

The Two Witnesses

Revelation 11:3-14

Introduction:

I. The ministry of the two witnesses.

A. The source of the power of their ministry

The authority and the power of the two witnesses comes from God.

Revelation 11:3 (ESV) And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

B. The nature of their ministry.

The ministry of the two witnesses is one of preaching.

Revelation 11:3 (ESV) And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

C. The duration of their ministry,

1. The ministry of the two witnesses covers a period of 1260 days which equals a period of 42 months each consisting of 30 days or a total of 3 ½ years.

Revelation 11:3 (ESV) And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

2. There may be significance in the reference to this period in terms of days and not months. Elsewhere there is prophetic reference to 42 months.

Revelation 11:2 (ESV) 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. If there is significance in a reference to days as opposed to months, it might be to emphasize the brevity of time or the consistency of their ministry.

D. The attire in which they are dressed for their ministry.

Revelation 11:3 (ESV) And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

The sackcloth represents that they are pronouncing a message of judgement and a need for repentance.

Jonah 3:5 (ESV) And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

Jonah 3:6 (ESV) The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

Jonah 3:7 (ESV) And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water,

Jonah 3:8 (ESV) but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

Daniel 9:3 (ESV) Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

Dan 9:3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

II. The power of the two witnesses to call down fire upon their enemies.

A. The power of the two witnesses to call down fire upon their enemies serves as divine protection for the two witnesses.

Revelation 11:5 (ESV) 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.

Rev 11:5 And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed.

1. The fire pouring from their mouth, most likely is not like that of a fire breathing dragon, but rather a metaphor as coming as a result of their command.
2. This would be similar to Rev. 19:21 where the sword is the word of God.

Revelation 19:21 (ESV) And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

B. There is a similarity here between the ministry of Elijah and that of the two witnesses that provides a basis for understanding.

1. Elijah called down fire upon his enemies as a means of protection against his enemies.
2. The need for protection was due to the unwelcomed message of Elijah to king Ahaziah.

2 Kings 1:4 (ESV) Now therefore thus says the LORD, You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.' ” So Elijah went.

3. Elijah was protected by calling down fire from heaven.

2 Kings 1:9 (ESV) Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty men with his fifty. He went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, “O man of God, the king says, ‘Come down.’ ”

2 Kings 1:10 (ESV) But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.” Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

2 Kings 1:11 (ESV) Again the king sent to him another captain of fifty men with his fifty. And he answered and said to him, “O man of God, this is the king’s order, ‘Come down quickly!’ ”

2 Kings 1:12 (ESV) But Elijah answered them, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.” Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

2 Kings 1:13 (ESV) Again the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up and came and fell on his knees before Elijah and entreated him, "O man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours, be precious in your sight.

2 Kings 1:14 (ESV) Behold, fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of fifty men with their fifties, but now let my life be precious in your sight."

2 Kings 1:15 (ESV) Then the angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So he arose and went down with him to the king

C. The calling down fire upon their enemies serves as a divine judgement against the enemies of the two witnesses.

1. Jesus did not permit his disciples to call down fire from heaven upon their enemies for He did not come to judge but to save. It was not time for Jesus to judge the world.

Luke 9:53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.

Luke 9:54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

Luke 9:55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

Luke 9:56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

2. During the tribulation the time is not for God to save but to destroy. This is the time of judgement.

Revelation 11:5 (ESV) 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.

It is not a time of personal vengeance but rather God's retribution.

III. The signs and protection that are given to accompany the prophesy of the two witnesses.

A. They have power to withhold rain from the earth

Revelation 11:6 (ESV) 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.

1. Here again is another similarity with the ministry of Elijah.

James 5:17 (ESV) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

2. There is the similarity in the type of judgement - namely withholding rain.

James 5:17 (ESV) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

3. There is the similarity in the length of judgement - namely 3 ½ years.

James 5:17 (ESV) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

- B. They have power over the water to turn it into blood.

Revelation 11:6 (ESV) 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.

Here is a similarity with the ministry of Moses.

- C. They have power to smite the earth with plagues as often as they desire.

Revelation 11:6 (ESV) 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.

- IV. The apparent success of the beast against the two witnesses.

- A. The beast can have no power over the witnesses until they have completed their task demonstrating that God is still in control.

Revelation 11:7 (ESV) 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,

- B. The beast comes out of his abode for a three-fold purpose.

Revelation 11:7 (ESV) 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,

1. The beast comes out of his abode to war against the two witnesses.

Revelation 11:7 (ESV) 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,

The beast enters into a conflict with the two witnesses.

2. The beast comes out of his abode to overcome the two witnesses.

Revelation 11:7 (ESV) 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,

The idea is to render them powerless and to invalidate their witness.

Here too there is a similarity with the book of Exodus in which the magicians of Pharaoh's court were able to turn their rods into snakes as well.

3. The beast comes out of his abode to kill the two witnesses.

Revelation 11:7 (ESV) 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,

The beast will not stop at discrediting the two witnesses. He wants them dead.

C. The beast will appear to be victorious over the two witnesses.

1. The beast will not be consumed with fire from heaven as were the other opponents of the two witnesses.
2. The beast will kill the two witnesses.
Revelation 11:7 (ESV) 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,

V. The wicked will rejoice over the death of the two witnesses.

A. Their dead bodies will lie in the middle of the streets of a wicked Jerusalem.

Revelation 11:8 (ESV) 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.

1. The city is indeed Jerusalem for it is the city where Christ was slain

Revelation 11:8 (ESV) 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.

2. It is a wicked city for it is personified as Sodom and Egypt.

Revelation 11:8 (ESV) 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.

Again the reference to Egypt goes right along with the parallel with the plagues of the tribulation and those that came upon Egypt.

3. God used this same personification in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 1:1 (ESV) The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Isaiah 1:10 (ESV) Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

- B. The dead bodies will be prevented from being buried.

Revelation 11:9 (ESV) 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.

It was customary to dishonor a body by refusing it a proper burial.

Genesis 40:19 (ESV) In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you.”

2 Kings 9:10 (ESV) And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her.” Then he opened the door and fled.

- C. The dead bodies of the two witnesses become a spectacle for all the world to see.

Revelation 11:9 (ESV) 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,

1. The wicked rejoice for they see themselves out from under God's judgement. They perceive themselves as having won.

Revelation 11:10 (ESV) 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.

2. The rejoicing of the wicked will turn to great fear.

Revelation 11:11 (ESV) 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.

- D. The ministry of prophecy has now ended.

1. God calls the witnesses home.

Revelation 11:12 (ESV) 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.

- a. The phrase “loud voice” occurs 24 times in the book of Revelation.
 - b. It is a loud voice drawing attention to its action.
2. The enemies of the witnesses see the witnesses depart into heaven.

Revelation 11:12 (ESV) 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.

3. Then there was a great earthquake which is a foreshadow of judgment.

Revelation 11:13 (ESV) 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.

Matthew 27:50 (ESV) And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

Matthew 27:51 (ESV) And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

- E. The enemies of the witnesses then give glory to God.

Revelation 11:13 (ESV) 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.

- 1. There are questions as to whether those who glorified God were actually converted or not.
- 2. One might liken this to the conversion of the centurion after witnessing the phenomena surrounding Jesus’ death.

Matthew 27:54 (ESV) When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

3. The informing theology of the mixed multitude that accompanied the Israelites out of the land of Egypt is very helpful at this point. In that informing theology we find that there were a mixed multitude of regenerate and unregenerate who gave glory to God and accompanied the Israelites on their journey.

Exodus 12:37 (ESV) And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.

Exodus 12:38 (ESV) A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.

- a. The “mixed multitude” that accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt consisted of two groups of Egyptians and other foreigners.

- (1) The regenerate.

Exodus 9:18 (ESV) Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.

Exodus 9:19 (ESV) Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.” ’ ”

Exodus 9:20 (ESV) Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses,

- (2) The unregenerate.

Numbers 11:1 (ESV) And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, and when the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp.

Numbers 11:4 (ESV) Now **the rabble** that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat!

Note the rabble are distinguished from the people of Israel.

- b. God intended that the plagues be a witness to the Egyptians and the entire world of the majesty and power of God.

Exodus 7:5 (ESV) The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.”

Exodus 9:15 (ESV) For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth.

Exodus 9:16 (ESV) But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

- c. Therefore, those who give glory to God after the death of the two witnesses might be comprised of both regenerate and unregenerate.
- d. This same informing theology might provide us with insight concerning the unregenerate during the millennial kingdom.

VI. The identification of the two witnesses.

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

- A. The two witnesses are identified with the prophecy of Zechariah.

Zechariah 4:12 (ESV) And a second time I answered and said to him, “What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?”

Zechariah 4:13 (ESV) He said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.”

Zechariah 4:14 (ESV) Then he said, “These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”

- B. The two witnesses are two individuals as opposed to the church and Israel.

1. There is an "article" in front of witnesses making them specific or definite witnesses.
2. The individuals are attired.
3. These individuals are killed and restored to life.

Revelation 11:11 (ESV) 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.

4. The fear that comes upon the wicked is due to their seeing the two witnesses stand upon their feet.

Revelation 11:11 (ESV) 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.

It is hard to explain how a spiritual revitalization of the church could be so dramatic and instantaneous as visible throughout the world.

5. The ascension of these two witnesses is observed by the wicked.

Revelation 11:12 (ESV) 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.

6. There is historical precedent for a literal physical ministry of the two witnesses in the personages of Elijah and Moses.

The ministries of Moses and Elijah took place as representative judgement of a later and still more severe judgement.

C. The two witnesses are not identified by name.

1. There are great similarities in the ministries of Moses and Elijah.
2. That is not to say, that these two witnesses are necessarily Moses and Elijah.
3. There is an interesting discussion concerning this passage and Malachi 4:5-6

Malachi 4:5 (ESV) “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

Malachi 4:6 (ESV) And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

4. If these individuals were Moses and Elijah then there is real question, “How could they die?”

VII. Conclusion:

