

The Book Of Revelation Study 52

Revelation 11:3-14 (NKJV)

³ *And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."*

⁴ *These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.*

⁵ *And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner.*

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.*

⁷ *When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.*

⁸ *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.*

⁹ *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.*

¹⁰ *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.*

¹¹ *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.*

¹² *And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them.*

¹³ *In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

¹⁴ *The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.*

The connection between this vision of the two preachers and the previous passage (v1-2) should be clear. They are among God's unique witnesses who will proclaim His message of judgment during the final stages of the Gentile trampling on Jerusalem and will preach the gospel so that the Jewish remnant can believe and enjoy God's protection.

Seven features of the lives and ministry of these two remarkable and powerful preachers unfold in the text:

1. **Their duty,**
2. **Their attitude,**
3. **Their identity,**
4. **Their power,**
5. **Their death,**
6. **Their resurrection,**
7. **Their impact.**

THEIR DUTY

Revelation 11:3a (NKJV)

³ *And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days"*

Once again, the speaker who **will grant authority to the two witnesses** is not identified, but it could be only God the Father, or the Lord Jesus Christ.

Witnesses is the plural form of *martus*, from which the English word *martyr* derives, since so many witnesses of Jesus Christ in the early church paid with their lives.

Since it is always used in the New Testament to refer to persons, the two witnesses must be actual people, not movements, as some commentators have held.

There are **two witnesses** because the Bible requires the testimony of two people to confirm a fact or verify truth.

Deuteronomy 17:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.

Deuteronomy 19:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

Matthew 18:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'

It will be their responsibility to **prophecy**.

Prophecy in the New Testament does not necessarily refer to predicting the future. Its primary meaning is **“to speak forth, to proclaim, or to preach”**

The two witnesses will proclaim to the world that the disasters occurring during the last half of the Tribulation are the judgments of God.

They will warn that God’s final outpouring of judgment and eternal hell will follow.

At the same time they will preach the gospel, calling people to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The period of their ministry is **twelve hundred and sixty days**, the last three and one-half years of the Tribulation, when Antichrist’s forces oppress the city of Jerusalem (**v2**) and many Jews are sheltered in the wilderness;

Revelation 12:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

THEIR ATTITUDE

Revelation 11:3b (NKJV)

“clothed in sackcloth.”

Sackcloth was rough, heavy, coarse cloth worn in ancient times as a symbol of mourning, distress, grief, and humility.

Jacob put on sackcloth when he thought Joseph had been killed; when his brothers came with the tunic of many colors;

Genesis 37:33-34 (NKJV)

³³ *And he recognized it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces."*

³⁴ *Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days.*

David ordered the people to wear sackcloth after the murder of Abner:

2 Samuel 3:31 (NKJV)

³¹ *Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "Tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner."*

The two witnesses will put on sackcloth as an object lesson to express their great sorrow for the wretched and unbelieving world, racked by God's judgments, overrun by demon hordes, and populated by wicked, sinful people who refuse to repent.

They will also mourn because of the desecration of the temple, the oppression of Jerusalem, and the ascendancy of Antichrist.

THEIR IDENTITY

Revelation 11:4 (NKJV)

⁴ *These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.*

The question of who the two witnesses will be has intrigued Bible scholars over the years, and numerous possibilities have been suggested.

John identifies them merely as **the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.**

That enigmatic description is drawn from:

Zechariah 4:1-14 (NKJV)

¹ *Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep.*

² *And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps.*

³ *Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left."*

⁴ *So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?"*

⁵ *Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."*

⁶ *So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts.*

⁷ *'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" ' "*

⁸ *Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying:*

⁹ *"The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you.*

¹⁰ *For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the Lord, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth."*

¹¹ *Then I answered and said to him, "What are these two olive trees--at the right of the lampstand and at its left?"*

¹² *And I further answered and said to him, "What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?"*

¹³ *Then he answered me and said, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."*

¹⁴ *So he said, "These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth."*

Zechariah's vision had both a near and a far fulfillment.

The historical fulfillment was the rebuilding of the post-exilic temple by Joshua the high priest (*Zech 3:1-10*), the religious leader and Zerubbabel, the political leader.

But Zechariah's prophecy also looks forward to the restoration of Israel in the Millennium (*Zech 3:8-10*).

The **olive trees** and **lampstands** symbolize the light of revival, since olive oil was commonly used in lamps. The connecting of the lamps to the trees is intended to depict a constant, spontaneous, automatic supply of oil flowing from the olive trees in to the lamps.

This symbolizes the truth that God will not bring Salvation blessing from human power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit;

Zechariah 4:6 (NKJV)

⁶ *So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts.*

Like Joshua and Zerubbabel, the two witnesses will lead a spiritual revival of Israel culminating in the building of a temple.

Their preaching will be instrumental in Israel's national conversion and the temple associated with that conversion will be the millennial temple.

While it is impossible to be dogmatic about the specific identity of these two preachers, there are a number of reasons that suggest that they may be Moses and Elijah.

First the miracles they will perform (destroying their enemies with fire, withholding rain, turning water into blood, and striking the earth with plagues) are similar to the judgments inflicted in the Old Testament by Moses and Elijah for the purpose of stimulating repentance.

Elijah called down fire from heaven;

2 Kings 1:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ *So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.*

2 Kings 1:12 (NKJV)

¹² *So Elijah answered and said to them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.*

He also pronounced a three-and-one-half-year drought on the land;

1 Kings 17:1 (NKJV)

¹ *And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."*

James 5:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

This is the same length as the drought brought by the two witnesses

Revelation 11:6 (NKJV)

⁶ These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy;

Moses turned the waters of the Nile into blood and announced the other plagues on Egypt recorded in *Exodus chapters 7-11*.

Second, both the Old Testament and Jewish tradition expected Moses and Elijah to return in the future.

Malachi predicted the return of Elijah in the future;

Malachi 4:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

And the Jews believed that God's promise to raise up a prophet like Moses necessitated his return.

Deuteronomy 18:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear,

Deuteronomy 18:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

Third, both Moses and Elijah (perhaps representing the Law and the Prophets) appeared with Christ at the Transfiguration, the preview of the Second Coming;

Matthew 17:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves;

² and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

³ And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Fourth, both left the earth in unusual ways. Elijah never died, but was transported to heaven in a fiery chariot.

2 Kings 2:11-12 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

¹² And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces.

And God supernaturally buried Moses' body in a secret location.

Deuteronomy 34:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.

⁶ And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day.

Since the text does not specifically identify these two preachers, the view we have just spoken of, like all other views regarding their identity, must remain speculation.

Next study we will talk about their:

1. **power**
2. **death**
3. **resurrection**
4. **impact**