

# The Two Witnesses

## Revelation 11

### The Two Witnesses

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, 2 but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. 3 And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 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 would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. 6 They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may 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 kind of plague, as often as they desire. 7 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, 8 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. 9 For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, 10 and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. 11 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13 And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

### The Seventh Trumpet

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” 16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying,

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,  
who is and who was,  
for you have taken your great power  
and begun to reign.

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18 The nations raged,  
but your wrath came,  
and the time for the dead to be judged,  
and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints,  
and those who fear your name,  
both small and great,  
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

## The Two Witnesses

This chapter gets us back into a part of Revelation where people have very different ideas about how the details of the chapter should be interpreted. Some people want to take the subject matter and say it refers to literal times, places, and individuals. Others are more comfortable making the subject matter symbolic of the church throughout the period of time between Christ's ascension and second coming.

This is where we have to be focused on keeping the point of Revelation as the point of our study, because it would be very easy to focus on debates about details that don't actually have any bearing on the point of the chapter.

In interpreting this passage, it is helpful to remember that Revelation is a book to the church about our role in the establishment of Christ's kingdom. God's plan for the world is not the re-establishment of an old order. His plan for this world is a new covenant with a new people who serve Jesus as king. Everything the church does in the world is to bear witness to the glory of God.

In interpreting Revelation, we must take care to recognize that this is a unique word through John to the church. It is therefore not entirely dependent on what was revealed to Israel through the Old Testament prophets. At the same time, when the imagery employed in Revelation 11 so closely echoes the imagery of Zechariah, we should make a note, even if the meaning of Revelation 11 differs from the meaning of Zechariah. The measuring of the temple has an echo of the man measuring the temple in Zechariah 2. The two witnesses echo the imagery in Zechariah 4. The powers possessed by the witnesses are reminiscent of the powers possessed by Moses and Elijah. Many commentators connect the reference of forty-two months and 1260 days to be one half of the seventieth week in Daniel.

I will be the first to admit that putting all of this together with everything recorded in the Old Testament is far above my paygrade. While there is nothing wrong with engaging in divine speculation, we need to first focus on the truths for the church that are made obvious in this passage.

God has miraculously preserved the church as his witness in every corner of the world. The Spirit of God is the secret to the church's perseverance through the most difficult suffering and assault on its faith. Even at times when persecution would seem to kill the church, it continually rises up as a faithful witness to Christ.

When Jesus said "the gates of hell cannot prevail" against the church he really meant it! There will come a time when the church seems to be dead. Rest assured that the death of the church is but an illusion.

## Discussion Questions

- What clues in Revelation 11:1-14 and other passages would lead you to identify the temple and the two witnesses with the church?
- Why is the church known for its witness?
- Where do the witnesses get their authority?
- Why do you think that God protects his witnesses through part of the time and not through other the other times?
- Why does the world hate the witnesses?
- Can the church ever be defeated? Why or why not?
- What aspects of the kingdom of God is the seventh trumpet pointing us toward?
- Is it comforting to you that God's wrath will fall on His enemies?