

The Two Witnesses

Revelation 11

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In Revelation 10 we left God's people experiencing the sweet joy of expecting Jesus to come on October 22, 1844, followed by the bitter disappointment when that expectation proved wrong. They had been so certain. They reviewed the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 again and again—"For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed." They interpreted this to mean that the earth would be cleansed by fire at the Second Coming. They were correct on the date, but wrong on the meaning of the sanctuary. In time, they came to understand that the sanctuary to be cleansed at the end of the 2,300 years was on earth, but in heaven. The subject of the sanctuary was the key that unlocked their bitter disappointment. And the sanctuary—or temple—is the focus of the opening verses of Revelation chapter 11.

Measuring the Temple

John writes, "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. 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" (Revelation 11:1, 2).

What does it mean to measure the temple?

In Scripture, measuring is always associated with some form of judgment. For example, Jesus said, "With what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Matthew 7:2). So when the angel tells John to measure the temple, he is talking about judgment in the temple. This is the scene Daniel saw in vision in Daniel 7:9-14. God's cosmic judgment sits before the whole universe.

What happens in the judgment? First, the judgment reveals God's justice and mercy. Satan has said that God is unfair, unjust, and arbitrary. The judgment proves that God is just and merciful in the way He has dealt with sin during the great controversy between

good and evil. It proves that Satan's accusations are false. The judgment shows that those who are lost eternally are lost because of their own choices. God has done everything He can to save every human being. The judgment is also known as the cleansing of the sanctuary in the Old Testament.

The Judgment and the Cleansing of the Sanctuary

This cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven was illustrated each year by the Day of Atonement in Israel's earthly sanctuary. Notice that the angel tells John to measure "the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there" (Revelation 11:1). This is a reference to the Day of Atonement symbolism. The only place in the Bible where we find this same exact sequence—temple of God, altar, and those that worship there—is Leviticus 16:33. Chapters 16 and 23 of Leviticus describe the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament sanctuary ritual. It was a symbol of God's final judgment and the end of sin. On that day every Israelite was commanded to fast and afflict their soul. This means that they were to search their hearts and repent of their sins. Revelation 11:1, 2 is talking about a final judgment, a final call to all humanity to repent

The Court of the Gentiles

The angel tells John not to measure the court for it has been given to the Gentiles (Revelation 11:2). In the Old Testament sanctuary, there was an outer court called "the court of the Gentiles." Gentiles were not allowed to enter the temple; they could go no further than this outer court. In the judgment taking place in the sanctuary in heaven, God's people heaven's sanctuary by faith. They are secure in the judgment covered by the righteousness of Jesus. If you don't enter the sanctuary by faith, you are not secure in Jesus. You are outside the court with the Gentiles. Inside the sanctuary, there is no way you can be lost. Outside the sanctuary, there is no salvation.

So the angel tells John to leave out the court of the Gentiles when he is measuring the temple. The Gentiles symbolize those who oppose God and His truth. They are treading the holy city underfoot. They have rebelled against God. They are trying to destroy God's people and stamp out His truth. These opponents of God will continue to tread down truth for forty-two months. Remember, a month in Bible times consisted of 30 days. Forty-two prophetic months equal 1,260 prophetic days. Or 1260 literal years. In Bible prophecy one prophetic day equals one literal year. (Numbers 14:34, Ezekiel 4:6) We find this

same time period—1,260 days—in the next verse in connection with the “two witnesses.”.

The Two Witnesses

“I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and destroys 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” (Revelation 11:3-6).

There have been many attempts to identify these two witnesses. Some have suggested Moses and Elijah—two individuals in the Bible who were taken to heaven. Let’s look at what the angel says about these two witnesses and see if we can determine who or what they are.

- They prophesy for 1,260 days clothed in sackcloth.
- They are symbolized by two olive trees and two lampstands.
- They can destroy their enemies by fire that proceeds from their mouths.
- They can shut heaven so that no rain falls.
- They can turn water to blood and strike the earth with all kinds of plagues.

In Zechariah 4 the prophet saw two olive trees and on either side of a golden lampstand—the same imagery that we find here in Revelation 11. Zechariah is told that this represents “the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:14). The olive trees are feeding their oil into the lampstand so that it continues to burn and give light. We are reminded of what the psalmist wrote: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

They can prophesy and keep rain from falling for as long as they predict. They can turn water to blood and smite the earth with plagues. **Can the Word of God do those things? Elijah, by the word of God, predicted three years in which no rain would**

fall on Israel, and it happened just as he said. He prayed to God, and the rain returned after the false prophets of Baal failed to end the drought (1 Kings 17, 18). Moses, by the word of God, brought plagues of all kinds on the Egyptians, including turning water to blood, because Pharaoh refused to let God’s people go free (Exodus 7).

The Word of God says that those who resist His word and remain His enemies will die. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Those who seek to harm the Scriptures will be consumed by the fire that comes from their mouth. God says, “Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them” (Jeremiah 5:14). God’s Word pronounces judgment upon all those who reject it. His word is like fire in the mouth.

Who are these two witnesses? Based on the characteristics given in Revelation 11, we can identify them as God’s Word—the Old and New Testaments. Here is further evidence of this identification.

Jesus told the religious leaders of His day, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). The Greek word translated “testify” in this verse is μαρτυρεω (martureo). And the very same root word (μαρτυς) is used in Revelation 11:3 for the two witnesses. The two witnesses are the Scriptures that Jesus is talking about in John’s Gospel. They are the Old and New Testaments, communicating God’s light and truth to the world.

1,260 Days (42 Months)

These two witnesses, the Old and New Testaments, “will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth” (Revelation 11:3). This is the same time period as the forty-two months during which the Gentiles (those who oppose God’s truth) will tread the holy city underfoot (verse 2). For 1,260 years God’s Scriptural witnesses would be clothed in sackcloth as they spoke judgment against the Gentile world, against those who were treading down God’s truth. We’ve seen this period before in the seals and the trumpets. It is presented in several different ways in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

When was this period? It was during the Middle Ages, the centuries from roughly A.D. 538 to 1798. During this time the church apostatized into deep spiritual darkness. It united with the secular power to exercise its authority over men and women. It persecuted those who remained faithful to God and resisted its false doctrines.

During these 1,260 years the Word of God—His two witnesses—were clothed in sackcloth. They were kept from the people and chained in monasteries. Their truths were hidden under a vast pile of tradition and ritual. Even amidst this spiritual darkness, God’s Word was preserved. The two witnesses testified in sackcloth.

The Two Witnesses Are Killed

Revelation 11 continues to tell the story of these the two witnesses,

“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 (verses 7-10).

The two witnesses will witness for 1,260 years and at the end of that time the beast from the bottomless pit will overcome them and kill them.

Most Bible commentators place the beginning of the 1,260 days in A.D. 538. By that date the Roman Empire collapsed. Justinian, the pagan Roman emperor handed over civil and religious authority to Pope Vigilius II. The two witnesses testified for 1,260 years—or until 1798. In that year, the French General, Berthier, fighting for Napoleon, took the current pope captive and brought him back to France where he died. This ended the dominance of the Roman Church’s in the Middle Ages. The two witnesses had testified against the opponents of God all during the 1,260 years.

The beast that ascended from the bottomless pit made war against them and killed them. That beast is Satan who has the key to the bottomless pit, as we saw in chapter 9 of

Revelation. But Satan always works through his agents on earth. How would Satan, the beast from the bottomless pit, attack and kill the Bible, the Word of God around 1798 at the close of the 1,260 days?

Can you recall what significant event was taking place in world history at this time? The French Revolution began in 1789 and lasted for almost ten years. It was taking place right at the time that the 1,260 days of prophecy ended. The French Revolution was known for its repudiation of Christianity. Sir Walter Scott wrote the following referring to the atheistic stance taken by the leaders of the revolution:

“The world for the first time heard in an assembly of men, born and educated in civilization, in assuming the right to govern one of the finest of the European nations, uplift their voice to deny the most solemn truth which man so receives and renounce unanimously the belief and the worship of a deity.” (*Life of Napoleon*, vol. 1, chapter 17).

In the French Revolution the government officially established the Cult of Reason as a state-sponsored atheistic religion intended to replace Christianity. A Festival of Reason was held nationwide on November 10, 1793. Churches across France were turned into Temples of Reason, and a living woman was enthroned as the Goddess of Reason. Bibles were burned in the streets. God was declared to not exist, and death was pronounced to be an endless sleep. Satan worked through godless men to kill God’s two witnesses. Their influence was destroyed. Their power was destroyed in the atheism that reigned. The Bible says that their dead bodies would “lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified” (Revelation 11:8).

What city is spiritually like Sodom and Egypt?

Egypt enslaved God’s people and refused to let them go. Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go” (Exodus 5:2). When you think about Egypt, you think about a form of atheism that denies the true God. What about Sodom? What do we think of in connection with Sodom. Gross immorality. Perversion. In the French Revolution at the end of the 1790s, when the 1,260 years came to a close, God’s two witnesses—the Old and New Testaments—lay dead due to the atheism and immorality that ran rampant as normal

restraints were loosed in revolution and bloodshed. In the French Revolution a power arose that, like Egypt, said, “I don’t know the Lord.” A power arose that, like Sodom, glorified immorality.

Revelation 11:9 says that the bodies of God’s two witnesses would lie unburied for three and a half days. The reign of terror in France lasted exactly three and a half years. It began January 21, 1793, and it ended on June 10, 1796 exactly three and a half years later. The Bible is accurate in its predictions.

Today, we are still reaping the results in a secular, materialistic, godless, atheistic, sex-centered, morally twisted society. Any time the influence of God’s Word is destroyed society will descend into social and moral chaos.

The Two Witnesses Resurrected

The two witnesses lay dead in the streets. However, the prophecy went on to say, “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” (Revelation 11:11).

God’s Word would come to life. There would be a mighty revival. Great fear would fall on those who saw God’s Word once more become the living power of God unto salvation.

Why does this amazing transformation take place? What caused God’s Word to come to life? Remember the angel’s words to God’s people at the end of Revelation 10—“You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings” (Revelation 6:11). Following their bitter disappointment when Jesus didn’t come, the Advent Movement discovered its error. It lifted God’s Word on high and went forth to the whole world with a message of God’s grace and a soon-coming Savior. The living Word of God is still alive today, and it is still speaking to human hearts.

The Seventh Trumpet—Judgment on All Humanity

Revelation 10:7 previews the sounding of the seventh trumpet in these words: “In the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished.” The “mystery of God” is the gospel message of salvation in Jesus (Colossians 1:27). God’s work of salvation is finished in the time of the seventh trumpet.

The great controversy comes to a close. God's grace and salvation triumph over evil, and sin is eradicated from the universe.

Notice the specific items that are listed in Revelation 11:15-19 as taking place when the seventh trumpet sounds:

- The kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of God and Jesus (verse 15).
- God reigns forever (verse 15).
- The dead are judged (verse 18).
- God rewards His people who serve Him (verse 18).
- God destroys those who destroy the earth (verse 18).
- The temple of God is opened in heaven (verse 19).
- There are cataclysmic eruptions of nature on earth—earthquakes and hail and lightning (verse 19).

This is a picture of the end of time and of the events that take place in connection with the return of Jesus. Judgment is pronounced on all humanity. Some are judged righteous, because they have accepted Jesus' robe of righteousness to cover their sins. Others are judged to be unrighteous, because they have refused to accept that robe. Jesus said, "The angel told Daniel, "Those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2).

When the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, the mystery of God is finished! Christ returns and the nightmare of sin is forever ended.