

I Will Give Power to My Two Witnesses and They Will Prophecy for 1,260 Days

11: 1-6a

DIG: What was John commanded to do? Why? Can we be sure about who they were? What powers did they have? Why did they have them? What was the nature of their ministry? What happens to these two witnesses?

REFLECT: What do you learn in this passage about what it means to be a witness? What has been toughest about living out your faith in school? At work? At home? Why is it so satisfying to be His witness? Why is it so hard?

Throughout human history the LORD has faithfully sent His spokesmen to call upon sinners to repentance. During the long, dark years of Isra'el's rebellion, ADONAI warned Isra'el and Judah through all the prophets, saying: God had warned Isra'el and Judah in advance through every prophet and seer, "Turn from your evil ways; and obey My commandments and regulations, in accordance with the entire Torah that I ordered your ancestors to keep and that I sent to you through My servants and prophets" (Second Kings 17:13). Tragically, they did not listen. However, God continued to send prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah and others who confronted wayward Isra'el and sinful Gentile nations. Through it all, the LORD has always preserved a believing remnant (Romans 9:27, 11:4-5; Isaiah 10:20-22 and 11:11). In the B'rit Chadashah, faithful preachers call for repentance and faith, offering all sinners the hope of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. This section is parenthetical and is **the fourth of five events** that will occur throughout the first half of the Great Tribulation.

In the future, during the earth's darkest hour, ADONAI will raise up **two** exceptional and powerful preachers. They will fearlessly proclaim the **Gospel** during the **first three and a half years** of the Great Tribulation. But in addition to preaching the **Gospel**, these **two preachers** will proclaim God's judgment on the wicked world. They will participate in fulfilling the words of Christ: **And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come** (Matthew 24:14). They will also be used by the LORD to bring salvation to Isra'el.²⁷⁶

John was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told: **Go and measure the temple of God and the bronze altar, and count the worshipers there** (Revelation 11:1, also see Ezekiel 40:3-4 and Zechariah 2:1-2). Measuring symbolizes reserving a city either for preservation (Ezekiel 40:3 to 48:35; Zechariah 2:1-5) or for destruction (Second Kings 21:12-14; Isaiah 34:11; Lamentations 2:8). The tribulation temple will be built after a

seven-year treaty is signed between **the Israeli** government and the antichrist. It will reinstitute their ancient worship and sacrifices. By the time it is built, much of the first **three-and-a-half years** of the Great Tribulation will be completed, and **the Jews** no doubt will be feeling happy and secure. **The tribulation temple** will be measured, but so will the worshipers. This indicates that the type of measurement has to do with spiritual matters rather than physical. As always, **Isra'el** will be judged first (**First Peter 4:17**).

The tribulation temple will be the fourth built in **Jerusalem** (see Bx - **The Tribulation Temple**). The first was built by Solomon, the second under Zerubbabel, **the third** (Herod's **Temple** (the one in which **John himself** had worshiped) had been destroyed by the Romans led by Titus in 70 AD. Ever since then, **Jerusalem** has been under **Gentile** domination. **Messiah** had prophesied: **Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled** (**Luke 21:24**). After World War II, **Isra'el** was reestablished as a nation and regained most of **Jerusalem** during the Six Day War in 1967. But **the Temple** site, the most vital part of the city, remained under Muslim control.

Because the antichrist will want to gain the trust of the Jews, he will probably allow them to build their **Temple** where the Dome of the Rock now exists. The Muslims will not resist. With his supposed worldwide peace, no one will resist him as he methodically gains control of the world's **nations**. In time, however, he will become increasingly irritated with the Jews. Their worship, contrary to the humanistic worship promoted by him, and their bloody sacrifices will be offensive to him. Furthermore, the 144,000 Israelites have actually accepted **Christ** and will be preaching the **Gospel** everywhere. Therefore, at the mid-point of the Great Tribulation, the antichrist will place a statue of himself in the Most Holy Place and declare himself to be **God** (**Mt 24:15; Rev 13:3-9**). **Isra'el's** love affair with the antichrist will be brief as the spiritual scales fall from **their** eyes and they finally realize who he is. He and **the Gentiles** will drive the Jews out of their Temple and **Tziyon** once more. **But exclude the outer court** (**Ezk 40:17-20**); **do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months** (**11:2**). For the second half of the Tribulation, or another **42 months**, **Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles** before **their** judgment would come and **the times of the Gentiles** would be complete.

And I will give power to My two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, corresponding to 42 months of thirty days, or three and a half years, **clothed in sackcloth** (**11:3**). **Witnesses** is the plural form of *martus*, from which the English word *martyr* derives, since so many **witnesses** of **Jesus Christ** in the early body of believers paid for their belief with their lives.²⁷⁷ These **two witnesses** are clearly prophets of judgment. **Sackcloth** will symbolize suffering and grief worldwide. **They** preach to both **Jew** and **Gentile** alike. The identity of the **two witnesses** has been a matter of much speculation. But whoever **they** are, **they** will be real men who speak and perform miracles, die, and rise again.

We are given few specifics about these two people. The miraculous authority given to these **two witnesses** by the LORD is similar to that of **Elijah** and **Enoch**. But in the end, we must exercise prudence and admit that we simply can't be dictatorial about **their** identity. To be definitive goes beyond what is written. But here are some thoughts.

Malachi said: **See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of ADONAI comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and hearts of children to their fathers. Or else I will come and strike the land with a curse (Malachi 4:5-6).** This prophecy is even more amazing in that it records the very last words of the TaNaKh. **He** was taken directly to heaven without dying (**Second Kings 2:11**). **God** must have had something for **Elijah** to do that required **him** to retain **his** natural body. So there **he** remains, waiting until that time when **he** will return to earth to complete **his** ministry, just **before that great and dreadful day of the LORD**.

Enoch was the only other man in all of human history who was taken directly to heaven without dying. **By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away (Hebrews 11:5).** **Enoch's** message to the wicked generation before the Flood could well be the essence of the message to the world during the first half of the Great Tribulation: **See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of His holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him (Jude 14-15).** So it seems that **Elijah** and **Enoch** could be the **two witnesses**, sent to the earth again in the last days to witness to an ungodly generation just **before Jesus Christ** returns.

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth (11:4). This enigmatic description is drawn from **Zechariah 4:1-3** and **11-14**. **Zechariah's** vision had both a **near historical** fulfillment and a **far eschatological** fulfillment. The **near historical** fulfillment was the rebuilding of the **Temple** after the Babylonian exile. But the **far eschatological** fulfillment looked forward to the restoration of **Isra'el** in the Millennium. **The Lord** called **them My two witnesses** because of **their** special relationship with **Him**. **They** had stood by **Him** in the days of **their** flesh, in the midst of **their** own ungodly generations, now **they** stood with **Him** in the last days. Now surely, **He** would stand by **them**.²⁷⁸ **Their** declarations of judgment will make **them** feared and hated. Many attempts will be made on **their** lives, but if **anyone** tries to harm **them**, **fire** comes from **their** mouths and devours **their** enemies (**Num 16:35; 2 Kings 1:10-12**). This is how **anyone** who wants to harm **them** must die (**11:5**). **These men** not only have power to defend **themselves**, but to also call forth great plagues upon the earth.

They shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the three and a half years they will be prophesying. And they will have the power to turn waters to blood (8:6-9) and strike the earth with every kind of plague they want (11:6). This drought will obviously bring about a worldwide famine and loss of human life. Not only that, but the world's atmospheric circulation will begin to change (7:1), reverting back to that of a canopy before the Flood (Genesis 1:6-8). This will prepare the world for the perfect environment of the Millennium. This drought corresponds to the judgment of the third seal at the beginning of the Great Tribulation (6:5-6). The third trumpet judgment will result in the poisoning of one-third of the earth's fresh water supply (8:10-11). In addition, the drought will last the entire 1,260 days of their preaching (Luke 4:25; James 5:17). All the seal and trumpet judgments are also called plagues in 9:20, so it will be obvious to the ungodly of the earth that the two witnesses will cause all the plagues inflicted upon them by the four horsemen. For example, their power to turn waters into blood matches the first and second trumpet judgments (8:7-8). All these events will lead up to their death.

The judgments that they will inflict will last for three and a half years. During that time they will be hated and despised by the nations, but especially by the antichrist. Assassins will try to kill them, only to be burned alive. ADONAI will protect them until they have finished their testimony. The two witnesses will seem indestructible. Not only that, but great multitudes will come to believe in Jesus Christ by the preaching of the 144,000 sealed Israelites who also will receive divine protection. For the antichrist, the tipping point will be reached in the middle of the Great Tribulation. Something had to change. However, it will not be what he had planned.