

The Two Witnesses
Revelation 11:1-14
Dr. Steven R. Hereford

INTRODUCTION

1. We come again to the interlude that's found in Revelation 10:1-11:14.
2. Last week we looked at *the little scroll* found in chapter 10.
3. Today we're looking at *the two witnesses* in chapter 11.
4. Read Revelation 11:1-14
5. Throughout history God has faithfully sent His spokesmen to call sinners to repentance.
6. During the long, dark years of Israel's rebellion 2 Kings 17:13 says, "the Lord warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets'."
7. Tragically, verses 14-15 says, "however, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. They rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers and His warnings with which He warned them. And they followed vanity and became vain, and went after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which the Lord had commanded them not to do like them.

8. 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 continues by saying, "The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy."
9. The prophet Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 44:4-6, "I sent you all My servants the prophets, again and again, saying, "Oh, do not do this abominable thing which I hate." But they did not listen or incline their ears to turn from their wickedness, so as not to burn sacrifices to other gods. Therefore My wrath and My anger were poured out and burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, so they have become a ruin and a desolation as it is this day."
10. Over and over God sent prophets and others to confront both wayward Israel and sinful Gentile nations but they would not listen.
11. This picture is not entirely bleak because God has always preserved a believing remnant.
12. To the Romans Paul wrote, "Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, 'Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved' " (Rom. 9:27; cf. Rom. 11:4-5; Isa. 10:20-22; 11:11).
13. God's salvation has come to the remnant of faithful Israel, as well as believing Gentiles, through the faithful preaching of the gospel.
14. In Romans 10:13 Paul declares, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." Then the apostle asks rhetorically, "How then will they call on Him in whom they

have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (v. 14).

15. In the New Testament, as in the Old, faithful preachers called for repentance and faith, offering all sinners the hope of forgiveness in Christ. Chief among those preachers was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:38).
16. The ranks of New Testament preachers also included John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-2), the Twelve (Matt. 10:5-7; Mark 6:7-12), Peter (Acts 2:14ff.; 3:12ff.), Stephen (Acts 7:1-56), Phillip (Acts 8:12, 35, 40), and the most prolific of them all, the apostle Paul (Acts 13:15ff.; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11).
17. They in turn passed the truth of the gospel to a next generation of godly preachers, who passed it down to other preachers (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2), such as Timothy, Titus, and the prophets and apostles of the churches, as well as the early church elders and overseers.
18. In the future, during Earth's darkest hour, God will raise up two exceptional and powerful preachers.
19. They will fearlessly proclaim the gospel during the last three and one-half years of the period that Jesus called "the great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21; cf. Rev. 7:14).
20. During that time of horrific divine judgments on the earth, of rampaging hordes of demons terrorizing and slaughtering millions of people, and wickedness rampaging unrestrained, their gospel preaching, along with that of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (7:1-10), the "angel flying in midheaven" (14:6), and the testimonies of other believers alive during that time, will be a final expression of God's grace offered to repentant and believing sinners.

21. In addition to preaching the gospel, these two preachers will proclaim God's judgment on the wicked world.
22. Their ministry will likely stretch from the midpoint of Danie's 70th week until just before the sounding of the seventh trumpet.
23. That trumpet will herald the pouring out of the rapid-fire bowl judgments, the battle of Armageddon, and the return of Christ.
24. But before introducing these two faithful witnesses, John records a fascinating incident in which he himself took part, an incident that sets the stage for the arrival of the two preachers.

I. The Measuring of the Temple (vv.1-2)

John is no longer a mere witness to the visions in Revelation. He again is involved in the very vision he is recording. We saw that in the last vision recorded in chapter 10 regarding the little scroll and the mighty angel.

A. John is Given a Reed Like a Measuring Rod (v.1a)

“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod.”

1. The NASB says it was “a measuring rod like a staff”
2. Kalamos refers to a “reedlike plant that grew in the Jordan Valley to a height of fifteen to twenty feet. It had a stalk that was hallow and lightweight, yet rigid enough to be used as a walking staff (cf. Ezek.29:6) or to be shaved down into a pen (3 John 13). The stalks, because they were long and lightweight, were ideal for use as measuring rods. In Ezekiel’s vision, an angel used such a rod to measure the millennial temple (Ezek.40:3-43:17)” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.293).

B. John is Told to Measure the Temple of God, the Altar, and Those Who Worship There (v.1b)

1. Measuring the temple signified God’s ownership of it

“Obviously, this was not an effort to determine its physical dimensions, since none are given, but was conveying some important truth beyond architecture. It could have indicated, as on

occasion in the Old Testament, that God sometimes marks things out for destruction (e.g., 2 Sam. 8:2; 2 Kings 21:13; Isa. 28:17; Lam. 2:8; Amos 7:7-9, 17). But John's measuring is better understood as signifying ownership, defining the parameters of God's possessions (cf. 21:15; Zech. 2:1-5). This measuring signified something good, since what was not measured was evil (v. 2). It is best to see it as God's measuring off Israel, symbolized by her temple, for salvation and for His special protection, preservation, and favor.” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.293).

- a) Referring to “the holy city, New Jerusalem” (Rev.21:2), verses 15-16 says, “And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.”
- b) Zech.2:1-5 says, “Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. So I said, “Where are you going?” And he said to me, “To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length.” And there was the angel who talked with me, going out; and another angel was coming out to meet him, who said to him, “Run, speak to this young man, saying: ‘Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I, says the Lord, will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.””

2. John was instructed to measure the temple and the altar but not the outer court, meaning he was to measure the holy place and the holy of holies

Naos (temple) does not refer to the entire temple complex (cf. v.2), but to the inner temple, made up of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The altar is probably the brazen altar, located outside the inner sanctuary in the courtyard, since that is where those who worship in the temple would have gathered. The people were never permitted into the inner temple; only the priests could enter the Holy Place (where the incense altar stood; cf. Lk.1:8-10)" (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.293).

There are "five distinct temples...alluded to by the Scriptures. Solomon's temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes pillaged and consecrated to Jupiter the temple of Zerubbabel in 168 B.C. Herod's magnificent temple was reduced to ashes by Titus in A.D. 70. The fourth temple, the edifice described in this chapter, is to be the focus of attention during the Great Tribulation. Finally, the fifth temple will be the millennial temple described in Ezek. 40-47" (Believer's Study Bible).

- C. John is Told Not to Measure the Court Outside the Temple (v.2)
 1. The reason is given: "For it has been given to the Gentiles" (v.2a)

"We are dealing here with that period that the

Lord Jesus spoke of in Luke 21:24, “And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

J. Vernon McGee says, “A great many people thought that when Israel captured Jerusalem, that was the end of the Time of the Gentiles. My friend, Jerusalem is still trodden down of the Gentiles. All you need to do is to walk down the streets of the old city, and if you see a Jew, you let me know because I did not see any there myself. All other races are there. Non-Jewish religious groups are all over the place; they have built holy places everywhere in the old city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is still trodden down of the Gentiles” (Thru the Bible).

“The court of the Gentiles, separated from the inner court in the Herodian temple by a low wall. Gentiles were forbidden to enter the inner court on penalty of death. That John is instructed not to measure the outer court symbolizes God's rejection of the unbelieving Gentiles who have oppressed His covenant people” (John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible).

2. The Gentiles will “tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months” (v.2b)

The “forty-two months (1260 days; three and one-half years) correspond to the overtly evil career of Antichrist, which dominates the last half of the Tribulation (13:5). That period will be the culmination of the ‘times of the Gentiles’” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.296).

“During this same forty-two-month period, God will shelter many Israelites in a place He has prepared for them in the wilderness (some speculate the rock city of Petra). Revelation 12:6 reads, "Then the woman [Israel] 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" (cf. v. 14). Many Jews will heed Jesus' warning to flee to safety:

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains; whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. (Matt. 24:15-20).

The rest, however, who remain (some in Jerusalem; 11:13) will face terrible persecution from the forces of Antichrist. At that time, God will bring salvation to Israel, using the two powerful preachers who will appear in Jerusalem (v. 3), and will also suffer hostility and hatred (vv. 7-8).

At the end of the 1,260 days (forty-two months; three and one-half years), Christ will return (19:11-16), destroy Antichrist and his forces (19:17-21; 2 Thess. 2:8), judge the nations (Matt.

25:31-46), and establish His earthly millennial kingdom (20:1-10)” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, pp.296-297).

II. The Ministry of the Two Witnesses (vv.3-14)

A. Their Duty (v.3a)

“And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”

1. “Two witnesses” are mentioned because the Bible requires the testimony of two people to confirm a fact or verify a truth
 - a) Deut.17:2-7
 - b) Deut.19:15
 - c) Mat.18:6 - “But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”
 - d) John 8:14-18 - “Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.”

e) 1 Tim.5:19 - “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.”

2. “Witnesses” is the plural form of martus, from which the English word martyr derives

“Since it is always used in the New Testament to refer to persons, the two witnesses must be actual people, not movements, as some commentators have held” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.298).

3. The “two witnesses” will have the responsibility to “prophesy”

a) Prophecy in the NT does not necessarily refer to predicting the future

b) Its primary meaning is to “speak forth,” “to proclaim,” or “to preach”

c) The two witnesses will “preach repentance” (Vincent) and warn of God’s wrath that is to come in the seventh seal

d) The period of their ministry will be “one thousand two hundred and sixty days” – the last three and one-half years of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord (see chart)

B. Their Attitude (v.3b)

“Clothed in sackcloth.”

1. Sackcloth was rough, heavy, coarse cloth worn in ancient times as a symbol of mourning, distress, grief, and humility
2. According to Genesis 37:34 Jacob put on sackcloth when he thought Joseph had been killed
3. David ordered the people to wear sackcloth after the murder of Abner - 2 Sam.3:31

“Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, “Tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner.” And King David followed the coffin.”

4. David wore sackcloth during the plague God sent in response to his sin of numbering the people - 1 Chron.21:16

“Then David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. So David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces.”

5. “The two witnesses will put on sackcloth as an object lesson to express their great sorrow for the wretched unbelieving world, racked by God’s judgments, overrun by demon hordes, and populated by wicked, sinful people who refuse to repent. They will also mourn because of the desecration of the temple, the oppression of Jerusalem, and the ascendancy of Antichrist” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.299).

C. Their Identity (v.4)

“These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.”

The imagery used here is drawn from Zech.4:1-14.

“Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, “What do you see?” So I said, “I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.” So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, “What are these, my lord?” Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” And I said, “No, my lord.” So he answered and said to me: “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the Lord of hosts. ‘Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of “Grace, grace to it!”’ Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying: “The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the Lord, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.” Then I answered and said to him, “What are these two olive trees—at the right of the lampstand and at its left?” And I further answered and said to him, “What are these two olive branches that drip into the

receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?” Then he answered me and said, “Do you not know what these are?” And I said, “No, my lord.” So he said, “These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.”

“The historical fulfillment was the rebuilding of the post-exilic temple by Joshua the high priest (Zech. 3:1-10), the religious leader, and Zerubbabel, the political leader. But Zechariah's prophecy also looks forward to the restoration of Israel in the Millennium (cf. Zech. 3:8-10). The olive trees and lampstands symbolize the light of revival, since olive oil was commonly used in lamps. The connecting of the lamps to the trees is intended to depict a constant, spontaneous, automatic supply of oil flowing from the olive trees into the lamps. That symbolizes the truth that God will not bring salvation blessing from human power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Zech. 4:6). Like Joshua and Zerubbabel, the two witnesses will lead a spiritual revival of Israel culminating in the building of a temple. Their preaching will be instrumental in Israel's national conversion (Rev. 11:13; cf. Rom. 11:4-5, 26), and the temple associated with that conversion will be the millennial temple” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.300).

Who are these two witnesses? The answer is we really do not know because their identity is not revealed but if you examine verse 5 you will see that they have power similar to that of Moses and Elijah.

1. First, the miracles they perform (destroying their enemies with fire, withholding rain, turning water into blood, and striking the earth with plagues) are similar to the judgments inflicted in the Old

Testament by Moses and Elijah for the purpose of stimulating repentance.

Elijah called down fire from heaven (2 Kings 1:10,12) and pronounced a three-and-one-half-year drought on the land (1 Kings 17:1; Jas.5:17) – the same length as the drought brought by the two witnesses (Rev.11:6).

2. Second, both the OT and Jewish tradition expected Moses and Elijah to return in the future. Malachi 4:5 predicted the return of Elijah, and the Jews believed that God's promise to raise up a prophet like Moses (Deut.18:15,18) necessitated his return (cf. John 1:21; 6:14; 7:40).
3. Third, both Moses and Elijah (perhaps representing the Law and the Prophets) appeared with Christ at the Transfiguration, the preview of the Second Coming (Mat.17:3).
4. Fourth, both left the earth in unusual ways. Elijah never died, but was transported to heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11-12), and God supernaturally buried Moses' body in a secret location (Jude 9).

All of this, of course, is speculation.

D. Their Power (vv.5-6)

“And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have

power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.”

Whether or not the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah, they will have miraculous power similar to those two Old Testament figures.

1. To kill (v.5)
2. To shut up heaven (v.6a)
3. To turn water to blood (v.6b)
4. To strike the earth with all plagues (v.6c)

The two witnesses will be “invulnerable and unstoppable for the duration of their ministry” (MacArthur).

David Jeremiah says, “For three and a half years, these men are invincible. They will stop the rain, turn the waters to blood, and strike the earth with plagues. They will tell men to their faces about their human wickedness; they will stab hearts with warnings of future judgments, even worse than the past. The hatred this pair arouses will be intense. After hearing them, no one will shake their hands and say, ‘That was a very inspiring sermon, pastor’! Some will repent, but many will be aroused to a frenzy of hatred. When their work is finished, the order will be given for the two witnesses to be killed” (Escape the Coming Night, p.143).

E. Their Death (vv.7-10)

“When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which

spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.”

“The witnesses are immortal for so long a time only as their allotted term of office lasts; when they have delivered their message, their immunity from danger ceases, and they are at the mercy of their enemies”
(The apocalypse of St. John. 1907 (H. B. Swete, Ed.).

1. The beast or Antichrist will kill them (v.7)
 - a) This is the first of 36 references in Revelation to the *beast*.
 - b) More detailed information will be given about him in chapters 13 and 17
 - c) He is introduced here with emphasis on his origin. He is said to have ascended “out of the bottomless pit.” This indicates that he is empowered by Satan.
 - d) Chapter 13 indicates that the *beast* is a world ruler (often called Antichrist) who imitates the true Christ, rules over the people of the world, and demands their worship (13:1-8).
2. Their dead bodies will lie in the streets of Jerusalem for three and a half days (v.8)

- a) They will be left “to lie as rotting corpses in the street of the great city where they ministered and where they were killed” (MacArthur).

“Refusing to bury the dead was the greatest cruelty one could offer throughout the ancient world” (Craig Keener, IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament), and was a way of “dishonoring and desecrating them. God forbade the Israelites to engage in that practice (Deut.21:22-23)” (MacArthur).

“The great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where our Lord was crucified” is a reference to the wickedness that will pervade that city during this time. The city of Jerusalem will be so overrun by evil that it will be like the wicked city of Sodom and the evil nation of Egypt.

- b) The “peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations” indicates the people around the world will “see their dead bodies” (on satellite television or some other form of visual media) and “not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves” (v.9)

“The unrepentant, sin-hardened masses will want to gloat along with their leader, the Antichrist, and glorify him for his victory over the two irritating preachers, who brought the drought and proclaimed the hated gospel” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.304).

- c) The deaths of the two witnesses will touch

off wild celebrations around the world (v.10)

Warren Wiersbe says, "This period of three and one-half days will be a "satanic Christmas" celebration. People will host parties and exchange gifts and rejoice that their tormentors are dead" (Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament).

John MacArthur adds, "Ironically, this is the only mention in Revelation of rejoicing. Sinners will be happy because those who declared to them God's judgments, tormented them with miracle power and messages condemning their sin and proclaiming God's impending judgment (vv. 5-7), and called for them to repent are dead. This emotional response graphically reflects the finality of their rejection" (Revelation 1-11, p.304).

F. Their Resurrection (vv.11-12)

"Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them."

1. The partying and gift giving of "Dead Witnesses Day" will be suddenly and dramatically halted by this most shocking event
2. Panic will seize the unregenerate world as their hatred and reviled tormentors suddenly spring to life.

3. The ministry of the two witnesses is complete and God calls them home in front of all the world. You can be sure this event will get national coverage and replays.

G. Their Impact (v.13)

“In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.”

1. This punctuates the resurrection of the two witnesses
2. The “seven thousand men” or “people” literally means “names of men” meaning that the seven thousand who were killed “were prominent people, perhaps leaders in Antichrist’s world government” (MacArthur)
3. As a result of the violent earthquake, and the astonishing resurrection of the two witnesses, “the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven”
 - a) This ending is much different than that of the sixth trumpet in Rev.9:20-21 where they “did not repent”
 - b) The phrase “gave glory to the God of heaven” seems to indicate a mark of genuine repentance (see Rev.14:6-7; 16:9)
4. The interlude ends in verse 14 with the announcement: “The second woe is past. Behold,

the third woe is coming quickly.”

CONCLUSION

1. The seventh trumpet (the third woe; cf.9:12) will soon sound, bringing with it the final, violent bowl judgments and the return of Christ in glory to set up His kingdom.
2. Judgment is coming for all those who reject Christ.
3. If you're here today and having received Christ, do so now before it's too late!