

## **The Ministry of the Two Witnesses** (Revelation 11:1-14).

The Two Witnesses minister in the Temple for the first-half of the Tribulation. However, they are only introduced in the Book of Revelation at the end of the time of the 6th Trumpet (at Mid-Tribulation). This is because their resurrection and ascension (along with a great earthquake) are the events that close the time of the 6th Trumpet (v11-14). (The next day the antichrist puts up the Abomination of Desolation in the Temple, and the angel blows the 7th Trumpet announcing the judgements of the Great-Tribulation which are now just starting - v15). Since this is the point at which the writer introduces these characters, he takes a break from the central sequence of events and inserts a parenthetical section about the Two Witnesses. Thus he gives a flashback describing their ministry in the first half of the Tribulation, and the events leading up to their death and resurrection at Mid-Tribulation.

The setting is the Temple where their ministry will be based:

**“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod.**

**And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the Temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there” (v1).**

Jewish worship at the rebuilt Temple is reinstated in the first half of the Tribulation. This is made possible through the covenant Israel makes with the antichrist, who will seem to many to be a saviour and the one who solves the Middle-East problem (Daniel 9:27). Israel will depend on him for protection against those who oppose the Temple. The use of the measuring rod signifies ownership. That is, Israel will have the control of the Temple and the right to worship there. Moreover, God owns it as His Temple, for it is God who raises it up to fulfill His purposes. Even though it only functions a short time, it has an important role in the salvation of Israel, especially through the ministry of the two witnesses. The fact that antichrist desecrates it, means it is holy.

Under this peace-treaty, the Gentiles (perhaps the United Nations or the Muslims or antichrist's own 'peacekeeping' forces) will own and control the rest of the Temple Mount:

**“But leave out the court which is outside the Temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles”** (v2a).

However at Mid-Tribulation there will be an invasion by antichrist, breaking his covenant with Israel (Daniel 9:27), and he will oppress and dominate Jerusalem for the 3.5 years of the Great-Tribulation:

**“And they (the Gentiles under antichrist) will tread the holy city underfoot for 42 months”** (v2b).

It is during this invasion that the antichrist kills the 2 witnesses, but only after they have completed their ministry to Israel (v7), for until then they are indestructible. (We see again that God is in final control of when antichrist comes to power, and restrains him until then). Antichrist must overcome the two witnesses in order to gain control of the Temple, stop the Jewish worship there, and put up His Abomination in it, converting it into a temple of worship unto himself. The fact that Daniel 9:27 describes the breaking of the covenant in terms of his actions in connection with the Temple, rather than his invasion of Jerusalem (although that is implied), proves that at the heart of this covenant is the settlement-deal and arrangements for the control of the Temple-Mount.

During the first half of the Tribulation, the two witnesses will minister in the Temple, anointed and protected by God's power:

**“I will give power to My two witnesses, and they will prophesy 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth (they will be calling for repentance and faith, firstly to Israel but also to the world)”** (v3).

Their witness to Israel: **“These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth”** (v4).

Their ministry to Israel, as 'the two olive trees' was prophesied in

Zechariah 4 - a chapter about the rebuilding of the Temple and the spiritual restoration of Israel to be a light to the nations. In fact the purpose of the rebuilding was this restoration.

**“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. Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.” So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, “What are these, my lord?” (v2-4).** The Menorah spoke of Israel, and the Olive Trees supplied anointing oil so that her light would shine. But rather than giving the interpretation straight away, the angel gave encouragements that the Temple would be rebuilt by the power of the Spirit (v5-10). This is because the Menorah was set within the Temple, that is, Israel would be restored through the Temple ministry. At that time, it was fulfilled in type by the anointed ministry of Joshua (the High Priest) and Zerubbabel (the Governor). God’s ‘Plan A’ was that Israel would be fully restored in the time of the second Temple but Israel rejected the Glory and the Temple was destroyed.

But Zechariah 4 looks beyond the Second Temple to the rebuilding of the Third Temple because God’s purposes do not change. Like the Second Temple, it will be rebuilt with God’s help against great opposition (satan knows the Temple is a major key to the restoration of Israel and thus the Second Coming of Christ). Then, in this Third Temple the two Olive Trees will stand before God and supply anointed ministry to Israel, proclaiming Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection before the Altar, bringing Israel to faith in Christ. With the Temple back in action, God can use it to remind Israel of the importance of blood-sacrifice (which she has forgotten, since the 2nd Temple was destroyed). As the sacrifices are made on the Altar, the Two Witnesses will be ideally positioned to

declare the Gospel to Israel - that the Temple-sacrifices are just pictures of the ultimate redeeming sacrifice of Christ, that forgiveness has already obtained through His blood, to be received through personal faith in Him.

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

**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?”**

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

**So he said, “These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth” (v11-14).**

The fact that Zechariah 4 applies to the Third Temple is established by Revelation 11:3 and by the fact that the spiritual restoration it speaks of was not accomplished in the time of the second Temple. In other words, God’s purpose of restoring Israel through the Temple ministry has not been stopped by the destruction of the Second Temple. The Temple will be rebuilt by God for the purpose of causing Israel to shine again. This will be accomplished by the uniquely important ministry of the two witnesses sent to prepare Israel to receive her Messiah.

Why are these Two Witnesses allowed to preach unhindered in the Temple? Surely they would be removed?

**“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” (v5).**

The power of God is so strongly on them, that anyone who comes against them gets burnt up! Even antichrist cannot stop them until they have finished their 1260 days. Their power is also

shown in the fact that at the end of their three and a half years, the antichrist **'makes war against them'** (11:7), which is not the kind of normal language used for just fighting two people! He has to come against them with an army and all his weapons.

They also have power to confirm their message to the world by calling down judgements upon Israel and the nations:

**“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”** (v6). This describes multiple world-wide plagues. When they were killed: **“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”** (v10). Clearly their ministry from the Temple has a world-wide reach and impact (through TV). They will also announce the world-wide judgements of the first 6 Trumpets, before they happen. The torments of v10 refer particularly to the 5th Trumpet (Rev 9).

**Their identities are MOSES and ELIJAH.**

**(1) Elijah** was taken up to Heaven in a chariot and did not die (2Kings 2:11). No doubt this was for a special purpose - he was preserved to fulfill an end-time ministry to Israel. Moreover, it was prophesied he would return before the Coming of the Lord ('the great and terrible day of the LORD') to minister to Israel, preparing her for the Coming of Christ to establish His Kingdom: **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse”** (Malachi 4:5,6). This prophecy is why many thought that John the Baptist was Elijah - a question that Jesus took seriously and answered. John indeed fulfilled the 'Elijah-ministry' of preparing

Israel for Christ's first Coming. The difficult passages about John and Elijah (Luke 1:17, John 1:21-23, Matthew 17:10-13, 11:9-14) can be explained by the fact that Elijah must come before Christ sets up His Kingdom, but because God knew that the Kingdom would be rejected by Israel at the first Coming, He sent John to stand in Elijah's place and with his anointing. Jesus said: **"If you (Israel) are willing to receive it (the Kingdom), he is Elijah - who is to come"** (Matthew 11:14). Jesus confirms that according to prophecy, Elijah must come again to minister to Israel. If Israel had been willing to receive Christ when He came the first time, it would have been Elijah himself preparing the way instead of John, but since she was not willing, John was sent instead of Elijah, and so Elijah is still yet to come. Thus John fulfilled the ministry of Elijah, ministering for three and a half years (AD 26-29), preparing the way for Christ's ministry to Israel (AD 29-33). Because Israel rejected the King, these 7 years were cancelled, the Kingdom was postponed, and the 7-years are to be rerun as the Tribulation, after which, this time round, the Kingdom must be established. Thus Elijah must come to Israel before the Second-Coming of Christ to fulfil a parallel ministry to John's (but 2000 years later) in preparing the way for the Coming of Christ. As John ministered before Christ's first appearance, so Elijah must minister before Christ's second appearance, to help prepare Israel for His Coming. As John ministered in the first half of the 7 years, so will Elijah.

**(2) Moses** died, but his body was taken to Heaven to be preserved for a special future use, which Satan contested (Jude 9). He died in full health (Deut 34:7), for the Lord just called his spirit home.

Thus we see that both Moses and Elijah ended their lives on earth in an unusual way, so that God was able to keep and preserve their natural bodies to be reused for their end-time ministry on earth! The only possible other candidate for this ministry is Enoch

(because he was raptured), but it is more fitting that Moses and Elijah, being Jewish, should be the two witnesses to Israel (whereas Enoch was a Gentile). Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets, which together witness to Jesus Christ.

Moreover, the distinctive miracles of the two witnesses bear the hallmark of Elijah and Moses. The Elijah-miracles are:

1. Fire from heaven, protecting him from enemies (v5, 2Kings1:10)
2. The prevention of rain for 3.5 years (v6a, 1Kings 17:1, Jas 5:17).
3. A bodily ascension into Heaven (Rev 11:12, 2 Kings 2).

**“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”** (v5). Their ministry will start with various attempts to capture and kill them. However, all who try are killed by fire from heaven. **“These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy”**(v6a). At the start of their preaching, they will also announce a drought on Israel (and perhaps even beyond) for the whole 1260 days of their ministry calling Israel back to God (as Elijah did in 1Kings 17).

The Moses’ miracles are:

1. Various plagues of judgement (v6b, Exodus 7 to 11).
2. Turning water to blood (v6b, Exodus 7:15-21).

**“And they have power over waters to turn them to blood and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire”** (v6). This ‘water to blood’ judgement refers to the 3rd Trumpet (Rev 8:8,9). It also matches the first plague upon Egypt, announced and initiated by Moses (Exodus 7:20). This shows that Moses (and Elijah) will announce and initiate, as God’s representatives on earth, the judgements of God, including the Trumpet judgements, just as Moses had previously brought the final plagues upon Egypt. This agrees with the principle that God always announces His judgements beforehand, through His prophets (Amos 3:7). This is

so that the world knows that God's judgement is falling on them because of their sin, and so they have a chance to repent. This is how they know the judgements come from God (eg- Rev 16:11,21).

Moreover only Moses and Elijah are uniquely qualified to be called Christ's witnesses, because they were present at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3,4), and continued to be present to personally witness Christ's last days on earth, His death, burial, resurrection (Luke 24:4), and ascension (Acts 1:10,11).

The Resurrection: **"They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, TWO MEN (Moses and Elijah) stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again'" (Luke 24:2-7). These 'two men' spoke as if they were present with the disciples just before the Mount of Transfiguration, when Jesus began to tell His disciples about His death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21).**

They then appeared with the transfigured Christ on the Mount: **"Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, MOSES and ELIJAH appeared to them, talking with Him" (Matthew 17:1-3).**

They were also present at the Ascension: **"While they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.**

**While they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, TWO MEN stood by them in white apparel, who said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11).**

Thus their description as witnesses (to Israel) is most appropriate, since they are actual eye-witnesses to Jesus Christ’s First Coming. Thus they will proclaim as true witnesses that Jesus is the Messiah-King, who died for the sins of the world and rose again. Then, when their time of ministry is over, God will provide a final confirmation to the world of the truth of their message (v7-13).

**“When they finish their testimony (after their 1260 days is over), the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit (about this time, the antichrist will suffer a deadly wound, but will be raised up again, with supernatural powers given to him by satan. This propels him quickly to world-dictatorship at mid-Tribulation) will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them (they suffer a martyr’s death at the hands of the antichrist)” (v7).**

**“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great (important) city which spiritually is called (1) Sodom and (2) Egypt, (3) where also our Lord (Jesus) was crucified” (v8).** This clearly identifies the place of their ministry and death as Jerusalem, but it also gives spiritual description of that time, which provides a coded message from God to those living in Israel:

(1) Sodom. Jerusalem, under antichrist for the Great-Tribulation, is compared to Sodom - a city given over to gross immorality and violence as a result of its rejection of the true God. It was not a place for believers, and Lot was told to flee Sodom before God’s judgement fell. This is a message to all believers in Israel that they, like Lot, must now flee to safety, because the time was

ripe for God's judgements to fall on antichrist and his kingdom (this agrees with the instructions of Jesus in Matthew 24:15-20).

(2) Egypt. Israel, at this time, is coming under the domination and oppression of the antichrist. It will be just like when she was in slavery in Egypt under the Pharaoh (a type of the antichrist). They will not be free to worship God, but instead be forced to follow antichrist or be killed. God, through Moses, provided for Israel an Exodus to a place of safety, for those who trusted in the Passover Lamb. Likewise at Mid-Tribulation, God will provide an Exodus for Israel to a place of safety from antichrist (see Rev 12:6, 13-16), in which Moses will again be instrumental. As Moses initiated the plagues from God on Egypt before the Exodus growing in intensity, so in the Tribulation, Moses will initiate Divine judgements upon the world (Rev 11:6). Through his ministry at the Temple, many in Israel will come to faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. These believers will obey his call to make an rapid Exodus from Israel to escape the antichrist (Rev 12:14). Like Pharaoh, the antichrist will pursue them with his army in order to exterminate them (Rev 12:15). However, as God intervened to have Pharaoh's army completely swallowed up by the Red-Sea as they were poised to exterminate Israel, so too God will have this army miraculously swallowed up by the earth, as it is about to destroy the fleeing Jews (Rev 12:16). Thus believing Israel (the remnant) will be able to escape to a place of safety in the wilderness. There she will abide 3.5 years under God's provision (Rev 12:6) as Israel lived 40 days in the wilderness, before going in to possess her Promised Land for the Millennium under the leadership of Joshua (Jesus). This Exodus and Entry into the Land will be part of great flow of all Israelites who will go out of all the nations into the Promised Land at the Second-Coming of Christ. This deliverance and regathering will be commemorated as a Second Exodus, even greater than the First (Jer 16:14,15; 23:3-8).

Thus, the message to believers in Israel at this time (the Middle of the Tribulation) is that it is like when they were in Egypt, under Pharaoh. They must immediately make an Exodus from the Land and God will help them.

(3) “Where also our Lord was crucified.”

The final part of this message to Israel, establishes a link between the events taking place in Jerusalem at Mid-Tribulation and the Lord’s crucifixion in Jerusalem. Just as spiritually, it will be like being in Sodom just before judgement falls, and being in Egypt just before the Exodus, so also it will be like being at Jerusalem at the time of the Lord’s death. Thus the death of the 2 witnesses is being compared to the death of Christ: **“their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city ... where ALSO (as well as the two witnesses) our Lord (Jesus) was crucified”** (v8).

\*The place where the witnesses will be killed (Jerusalem) is the same place where the Lord was crucified.

\*Christ was killed at the hands of the Romans.

Likewise, His witnesses will be killed by the antichrist (ruler of the Revived-Roman Empire).

\*Both the Lord and His witnesses are righteous men, who die a martyr’s death at the hands of evil men.

\*But of course, most significant is the fact that they don’t stay dead but rise again after 3 days, and ascend into heaven, just like Jesus!

They had been declaring to Israel that Jesus was their crucified and risen Messiah. Their public death followed by their resurrection and ascension after 3-days will provide a clear and powerful SIGN (a PICTURE and PROOF) of Christ’s death and resurrection after 3 days, confirming the Gospel message that they had been preaching. Thus God will give to Israel, for the last time, ‘the sign of Jonah’ (a resurrection after 3 days that proves Jesus is their Messiah).

So, when the witnesses are killed and raised up again, this will be a proof to many in Israel that Jesus is the Christ (they will no doubt announce their coming death and resurrection in advance, declaring that it will be a demonstration of the truth of Christ's death and resurrection). Therefore, God's message to Israel at this time is that upon seeing the death and resurrection of the two witnesses they must put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah (and realise also that the antichrist is their deadly enemy) and therefore they must heed Jesus' warning in Matthew 25:15-20 to flee immediately.

Having explored the meaning of these events, let us continue with the account of their death and resurrection: **“Their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city. 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”** (v8,9). Having fulfilled their time of ministry, God allows antichrist to kill them and their dead bodies are put out on open display for the whole world to see. This requires the world-wide television through a satellite network, which is technology that has only recently been available! **“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”** (v10). There will be world-wide rejoicing. The nature of this celebration shows that they must have announced the world-wide judgements of the first half of the Tribulation. The world will come to see these two men as responsible for all their recent troubles, and so when they see the antichrist finally overcoming them, there is a massive celebration. They believe that the antichrist has defeated God and that their troubles are over.

However, all this publicity backfires on the antichrist, for God raises the witnesses up after three days and they ascend to heaven: **“Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from**

**God entered them, and they stood on their feet (resurrection), and great fear fell on those who saw them.**

**And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they ascended to heaven in a cloud (it is possible that this is the 144,000 being raptured at the same time) and their enemies saw them (this is all on live TV!)” (v11,12).**

When God raises them up and they ascend into heaven, there is a great earthquake that hits Jerusalem (this is another similarity to the resurrection of Christ): **“In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake 7,000 people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven” (v13).** The resurrection of the witnesses, combined with the great earthquake at the same time, will have a great impact on the Jews in Israel. Many will be converted to Christ and as a result escape from the antichrist. Thus, at the end of their ministry God uses the witnesses to give a final sign to Israel, the sign of Jonah, a resurrection from the dead after three days (just as He did at Christ’s First Coming). As Elijah succeeded in turning Israel around after 3.5 years (when he confronted the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel), and as Moses succeeded in leading Israel out of Egypt’s power after the 10 plagues, so they will again succeed in their ministry to Israel. By the end of their 3.5 years, many of Israel will be converted.

**“The 2nd Woe (the 6th Trumpet) is past (this earthquake marked the close of the 2nd Woe - thus the 6th Trumpet judgement is now over). Behold, the 3rd Woe (of the Great-Tribulation and the 7th Trumpet Judgements) is coming quickly (immediately after). Then the 7th angel sounded” (v14,15a).** Immediately afterwards (the next day after the earthquake) the antichrist will desecrate the Temple, resulting in the 7th Trumpet being blown announcing the start of the Great-Tribulation with its judgements from God.