

THE TWO WITNESSES

Revelation 11:3-14

Throughout history various men have sought to rule the world. None succeeded.

In the Tribulation a man will succeed.

How will this come about?

The Scriptures reveal that...

2 Thessalonians 2:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ *The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,*

Antichrist will achieve world dominion. He will be energized and enabled by Satan. Citizens of the Tribulation who have no commitment to truth will fall prey to his deceptions.

Chief among his deceptions will be his resurrection from the dead.

The Antichrist will be part of a counterfeit trinity consisting of himself, Satan and the False Prophet. Mimicking Jesus' death and resurrection, Antichrist will be killed and will rise from the dead. Three times this counterfeit resurrection is mentioned in Revelation 13.

Revelation 13:1-4, 11-14 (ESV)

¹ *And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ² And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. ³ **One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed,** and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. ⁴ And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"*

¹¹ *Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.*

¹² *It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, **whose mortal wound was healed.** ¹³ It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, ¹⁴ and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that **was wounded by the sword and yet lived.***

When will the death and resurrection of the Antichrist take place?

Our study of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11 enables us to identify when on the Tribulation timeline Antichrist will die and be resurrected.

First, Revelation 11:3 reveals the Two Witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days (3 ½ years).

Revelation 11:3 (ESV)

³ *And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."*

The Two Witnesses will prophesy during the first half of the Tribulation. When their days are fulfilled, at the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation, God will allow the Antichrist to kill the Two Witnesses. As we read Revelation 11:7 note that the Antichrist is *the beast that rises from the bottomless pit*.

Revelation 11:7 (ESV)

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,*

His death and resurrection must take place before he kills the Two Witnesses midway through the Tribulation.

Rising from the bottomless pit is a reference to Antichrist's resurrection. The bottomless pit (Abyss) is the place of temporary confinement for fallen angels in the underworld. After his death, the soul of Antichrist will go to the bottomless pit and at his resurrection return from the bottomless pit and be reunited to his body. Though the text does not state it, I speculate the Antichrist will rise three days after his death mimicking in detail the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, the true Christ.

From Revelation 11:7 we discover that the death and resurrection of Antichrist will take place during the first half of the Tribulation prior to the midpoint. Antichrist's resurrection coupled with his defeat of the Two Witnesses will create a powerful deception because of which many will subjugate themselves to him.

It is by these means Antichrist will come to dominate the world during the second half of the Tribulation.

Let's return our attention to Revelation 11 and the ministry of the Two Witnesses.

The Two Witnesses will be so hated by the unbelieving population of the Tribulation that their murders by the Antichrist will result in a worldwide celebration. Let's review what we've learned thus far about the Two Witnesses and then complete our study of their ministry.

THE TWO WITNESSES (11:3-13)

The Two Witnesses Will Prophecy During the First Half of the Tribulation (11:3)

As we read previously the Two Witnesses will prophecy for 1,260 days which is equivalent to 3 ½ years.

Revelation 11:3 (ESV)

³ *And I will grant authority to my Two Witnesses, and they will prophecy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."*

Their ministry is ended by the Antichrist and not the second coming of Christ (which will end the second half of the Tribulation). Therefore we know the Two Witnesses will prophecy throughout the first-half of the Tribulation.

The Two Witnesses Will Be Messianic Jews Empowered By the Holy Spirit (11:4)

Revelation 11:4 (ESV)

⁴ *These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.*

Though some teach this, the Two Witnesses will not be Moses or Elijah or Enoch. Rather, they will be Messianic Jewish men saved some time before the Tribulation. The reference to the two olive trees and the two lampstands is a reference to a vision recorded in Zechariah 4. The vision given the Old Testament prophet Zechariah was for the purpose of encouraging Zerubbabel and Joshua. Zerubbabel and Joshua were responsible to lead the Jewish returnees in building the second Jewish Temple in 520 B.C. The task was overwhelming. God assured Joshua and Zerubbabel He would supply them with an inexhaustible supply of the Holy Spirit's power by Whom they would complete their task of building the Temple.

The Two Witnesses are not Zerubbabel and Joshua. Rather, *just as* God empowered Zerubbabel and Joshua through the Holy Spirit to complete an overwhelming task, *so also* God will empower the Two Witnesses through the Holy Spirit to fulfill their ministry against overwhelming worldwide opposition.

The Two Witnesses Will Witness Against Israel and Against Antichrist (11:3)

Observe verse 3 closely.

Revelation 11:3 (ESV)

³ *And I will grant authority to my Two Witnesses, and they will prophecy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."*

These men are called *witnesses*, there are two of them, they will prophecy and they are clothed in sackcloth.

Witnesses testify in courts of law. The Two Witnesses are witnesses for the Prosecution. The Law of Moses required at least two witnesses to establish a claim against a defendant (Deut. 19:15). The *Two Witnesses* will testify to the innumerable ways Israel has sinned against God and Messiah.

As *prophets* in the tradition of Old Testament prophets, the Two Witnesses will both call Israel to repentance and to faith in Messiah. They will prophesy concerning the true nature of Antichrist and will forecast all that is revealed in Scripture concerning the Tribulation judgments, the counterfeit trinity, the death and resurrection of Antichrist, the defilement of the Temple by Antichrist and the second coming of Christ in victory.

They will witness and prophesy in *sackcloth* mourning the apostasy of Israel, the suffering of the Jews and the suffering of all during the Tribulation.

They will declare the truth and preach Christ. Undoubtedly many will come to faith through the ministry of the Two Witnesses. But their message and ministry will earn them the hatred of Antichrist and the unbelieving population of the Tribulation. Numerous attempts will be made on their lives, but through the power of the Holy Spirit they will fulfill the 1,260 days of their ministry.

The Two Witnesses Will Survive Many Assassination Attempts (11:5-6)

Revelation 11:5-6 (ESV)

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.*

The Two Witnesses will have a combination of the greatest powers ever given prophets on earth. By these means they will survive the many assassination attempts over the course of the 1,260 days of their ministry.

The Two Witnesses Will Be Killed by the Antichrist (11:7-10)

Revelation 11:7-10 (ESV)

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.*

The Antichrist will war against the Two Witnesses and will succeed in killing them. All previous attempts to kill the Two Witnesses will fail because of the miraculous powers of the Two Witnesses by which they will be able to kill those who attempt to murder them. But when the 1,260 days of their ministry is fulfilled, God will allow Antichrist to have power over them and to kill them. This power of the Antichrist over the Two Witnesses, when all others failed, will be another reason why mankind will give its allegiance to the Antichrist.

The murder of the Two Witnesses will result in worldwide celebration. In a show of raw inhumanity, their bodies will be left in the streets of Jerusalem for 3 ½ days violating the Jewish custom of burial within 24 hours of death even for criminals. This is the only time during the seven year Tribulation that the citizens of the world rejoice and make merry.

The Two Witnesses Will Be Resurrected and Ascend to Heaven (11:10-12)

Revelation 11:10-12 (ESV)

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.*

The world party will come to an abrupt end when the Two Witnesses are resurrected and ascend to heaven. Undoubtedly this will be broadcast internationally. As if adding an exclamation to this event, God will then give Jerusalem a good shake.

An Earthquake Will Damage Jerusalem and Kill Seven Thousand (11:13)

Revelation 11:13 (ESV)

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.*

An earthquake will strike Jerusalem damaging a tenth of the city and killing seven thousand. Citizens of Jerusalem will acknowledge these events as coming from the hand of God. Perhaps in the end, some will finally respond to the message of the Two Witnesses and put their faith in Jesus.

The Earthquake Completes the Sixth Trumpet Judgment and Anticipates the Seventh (11:14)

Revelation 11:14 (ESV)

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

The second woe is the sixth Trumpet Judgment (Rev. 9:1, 12-13). The third woe is the seventh Trumpet Judgment (11:15).

REFLECTION

I believe the ministry of the Two Witnesses is primarily to the nation Israel confronting her sin of unbelief and calling her to repentance and faith in Jesus the Messiah. Undoubtedly their message will reach around the world and many will come to faith through their witness along with the witness of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (Rev. 7).

The timeless principle in this passage has to do with responding to God's Word. The Two Witnesses will be declaring God's Word and validating their message with supernatural signs and wonders. Everyone will hear, see and know that the Two Witnesses speak for God. Even with all that proof the vast majority of the earth's population will reject their message, hate them and rejoice at their murders.

It will not be for lack of evidence that they refuse to submit to the Lord, but because of hardness of heart.

The same is true today. Human nature is the same. As you share Christ keep in mind that some people have an honest heart and after their questions are answered will trust in Christ. Others, however, will have objections and questions not for the sake of finding the truth, but for resisting it. Be faithful. Be clear in sharing Jesus Christ crucified, buried and risen again. Don't beat yourself up if someone does not come to faith after you've done all you know to do. Remember the Two Witnesses!

This also begs the question concerning the condition of our own hearts. Are we responding to God's Word with faith and obedience or are we rejecting God's Word? When God's Word teaches us to forgive are we forgiving? When God's Word teaches us to serve are we serving? When God's Word teaches us to pray are we praying? When God's Word teaches us to be sexually pure are we being pure? When God's Word teaches us to seek first His Kingdom are we seeking first His Kingdom?

If not, why not?

Each of us need to examine ourselves and ask, "How am I responding to God when He speaks to me from His Word?" "Do I have a stubborn heart towards God?" If so, let us repent and renew our commitment to humble ourselves before God and do His will.

Let us be hearers *and* doers of God's Word as James exhorts us:

James 1:22-25 (ESV)

²² *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* ²³ *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.* ²⁴ *For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.* ²⁵ *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*