

In a continuation of the interlude between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets, this chapter describes the ministry of the two witnesses who preach during the last 3 ½ years of the tribulation. God ensures that they complete their ministry and then allows them to be killed by the Antichrist, causing the world to celebrate their deaths until God resurrects and takes them to heaven in plain view of all.

¹ And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

John is given a measuring rod and instructed to measure the temple of God, the altar, and the worshipers in the temple. Many manuscripts omit the reference to the angel and so most translators believe it was not necessarily the angel speaking in this verse and those following. The fact that the results of John's measuring are not given imply that obtaining the actual measurements is not the purpose of the exercise. In the OT the act of measuring was often used in prophecy as an expression of ownership and protection and here God is likely expressing His ownership and protection over His temple in Jerusalem, its altar and those who truly worship Him during the tribulation.

² But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

Although he is instructed to measure the temple itself and the altar and the worshipers within, John is told to exclude the outer court which is the court of the Gentiles. God is not extending His ownership and protection to the Gentiles who will occupy the city of Jerusalem for 42 months (3 ½ years). The implication of the phrase "tread under foot" is that these Gentiles are not tourists or worshipers but an occupying force much like Rome in Jesus' day who denied the Jews sovereignty over their own city. It will likely be at the beginning of this period that the Antichrist will desecrate the temple by seating himself there and declaring himself to be God.

³ And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. ⁴ These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

"And I will give power unto my two witnesses" - The word "power" is not in the Greek, and so it reads "I will give unto my two witnesses" in the original. God will give these two witnesses the authority, miraculous power and His divine protection to preach until their mission is complete.

"and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth" - As described in the next verses, God protects them and gives them the ability to preach for 1,260 days (42 months or 3 ½ years), apparently during the time the Gentiles are occupying Jerusalem. They are clothed in sackcloth, the traditional garment of a prophet, signifying that they are occupying the traditional OT office of a prophet through calling people to repentance and warning of judgment.

"These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth" - This line is almost a direct quotation of **Zech. 4:14**: "*Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.*" In chapter 3 of Zechariah an angel had shown Zechariah a vision of Joshua the High Priest being opposed by Satan and how the LORD would cleanse him of his sin and protect him in his role as priest. In chapter 4 the vision continues and Zechariah sees a golden candlestick with an olive tree on either side. The two olive trees have branches that drip their oil into the bowls of the candlesticks, providing them with a perpetual fuel supply. The angel gives a message of encouragement for Zerubbabel, the governor of Jerusalem (this is during the time of Nehemiah). When Zechariah asks the meaning of the olive trees the angel gives the answer quoted above from v. 14. In Zechariah's vision the two olive trees appear to represent Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the governor, whom the LORD had anointed for the purpose of leading the Jews (represented by the candlestick) back to God. During the tribulation the two witnesses will fill a similar role through their preaching to lead people to God.

So who are these two witnesses? Commentators are deeply divided on their identity but there are three main camps. Briefly, one camp believes them to be Enoch and Elijah because neither of them have died physically, while another camp believes the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah because they are the two who appeared to Jesus during His transfiguration. A third camp believes these two witnesses are two unknown (to us) men who are already alive during the tribulation whom God chooses to use for purpose of calling people to repentance like the olive trees in Zechariah. I lean toward this third camp.

⁵ And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. ⁶ These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.

"And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies" - God gives these two witnesses unprecedented power to protect themselves: projecting fire from their mouths to incinerate anyone who would harm them in an attempt to silence them. Elijah could call down fire from heaven to consume those who would take him by force (2 Kings 1:9-12), which is one of the reasons why some point to Elijah as being one of the witnesses.

"and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed" - Fire from their mouths seems to only be for self-defense, but it is a defense that no one will be able to overcome until God decides that they have finished their ministry.

"These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy" - The remaining demonstrations of the power of the witnesses seem to be not for self-defense but to draw attention to the validity of their message. The ability to cause a drought is also attributed to Elijah.

"and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues" - Those that believe Moses is one of the witnesses point to this power as being like the plagues of Egypt during Moses' time. However, in both Elijah and Moses' case, it was God who did the miracles, not the men.

"as often as they will" - God gives them the ability and guidance to use these powers whenever they please within the will of God.

⁷ And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. ⁸ And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

“And when they shall have finished their testimony” - No one is able to touch these two witnesses until they have accomplished the ministry that God gave them to do. God is able to protect His people in order to accomplish His purposes.

“the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit” - A reference to Satan, who is the power behind and controlling agent of the Antichrist. Satan, in the person of the Antichrist, will come against the two witnesses.

“shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them” - The expression “make war against them” implies not a simple murder but a military operation. The Antichrist succeeds where others have failed because the two witnesses have completed their ministry and God allows them to be killed so that the next step in their purpose can be fulfilled.

“And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city” - Rather than being removed for sanitary reasons, the bodies of the two witnesses will be left in the street for all to see. Perhaps the Antichrist wants the world to see his success against the two witnesses.

“which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified” - John makes it obvious that the location where the two witnesses are killed is Jerusalem. This speaks to how far from God the inhabitants of Jerusalem truly will be, for it will be an evil city of sexual perversion and idolatry at this time.

⁹ And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. ¹⁰ And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

“And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half” - Through news broadcasts, internet and social media the entire world will be able to see the corpses of the two witnesses. This will go on for 3 ½ days.

“and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves” - Even criminals killed in the midst of committing a crime are allowed a burial, but not these two witnesses. They are so hated by the world that they are not allowed the dignity of a burial. People from all over the world will want to see their bodies decompose in the street as an expression of their contempt.

“And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another” - Another indication of the world’s hatred for the two witness is the celebration over their deaths. It will be like a holiday.

“because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth” - The world will hate the two witnesses (prophets) not only because they did not like being called out for their sin by the preaching of the prophets but also because they suffered under the plagues that the prophets sent on the earth.

¹¹ And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. ¹² And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

“And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them” - It could be a coincidence that the prophets lay dead a day for each year they preached, but we see the number 3 ½ frequently in association with the tribulation. After the 3 ½ days God resurrects the prophets in plain sight of those who have been celebrating their demise.

“and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them” - These people know how dangerous the prophets were when they were alive and when they see them rise from the dead and stand to their feet there is no doubt that they were in a state of panic.

“And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither” - When it says “they heard a great voice” it’s unclear if the “they” are the two prophets or if the bystanders also hear and understand the voice from heaven. Quite likely the voice is for the benefit of the bystanders who also hear the voice and understand that it is God Who is calling His faithful servants home.

“And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them” - The two prophets ascend to heaven in a cloud, much like Jesus when He ascended. However, these two prophets do so in plain sight of their enemies who witness the whole event. In fact, it’s possible the event will be captured by news cameras and/or social media for the whole world to see.

¹³ And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

“And the same hour was there a great earthquake” - Shortly after the prophets ascend to heaven God sends an earthquake to punctuate the importance of their ministry and express His displeasure that they were killed in rebellion against Him.

“and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand” - Ten percent of the city of Jerusalem collapses during the earthquake, resulting in the deaths of 7,000 men. One commentator suggests the dead may be primarily among the leaders of the Antichrist’s occupying force.

“and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven” - The survivors give glory to God, but this reaction may only be one of fear and not of true repentance. Churches started filling up after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, but it did not take long for things to return to normal once the fear wore off.

¹⁴ The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

An angel warned of the three woes in Rev. 8:13, referring to the last three of the seven trumpets. At this point the fifth and sixth trumpets (the first and second woes) have sounded, leaving only the seventh trumpet (the third woe) remaining to sound. We are told that there will be no more delay in the sounding of this last trumpet.