

Two Witnesses, Part 2

Scripture: Revelation 11:3-6

Code: 66-37

I don't know about you but I am so challenged and so encouraged with the opportunity to be preaching through the book of Revelation. I did this once early in my ministry here many years ago and thought that I had covered the ground fairly well. And as I studied it in the years intervening before we began this series, I was more and more enriched but this study has taken me beyond anything I could have imagined in terms of the things that are in this great, great book. And, in a sense, I cannot tell you even a part of what I'm learning, some day maybe it will all come through other sermons as we interface again with this book, but it's such a rich, rich book.

We find ourselves in the eleventh chapter, one of the more difficult sections of the book of Revelation, much of it is difficult to understand. This particular chapter, at least the initial part of it, poses some challenges to the interpreter as has chapter 10 posed. But as we come into chapter 11 we find ourselves in another interlude. There are several of them in the book of Revelation and I want to take you somewhat patiently through this chapter, particularly the things that are on my mind tonight, I don't know how far we'll get but I want you to grasp and understand because I don't want to pass by anything that God has given us in a cursory way for fear that He might be displeased at our lack of attention to the detail that He has placed here.

So we find ourselves in another interlude before the final fury in a series of judgments that will take place in the future time of Tribulation to come on the whole world, a time called the day of the Lord. As we have gone through the book of Revelation, we know our location now, we are in this seven-year period called the time of Tribulation, a future time just prior to the return of Christ to establish His earthly Kingdom. This time began to unfold as seven seals were broken, seven seals that sealed a scroll. That scroll was the title deed to the earth and as each seal was broken, another phase of judgment occurs which is part of the plan to take back the earth and the universe from the usurper Satan and give it to the rightful heir, namely Jesus Christ.

As each of those seals unfolded we got through seal number six but before number seven there was an interlude, a pause before the final and most severe judgment, the judgment of the seventh seal. Soon we will be looking at seven-bowl judgments. The seven-seal judgments stretch across seven years. The seven-bowl judgments happen rapid fire right at the very end of the time period, one right after the other. We will study six of them and then we will see another interlude. There will be an interlude just before the seventh bowl, as there was before the seventh seal.

Between the seals and the bowls is a series of judgments that don't take as long as the seals and aren't as brief as the bowls, called the seven trumpet judgments. We've gone through six of them and now we are in the interlude before the seventh. So in each case there is a pause, a respite, an interlude before the final and seventh judgment.

The purpose of the interlude is the same in all three cases. It is to comfort and encourage the saints alive at that time because they will be engulfed in the sixth seals, the six trumpets and the six bowl judgments to some degree and perhaps as they increase in fury, they're going to be wondering just exactly what is going on and is the Lord still in control. And so in each case before the final and worst judgment, the Lord stops to pause long enough to remind them of comforting truth about His care for His own.

Summing up then to this point in chapter 11, the seven seals have been opened, the universe is being judged, taken back from the usurper by Jesus Christ. Those opened seals have brought divine wrath in the form of false peace, wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilence and death. They have included vengeance and the collapse of the universe. The seventh seal then released the seven trumpets which included the destruction of a third of the plants, all of the grass, a third of the seas, a third of the creatures in them, a third of the ships, a third of the fresh water, one third of the sun and the moon, the release of demons bound for millennia in the pit to torment men, and then two hundred million more hellish fiends kill a third of all mankind with fire, brimstone and smoke. All of that has already gone by in this brief seven-year period known as the time of Tribulation to come upon the earth.

Before the seventh trumpet blows and releases the seven bowls, however, which will by all means be the worst judgment yet, comes this brief respite for the Lord to show His people that He is still carrying for them, still effecting His purpose. This pause is a long one. It takes up chapter 10 and chapter 11 down through verse 14. It focuses on the fact that God will have His testimony during that future time. It focuses on the fact that John is to look at that time, understand it, see its sweetness because righteousness will reign and judgment on sinners will come, see its bitterness because the ungodly will be destroyed, and that as he views that, according to verse 11, he must write down everything. He must prophesy. The record must be kept so that in that day it can be read by saints who are wondering what is going on. If you are one living during that time, if you were to experience that as many will, you would be searching the Scripture for some explanation and you would find the interlude sections of Revelation very comforting because in the midst of all the judgment they would tell you that God is still in control.

Chapter 10 then looks at the testimony that is written in the book of Revelation by the Apostle John. Chapter 11 looks at two witnesses, two very interesting preachers who will appear in that day to proclaim salvation, to call men to repentance, as well as to warn about judgment. And that is the main theme of chapter 11 starting in verse 3 and running down to verse 13.

So right up until the end of judgment, God will have His witness. He will have His written witness in the book of Revelation which will be chronologizing everything that is going on and they will be able to look at the book of Revelation, see the things that are unfolding around them, and understand as well that God is still gracious, God is still merciful, God is still working His plan. Right to the end the Word of God will be in their hands, and right to the end God will have His preachers, not only the hundred and forty-four thousand who have been sealed from any harm to preach the gospel, not only an innumerable number of Gentiles who have been redeemed, many of whom have been martyred and some of whom have not and the whole nation of Israel which eventually will turn in repentance, looking upon their Messiah and believing. But God will also have in addition to those people to testify to the gospel and as well a flying angel going through heaven preaching the everlasting gospel from up above, which will be an amazing thing to see and experience, but He will have two amazing preachers on the earth. They will be there to warn about the judgment. They will be there to call men to repentance. When they are done, the seventh trumpet will blow and the seven-bowl judgments will come rapid fire and the Lord will return in flaming judgment to destroy sinners and demons and establish His Kingdom on the earth.

So as we come in to chapter 11 we are near the end of the seven-year Tribulation and we are going to meet the two preachers. Before we meet them in verse 3, remember the chapter opened with an interesting bit of action. We discussed the last time where John is drawn into the vision and given a measuring rod and he is told to rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship in it and leave out the court which is outside the temple, do not measure it for it has been given to the nations and they will tread underfoot the holy city for forty-two months. We mentioned last time, and I'm not going to belabor the point, it took us a whole evening just to develop those two verses so you need to get the tape if you weren't here, it's a vital one.

But what those two verses are basically saying is the temple symbolizes the Jews and God is measuring out the temple because it belongs to Him. It is symbolizing that the Jews are God's possession and in spite of all of the judgment and all of the demons and Satan and Antichrist overrunning the earth, God will bring Israel to salvation and the Kingdom. And He says don't measure the outside, that is to say outside the preservation of the nation of Israel there will be nations of the world that will be judged because they do not belong to God. In fact, they will trample Israel, trampling the city of Jerusalem, but God will limit that trampling to forty-two months which is the last half of the seven years called the Great Tribulation.

Though Antichrist and his world of Gentile Antichrist forces are attacking Jerusalem, and though they are trampling it down, persecuting the Jews relentlessly though it is surely the time of Jacob's trouble, as the prophet called it, many Jews will hear about Jesus Christ and they will be saved. Remember now, already the hundred and forty-four thousand Jews, twelve thousand from every tribe, have been converted to Christ and have been preaching. And they've been preaching, starting in the first half of

the seven years, and now a new invincible evangelistic force is going to be added. And I believe they will become the final two great instruments of the salvation of the nation of Israel, that is to say those Jews that are as of yet not saved. Even in the midst of Gentile trampling on the holy city, even in the midst of the persecution and slaughter of the Jews, Jews will be being saved and a great catalyst in their salvation as we shall see in this chapter will be these two amazing preachers, amazing preachers.

I suppose you could look at it like this, whatever Jews have not been converted at the preaching of the hundred and forty-four thousand or the everlasting angel, or the testimony of other converted Jews or converted Gentiles, whatever Jews have not been killed and destroyed, whatever Jews still remain and their hearts are open will come to faith in their Messiah through the preaching of these two witnesses. And I believe you see that in verse 13 when it says, "The rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." That's the final culmination, the punctuation point at the conclusion of the salvation of the people of Israel." So these two messengers are crucial. And they play a very important role in the last component of bringing salvation to Israel. Then Messiah can come, destroy the ungodly and set up the Kingdom promised to Israel and to all who love Christ.

Let's meet the two witnesses. "And I will grant authority to My two witnesses and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." Stop there.

God says I'm going to raise up two special witnesses for twelve hundred and sixty days, that's the same as forty-two months, that's three and a half years. During that final three and a half years while Jerusalem is being trampled by Antichrist

and his worldwide Gentile force that are massacring all the Jews they can, during that period of time these two witnesses will have a powerful witness, a powerful testimony. In spite of pagan oppression God will get His message out so that Israel will believe and as well many others from among the Gentile nations surely will believe the testimony of these two great preachers.

Now verse 3 assumes a speaker. We don't know who it is. The "I", "And I will grant authority to My two witnesses." But if I were guessing I would say because of the personal pronoun this would have to be one of either two persons...God the Father or the Lord Jesus Christ. "I will give permission, I will commission My two witnesses," that is two witnesses to Me, two who will give testimony to Me. The word "witness," martusin the Greek, always refers to persons. These aren't books, these aren't videos, these aren't motion pictures, these are people. They aren't weapons. They aren't movements as some commentators have thought. They are people. "I will grant authority," says God or says the Lord Jesus Christ, "to My two witnesses."

By the way, the word "witness," martus in the Bible gives us our English word martyr. And the reason we think of a martyr is someone...as someone who died is because so many witnesses to the truth of Christ gave their life that the word "witness" became synonymous with dying. So frequently did they seal their testimony in their blood.

Two is a very important number. And again I told you I'm going to belabor this a little because I want you to grasp this, this is so powerful. Here is the culmination of God's promise to Israel. Two, you will remember, was the Old Testament number for the confirmation of any testimony, right? Any time there was testimony it needed to be confirmed by at least two witnesses. So it says in Deuteronomy chapter 17 verse 6, chapter 19 verse 15, Numbers chapter 35:30. And you find even in the New Testament Hebrews 10:28, Matthew 18:16; John 8:17. That's just standard stuff.

So here are two witnesses granted authority from God the Father and/or from the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are to give testimony to God, testimony to Christ, testimony to the gospel and to God's judgment. It says, "And they will prophesy," and I want to make sure you understand that that word "prophesy" doesn't have the primary sense of predicting the future, but of standing before someone and preaching. It could be translated, "They will preach." They will stand before the world and they will preach. What will they preach? Judgment. They will interpret what is going on for the three and a half years of their ministry. Remember now, that three and a half years begins the time of terrifying judgment, the time after the abomination of the desolation when the Antichrist sets up His rule in the world and says he's God and demands that everybody worship him as God or die. The judgment of God, the Antichrist, all of the things that we've seen in the latter part of the seals and through the trumpet judgments will be going on and these two men will be standing before the world interpreting all of that, preaching judgment...no doubt saying what you've seen is the judgment of God and you haven't seen anything yet, no doubt saying read the book of Revelation if you have any questions, it's there for you, read about what is to come in this seventh trumpet and in the seven bowls.

At the same time they will be warning about hell to follow. At the same time they will be warning about Antichrist, about the demons running over the earth, wounding and injuring people and even killing them with fire and brimstone. At the same time they will be calling men and women to salvation. They will be presenting the gospel. They will be saying the age of grace is not yet over. The time of mercy has not ceased. And so these two preachers will do this for twelve hundred and sixty days, forty-two months, three and a half years. Period of their preaching and predicting judgments is the same as the period of trampling of the holy city, it's the same as the period of the reign of Antichrist, the hiding of Israel, the time of Jacob's trouble, it's the last half, the Great Tribulation.

That describes their duty, if you're keeping an outline, that describes their duty. Secondly, let's look at their attitude...at their attitude. Verse 3 says, "They are clothed in sackcloth." Sackcloth is about as primitive a garment as you can imagine. You know what sackcloth is, basically it's what you bring

home potatoes in, rough, coarse, heavy. And it was used in ancient times uniquely by the prophets, read Isaiah 22:12, Jeremiah 6:26. And the reason the prophets used it was whenever they were prophesying judgment, they took a mourning posture---- m-o-u-r-n-i-n-g, a sad posture and a posture of humility. It was expressive of sadness. It was expressive of humility. It was expressive of penitence. When people wanted to repent they would clothe themselves in sackcloth and put ashes on their heads. That's what the truly repentant Jew would do, Matthew 11:21, Luke 10:13 talks about that.

So here are these two prophets and their attitude is humility. And their attitude is sorrow, sadness. They're not dressed in festival garments. They're not happy about what is coming, judgment, damnation. It is then worn by these two express the great sorrow and mourning they feel over the wicked, over the wretched world, the judgment of God falling constantly around them in the seal and the trumpet and the bowl judgments. They're mourning over the desecration of the temple. They're mourning over the ascendancy of Antichrist. They're mourning over the devastation of Jerusalem...sackcloth.

Jacob put on sackcloth when his sons came and said that his brother Joseph had been slain by wild beasts. When David heard of the cruel murder of Abner, the captain of his host, he rent his garments, the Bible says, and to mourn over Abner he put on sackcloth. In the terrible famine in Samaria, two mothers had agreed that on one day the first mother would boil her son and they because they were starving would eat the first mother's son. Then when that child was devoured they would eat the other woman's son. But one of the women hid her son when the first baby was eaten and in their altercation they had brought their quarrel to the king of Samaria. In desperation in the midst of the terrible famine the king was seen walking along the top of his wall...how could he resolve such a horrific issue. He tore his clothes in unspeakable sorrow and the people below looked and saw that he wore the garment of sackcloth underneath his royal robe.

When Sennacherib the astute and the able military genius of the winged bull of Asher swept down and carried away the northern kingdom of Israel, he then placed his armies around Jerusalem as men would hold a piece of iron in a vice. Hezekiah with a heavy heart went up to the house of the Lord and he was clothed in sackcloth.

It's a garment of mourning. It's a garment of sorrow. It's a garment of sadness.

As we come to verse 4 we come to a third component in understanding these two witnesses, that's their identity...their identity. Immediately when you read verse 3 the first thing you think of is who are they? Well the answer comes, as much as it comes, in verse 4. "These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth."

You say, "I'm not helped?" I understand that. I understand that. This is a very unusual description. And I want to take the time to let it unfold because it has such importance in the whole scheme of God's plan with regard to Israel. The description of these two witnesses as two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth is right out of the prophecy of Zechariah. Now John has drawn on Zechariah's prophecy before, chapter 1 verse 4, so we've gone back there to pick up some of the great prophetic truth in Zechariah at the behest of John earlier in our study of this book and this time he refers to the very unique discussion in Zechariah chapter 3 and chapter 4.

Two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord is all terminology that is part of the vision of Zechariah 3 and 4. And frankly the detail is very important. So let's go back to the Old Testament to Zechariah chapter 3. I think you'll find this fascinating. Zechariah the prophet had some amazing visions from God. Some years ago we went through the book of Zechariah verse by verse. If you're interested in that study it's available on tape. But Zechariah had some amazing visions from God. They had, now listen to me carefully, both near and far fulfillment. And that is very common in prophetic literature. There is a near historic fulfillment and a far future messianic fulfillment. That is the prophecies that came by way of vision to Zechariah reveal to him matters related to the rebuilding of the temple in his own time as well as the restoration of the kingdom in the end time. Did you get that? That which was revealed to Zechariah focused historically on the rebuilding of the temple in his own time and he was alive between Ezra and Nehemiah when the rebuilding of the temple took place historically. But those prophecies not only focused on that time but they looked forward to the full restoration of the Kingdom in the end time, the Kingdom promised to Israel when the Messiah would reign.

So Zechariah lived between Ezra and Nehemiah, the rebuilding of the temple had been approved in Ezra's time, but was not being done. So God used Zechariah to get them moving to encourage two men to lead the building and the restoration. Those two men were very important men. One was a priest and the other was a ruler. Their names were Joshua, not the same as the Joshua of the Pentateuch period, and Zerubbabel...Joshua the high priest, Zerubbabel the governor or the ruler. It fell the lot of Zechariah, among other things, to motivate Joshua and to motivate Zerubbabel to get on with the business of building the temple. Joshua had a vested interest, after all he was the high priest. And so did Zerubbabel, he was the ruler of the land.

The Jews of Zechariah's time knew they had sinned. And they feared they had no basis for God's favor. They knew God would not tolerate their evil, faithless, vacillating hearts and they were sure God was through with them, they were sure they would never see the temple rebuilt, they were sure they would never be restored to the place of blessing. And so God gives a vision to Zechariah to encourage them, to show them that the promise of restoration was still in place.

Chapter 3 verse 1, Zechariah says, "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him." Joshua, now remember this,

as high priest is the representative for the nation. You remember, don't you, that the high priest was the representative before God of the whole nation. Joshua then is the symbol of the nation of Israel. He is standing before the Lord. And you know why he's there, pleading the cause of his people like any good priest. And begging God to be gracious and merciful and forgiving and to restore the people, to give them back their city and give them back their temple and give them back their kingdom.

But Satan's there too. The book of Revelation says that he is the accuser of the brethren night and day before the throne of God and here we find him there. He's there and he's accusing Joshua. And what is he saying? Well he's saying...I wouldn't listen to Joshua, look at the kind of man Joshua is, he's done this and he's done that, and he's not a worthy man and he's an evil man. And Satan is standing right there at the right hand of God accusing Joshua.

But God doesn't want to hear any of it, verse 2. "The Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, Satan. Indeed the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is this not a bran plucked from the fire?'" Amazingly the wicked, fallen archangel of God, himself so vile as to have hell created for him is standing at the right hand of God accusing Joshua. And the people he represents of being so sinful they are unworthy of God's favor. And the question comes...who does he think he is who is infinitely worse to make such an accusation against others?

Was he right? No. God rebuked Satan for questioning His promise to restore Israel. And then God moves to cleanse Joshua, verse 3. "Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments standing before the angel." What does that tell you? Joshua was a sinful man like all men. And in this vision he sees Joshua in a filthy garment. There's no hiding his sin and he needs to be cleansed. And He spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again He said to him, "See I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes." Then I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head," so they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments while the angel of the Lord was standing by.

Here is the forgiveness. Here is the cleansing. Here is the removal of guilt from Joshua. And as the representative of His people God is saying, "I am going to forgive My people, I'm going to forgive this nation. I am reiterating My promise of salvation and covenant, and if My people will meet My conditions I will restore them." Verse 6, "The angel of the Lord admonished Joshua saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, if you will walk in My ways and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts and I will grant you free access among these who are standing here.'" Who are they? Angels. If you will just obey Me and walk in My ways and do My service, I will allow you to govern My house and take charge of My courts and I'll grant you access to holy angels. I'll restore you as a nation. I'll give you back your identity and back your Kingdom and back your temple. I'll restore you as My priest nation, even as I have restored your own high priest. That is all on the basis of God's free sovereign electing love and not for any merit or

work, and yet they must be obedient. Such grace does not excuse disobedience, it demands it.

When the people obey Me, He says, the restoration will come. And then the amazing part, verse 8, "Now listen, Joshua, the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you, indeed they are men who are a symbol for behold I am going to bring in My servant the branch." Woe, who is this? The Messiah. Now we've jumped from history present in Zechariah's time to the very end. "For behold the stone that I have set before Joshua on one stone are seven eyes, behold I will engrave an inscription on it, declares the Lord of host, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, declares the Lord of host, every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under His vine and under His fig tree."

What is that? That's the promise that the Messiah will come called the branch. That's the promise that the Messiah will set up His Kingdom. And in that Kingdom, God in one moment, in one day at the coming of Jesus Christ will remove iniquity and in that day He will set up His Kingdom and everyone will invite his neighbor to sit under His vine and under His fig tree. What is that? Peace, holiness and peace...the great ultimate final glorious restoration. And so what Zechariah is seeing then is a near fulfillment and a far fulfillment. So God chooses Joshua, the high priest. He chooses Joshua to stand before Him as the cleansed and forgiven servant in the new temple to be built in a new Israel...a new Israel come back from its captivity, and it is all symbolic of an ultimate final restoration and eternal glory in the Kingdom Messiah will bring at His Second Coming.

So all of that is laid out in chapter 3. We meet Joshua. Now Joshua knows and Zechariah can fill him in on any of the details because he had the vision. Now Joshua knows that restoration is promised where there is obedience and he can begin to move the people toward that restoration. But there's another key player in chapter 4, the ruler by the name of Zerubbabel.

"Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me as a man who was awakened from his sleep. And he said to me what do you see? And I said, I see and behold a lampstand all of gold with its bowls on the top of it and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it. Also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl, the other on its left side." Quite an amazing scene, isn't it?

Did you notice there we run into the lampstands and the olive trees just as it said in Revelation chapter 11? What he is describing here is the menorah. Do you know what a menorah is? That's that Jewish candle you see with the seven lights on it, the one in the middle and then the three on each side. You see it everywhere. In front of the Knesset(?) in Israel which is the governing parliament. There's a massive menorah out there.

The bowl that he talks about, and I want to just kind of form this in your mind, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, the bowl is an oil vessel. And above this menorah, this is almost an

automated menorah, because there's a bowl up there that constantly drips oil flowing into the lamps by gravity, this is the vision he sees. I wish I could diagram for you. And then you will notice he says it has seven spouts. The bowl comes down, it divides into seven spouts, each of those spouts dispersing oil constantly to the seven lamps.

Then there are two olive trees, what are they? What kind of olive...what kind of oil did they burn in a lamp? Olive oil. That's why I say you've got a self-contained operation here, the two olive trees are producing the oil that goes into the bowl that is disseminated out of the seven spouts that goes into the lamps to keep the light burning. Here is a spontaneous automatic oil supply with no human agency.

You say, "Is that important?" You better believe it's important because what it says is that God is going to keep this whole thing moving without any human involvement. Verse 4, "Then I answered and said to the angel who was speaking with me, saying, 'What are these, my lord?' So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, 'Do you not know what these are?' And I said, 'No, my lord.' Then he answered and said to me, 'This is the Word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying...' You recognize the next phrase? "Not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." I want Zerubbabel to know, I want Zerubbabel to know that without any human agency, without any human might and without any human power, God is going to keep the nation of Israel alive. He's going to keep the lamp lit. And it's going to flow from the two olive trees.

Verse 7, "What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain and he will bring forth a top stone with shouts of grace, grace to it. Also the Word of the Lord came to me saying, 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house and his hands will finish it, then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you, for who has despised the day of small things.'" We might have a little beginning, but wait till you see the end. "But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel, these are the eyes of the Lord which range to and fro throughout the earth."

What he is saying is there are two olive trees and those two olive trees are going to be the divine instruments by which God keeps Israel alighted. Those two olive trees represent Joshua and Zerubbabel, two men whom God would use to restore Israel. Joshua would be the instrument of the spiritual revival. Zerubbabel would be the instrument of the rebuilding. Zerubbabel would rebuild the temple by God's power, and Joshua would bring about the revival. Between them, priests and king, they brought about the restoration of Israel to God and the restoration of Israel to its definition as a Kingdom.

Then the final component, verse 11, "And I answered and said to him, 'What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand on its left?' And I answered the second time and said to them...to him, 'What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes which empty the golden oil

from themselves?' So he answered me saying, 'Do you not know what these are?' And I said, 'No, my lord.' Then he said, 'These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.'"

Two oil trees, olive trees that produce oil; two branches; two pipes; two anointed ones standing by the Lord through whom the supply of the Spirit flows continually to bring salvation and restoration. Who are they? They are Joshua and Zerubbabel.

Back to Revelation. When we read that God has two witnesses in the end time called two olive trees and two lampstands, we now know exactly what that means, don't we? That God is getting ready for the salvation and the restoration of what people? Israel. God is in the midst of renewal. God is in the midst of restoration, as He was in the days of Joshua and Zerubbabel. Only this time the new temple will be the Millennial temple and the new commitment will be national salvation. And the new worship will be centered on the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, the magnificent imagery. Joshua and Zerubbabel were God's instruments for the ancient restoration of Israel. They were olive trees, golden pipes through whom the Holy Spirit's power was flowing. And so will the final two witnesses be. Olive trees, golden pipes...wow, and it won't be by human power or human might that they will be used to bring about the restoration. I believe these two play that primary and culminating role in bringing Israel to salvation. They become the most powerful preachers to bring redemption to the last part of the remnant.

You say, "But who are they?" Last week Scott Artivanas(?) and Rick Holland came up to me and volunteered, can you imagine that? The question has come for years, who are they? And I'm not going to tell you that I can answer that question absolutely but I can give you a suggestion because it doesn't tell us here but there might be a possibility that they could be Moses and Elijah returned to the earth...really, that's right. Why? Well, they're very unusual guys. Verse 5 tells us about them. "If anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies." Now that's a fairly shocking capability. You've heard of bad breath, this is deadly breath.

Verse 6, "If...if they desire, and they do, they have power to shut the sky in order that it might not rain. They can turn water into blood, they can smite the earth with every plague as often as the desire."

Now let me tell you something. Those things that they do--fire, drought, water turned to blood and smiting the earth with every plague, are very similar to judgments inflicted in the Old Testament by Moses and Elijah. Elijah during his life brought down fire from heaven, didn't he? Second Kings chapter 1, so that it consumed the enemies of God. He also shut off rain from heaven, 1 Kings 17, James 5:17 talks about it. And Moses turned water into blood and smote the people of Egypt with all kinds of plagues, according to Exodus 7 through 10.

Let me give you second reason it might be Moses and Elijah. Prophecy has some predictions regarding them in the future. Malachi 4 verses 1, 5 and 6 says, "Before the final day of the Lord Elijah will come." And the Jews believed that before the end at the setting up of the Kingdom, Moses would come, and they based it on Deuteronomy 18:15 to 18..."That prophet like unto Moses..." Both of those traditional and typical Jewish expectations seem to be combined in John 1:21. So there has always been the belief among the Jews that Moses and Elijah would come back.

Thirdly, both Moses and Elijah were seen in the preview of the Second Coming. What was that? What do we call that? The transfiguration. In Matthew 17, Mark 9 and Luke 9 when the disciples were taken up in the mount and Jesus was transfigured before them and they saw Him in a preview of His Second Coming glory, who appeared? Moses and Elijah.

Fourthly, both Moses and Elijah were used by God to bring supernatural means of suffering on people for the purpose of stimulating repentance.

There's another reason, Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets.

There's another reason, both left this life in unusual ways. Elijah didn't die, he went up to heaven in a chariot of fire, 2 Kings 2 says. And Moses' body was never found and it was disputed over, wasn't it, by Michael, God wanting to retain for His own purposes. Why would God want it? Maybe He wanted it so He could use it again. Elijah never died.

You say, "Well what about the statements in the gospels that if people had believed in Jesus Christ, John the Baptist would have been that Elijah?" You know, that's what it says in Matthew 11:13 and 14. That if you had believed then John would have been the Elijah. In other words, if you had believed in Christ and He set up His Kingdom, then John would have fulfilled the prophecy that Elijah was going to come...and in the very description of John in Luke 1 it says He came in the spirit and the power of Elijah.

So some think that it really isn't Moses and Elijah but it's some like Moses and Elijah, because after all, if John could have been that Elijah, then it wasn't really Elijah it was John. So we can't be absolutely dogmatic. Others say it couldn't possibly be Moses and Elijah because Moses died and it's appointed unto man once to die and you can't die twice. Wrong, that argument won't work. Lazarus died twice, so did everybody else who was raised from the dead.

So you can't be dogmatic but it is kind of curious and also the length of the drought that Elijah brought is exactly the same as the length of the drought that these two witnesses bring. So who knows, maybe Elijah is real good at three-and-a-half-day deals. And not just that, three-and-a-half-year droughts, for that's the nature of this drought and the one which he brought.

So, I don't know if it's Moses and Elijah, but it might be. Our time is gone, that's too bad because this is where it really gets exciting. You'll be back.

Father, we thank You for what we've seen tonight. We thank You for more evidence that You have a plan for Israel and it hasn't changed and You're going to send two olive trees, two lampstands. We don't even comprehend how people can believe there's no future for Israel when it's so clear. There's going to come a time of restoration and salvation. We long to see that happen because, Lord, we look at this and we say You're a God of Your word and You keep Your promise no matter how wayward, no matter how far Israel wanders from You, no matter how secular, how godless, how hostile, how hateful toward Christ, the day will come...the day will come when You will bring Israel to Yourself. We thank You for the veracity of Your promise, and we thank You for Your grace to the world of sinful men that right down to the very finish You're going to have two preachers that people will have to listen to because they'll never be able to turn aside from them. They're too powerful. They will become the topic of the world. Television will be dominated by them. The gospel will be preached in its warning side and its hope. Thank You, Lord, that You do not leave this world without witness. There will be the written Word because of a faithful John who continued to speak and write of what he saw, and there will be two great preachers. Maybe Moses and Elijah, and oh how marvelous that would be for Israel because they esteem those two so highly.

But, Lord, we thank You that You keep Your promise and You keep the doors of grace open, right to the end. We look forward to that and with John we rejoice and yet we feel sorrow. This is where the world is headed. May we be faithful to call them to salvation before it is too late. We as a church will be gone during this time, this is our time. You'll have Your witnesses then but this is our time. Who knows but that the Tribulation could begin in the lifetime of those around us, help us in the time we have to take the gospel to every corner of the world, even the corner where we live.

Thank You for the tremendous confidence we have in Your Word. The more we study it and the deeper we go, the more it verifies its authenticity and the more it shows who You are. Thank You for being a God who keeps His promise, even to a wayward people, and a God who is infinitely gracious to the very end. We ask these things and we affirm these things in our Savior's name. Amen.

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