

The People of the Apocalypse
“The Two Witnesses”

The two man team described in Revelation 11:3-14 could accurately be called the mightiest prophets ever sent to the people of God. However, the first text describing them reveals their simple and most compelling title:

“And, I will give power unto My two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days clothed in sackcloth.” (Revelation 11:3)

The word translated witnesses is used in the New Testament over seventy times with the Apostle John’s writings containing more than half of these occurrences. It is the same word the Lord Jesus Christ used in His farewell commission to those gathered at His ascension:

“But ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is, come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

These two witnesses will in fact witness of the Lord Jesus Christ *“unto the uttermost part of the earth”* as this passage eventually reveals, but, this first title given them indicates that any faithful witness can be used of God to perform the mightiest of deeds as evidenced in the two witnesses ministry.

This verse tells us who they are, what they will be doing, when they will accomplish their ministry, and what type of ministry they will have:

1. They are: *“My two witnesses”* or God’s personal witnesses
2. They will prophesy
3. They will prophesy for 1260 days or 3-1/2 years which is the last half of Daniel’s 70th Week
4. They will prophesy of judgment indicated by their attire and the description of their activities

That they are God’s personal witnesses is also indicated in the next verse:

“These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.” (Revelation 11:4)

But before their personal position before God is given, their next title as *“The two olive trees”* reveals that these two witnesses also are spoken of previously in the book of Zechariah:

“And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.” (Zechariah 4:1-3)

This vision given to the prophet Zechariah was intended to supply him with encouragement concerning his work of rebuilding the temple after the Jews returned from captivity in Babylon. The vision reveals that God’s Spirit would provide the necessary power to accomplish this immense task as the angel explained utilizing the now oft quoted verse:

“Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit says the Lord of hosts.” (Zechariah 4:6)

But Zechariah wanted to know exactly what *“the two olive trees”* were as he repeatedly asked the angel:

“What are these, my lord? (Zechariah 4:4)...What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? (Zechariah 4:11)...What be these two olive branches [clusters: NASB] which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?” (Zechariah 4:12).

His repeated and expanding inquiries end up providing more descriptive information identifying them as God’s *“two olive trees...the two witnesses”* of Revelation 11.

It appears that Zechariah understood what the candlestick with its bowl, seven lamps and seven pipes was, but, he

did not immediately comprehend the meaning of the “*two olive trees*” causing him to continue looking, seeing every single detail.

Then, after remaining silent until Zechariah completes his thorough examination, the angel responds:

“*And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.*” (Zechariah 4:13, 14)

Three parallels emerge in both Zechariah 4 and Revelation 11:

1. They are called “the two olive trees” (Zechariah 4:3, 11, 12; Revelation 11:4)
2. They are given the power of the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:14; Revelation 11:3)
3. They are standing in the presence of God (Zechariah 4:14; Revelation 11:4)

In all these two men are given five different titles:

1. The Two Olive Trees (Zechariah 4:3, 11, 12; Romans 11:11-27; Revelation 11:4)[Israel Connection]
2. The Two Anointed Ones (Zechariah 4:14) [Instruments of the Holy Spirit]
3. The Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:3) [Instruments of Testimony]
4. The Two Candlesticks (Revelation 11:3) [Illuminators of Truth]
5. The Two Prophets (Revelation 11:10) [Instruments of Judgment]

Although much of the information given in Zechariah’s vision is symbolic in nature, there is enough there to tie the Revelation 11 account of “*the two witnesses*” to Zechariah 4 by examining and discerning the intent of the symbolic language without destroying the unity of the passage.

Paul also uses this symbolic term “*olive tree*” to describe the Israelites when discussing their fall and how it was through their fall that the Gentiles “*the wild olive tree*” was grafted into “*the olive tree*” receiving the salvation blessing of Israel as a direct result! (Romans 11:11-27)

This title used repeatedly in Zechariah and again in Revelation is the Israel Connection indicating that these “*two witnesses*” will definitely be in the same mold as the Hebrew prophets of old. It is evident that the focus here is “*the two olive trees*” for the angel deliberately omitted giving any information about them to Zechariah in his initial interpretation.

He only covered the candlestick and it’s features at the first, causing Zechariah’s persistent questions concerning “*the two olive trees*” to eventually provide more detail. The third time his question includes three more facts concerning them:

1. They are called two olive branches of clusters showing their productivity
2. They are beside the golden pipes
3. They empty the golden oil from themselves through the golden pipes

They are emptying themselves of “*the golden oil*” which symbolizes their “*spending and being spent*” (II Corinthians 12:15) by the Holy Spirit for the kingdom of God, becoming the source and supply for the illumination of the candlestick which is a symbol for the illuminating word of God:

“*Thy word is a lamp [candle] unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*” (Psalm 119:105)

The two witnesses, after giving themselves totally to their Lord during their 3-1/2 year ministry, will eventually empty themselves completely becoming the most heralded martyrs of the time of the end as the remainder of this passage reveals. (Revelation 11:7-14)

In Revelation 11:3 the Lord “*gives power*” to these two with the word “*power*” supplied by the translators not appearing in the original text. In essence, the Lord gives to these two an immeasurable amount of His Holy Spirit

which they pour out of themselves for His glory:

“How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” (Luke 11:13)

They are accurately identified as *“the two anointed [by the Holy Spirit] ones”* literally meaning *“The sons of fresh oil”* or as the Septuagint has in the margin *“The sons of fatness”*. And, these *“two anointed ones”* also *“stand by the Lord of the whole earth”* (Zechariah 4:14) corresponding to the *“two witnesses...standing before the God of the earth.”* (Revelation 11:3, 4)

This last designation, *“the two anointed ones”* meaning *“The sons of fresh oil/fatness”* gives rise to an additional possibility concerning these two men. The Apostle John and his brother James were called *“The sons of thunder”* (Mark 3:17) by the Lord Jesus Christ and worked together as a two-brother team.

And, it has been the practice of the Lord to use two-brother teams in the past also including Moses and Aaron and Peter and Andrew. James and Jude who were the Lord Jesus’ own half-brothers, while not necessarily seen together as a team, they were used mightily during the same time period, in the early church at Jerusalem with both eventually writing inspired letters in the New Testament.

Therefore, it could well be that the Lord will again call two brothers (*“For blood is thicker than water”*) to fulfill these most intense and trying end of the age positions as His two inseparable prophets of judgment during a time when the world as a whole will be fully set against them for it’s inhabitants will be suffering under the mighty judgments of God!

The following patterns support this theory showing that other events connected to the Day of the Lord plagues/judgments have similarities and parallels to the time God sent plagues/judgments upon Pharaoh and the land of Egypt:

1. Then, God called His first two-brother team, Moses and Aaron, as His prophets of judgment, similar to these two end of the age prophets of judgment
2. Then, He provided safe haven for His people in the land of Goshen and He will also provide a similar haven to *“the woman”* which represents faithful Israel of Revelation 12
3. The judgments/plagues themselves also have definite similarities as the actions of these two witnesses have power to bring judgment similar to those which occurred during the plagues in Egypt:
“These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues as often as they will.” (Revelation 11:6)

The water was turned to blood, (Exodus 7:14-25) and Moses and Aaron were used to bring other plagues upon Egypt during their mighty ministry of judgment (Exodus 7-11).

However, these *“two witnesses”* eventually are brought to a seemingly gruesome end:

“And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.”
(Revelation 11:7-10)

Notice, their work on earth is complete, the Antichrist personally makes war against them, and overcomes them, implying that it was necessary for the Antichrist to personally formulate a military plan and focus his own efforts upon eliminating these two prophets for they were definitely not brought to their end easily.

Although they do suffer their deaths at his hand, in the process they receive great reward from the Lord for they will be the most heralded end of the age martyrs, putting themselves in the place of enduring violent persecution throughout their 3-1/2 ministry. Their deaths as martyrs for the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternally shining capstone of their selfless and sacrificial ministry for their Lord.

After their martyrdom a worldwide party atmosphere breaks out including the almost unthinkable “*sending of gifts*” as though the most celebrated event of that time has taken place! (Revelation 11:10) But, as the Scripture records, God always has the last word and He is definitely not finished with His two witnesses just yet!

“And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither, And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.” (Revelation 11:11,12)

The Lord miraculously resurrects His servants and “*Great fear fell upon them which saw them*” indicating the world will also witness the climactic ending of this supernatural event with the natural response of great fear, for they, in essence, have taken part by showing their approval of the deaths of these two servants of God demonstrated by their grandiose worldwide celebration during the previous 3-1/2 days.

“And the same hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant [remainder] were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.” (Revelation 11:13)

The Lord concludes this most significant end of the age episode of martyrdom by sending an earthquake which destroys a tenth of the city of Jerusalem resulting in the deaths of seven thousand. The word translated “*remnant*” literally means rest or remainder indicating that those who were not killed “*were affrighted*”, or terrified being thrown into a state of great fear.

They obviously recognized exactly Who was the source of these supernatural events as they ascribe glory to God. Therefore, in the plan and control of God, the deaths of these two are used to bring together His purposes, for even in their closing scene upon earth they will be extremely effective in bringing great glory to God!

Additionally, the ministry of these two “*People of the Apocalypse*” takes on a much greater Biblical significance when these twelve parallels to the Lord Jesus Christ’s ministry are evaluated:

1. They will be anointed by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18; Zechariah 4:14)
2. They will proclaim judgment to God’s enemies (Matthew 23; Revelation 11:5,6)
3. They will minister on earth 3-1/2 years (Length of the Lord’s (4) Gospels ministry; Revelation 11:3)
4. They will complete their work on earth (John 17:4; Revelation 11:7)
5. They will die at the hands of their enemies (Matthew 27:19-53; Revelation 11:7)
6. They will die in Jerusalem (Revelation 11:8)
7. They will remain dead for similar time period (Matthew 16:21; Revelation 11:11)
8. They will be miraculously resurrected (Matthew 28:1-20; Revelation 11:11, 12)
9. Their resurrection will be accompanied by a great earthquake (Matthew 28:2; Revelation 11:13)
10. Their resurrection/ascension will be witnessed by many (Acts 1:1-4, I Corinthians 15:6; Revelation 11:11-13)
11. They will ascend to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:8; Revelation 11:12)
12. They will bring great glory to God (John 17:1, 4, 5; Revelation 11:13)

