

# The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11

by Dr. John C. Whitcomb

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## THE TIME OF THEIR MINISTRY

Most dispensational commentators agree that the holy city, Jerusalem, will be "trodden down" by the Gentiles for 42 months *during the last half of the 70th Week of Daniel* (Rev. 11:2; cf. Luke 21:24)). This time period is identical to the 42 months of Rev. 13:5, which is the time God assigns to the Beast, the Antichrist, to blaspheme His name and to persecute His people.

This will be the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy in Dan. 7:21, that "the little horn" will make war against the saints and will prevail against them until "the Ancient of Days" finally comes. Daniel is also told that "the saints will be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time" (7:25), and that after these three-and-one-half years, "when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished" (12:7).

What, then, are the "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" during which "My two witnesses" will receive authority to "prophesy...clothed in sackcloth" (Rev. 11:3)? Time indicators, such as "1,260 days" are to be understood literally. John F. Walvoord explains: "Very prominent in the book of Revelation is the use of numbers, namely, 2, 3, 3 1/2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 24, 42,

144, 666, 1,000, 1,260, 1,600, 7,000, 12,000, 144,000, 100,000,000,  
200,000,000 . . .The general rule should be followed to interpret numbers  
literally unless there is clear evidence to the contrary."<sup>1</sup>

For several reasons, I suggest that *this is the first half of the Seventieth Week. First*, there seems to be an intentional distinction between the time of the Gentile occupation of the Temple's outer court and the city, and the time of the two witnesses, by means of the different time-units used: 42 months for the Gentile domination and 1,260 days for the two witnesses. If the same time period is intended for both groups, why is not the 42-month time-block sufficient to cover both?

*Second*, and more important, in the very next verse (Rev. 11:4), the ministry of the two witnesses is compared to the ministry of the two olive trees of Zech. 4:3, namely, *Joshua* the high priest and *Zerubbabel* the governor of the Jewish remnant, who returned from Babylon to re-establish legitimate worship in Jerusalem (Zech. 3:1 and 4:6). *These leaders did not have to wait for the Temple to be rebuilt to begin sacrificing on the altar which they erected on the ruins of Solomon's Temple* (cf. Ezra 3:2-3). *By the same token, the two witnesses will not have to wait for the third temple to be built in order to begin sacrificing on a divinely legitimate altar on the present ruins of the second temple.* What they *will* need is supernatural protection to re-institute the

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation Of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 28; cf. p. 175; and Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 232-233.

sacrifices (cf. Dan. 9:27) in the presence of enormous, even global, opposition (cf. Rev. 11:10).

The reason why this will happen during the first half of the seventieth week is that "in the middle of the week He [the Antichrist] shall bring an end to sacrifice [*zevach* = bloody sacrifices] and offering [*minchah* = non-bloody sacrifices]" (Dan. 9:27). As J. Dwight Pentecost explains, "This expression refers to the entire Levitical system, which suggests that Israel will have restored that system in the first half of the 70<sup>th</sup> 'seven.'"<sup>2</sup> Antichrist will replace the legitimate, God-honoring Jewish worship system, which only the two witnesses can inaugurate, with his own system, namely, *the abomination of desolation* (cf. Dan. 9:27b, 12:11; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:14-15). *But the Antichrist cannot do this until the 1,260 days of ministry allotted by God to the two witnesses has been completed* (cf. Rev. 11:7).

*Third*, the Lord Jesus issued this command to Jews of the tribulation period: "when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . . then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains . . . For then there will be great tribulation such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:15-21). Here an obvious question arises: Would the two Jewish witnesses remain in Jerusalem during the 42 months of Antichrist's dominion if the Lord Jesus, their Messiah, told them to flee to the mountains?

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<sup>2</sup> "Daniel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 1365.

*Fourth*, if the 1,260 days occur during the last half of the Week, then the entire world would be celebrating the death of the two witnesses for three-and-a-half days after the Battle of Armageddon and the destruction of the Antichrist! This is very difficult to imagine. As Gary G. Cohen explains, "at the end of the second three-and-a-half year period, the Beast followers are lamenting over Babylon and the vials, [are] gathered for the great battle at Armageddon, and [are] finally slain by Christ, whose coming is surrounded with the powers of the heavens being shaken (Rev. 16-18; 19:11-21; Matt. 24:29-30). This picture does not harmonize well with the three-and-a-half days of rejoicing and gift-giving in which the earth-dwellers participate following the murder of the witnesses. This discordance between the end of the second three-and-a-half year period and the three-and-a-half days following the end of the three-and-a-half year ministry of the witnesses makes it most unlikely that the prophesying of God's two servants takes place during the latter half of the week."<sup>3</sup>

*Fifth*, putting the two witnesses into the last half of the Week compromises the totality of Antichrist's dominion during that same period. How can he bring fire from heaven upon *his* enemies (through the False Prophet, Rev. 13:13) if the two witnesses are simultaneously bringing fire from heaven upon *their* enemies (Rev. 11:5)? We are clearly dealing with two different time periods: the first half of the Week with the overwhelming power of the two witnesses, and the last half of the Week with the overwhelming power of the

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<sup>3</sup> Gary G. Cohen, *The Chronology of the Book of Revelation* (Th.D. Diss., Grace Theological Seminary, May 1966), 251.

Beast and the False Prophet. When the world asks the rhetorical question, "Who is able to make war with [the Beast]?" (Rev. 13:4), it seems obvious that no one can answer, "The two witnesses are able to make war with him," for their 1,260 days of ministry will have ended, and they will be gone.

*Sixth*, our Lord stated that "Elijah is coming first *and will restore all things* (italics added)" (Matt. 17:11). Whoever "Elijah" turns out to be (see below, The Identity of the Two Witnesses), his spectacular success (under God) in bringing Israel back to her Messiah *must be during the first half of the seventieth week*, for Isaiah prophesied that Israel will have given birth "to her children" as soon as her time of tribulation begins (Isa. 66:8).

Furthermore, the basically regenerated nation, called "the woman" in Rev. 12, will flee into the wilderness and be nourished by God for 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6, 14; cf. Isaiah 26:20-21), namely, the last half of the week. "The dragon," Satan, will then "make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (12:17), presumably the 144,000 witnesses from the 12 tribes of Israel and multitudes of their Gentile converts.

The crucial question, then, is this: by whose testimony is the nation of Israel brought into the blessings of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. Jer. 32:37-41; Ezek. 36:25-28)? And by whose witness are 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes led to the Lord, in order that, as our Savior promised, "this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world [during the last half of

the Week] as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14)?

The prophet Malachi provides the answer: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet *before* (italics added) the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD [i.e., the final 42 months of the 70<sup>th</sup> week], and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:5-6). Our Lord, of course, was referring to this final statement of the Old Testament when He assured Peter, James and John that, "indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things" (Matt. 17:11).

Some have mistakenly assumed that Israel as a nation cannot be converted until "they will look on Me whom they pierced" (Zech. 12:10), namely, at Christ's second coming in glory. But our Lord insisted: "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). These words were spoken to Thomas who refused to believe until he could "see in His hands the print of the nails" (vs. 25). Was Thomas converted when he did see the marks of his Lord's crucifixion? No, for he, like the other ten apostles, was already a born-again believer (cf. John 13:10-11). Likewise, Israel will be filled with contrition when they finally see the Savior whom they had crucified, and "will mourn for Him, as one mourns for his only son," with "all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves" (Zech. 12:14). Doubtless, this will also be the occasion when they will cry out, "Surely He has borne our griefs ...yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted" (Isa. 53:4-5). Thus,

there will be at least a 42-month gap between Israel's conversion and the overwhelming sight of their pierced Savior.

Immediately following the rapture of the church, there will be no believers left on this planet. Assuming that God never leaves Himself without a witness in the world, the two witnesses will suddenly appear in Jerusalem to begin their powerful work. In the words of Alva J. McClain, founder and president of Grace Theological Seminary, "The effect of their testimony is very impressive, appearing very early in the book of Revelation and probably accounting for the martyrs seen under the fifth seal (6:9). In chapter 7 the effect greatly expands, including 144,000 Israelites (vss.3-8), and also a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations" (vss. 9-14).<sup>4</sup> His colleague and successor, Herman A. Hoyt, agreed that "The importance of their testimony cannot be overestimated (Rev. 11:4)...By their testimony, it is my opinion, they bring about the conversion of the 144,000 who will become the witnesses during the final half of the tribulation period."<sup>5</sup> In addition to my personal mentors, Alva J. McClain and Herman A. Hoyt, several others have concluded that the two witnesses will proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom (i.e., the true Gospel of the saving work of Christ as a prerequisite for entering the Kingdom) during *the first half* of the 70<sup>th</sup> week.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1959), 458.

<sup>5</sup> Herman A. Hoyt, *Studies in Revelation* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1977), 74.

<sup>6</sup> James L. Boyer, "Notes on the Book of Revelation" (Syllabi, Christian Workman Schools of Theology), 22. See [www.whitcombministries.org](http://www.whitcombministries.org) for more details; Gary G. Cohen, *The Chronology of the Book of Revelation*, (TH.D. Diss., Grace Theological Seminary, May 1966), 251-254 and *Understanding Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1978), 46, 133-135; Tom Davis, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Schroon Lake, NY: Word of Life Bible Institute, 2005), 30; Theodore Epp, *Practical Studies in Revelation* (Back to the

An interesting parallel to the amazing effects of the preaching of the two witnesses may be found in the ministry of the Apostle Paul at the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus: "And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10).

### **THE IDENTITY OF THE TWO WITNESSES<sup>7</sup>**

For 2,400 years Jews have anticipated the literal return of Elijah as the forerunner of Messiah. At the Passover meal (*the Seder*), "there is an extra place setting and a special cup on the Seder table designated just for Elijah...The meal is followed by a prayer, and a member of the family is then asked to go to the

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Bible, 1970), p. 144; Arno Froese, *119 Most Frequently Asked Questions About Prophecy* (Columbia, SC: The Olive Press, 2003), 152-153; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 240, 250; Robert Gromacki, *Revelation* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 2000), 65-66; I.M. Haldeman, *Synopsis of the Book of Revelation*, 13 (a pamphlet series, n.d., listed in Walvoord, p. 178); Hippolytus, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 5:248, col. B, nd fragment 39, 184 (documented by J.B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 170-171); Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, *Prophecy Watch* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1998), 160, 164; Thomas Ice, "Why Futurism?" in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, *The End Times Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 414; Harry A. Ironside, *Revelation* (Loizeaux Bros., 1930), 191; Alan Johnson, "Revelation" in K.L. Barker and J. Kohlenburger III, eds. *The NIV Bible Commentary* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1994), 1178; Tim LaHaye, "Twelve Reasons Why This Could Be The Terminal Generation," in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 441; David Larsen, *Jews, Gentiles and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1995), 274, 293; David M. Levy, *Revelation: Hearing the Last Word* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), chart following p. 287; Robert Lightner, *Last Days Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1997), 16; William R Newell, *The Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1935), 158-160; Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 84; J.B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961), 170-171; Wilbur M. Smith, "Revelation" in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, edited by C. Pfeiffer and E. Harrison, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 1510; Gerald Stanton, *Kept From the Hour* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Pub. Co., 1992), 187-188; Lehman Strauss, *The Book of Revelation* (Loizeaux Bros., 1964), 218; H.L. Wilmington, *The King Is Coming* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Pub., 1981), 166.

<sup>7</sup> John C. Whitcomb, Adapted from "Elijah is Coming" in *Conservative Grace Brethren Publications* (Warsaw, IN: Lakeland Conservative Grace Brethren Church, June, 1999), 24-34. Used by permission. Cf. Timothy Demy and John C. Whitcomb, "Witnesses, Two," in Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, eds., *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2004), 401-403.



door, open it, and see if Elijah the prophet is coming.”<sup>8</sup> This expectation, of course, is based on the final words of the prophet Malachi at the very end of our Old Testament: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5-6).

When Peter, James and John beheld *Elijah* on the Mount of Transfiguration, they were astounded. Could it really be true that Elijah would personally, physically, and visibly appear as the forerunner of Christ at the inauguration of His Kingdom? A week before they climbed this mountain, the Lord Jesus had told them: “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:28). So this was a foretaste, a powerful visual aid, of the manner in which the Son of Man would return to the earth: personally, physically and visibly, in glory (cf. Acts 1:11).

But why did this foreview also include the visible presence of Elijah? Peter, James and John were very concerned about this. Coming down from the mountain, they asked the Lord: “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ And He answered and said, ‘Indeed Elijah is coming first and will restore all things’” (Matt. 17:10-11). Thus, the Lord Jesus was agreeing with the

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<sup>8</sup> Scott Bruce, *The Feasts of Israel* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1997), 44, 47, 54. cf. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (New York: Longman, Green, and Co., 1896), Vol. I, pp. 142, 43; Vol. II, pp. 706-09.

scribes that the prophecy of Malachi should be interpreted literally, just as the chief priests and scribes had interpreted Micah 5:2 literally when they were asked concerning the birthplace of the Messiah (Matt. 2:3-6).<sup>9</sup>

### **The Greatness of John the Baptist**

Now this created a great dilemma for the disciples. If Elijah was to prepare Israel for the Kingdom (which they expected to happen at any moment), when and how would he appear, and how did John the Baptist, their former (and now dead) mentor (John 1:35-40) fit into this scenario? Was not the Baptizer "the burning and shining lamp," in whose "light" the disciples "were willing to rejoice" because "he has borne witness to the truth" (John 5:33-35)? Was he not "more than a prophet" (Matt. 11:9)? Was he not the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3 ("The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD'" cf. Matt. 3:3)? Was he not "My messenger" whom God would send "to prepare the way before Me" (Mal. 3:1; cf. Matt. 11:10)? In fact the Lord Jesus asserted that "among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11). Thus, in the mind of our Lord, John was personally and prophetically at least as great as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph,

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<sup>9</sup> The ultimate tragedy, of course, was the refusal of the Jews to worship Jesus when they understood perfectly His claim to be God's Son and saw His undeniable Messianic sign-miracles (John 5:18-47). Many orthodox Jews today are still waiting for a personal Messiah; but they do not believe He will have a divine nature. Peter himself, while on the Mount, was confused as to the absolute uniqueness of the Lord Jesus in contrast to Elijah and Moses (Matt. 17:4), even though God the Father had illumined him on this matter a week earlier (Matt. 16:17; cf. 2 Pet. 1: 16-18)! God's explanation for human suppression of biblical Christology is that "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). For a helpful study of the deity of Messiah, see Ron Rhodes, *Christ Before the Manger: The Life and Times of the Preincarnate Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992). Cf. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1988), 328, 336.

Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, -- and even Elijah!

### **Israel's Responsibility**

It is perfectly clear, then, that it was not because of some lack of dedication or wisdom that John the Baptizer failed to bring Israel to the place of spiritual readiness to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the long-awaited Messiah. The national rejection of Jesus was entirely the fault of the people and their leaders! With respect to John, therefore, our Lord explained: "If you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah, who is to come" (Matt. 11:14). Then, amazingly, He added: "Elijah has come already, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they wished'...Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist" (Matt. 17:12-13).

Thus, *John could have been Elijah if Israel had accepted his message.* This is a theme that dominates the entire Bible – *men are responsible moral agents before God*, and can never reject this accountability by arguing that since *God is the sovereign LORD of history* they cannot make genuine choices (cf. Rom. 9:18-24). Judas Iscariot could have reasoned: "Since my betrayal of the Messiah has been predestined [e.g., Luke 22:22a – "truly, the Son of Man goes as it has been determined..."], I have been deprived of my freedom of choice, and am therefore innocent!" But our Lord, anticipating such depraved thinking, added: "but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22b; cf. Acts

2:23 concerning the entire nation). Thus, Joseph could say to his murderous brothers: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to...save many people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

There are at least three reasons for concluding that John was *not* Elijah. First, the angel Gabriel announced to Zacharias the priest concerning his son John: "He will also go before Him *in the spirit and power of Elijah*" (Luke 1:17). Therefore, he was not literally Elijah. Second, our Lord stated, soon after the death of John, "Elijah is coming first and will restore all things" (Matt. 17:11). Thus, the Lord Jesus interpreted Malachi's prophecy literally: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet..." (Mal. 4:5). Third, the leaders of Israel confronted John with a direct question: "Are you Elijah?" His answer was unequivocal: "I am not" (John 1:21).

However, in spite of the fact that John was not Elijah, *his offer of the Kingdom to Israel was absolutely genuine*: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). This identical appeal was made by our Lord, and by the Twelve and the Seventy. Therefore, no Jew could say, "We never heard a clear and genuine offer of the Kingdom!"

### **The Theological Antinomy**

But here we must face a great theological antinomy, namely, an apparent contradiction of logic that mere human intelligence cannot resolve: first, *the offer of the Kingdom was absolutely genuine*. *The contingency* was this: *the coming of*

*the Kingdom was dependent upon the believing response of the nation of Israel.*

Without national repentance on the part of God's chosen people, there can be no Messianic kingdom on this earth (see Romans 11:12, 15, 25-29, and many Old Testament prophecies). Also for individuals, whether Jew or Gentile, there can be no salvation without genuine faith in God and His Word. This is a fundamental reality in all human history under God.

Second, at the same time, God had planned from all eternity that the Kingdom offer would be rejected at Christ's first coming, and would be accepted at His second coming.<sup>10</sup> Yes, we always need to be reminded of Deut. 29:29, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever," and Isaiah 55:8-9, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

No Jew could escape the ultimate urgency of the Baptizer's message by reasoning: "John himself admits that he is not Elijah. Therefore, since the Kingdom cannot come until Elijah appears, we have no need to humble ourselves before this non-Elijah!" To excuse themselves, the Jewish leaders finally concluded that John had a demon! (cf. Matt. 11:18).

A similar urgent responsibility rests upon people today. No one, however exalted (in political, social, economic, educational, or scientific realms), may

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<sup>10</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum has pointed out, in light of Mark 9:9-13, that "if Elijah had come before the first coming of Christ and restored all things, then the prophecies of the sufferings of the first coming would remain unfulfilled" (*The Footsteps of the Messiah* [Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, 1982], p. 90.)

dismiss the urgency of the Gospel message because of the personality traits of the messenger. Like the Corinthians long ago, people in our day sometimes make a great issue of who won them to the Lord and/or baptized them. Paul's response to the Corinthians was pointed: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one" (1 Cor. 3:5; cf. 1:12-17; 3:21-23; 4:6).

John's appearance and life-style (like Elijah's – 2 Kings 1:8; cf. Zech. 13:4) were not impressive to sophisticated Jews: a garment of camel's hair and a diet of locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:4). Who among the leaders would want to be identified with such a strange-looking character? But God intended for his appearance to be a rebuke to the luxurious materialism of the royal family and the Pharisees and the priests (Matt. 11:8). Many of the common people, however, did respond to his powerful preaching (Matt. 3:5-6; 11:12; 21:26).

Thus, to summarize the antinomy: God assures us, on the basis of His unchangeable foreknowledge, that Elijah – not John – will bring the nation to repentance. But human responsibility required that John's message be received with genuine repentance and faith, just as fervently as if Elijah himself had been God's messenger.

### **Has Elijah Been Glorified?**

Elijah is coming back as a messenger to Israel. But how can he come back to the earth in a physical, mortal body? Was he not last seen being swept "to

heaven" by a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11)? This is a major reason why many evangelical theologians deny that Elijah can literally return to the earth and be killed (Rev. 11:7). If Elijah was glorified without dying, how can he return to the earth and die?

A very important factor in solving this problem may be found in our Lord's statement: "No one has ascended to heaven, but...the Son of Man" (John 3:13). In the immediate context, our Lord was explaining to Nicodemus that He alone could testify concerning things in heaven, because He alone had been there. While this statement sheds significant light on our Lord's unique authority to speak of "heavenly things," His statement also seems to exclude the possibility that anyone, including Enoch and Elijah, could ever have ascended to the third heaven.

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus was "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep," in the sense of receiving a glorified body; and no one else will receive such a body until "those who are Christ's" have that inconceivably marvelous experience "at His coming" (1 Cor. 15:20-23). Technically, of course, it could be argued that our Lord was referring only to a resurrection from the dead, and that neither Enoch nor Elijah had died. But, in the light of the "first fruits" statement of 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23, it is very difficult to believe that two men could have been physically glorified before the Savior was glorified.

Renald E. Showers agrees that "Enoch and Elijah did not receive glorified bodies when God took them from the earth." But he also finds strong evidence in

Hebrews 11:5 that Enoch did not “see” (=experience; cf. Luke 2:26) death. The text states that the very purpose for God’s taking Enoch was so that he should not experience death.<sup>11</sup> So we are left with the question of Enoch’s condition after he was “taken up.” A similar question may be asked concerning Korah, Dathan and Abiram who “went down alive into the pit [Sheol]” (Num. 16:33). My understanding would be that they *did* die after disappearing from the sight of men.

After the glorification of Christ, the apostle Paul “was caught up to the third heaven...into Paradise” (2 Cor. 12:2, 4). But he was not glorified, for the experience was temporary, and he returned to the earth with a mortal body (complete with a sin nature) and finally died. The truly amazing statement, however, is that he didn’t know whether his brief visit in heaven was “in the body or apart from the body” (12:2-3). Renald Showers sees 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, therefore, as indicating that Paul “believed in the possibility of a human being in a mortal body being caught up to and existing in God’s heaven for some period of time.”<sup>12</sup>

This brings us again to the fascinating statement of Hebrews 11:5 – “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death.” The termination of his life on earth was totally different from that of any before him – he simply disappeared! Now it should be noted that two other God-honored men in the Old Testament shared the distinction of leaving this world with no one seeing them

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<sup>11</sup> Personal correspondence, Nov. 4, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



dying or dead – *Moses* (Deut. 32:48-52; 34:1-6) and *Elijah* (2 Kings 2:11-14). The author of Hebrews stated: "...it is appointed for men to die once" (9:27). However, the "mystery" (divine truth once hidden but now revealed) of the rapture of the Body and Bride of Christ without dying (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:15-17) is the glorious exception to this "die-once" rule. But is it really legitimate to stretch this exception to include Enoch or Elijah? Old Testament saints were not members of the Body and Bride of Christ to whom this "blessed hope" was exclusively given (cf. Eph. 3:4-10). That Enoch entered the realm of the righteous dead<sup>13</sup> without dying seems to be the teaching of Hebrews 11:5. That he was physically glorified is highly unlikely.

Enoch did not "see death." But the Scriptures do *not* say this of Elijah. In fact, there seems to be some support for the concept that Elijah finally did die after he was caught up by a whirlwind. Nearly 900 years after that event, three of our Lord's disciples saw *Moses* (who had died 1,400 years earlier) and *Elijah* together (Matt. 17:1-8). Since Moses could not have had a glorified body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20, 23), the implication is quite strong that Elijah did not either. Like Samuel 1,000 years earlier (1 Sam. 28:15), they were temporarily "brought up" from their place of rest in the "Paradise" of pre-resurrection-of-Christ history (cf. Luke 23:43 with 2 Cor. 12:2-4 and Eph. 4:8-10), which our Lord also described as "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22), and which was located at that time in "the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40 cf. 1 Pet. 3:19).

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<sup>13</sup> Our Lord described this place as "Abraham's bosom" (Lk. 16:22), "Paradise" (Lk 23:43) and a special realm within Sheol/Hades before His resurrection (Lk. 16:23).

Moses and Elijah appeared briefly to Peter, James and John, but had nothing to say to them. Instead, they were conversing with their Lord. As they “talked with Him” (Luke 9:30), they “spoke of His decease [Gk. *exodus* = a euphemism for His death] which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). They were presumably concerned about the fact that not until their great King/Priest/Messiah shed His blood upon the Cross could they be fully redeemed. However, in the meantime, they had been redeemed, like Abraham (Gen. 15:6), as it were “on credit,” because the blood payment of the Lamb of God for pre-Calvary believers was already accomplished in the mind of God (cf. Rom. 3:25-26; Eph. 1:3-11). If Elijah was concerned about the “decease” which his Lord was soon to accomplish in Jerusalem, the implication is that he (like Moses) had not yet been physically glorified. Thus, the fact that they appeared “in glory” on the mount was merely a temporary foretaste of their ultimate glorification at the time of Christ’s Second Coming. A significant analogy to this experience may be seen in the face of Moses which glowed brightly after he communed with God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:29-35).

On the basis of these theological inferences, then, we understand that Elijah will be brought back from the dead (like Lazarus and several others) to mortal life, and to die again three-and-one-half years later (Rev. 11:3-13). In Bible times God raised some people from the dead *after only a few hours*, and Lazarus *after four days* (when it was evident to everyone that his body was decomposing [John 11:39]). The main point at issue here, however, is that God

is not limited by time or by the availability of any part of a person's physical body in order to perform the miracle of glorious resurrection, or even the miracle of resuscitation/restoration to mortal life.

We read in 1 Corinthians 15:38 that God gives "to each seed its own body," and "that which you sow [in death and burial], you do not sow that body that shall be." This is the basic reality of all resurrections. On the human level, we might describe it this way: God knows the unique "blueprint" or "DNA information code" of every human being, and is perfectly capable of giving a person a glorified body, and even another mortal body (complete with the original sin nature) after thousands of years.

### **Elijah and Moses**

Yes, Elijah is coming back to this earth again, and he will not come alone as he did at the beginning of his first ministry. Rarely does God send a servant into a significant ministry without a coworker. Robert L. Thomas has observed: "The OT required two witnesses as competent legal testimony to secure a conviction (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Num. 35:30; cf. Heb. 10:28). Jesus also made the number two a minimum to confirm a point of discipline (Matt. 18:16) or verify truth (John 8:17). Paul too alluded to the need of a plurality of witnesses to validate a judgment (2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19)."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 87.

But who will be Elijah's companion witness? Many have suggested *Enoch*; but this great antediluvian saint and prophet would not be an appropriate fellow-witness with Elijah in *a prophetic ministry directed exclusively to Israel*. Far more appropriate for such a unique function would be *Moses*. For future apostate Israel, after the rapture of the Church, no man in her entire history would have greater respect and appreciation than Moses. In fact, Moses is named *80* times in the New Testament (compared to Abraham, *73* times, David *59* times and Elijah *29* times)! God raised up these men *to confront Israel in times of deep apostasy*. Moses was God's great deliverer and lawgiver for Israel, of whom He said: "There has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt...and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34:10-12). By the time our Lord appeared in Israel, the Jews actually thought that *Moses* had given them the bread in the wilderness (John 6:32).

As for *Elijah*, surely one of the greatest of the prophets, God answered his humble prayer (cf. 1 Kings 18:36-37) by sending *fire from heaven* to consume his sacrifice on Mount Carmel and thus to defeat the 450 prophets of Baal; and finally to vindicate him by means of "a chariot of fire and horses of fire" to escort him out of Satan's world (2 Kings 2:11).<sup>15</sup> When he was almost overwhelmed by the spiritual darkness of Israel under the demonic Jezebel, Elijah identified

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<sup>15</sup> "The mystery surrounding Moses' death (Jude 9) and the translation of Elijah offer some corroborations of these as the two witnesses" – Robert L. Thomas, op. cit., p. 88.

himself with Moses by fleeing to “the cave” (Heb: *ha-m<sup>e</sup> ’ ārâ*) where Moses 600 years earlier was hidden by God as His glory passed by (1 Kings 19:9; Exod. 33:21-23). So highly did the Jews of Jesus’ day think of Elijah, that when they saw His miracles, some concluded that Elijah had returned (Matt. 16:14). Also when our Savior cried out from the cross, “Eli, Eli...,” they believed He was “calling for Elijah” to save Him! (Matt. 27:47-49; Mark 15:35-36).<sup>16</sup>

When the two witnesses appear in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Seventieth Week, “they immediately begin their prophetic ministry. Just prior to this (hours, days, weeks?) the rapture will have removed all believers from the earth. Therefore, there will be no one to train these two witnesses, and no time to train them. They must be men already possessing full knowledge of the Scriptures and well seasoned for such a demanding ministry. Moses was the lawgiver; Elijah was the law-enforcer. Both will be men of experience. They will be perfectly equipped for a ministry to Israel before a world-wide audience.”<sup>17</sup>

Neither Moses nor Elijah ever entered Jerusalem, though Moses might have seen it from a distance (Deut. 34:2), and Elijah wrote a letter of judgment to one of the worst kings Jerusalem ever knew (2 Chron. 21:12-15). And, as we have seen, both Moses and Elijah, emerging temporarily from “Paradise” to appear on the Mount of Transfiguration, were very concerned about something soon to happen in Jerusalem. (cf. Luke 9:31)

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<sup>16</sup> See the high praise of Elijah, who will “restore the tribes of Jacob,” in *Ecclesiasticus* (Sirach) 48:10. Cf. H. Bietenhard, “Elijah,” in Colin Brown, ed., *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) I, pp. 543-45.

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication from Scott M. Libby, Pastor of the Grace Brethren Church, Coventry, VT, September 20, 1998.

The Lord Jesus said that "it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33)! In the light of this statement, it is noteworthy that these two great Israelite prophets will not only enter Jerusalem, but will experience their second and final physical death in its streets at the hands of "the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit" at the mid-point of the Seventieth Week (Rev. 11:7-10; cf. Dan. 9:27).

One of the most convincing evidences that *Elijah* and *Moses* will be the two witnesses in Revelation 11 is the nature of the judgment-miracles these men will perform. "If anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies...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" (Rev. 11:5-6). The first two types of judgments listed were those which *Elijah* inflicted upon Israel (three-and-one-half years of drought – 1 Kings 17:1; cf. Luke 4:25; James 5:17; and fire from heaven upon two military detachments sent by King Ahaziah to capture Elijah – 2 Kings 1:10, 12); and the second two types of judgments (blood from water and a variety of plagues) were those which *Moses* inflicted upon Egypt (Ex. 7-12).

Why are Elijah and Moses not named as the two witnesses in Revelation 11? Perhaps the Old Testament and the Gospels are so clear on this point that the Holy Spirit deemed it unnecessary to identify them by name. Would not the

final words God addressed to Israel in the Old Testament have been sufficient?<sup>18</sup>

“Remember the Law of *Moses*, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel with the statutes and judgments [cf. Matt. 24:20]. Behold, I will send you *Elijah* (italics added) the prophet...” (Mal. 4:4-5).<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

The true Church is not destined to see the Antichrist or the two witnesses in Jerusalem. Our “blessed hope” is to see Christ our Bridegroom and our Head (Titus 2:13; 2 Cor. 11:2). Nevertheless, our covenant-keeping God also has a special appointment for His Chosen People Israel (Rom. 11:25-32); and that

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<sup>18</sup> It must be emphasized that the book of Revelation stands solidly upon the Old Testament, like the capstone of a pyramid upon all the levels of stone beneath it. “Of the 404 verses of the Apocalypse, there are 278 which contain references to the Jewish scriptures” (cited by Walvoord, op. cit., p. 31).

<sup>19</sup> Among those who identify one of the two witnesses as Elijah are: William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Vol 2, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976): “much more likely the witnesses are Elijah and Moses,” 70; James L. Boyer, op. cit.: “one would be Elijah...the other would probably be Moses,” 21; M.R. DeHaan, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1946): “Elijah and Moses,” 159; H.W. Frost, *Matthew 24 and the Revelation* (New York & Oxford, 1924): “Moses and Elijah,” 144. (cited by C. Keener, p. 290); Herman A. Hoyt, *Studies in Revelation* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1977): “Without a doubt, one of these witnesses is Elijah...Moses may be the other,” 75; Robert Govett, *The Apocalypse* (London: C. J. Thynne, 1920): “Elijah and Enoch”, 225-250. Cited by Walvoord, op. cit., 179; Craig S. Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000): “Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Jerome believed Enoch and Elijah remained alive and would return as witnesses...such a view is not impossible. See SIR 48:10; SIFRE DEUT 41:4:3; 342; 5:2; 4 Ezra 6:26,” 290-91; David Larsen, *Jews, Gentiles and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1995): “Probably Moses and Elijah,” 293; Hal Lindsey, *New World Coming*: “Elijah and Moses” 162-63 (cited by C. Keener, p. 290); John MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999): “They may be Moses and Elijah,” 300; Alva J McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1959): “As to their identity, one is most certainly Elijah,” 457; Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1983): “it does seem quite probable that [Enoch and Elijah] will be Christ’s two witnesses,” 194-95; Walter K. Price, *The Coming Antichrist* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974): “Moses and Elijah,” 194; Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., n.d.): “Probably Elijah and Moses,” 230; J.A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.): “Elijah and Enoch” (a very detailed discussion), 244-54; J.B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961): “Moses and Elijah,” 169; *The Targums* (Aramaic Translation/Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, cited by H. Dietenhard, op. cit., p. 544): God will “gather the diaspora through Elijah and Moses;” Merrill Tenney, *Earth’s Coming King: Revelation* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1977): “Elijah and Moses,” 55; Robert Thomas, op. cit.: “the balance of the evidence is for an expectation of the actual return of [Moses and Elijah],” 89.

appointment includes national repentance through the prophetic ministry of Elijah (and Moses). Even before “the great and terrible day of the LORD” (the second half of the Seventieth Week) begins, Zion will “give birth to her children” (Isa. 66:8), and through them (presumably disciples of the two witnesses), “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations” (Matt. 24:14). When contemplating the destiny of ethnic Israel in the light of the unconditional and thus unbreakable Abrahamic Covenant promises<sup>20</sup>, we can only say with Paul, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For a masterful refutation of “replacement theology,” namely, that the Church has permanently replaced Israel, see Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: the Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Johnson City, TN: STL Distribution, 2004). 1.800.289.2772

<sup>21</sup> For more information on this subject, listen to Dr. Whitcomb’s recording, “Background to ‘The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,’” at [www.sermonaudio.com/whitcomb](http://www.sermonaudio.com/whitcomb).