ αἱ πόλεις τῶν ἐθνῶν ἔπεσαν (Rev 16:19a)</p> <p>“great hailstones, about a talent each, fell from heaven on people and people blasphemed God because of the plague of hailstone, because it was exceedingly great” χάλαζα μεγάλη ὡς ταλάντια καταβαίνει ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τῆς πληγῆς τῆς χαλάζης, ὅτι μεγάλη ἐστὶν ἡ πληγὴ αὐτῆς σφόδρα (Rev 16:21)</p>

What in Rev 11:13 is simply described as “a great earthquake” and its results, in the seventh plague vision is more elaborated, showing that the interlude transcends the sixth trumpet time period, encroaching into the seventh. The reaction of humanity is twofold. Initially, the survivors of the earthquake fear God and give him glory. The language is strikingly similar to the vocabulary of the first angel’s message (Rev 14:7). Yet, the scene’s development in light of the seventh plague shows that their apparent repentance is

only belated remorse.⁵⁹ They are furtherly hit by the hailstorm, which stirs them up to the extreme. Therefore, they blaspheme or curse God for the complete severity of the hailstorm.

Some scholars argue for a global⁶⁰ repentance and/or a national⁶¹ repentance of Israel. However, the statements in Rev 6:15–17; 13:3–4; 19:19 constitute enough internal proofs that universalism is simply not on John's agenda. Robert Mounce affirms that universalism "runs counter to the clear teaching of Scripture concerning the serious consequences of spurning the love of God in Christ Jesus."⁶² Against universalism, also write other Revelation scholars.⁶³ There is an important syntactical difference between the language in Rev 14:7 and the one in 11:3. In the former, the actions of fearing and glorifying are in the imperative aorist, which signifies a command of an action seen as complete,⁶⁴ continuation being implied, grammatically or at least semantically (the main verb is durative).⁶⁵

⁵⁹ The temporary regret is well illustrated by Moses Stuart with cases of people, positively impressed at one moment, but later turning completely against that impression. For example, the Jews impressed by Jesus' messiahship who later cry out for him to be crucified. Stuart states that the third woe will annul the eventual good effects of the earthquake. Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Morrill & Wardwell, 1845), 2:239.

⁶⁰ So Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 238–337 (esp. 282). Ian Boxall, *Black's New Testament Commentary: The Revelation of Saint John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 167. Loisy, *L'Apocalypse de Jean*, 216.

⁶¹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC 52B (Dallas: Word, 2002), 628. Loisy, *L'Apocalypse de Jean*, 216. Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Translator's Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 173.

⁶² Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 224.

⁶³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 435. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book, 1935), 351. Easley, *Revelation*, 195.

⁶⁴ Stanley E. Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed, and Matthew Brook O'Donnell, *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 300.

⁶⁵ The second verb in the command ("to give glory") is not necessarily a durative verb, but Gerard Mussies suggests that, when durative verbs are expected, John prefers and uses an aorist, probably in order to avoid the eventual superfluity. Gerard Mussies, *The Morphology of the Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Bilingualism*, NovTSup 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 340–41.

On the other hand, the second reference uses the two verbs in the indicative⁶⁶ aorist to simply point out that the remainder feared and gave glory to God at that moment of the action⁶⁷ (after and because of the earthquake) without implying the same attitude beyond that circumstance. Gregory Beale admits that in the light of Dan 2, 4, and 5, “‘giving glory to God’ does not always indicate the response of true Israelites but may also be the response of unbelievers who nevertheless are forced to acknowledge the reality of God’s sovereignty (e.g., Josh 7:19; 1 Sam 6:5; cf. 1 Pet 2:12).”⁶⁸ Therefore, the language in Rev 11:13 seems to imply only a parody of the true repentance toward and adoration of God.

The interlude stops here. Its purpose was to answer the dilemma of unresponsive humanity. In Rev 9:20–21, at the climax of the sixth trumpet, the Apocalypse highlights that the last generation of the wicked manifests the Belshazzar’s syndrome. While Babylon’s political integrity is seriously jeopardized, its king and his entourage worship the demons and the idols of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone (Dan 5:4), being in total ignorance of the impending doom. The unposed question is probably, Is that all? Could anything else be saved out of Babylon? The interlude emphasizes the sad destiny of eschatological Babylon, an entity that is nothing short of a feint, self-confident religious body. Even in the last moment, Babylon simulates true repentance, only to unmask herself when God confutes it. The negative tone of the trumpets’ interlude regarding the fate of the end-time Babylon is counterbalanced by the angel’s mission in Rev 18:3–8. At the last call, whoever does not

⁶⁶ “The indicative does *state* a thing as true,” though it “does not guarantee the *reality* of the thing.” A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 1919), 915.

⁶⁷ James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *A Morphology of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 309.

⁶⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 603.

come out of Babylon ends up against God. There is no actual change inside the fateful city.

CONCLUSION

This study asked whether the two witnesses' passage is to be viewed eschatologically or not. The answer is positive and supported by the following reasons. First, all interludes in Revelation are about the generation of the eschaton. This is also true of the passage of the two witnesses, primarily of their conflict with the beast which comes up out of the abyss. This confrontation occurs after their in-sackcloth prophetic activity at the end of their testimony. The precise moment is after the beast comes out of the abyss. This identifies the beast in Rev 11:7 with the scarlet beast in Rev 17:8, 11, the only beast which comes out of the abyss in the Apocalypse of John. The conflict is to take place in the last (eighth) phase of the beast. The two witnesses have been interpreted in this study as representing God's people in possession of the spirit of prophecy. Their death, resurrection, and ascension are actual, as they replicate what happened to Jesus Himself on a larger scale. This is probably the last chapter of the great conflict alluded to in Rev 12:17. The fate of the unrepentant humanity is exposed, too. They are destroyed in the last great earthquake of divine eschatological judgment.