

Revelation 11: The Two Witnesses

Revelation 11:3–6 | Sunday, February 5 | Revelation Series

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OVERVIEW

Two men are given authority to prophesy twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth, and everybody, Hal says, wonders who they are. He works the clues rather than guessing. The sackcloth is a sign every Israelite would read: these are prophets who have utterly rejected the nation's religion, its lifestyle and its clinging to the wealth of this earth. The two olive trees send him to Zachariah, where the trees feed a lampstand with an unceasing supply of oil, and where the angel calls them the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth. The two lampstands send him back to Revelation 1:20, where the seven lampstands are the churches — so once the Church is taken out, these two take up the job of the whole Church. Then the identifying clues: power to shut up the sky so that no rain falls, and power to turn the waters into blood. Hal says plainly that he believes they are Moses and Elijah, and spends the rest of the message building the case from Matthew and Malachi.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Revelation 11:3 — Authority granted to two witnesses to prophesy twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth

Revelation 11:4 — These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth

Zachariah chapter 4 — The golden lampstand, the two olive trees, and the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth

Revelation 1:20 — The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the churches

Revelation 11:5 — Fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies

Revelation 11:6 — Power to shut up the sky so no rain falls, to turn the waters to blood, and to smite the earth with plagues

Matthew 17:9 — Coming down from the mountain — why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?

Malachi 4:4 — Remember the law of Moses — behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible Day of the Lord

KEY TERMS

The two witnesses — the two given authority to prophesy twelve hundred and sixty days — which Hal takes as the first three and a half years of the seven

Sackcloth — the prophet's sign of utter rejection: of the nation's religion, of its lifestyle, and of its clinging to the wealth of this earth

The two olive trees — out of Zachariah — the unceasing source of the oil that fuels the lamp; the oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit

The two lampstands — a lampstand gives the light of God's truth; in Revelation 1:20 the seven lampstands are the churches

The two anointed ones — the angel's name for them in Zachariah — those who stand by the Lord of the whole earth

Seven — the number Hal reads as completion or fullness, so that the seven churches mean the whole Church

The two portraits of the Messiah — the lowly, humble, suffering Messiah who came to die for sin, and the conquering king who comes back to reign — sometimes painted on the same canvas, separated only by a comma

The spirit and power of Elijah — what John the baptist came in, Hal says, because God knew the nation would reject Jesus

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Answer from the message itself. Every answer is in the teaching.

1. What are the two witnesses given, and for how long?

2. Why does Hal say it is the first half rather than the second?

3. What does the sackcloth signal to an Israelite?

4. What do the two olive trees mean, and where does Hal go to find out?

5. What does the angel there call the two olive trees?

6. Where does Hal go for the meaning of a lampstand, and what does he find?

7. What does Hal say the number seven means, and what follows for the churches?

8. What is the argument Hal builds from the lampstands about the timing of these two?

9. Who else will be at work alongside them?

10. What two clues in verse 6 point to who they are?

11. Why did Jesus reading in the synagogue stop in the middle of a sentence?

12. In Matthew 17, what does Jesus say about Elijah, and who did the disciples understand him to mean?

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. The sackcloth says these prophets have let go of the wealth and the standing of this world before they say a word. What would that cost you, and what would it free you to say?

2. Hal's picture is of two trees feeding a lamp so it never goes out. Where does the oil in your own lamp actually come from?

3. He says the Church is the witness now, and quotes the line about people "standing on the promises while sitting on the premises." What does that look like in practice, and what is the alternative?

4. Two men take up the work of the whole Church. Does that make you feel the weight of what the Church is for, or relieved that God can manage without us?

5. There are two portraits of the Messiah, and Hal says which one you look for tests where your heart is. Which one have you been looking for lately?

6. God sent someone in the spirit and power of Elijah, knowing he would be rejected. What does that say about how God keeps offering himself to people who will not have him?

MEMORY VERSE

"And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

— Revelation 11:3, as Hal reads it in this message