

REVELATION 10 AND 11

(PART 4)

PROPHESYING AGAIN – THE GOSPEL’S FINAL CALL

(REVELATION 11:4-7)

Identifying the Two Witnesses

Zechariah saw, in an angel-directed vision, a golden candlestick with seven lamps. The oil (implied) came from two olive trees into a bowl that, in turn, fed those seven lamps (Zechariah 4:1-6).

- The angel also noted that those two olive trees were “two anointed ones” that stand by the “*Lord of the whole earth*” (Zechariah 4:14).
- Zechariah heard these words:
“This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

Zerubbabel, the new governor, and Joshua, the High Priest, were set aside to lead the first wave of captives from Babylon to Jerusalem under a decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. Their mission was to be Spirit-led.

- These two leaders were witnesses of God’s power and direction
- As they led the people, the multitude, heading toward Canaan.

Thus, we have a fascinating association between two heavenly anointed beings (commissioned for a specific task) that administer or are conduits of oil (the Holy Spirit) to a “candleholder” to provide a full complement of light (seven flames).

- This helpful imagery guides us into the meaning of what John is about to describe.
- Zechariah’s vision is partially seen in Revelation 1:4c, 3:1 and 5:6c, i.e.:
*“... having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the **seven Spirits of God** sent forth into all the earth”* (Revelation 5:6c).
- That, in turn, also alludes to the final and **full** outpouring of God’s Spirit, called the Latter Rain (Joel 2:23, Zechariah 10:1).

There are two leaders – two witnesses – who help instruct and guide earth’s final body of believers. One symbolizes the laity (Zerubbabel), the other God’s anointed (Joshua). This is how John begins:

“These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth” (Revelation 11:4).

- The implicit resource of the olive trees is the Holy Spirit, a power of heavenly origin.¹ Those anointed “candles” are receiving the holy presence of God.
- Instead of one lampstand, as in Zechariah, John sees two, fed by two olive trees – “anointed ones” who stand by God, the Lord of the whole earth. Those candlesticks are defined in verse 3 as His “two witnesses!”
- Candlesticks (lampstands) were previously noted to represent “churches” (Revelation 1:20).

In the ancient tabernacle the light that came from the lamps of fire represented the light of God’s presence (Numbers 8:1-4), just as it is noted in Zechariah, all a symbol of His Spirit!²

In Revelation 1 there are seven churches (lampstands). Here, there are only two. Why?

- They are the “two witnesses” at earth’s last three and a half years (vs 3).
- It is clear from other parts of this book that at the end, five churches will have apostatized and become part of Babylon.
- Those churches represent the various types of Christian bodies at the end.

Despite persecution and opposition for that three and a half years (Revelation 11:2), a pure group of witnesses is preserved.

- This is the end-product, **the remnant**, of John measuring the temple in verse 1.
- The two churches that God levied no criticism towards were Smyrna and Philadelphia.³

These two lampstands/churches symbolize those groups of people who will finish the work! They are the key “light bearers.”⁴ They are the voices who cry, “Behold the bridegroom cometh” (Matthew 25:6).

- A testimony of two witnesses validates truth (Deuteronomy 19:15).
- “In his earthly ministry Jesus followed this Mosaic tradition when he urged his audience to receive his testimony because of two witnesses to it (Jn 8:16-18), and he practiced this when he sent out the twelve disciples and the seventy-two in teams of two (Mk 5:7; Lk 10:1; cf. Acts 15:39-40). This practice of having testimony concerning Jesus established by two witnesses is illustrated by the testimony of the two witnesses on the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah. So now the church is to proclaim prophetically the testimony of Jesus to the world as it is also thus confirmed to be the truth.”⁵

“From the two olive trees, the golden oil was emptied through golden pipes into the bowl of the candlestick and thence into the golden lamps that gave light to the sanctuary. So from the holy

¹ Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 421.

² Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), 576.

³ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

⁴ Mounce, Robert H.; *The Book of Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977), p. 218.

⁵ Brighton, Louis A; *Revelation, Concordance Commentary* (Concordance Publishing House, St. Louis), 1999, p. 294.

ones that stand in God's presence, His Spirit is imparted to *human instrumentalities* that are consecrated to His service. The mission of the two anointed ones is to communicate light and power to *God's people*. It is to receive blessing for us that they stand in God's presence. As the olive trees empty themselves into the golden pipes, so the heavenly messengers seek to communicate all that they receive from God. The whole heavenly treasure awaits our demand and reception; and as we receive the blessing, we in our turn are to impart it. Thus it is that the holy lamps are fed, and **the church** becomes a light bearer in the world."⁶

"From the anointed ones that stand in God's presence the fullness of divine light and love and power is imparted to **His people**, that they may impart to others light and joy and refreshing. Those who are thus enriched are to enrich others with the treasure of God's love."⁷

"The mission of the two anointed ones is to communicate to **God's people** that heavenly grace which alone can make his Word a lamp to the feet and a light to the path."⁸

Intriguingly, there is another provocative orientation:

"'Thy word,' said the psalmist, 'is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.' Psalm 119:105. The two witnesses represent the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament. Both are important testimonies to the origin and perpetuity of the law of God. Both are witnesses also to the plan of salvation. The types, sacrifices, and prophecies of the Old Testament point forward to a Saviour to come. The Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament tell of a Saviour who has come in the exact manner foretold by type and prophecy."⁹

The symbolism of the "two witnesses" closely resembles that of Zerubbabel and Joshua. Just as they were raised up to bring restoration to God's church (temple) (Zechariah 4:2-3, 6, 11-14), so will these "evangelists" accomplish a similar mission at the end.¹⁰ Again, one symbolic of the laity, the other of God's specially anointed leaders.

Since the two witnesses teach, prophesy and lead others in an end-time setting, they are seen as without fault.

Their Work Begins

"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" (Revelation 11:5).

The "prophetic ministry" of the two witnesses begins. Their message is not here revealed – but intimated throughout the book (i.e., 14:6-11). Revelation 11:5-7a are heavenly administrative comments. They are "statements of loyalty" for those fulfilling and completing the gospel commission.

⁶ White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 510.

⁷ White, Ellen G.; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 594.

⁸ White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, January 16, 1908.

⁹ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 267.

¹⁰ Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 8–22 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago), 1992, p. 89.

- God's sovereignty flashes forth on their behalf (cf. Revelation 3:10; 7:3-4; 9:4, 20; 11:1).
- The metaphorical picture suggests that **if** anyone tries to harm them, fire comes out of their mouths and destroys those enemies.

The *mouth* is a symbol of where judgment is pronounced (Revelation 2:12, 16; 9:17-19; 12:15-15; 16:13; 19:15, 21). *Fire* represents the execution of the sentence coming from the "fiery word" (Jeremiah 5:4) that will consume the guilty (Psalm 39:3).¹¹ This is a "legal pronouncement." They will be indicted.¹²

The phrase "if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed" is a principle often repeated in Revelation, called *lex talionis*. The punishment must fit the crime (cf. Revelation 13:10, 18:5-7).

The statements which begin in verse 5 start a narrative that assures success in their mission.

- That will be affirmed in 7a.
- "Their ministry cannot be stopped or destroyed for 'not even the gates of hell can overcome it.' (Matthew 16:18)."¹³

Unbridled Power

"... *But you will receive power **when** the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses*" (Acts 1:8 – NIV – emphasis added).

- Power to resist sin is an "assurance theme" throughout the Bible.
- Power to complete the gospel commission only awaits man's response to the infilling of the Holy Spirit.
- Now a glimpse into those promises in action, as the oil from those olive trees continuously flows.

"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" (Revelation 11:6).

John repeats twice that these witnesses "have power." "Power" is *exousian* (G), which encompasses "authority," especially over the natural world. That is where *life* exudes from. Thus, these "judicial gifts" directly impact people. Similar parallels are noted in the Old Testament.

- Elijah was given power to stop the rain for three and a half years (I Kings 17:1, 7; 18:1; James 5:17). It is fascinating to note that this is the same duration of time these two witnesses are active (Luke 4:25)!
- In his day it was done to lead rebellious Israel to repentance.

¹¹ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 422.

¹² Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 580.

¹³ Brighton, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

- It is assumed that should God's last-day people again beckon such plagues, they would serve the same purpose as well as punish apostasy.
- Moses was given authority to decree that water be turned into blood (Exodus 7:17-21; 9:14; 11:10; I Samuel 4:8).
 - Such power is part of God's final curse on planet earth as evidenced in the third Trumpet (Revelation 8:8) and the third Bowl (Revelation 16:4).
 - Intriguing is the "greater power" of these two witnesses since they can call for these curses as often as they desire!

Malachi predicted that the coming of Elijah would be before the coming of the Day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5-6) (symbolizing both advents). This intimates that these two witnesses will replicate the work that Elijah experienced in dealing with rebellious Israel prior to Christ's Second Coming.

Their power extends to their ability of "striking the earth with every type of plague whenever they might wish." This "strongly suggests that the Egyptian plagues are indeed the model for those inflicted by the two witnesses."¹⁴

One challenge that many question relates to the fire, draught, blood and other "plagues." Are they literal or symbolic?

If literal – are they additive curses to those of the Trumpet and Vial plagues?

Moses and Elijah serve as examples. They didn't bring the plagues in their respective experiences – but were messengers and petitioners for when they were necessary. ***Those woes were literal.***

The judicial roles of Moses and Elijah were responses to those who persecuted or impeded the mission of God's people (pagan – as in Moses, and "God's people" – as in Elijah).

If symbolic (as Beale suggests)¹⁵ – then the imagery conveys:

1. Fire – God will destroy anything that impedes the forward work of bringing the gospel to the whole earth.
2. Draught – for those opposing the witnesses' mission, God is willing to withhold life-giving blessings to weaken their resistance.
3. Blood – if necessary, a supernatural plague (which could even threaten their lives) would demonstrate that it is God who is blocking their apostasy.

Questioning more deeply: Could these "plagues" actually be the literal Trumpet plagues of 8:7-12? Some think so – and that may be the ultimate tool God uses during earth's last witnessing phase, often referred to as the "loud cry." It becomes a gospel call with supernatural signs and warnings.

¹⁴ Aune, David E.; *52A World Biblical Commentary; Revelation 6–16* (World Books; Dallas, Texas – 1997), p. 616.

¹⁵ Beale, *op. cit.*, pp. 583-586.

“Intractable impenitence in the face of the prophetic witnesses sets in motion these judgments,” which are part of the witness itself!¹⁶

“And when they shall have finished their testimony,” (Revelation 11:7a).

The message of God’s last evangelists is summed up by “their testimony” (vs 7a). That testimony is also “their prophecy” (Revelation 10:11).

- This mission ends at the termination of the 1260 days (called the “appointed time” in Daniel 8:19, 11:35; cf. Revelation 11:3).
- God will not permit Satan to experience a “temporary triumph” over the global spread of the gospel until that witnessing is completed.¹⁷

This final work moves forward under severe persecution (attested to by the fifth Seal). But that mission will succeed. The concept in that Seal reveals that the horrors don’t stop “until the number (of the martyred saints) is complete” (Revelation 6:11).¹⁸

- They maintain their “conquering perseverance” (first Seal imagery – Revelation 6:1-2) even to death.
- *“And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death”* (Revelation 12:11).

This means that what follows (7b-13) occurs at the end of history.¹⁹

- Right at the end, the church will appear defeated from outward appearances.
- But – the promise, firmly stated by Christ, is that this silencing of their voices signals that the end and His return is imminent (Matthew 24:14, 29-31).

Intriguingly – this victory (Revelation 11:11-12) reveals that the measuring of the church and its worshipers (11:1) guarantees that a body of saints, divinely chosen, will be eternally His.

Revelation 7, related to God’s “kingdom number” [twelve], is when all the citizens (“jewels” – Malachi 3:17) have been identified.

There are amazing prophetic parallels associated with this time!²⁰

Revelation 6:9, 11:

“The souls of the ones who had been slain ... on account of the witnesses ... until the number should be completed ... of the ones to be killed”

Revelation 11:7:

“When they should complete their witnessing ... he will kill them”

¹⁶ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 586.

¹⁷ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 587.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

“As the end approaches, the testimonies of God’s servants will become more decided and more powerful, flashing the light of truth upon the systems of error and oppression that have so long held the supremacy. The Lord has sent us messages for this time to establish Christianity upon an eternal basis, and all who believe present truth must stand, not in their own wisdom, but in God; and raise up the foundation of many generations. These will be registered in the books of heaven as repairers of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in. We are to maintain the truth because it is truth, in the face of the bitterest opposition. God is at work upon human minds; it is not man alone that is working. The great illuminating power is from Christ; the brightness of His example is to be kept before the people in every discourse (Letter 1f, 1890).”²¹

“the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them” (Revelation 11:7b)

This is the first time “the” beast (*therion* – a cruel, violent, rapacious creature) is introduced.

- In Daniel a beast (*theria* – H) is an earthly empire or nation that opposes or wars against the saints (Daniel 7:18, 27).
- This creature is not Satan since *he* is represented as a dragon, serpent and devil in Revelation (12:3, 9).

This also informs us that the beast (some nation/country) that had already ascended during the time of the two witnesses’ activity (42 months) (Revelation 11:2, 13:5) silences their voices.

- This beast ascends from the abyss – the haunt of demons (Luke 8:31, II Peter 2:4, Jude 6).
- This beast power comes only as God will “hand over” to him the saints (Daniel 7:25).
- If this is a literal picture of martyrdom, then the 144,000, God’s final witnesses, could not be translated.
- Those translated are too numerous to count (Revelation 7:9, 13-15).

The two witnesses are the “two candlesticks” or churches. They represent God’s last believers, who finish the work, laity and anointed leaders – and also the precious Old and New Testaments.

- The setting and imagery of “killing” is best seen as “silencing” these witnesses. God’s people, the saints, no longer have a voice. But their work has been completed.
- Though there is a parallel to the martyrdom of the fifth Seal, these witnesses are “killed” after the 1260-day period! Probation has closed. At that time no deaths occur among the saints.
- This echoes the time of the “great tribulation” of Daniel 12:1 and Matthew 24:21.

“The accusation urged of old against the servant of God will be repeated and upon grounds equally well established: ‘And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast

²¹ White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, p. 1152.

followed Baalim.' 1 Kings 18:17, 18. As the wrath of the people shall be excited by false charges, they will pursue a course toward God's ambassadors very similar to that which apostate Israel pursued toward Elijah."²²

Remember – Elijah was translated!

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²² White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 590.