

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

The Two Witnesses?

Revelation 11:1-6

INTRODUCTION:

Most commentators admit that this is perhaps the most difficult chapter in Revelation to interpret. I personally had to spend a lot of time preparing this message. Since the chapter is full of symbols, I had June put a list of the symbols and their meaning in the bulletin for you.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Revelation 11:1-6 (NASB)

11 Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. ² Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months. ³ And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 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. ⁶ These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

Prayer

BODY:

I. MEASURING THE TEMPLE.

Revelation 11:1 (NASB)

11 Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.

A reed (bamboo rod) is given to John. He is becoming more active and involved in the vision. He is told to measure the temple. Some people argue that Revelation must have been written somewhere around 65 AD instead of the later 90 AD date since the temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

But we must remember that we are reading apocryphal writing. It is not to be read literally, but it is to be read symbolically.

John was in exile on Patmos. It does not matter if the temple is still standing in Jerusalem or not. It would not be possible for him to literally measure it anyway. This is not a physical temple. Nor is it a literal measurement. We, Christians, are the temple of God. God does not dwell in a temple made with hands. He dwells, through His Holy Spirit, within His faithful believers. The temple here represents God's people.

What does it mean to measure the temple? The measuring rod represents the gospel. It is the way to measure those who are Christians and those who are not.

John 12:48 (NASB)

48 He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

How about measuring the altar? The altar was the place where sacrifices were made for forgiveness of sin in the Old Testament. We are told to offer ourselves as an acceptable sacrifice to God. We will be measured (or judged) by this standard as well.

Romans 12:1 (NASB)

12 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

The gospel does the measuring. In judgment we will be held up to the standard of the teachings of the New Testament.

Revelation 11:2 (NASB)

2 But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

John is not to measure the outer court. If Israel, by definition, is God's people, then the gentiles would be "not God's people". In fact the word "outside" in the book of Revelation consistently refers to people who do not belong to God.

Listen to what John wrote to the church of Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:12 (NASB)

12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

So John is supposed to measure the believers, but not the unbelievers.

Then John says the holy city will be trampled for forty-two months. The holy city refers to the people of God. The 1260 days is once again telling us that, while we are on earth, we will be persecuted for our faith. This period of time is referred to in four different ways.

- 1,260 days – A prophetic day represents a year, thus 1,260 years.
- 42 months – A month is 30 days, thus $42 \times 30 = 1,260$.
- 3 ½ times – A "time" = a year, so 3 ½ times = 3 and a half years. A typical prophetic year is 360 days long. $360 \times 3.5 = 1,260$.

- Time, times, and half a time – Time = one year; times = two years; half a time = half a year; thus, this phrase is equal to the one above.

II. THE TWO WITNESSES.

Revelation 11:3 (NASB)

³ And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”

Many different interpretations can be found about the two witnesses. Everyone wants to know who the two witnesses are. It is interesting because these two witnesses are also described as two olive branches and two lampstands in the next verse.

In Zechariah 4 the prophet sees two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. He asks, "What do these stand for?" The angel says these stand for the two anointed ones that God has put over all of His people. In the Old Testament the two anointed ones that were the joint rulers over God's people were the kings and priests.

What is Jesus known as? "King and High Priest".

What did Revelation 5:10 call Christians?

Revelation 5:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ “You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

Do you think that is an accident? Probably not.

So the question is are you looking at Jesus or us? You may say "There are two of them".

Yes! But there is a good reason why there are two witnesses from an Old Testament perspective.

Why two witnesses? Because every valid testimony in a court of law must be validated by two to three witnesses says Deuteronomy 17. So the fact that there are two should not take away from the imagery. The testimony is valid because there are two witnesses on the stand.

This is what is being said here. In the trumpets John is being told to tell them this message. Your job is to make your witness known. It will result in suffering and possibly even your death. But guess what! You are in good company. Because it also happened to our Savior. Your job as Christians, despite what comes your way, is to witness says the trumpets. It is very comforting to hear that after you have heard that you are spiritually secure.

The church, the faithful in God's family, is to be the witness to a lost and dying world. This is the mission and purpose of the church.

Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Matthew 28:18-20 (NASB)

¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

We are to be “faithful and true witnesses” in carrying the gospel to the lost.

1 John 5:10-12 (NASB)

¹⁰ The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. ¹¹ And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

As we live for Christ, we are to be witnesses for Him.

Revelation 11:4 (NASB)

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

The two witnesses are here described as olive trees and lampstands. Olive trees were used by Paul in Romans 11 to describe how God cut off the Jew and grafted in the Gentiles. Here the olive tree represents the church.

Romans 11:17-21 (NASB)

¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. ¹⁹ You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” ²⁰ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.

In Rev. 1:20 we learned that the lampstands represented the SEVEN churches.

Revelation 1:20 (NASB)

²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

The number seven suggests completeness. Thus the seven churches represent all of the people of God between Christ's first and second coming, His complete church. Thus the designation of Christians as a Kingdom and Priests fits in nicely.

Revelation 11:5-6 (NASB)

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. ⁶ These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

God is saying, in effect, "You might despise Christians and you might seek to eliminate them from the earth. But, if you hurt one of my family, you will have to deal with Me."

"Fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies". That sounds a lot like Elijah, doesn't it! Fire coming out of heaven and devouring his enemies. Fire always represents judgment. God will not turn His back to sin forever. His day of wrath will come.

"So if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. ⁶ These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying;

This sounds like Elijah again.

So, we not only have them looking like a king and priest, and not only like witnesses with a valid testimony, but also like Elijah.

But it gets even better...

and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

That sounds like Moses. He turned the Egyptian's water into blood and he brought about the twelve plagues.

Here is my question. What do the two witnesses stand for? Moses, who represents the law, and Elijah, who represents the prophets.

It is not an accident or coincidence that Moses and Elijah were seen with Christ at the transfiguration.

Matthew 17:1-8 (NASB)

17 Six days later Jesus *took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and *led them up on a high mountain by themselves. ² And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. ³ And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. ⁴ Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard *this*, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. ⁷ And Jesus came to *them* and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." ⁸ And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.

Moses sums up all the Law and Elijah sums up all the prophets. One way to refer to the Old Testament is to say "The Law and the Prophets". All of the Old Testament is wrapped up in one of these two symbolic figures. That is probably why they were at the transfiguration which occurred before Christ's crucifixion.

The two witnesses look a lot like Moses and Elijah, but they also look a lot like Jesus. Their message which is very powerful obviously angered off a lot of people because their message ends up getting killed. They lay in the street and after three and a half days, they are raised from the dead. Does that sound familiar? Then they ascend to heaven on a cloud. Does that sound familiar? And guess where they were killed? They were killed in the city where our Savior was murdered. They were killed in Jerusalem.

Moses and Elijah were the symbols of the law and the prophets. Peter, James, and John see Moses and Elijah talking with Christ. Luke tells us that they are talking about what is about to happen. Why? Because all of the law and the prophets have been pointing to this time! The time when we will live under grace instead of the law.

Then they see a bright cloud and a voice coming out of the cloud saying “**This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!**” and they fell to the ground. Man is always terrified and fall as dead men when they encounter God. Then Jesus came to them and told them not to be afraid. And the scriptures say they saw no one except Jesus.

This scripture symbolizes that **NOW** Jesus **IS** the law and the prophets.

Matthew 5:17 (NASB)

17 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. He is the Messiah that the law and the prophets have been proclaiming all this time!

That being said, Who are the two witnesses?

Well, it looked a lot like Moses and Elijah and it also looked a lot like Christ. But do you remember the little scroll in chapter 10. John was told to eat it. As Christians we are the body of Christ and we are to “eat,” or internalize, the Word of God. We should know and follow the Word so well that people can see it living within us. So the two witnesses look at lot like the true church also.

CONCLUSION:

ILLUSTRATION:

One day, a man walking through the forest came upon a lumberjack who was sawing away at a large tree and not getting very far at all. The man approached the logger as he stopped for a moment to rest and observed that the logger would get further if he sharpened his saw. The logger replied that he just didn't have the time to sharpen the saw because he was too busy cutting down the tree, and went back to his work.

The church, the faithful in God's family, is to be the witness to a lost and dying world. This is the mission and purpose of the church.

If we don't take time to sharpen our spiritual lives we become dull. We must keep our "spiritual blade" sharp by internalizing God's word and by our witness. We work relentlessly to achieve things that have no eternal value. When you think about it, that doesn't make much sense, does it? May we learn how to spend less time on the "urgent things" that crowd out the eternal things.

This is the Day!

