



The Revelation of Jesus Christ

"Can I Get a Witness?"

11:3-6

The Great Tribulation will feature extraordinary efforts by God to evangelize the population of the earth.

Two empowered characters will appear on the earth and go about witnessing. For a time they will be indestructible and they will perform miracles. Then God allows them to be killed. But not to worry! After three days they are raised from the dead and they ascend to Heaven while the whole world is watching.

Revelation 11:3 "And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

Why two? Because "in the mouth of two witnesses every word shall be established" (Second Corinthians 13:1).

- Two spies of the twelve commissioned by Moses were correct (Numbers 13).
- Joshua sent in two spies to scope out the land (Joshua 2:1).
- Jesus sent out His witnesses two by two (Mark 6:7).
- There were two angels in the tomb on Easter morning (John 20:12).
- There were two men at the ascension of Jesus who told the disciples He would return in like manner (Acts).

As much as you are able, try to partner-up in ministry and especially in evangelism. It's when two or three are gathered that Jesus promised to be among us in a special way.

These two witnesses will “prophesy.” Prophecy is speaking forth the truth of God’s Word. It is speaking for God with “authority.” It can involve the future but isn’t limited to predictions. What I get from this is that these guys will have both “authority” and what we’d call anointing. When they speak hearts are stirred.

They wear “sackcloth.” It’s the uniform of Old Testament prophets who commanded folks to repent of their sins, turn around, and follow God.

Their ministry lasts “twelve hundred and sixty days.” Exactly three and one half years (based on a 360-day year). The seven years of the Great Tribulation are broken in half by an event we are getting to. It is the antichrist coming in to the rebuilt Jewish Temple and desecrating it.

Remember - the Revelation is chronological as you follow the breaking of the seven seals, the blowing of the seven trumpets, and the pouring out of the seven bowls. Passages in-between give detail as to what is transpiring either on earth or in Heaven.

The two witnesses will be preaching with authority and anointing for the entire first half of the Great Tribulation.

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

This refers us back to an image in the Old Testament book of Zechariah. In the picture from Zechariah, oil lamps are filled directly from olive trees which pipe oil right to the lamps. This is a picture of continual, abundant supply.

The passage from Zechariah had its first application to two men in Zechariah's day: Joshua and Zerubbabel. God was giving the Jews rebuilding that earlier Temple a word of encouragement that He would provide everything they needed as they depended solely upon Him.

It's informative that just as the third Temple is operational (v1-2) these two appear and are described as lampstands. In the rebuilt Temple there will be a lampstand, a seven-branched candlestick we call the menorah. Jews will be worshipping in the Temple. But as I mentioned last time, God is not in that Tribulation Temple. He will not be pleased with that worship. His lampstand, the church, replaced the Temple of Jesus' day. These two will, in a sense, be His lampstand on the earth in the Great Tribulation.

A common and very appropriate question about the Great Tribulation has to do with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is described as being removed from the earth when the church is raptured. If He is removed, how will people get saved?

He will be removed only in the sense that He is not indwelling the church on the earth. He will continue to have the ministry of anointing God's servants and saints with power. He will continue to convict nonbelievers and show them Jesus Christ.

Revelation 11:5 And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way.

I cannot even begin to envision this. It's not that "fire" falls on their persecutors from Heaven. It "flows out of their mouths." If you are a comic book or sci-fi kind of person you know that there are many superheroes or villains who have the ability to manipulate fire. These guys really will have that ability!

It's probably not "fire" as we think of it. Otherwise you could approach the two witnesses in a flame retardant suit. They apparently have the ability to speak death upon any assailants.

Revelation 11:6 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.

They rule nature for three and one half years. I get the sense that they preach then verify their preaching by commanding the forces mentioned.

Their miraculous ministry is an effort to counter the counterfeit Christ. He hasn't been introduced to us yet but the world leader we call antichrist will be on the scene. He will have made peace in the Middle East. The treaty he makes with Israel allows them to rebuild the Temple (as we saw in verses one and two). The antichrist will be wondered after and be hailed as a messiah.

The two witnesses give the rebuttal to antichrist's reign. With Heaven's authority and the anointing of God the Holy Spirit they tell the world the truth about antichrist and Jesus Christ and they confirm it with the wonders they perform - and by killing those who try to attack them.

Who are these guys?

Who they are must not be too terribly important otherwise God would have told us. But you can't help but wonder.

The leading candidates are Elijah, Moses, or Enoch. Occasionally you hear Zerubbabel's name thrown into the mix.

You may not be familiar with Enoch. He was an Old Testament character before the global flood. He was, in fact, Noah's great grandfather. He walked with God and was taken directly to Heaven by God. He becomes for us a type of the Rapture of the church.

Perhaps the main reason for thinking Enoch is one of these two witnesses is that he never physically died. If it is anyone else other than Enoch and Elijah - who was also taken alive to Heaven without dying - then that person will have to die twice. Enoch can come back, be killed by antichrist, then raised from the dead.

The theory is based on the verse in Hebrews that states it is appointed for men to die once (9:27).

The words in Hebrews are a general principle not a law. Lots of people died twice. Lazarus, the friend of Jesus whom He raised from the dead, is a good example. Also, lots of people will never die. Everyone taken to Heaven in the rapture will never die.

So we have no compelling reason to think Enoch is one of these two guys.

Some think Elijah is definitely one of the witnesses because:

- His ministry seems like one of these two witnesses. For example, he caused it to cease raining for a period of three and one half years and he called fire down from Heaven (2 Kings 1 and James 5:17-18).
- It is specifically prophesied that Elijah will return before the end of the age (Malachi 4:5-6).
- Elijah had a unique "conference" with Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-6).

Some think Moses is definitely one of the witnesses because:

- His ministry seems like one of these two witnesses. He could command plagues of various sorts (Exodus 7:20-21).
- God seems to have a special purpose for the body of Moses that Satan wanted to defeat. In Jude 9 you learn Satan demanded Moses' body but God had Michael the archangel take care of it.
- The enemies of Moses were destroyed by fire (Numbers 16:35).
- Moses was also at the unique "conference" with Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-6).

The fact it was Elijah and Moses with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and that they seemed to be discussing His coming to establish the kingdom, gives these guys the edge.

In addition Bible commentators see them as symbolic to the Jews of the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah) making them a great type. Jesus, the one they witness about, was the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets.

By the way: If they are Elijah and Moses, it may be that they were the two who were with Jesus and His disciples at His ascension to Heaven. In Acts we're not told they were angels.

The dream team of Elijah and Moses are your best choice if these guys are old school.

It could be, however, that the two witnesses are not Old Testament characters at all but men picked by the Lord during the Great Tribulation. They may be two believers ministering in the spirit and power of these great Old Testament men, even as John the Baptist went forth in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17 and Matthew 7:12-13).

We said that this image of two witnesses as the lampstand was borrowed from Zechariah. At the heart of the vision Zechariah received is the timeless principle,

Zechariah 4:6 ... 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts.

“Might” is a word often used to describe strength in numbers; it is our *collective* strength as a congregation.

“Power” is a word often used to describe strength without numbers; it is your *personal* strength as an individual.

Neither the strength of our numbers as a group, nor your personal strength as an individual, can accomplish the work of God. God’s work can only be accomplished by God’s “Spirit.”

Pastor and author Warren Wiersbe points out that there are three ways we can go about trying to accomplish God’s work: 1) We can trust our own strength and wisdom, 2) We can borrow the resources of the world, or 3) We can depend upon the Spirit of God.

No one ever admits they are trusting in their own strength and wisdom, or that they are borrowing the resources of the world. Yet often that is the case.

Zerubbabel and Joshua are called (in Zechariah 4:14) “the two anointed ones.” There is an alternate translation to the phrase “the two anointed ones.” The phrase can be translated “the two sons of fresh oil.”

God always sees to it that His work gets accomplished. He uses individuals and congregations, but He never depends on their might or power.

Rather than focusing on the work, be filled with the Spirit and let the Spirit flow through your life. Be a son or a daughter of fresh oil.

