

Bible Study: Rev 11:1-14 The Two Witnesses

Author: John

Audience: the seven churches of Asia Minor

Date: approximately 95 A.D.

Location: Patmos

Theme: the revelation of Jesus Christ; things which must soon take place

Genre: prophecy/apocalyptic

Outline

The measurement of the temple (11:1-2)

The ministry of the two witnesses (11:3-6)

The death of the two witnesses (11:7-10)

The resurrection of the two witnesses (11:11-14)

Observation

John must measure the temple, altar and worshippers, but not the outer court

The Gentiles will trample the holy city for 42 months (i.e., 1260 days, 3.5 years)

The two witnesses will prophesy for 1260 days (i.e., 42 months, 3.5 years)

They are the two olive trees, the two lampstands before the Lord of the earth

They cannot be stopped or killed; divine power destroys their enemies

They can smite the earth with any kind of plague whenever they desire (latitude)

After 42 months, the beast will finally kill them

Their dead bodies will lie in a Jerusalem street

The nations will watch their dead bodies for 3.5 days, withhold burial

The nations will rejoice because the 2 witnesses tormented them

After 3.5 days, God will resurrect them; they ascend into the clouds

A great earthquake destroys 1/10 of the city (Jerusalem), 7000 die

The second woe is now past, the third woe comes quickly

Interpretation

1. Why was John told to measure the temple and the worshippers?

In Rev 10, John eats a scroll very similar to Ezek 2:9–3:4. Next, he measures the worshippers in the temple; this is reminiscent of Ezekiel 9 where the righteous are marked for deliverance and the wicked are destroyed. Measurement is associated with judgment and spiritual assessment in various Scriptures (cf. Ezek 40-41, Dan 5:25-31, Amos 7:7-9, Zech 2:1-3, Rev 21:15-17).

“John’s measurement of the temple is a symbolic action. To measure something means to claim it for yourself. When we sold our house in Chicago, the new owners brought in an architect to measure various areas and recommend possible changes. Had the architect shown up previous to the buyers’ commitment, we would have thrown him out.”¹

2. What is the significance of the 42 months?

The beast will have power for 42 months (Dan 7:25, 9:27, Rev 13:5); the 2 witnesses appear to start at the same time and end right before the third woe, the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:14-15).

¹Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Re 10:1.

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Dan 7:25 'He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

Dan 9: 27 "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

Re 13:5 There was given to him [the beast] a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.

3. What is the connection between the 2 witnesses, the 2 olive trees & the 2 lampstands?

In Zech 4:2-14, two olive trees symbolized 2 anointed leaders among God's people who were empowered by the Holy Spirit; the olive oil coming from the two trees appears to symbolize the Holy Spirit (e.g., 1Sam 10:1, 6). A lampstand often symbolized a human instrument that God uses to radiate His truth to others (e.g., Mt 5:14, Rev 1:20)

4. Who are the two witnesses?

The text does not say, but some speculate that they might be Moses and Elijah because fire devours their enemies and they can shut up the sky or turn water into blood (cf. 2Kings 1:10, 1Kings 17:1, Ex 7:17). Elijah is predicted to come again (cf. Mal 4:5-6, Mt 17:1-13).

2Kings 1:10 Elijah replied to 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.

1Kings 17:1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

Ex 7:17 'Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood.

Mal 4:5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

Mal 4:6 "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

Application

An example to follow: the two witnesses

- Would you be willing to trade your Fruit-of-the-Loom for a burlap loincloth?
- Would you be willing to exercise divine power without abusing it?
- Would you be willing to stand against the whole world to do God's work?
- Would you be willing to volunteer for this job knowing it's a suicide mission?

If you are Christian, you've already given God your answer!

As Christians, we are called to a life of self-sacrifice and earnest, prevailing prayer

As Christians, we are called to witness to others in our own place and in our own time

As Christians, we are called to lay down our lives for the sake of the Great Commission