

### **Read Matthew 25:1-13**

God will ensure that we are able to do what He has called us to do (have the supplied oil)—to shine for Him. What is our responsibility in that?

## **Who are the witnesses in Revelation 11?**

Excerpt from Kistemaker's Commentary on Revelation 11,  
in the New Testament Commentary Series.

John writes “forty-two months.” The Apocalypse makes this period equal to 1,260 days or “time, times, and a half time,” which is three and a half years (11:3; 12:6, 14). The three and a half years comprise the period of the Maccabean war when the temple was desecrated from June 167 to December 164 B.C. (compare Dan. 7:25; 12:7). Swete offers the following equation: “the duration of the triumph of the Gentiles = the duration of the prophesying of the Two Witnesses = the duration of the Woman’s sojourn in the wilderness.”<sup>151</sup> In short, these periods showing harmony in duration and extent appear to refer to an interval of undetermined length that extends from Jesus’ ascension to his return.<sup>162</sup>

Last, some interpreters apply the period of forty-two months to the years immediately preceding the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. But the length of time does not fit the record. The Jewish revolt against Rome began in the late spring of 66 and ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in August–September 70. Also, the trampling of the holy city by the Gentiles began after Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Romans. Placing the forty-two months after September 70) is pointless, for then there is a beginning without an end.

Accordingly, John takes this prophecy of Jesus and applies it not to the earthly Jerusalem but to the church, which is the image of the new Jerusalem. The Gentiles are not non-Jews but rather non-Christians who trample all that is holy and make it profane. The trampling of the holy city refers to a period of persecution that

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>15</sup> Swete, *Revelation*, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> <sup>16</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, p. 567; Mathias Rissi, *Time and History: A Study on the Revelation*, trans. Gordon C. Winsor (Richmond: John Knox, 1966), p. 40.

Christians suffer throughout the ages. But remember that God sets the limit for its duration. Indeed, this period spans the time from the ascension to the return of Jesus. I conclude that in Revelation time is an idea presented in summary form that should not be expressed in literal terms of years or even centuries. Chronological time is of fleeting importance in this book, because not time but principle governs the Apocalypse.<sup>3</sup>

Who are the two witnesses? Scholars have suggested names taken from both the Old and the New Testaments. Tertullian and Irenaeus mentioned Enoch and Elijah because these two did not see death (Gen. 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11). But would these two glorified saints who did not die return at the same time and would they oppose the beast that comes up out of the Abyss and suffer martyrdom (v. 7)?<sup>184</sup> Others say that the witnesses are Moses and Elijah. These two appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3). Moses represented the Law and Elijah the Prophets. Scripture stated that God would raise up a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15, 18) and Elijah would reappear (Mal. 4:5).<sup>195</sup> Still others propose the names of Jeremiah and Elijah, Joshua and Caleb, Peter and Paul, John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth, John and his brother James, Stephen and James of Zebedee, to mention no more.<sup>206</sup>

However, I suggest a symbolic interpretation, namely, that the two witnesses represent the church of Christ that by proclaiming the gospel calls the world to repentance. First, the witnesses must

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3 Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, [\*Exposition of the Book of Revelation\*](#), vol. 20, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 327.

4 <sup>18</sup> See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 276. He writes, “There is no good evidence of traditions from before the time of Revelation in which returning prophets were expected to suffer martyrdom.”

5 <sup>19</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2:86–87; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, p. 89; Caird, *Revelation*, pp. 134–36.

6 <sup>20</sup> Refer to Van de Kamp, *Israël in Openbaring*, pp. 183–86; Josephine Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, AB 38 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 177–78.

address all the inhabitants of the world: peoples, tribes, languages, and nations (v. 9), which can hardly be done by only two witnesses. Second, the pairing of the witnesses is reminiscent of Jesus' sending out his disciples two by two (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). The apostles also go out two by two (Acts 3:1; 8:14). Third, in Israel a verdict was confirmed on the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6; 19:15), and the church exerts discipline on that same basis (Matt. 18:16). Indeed, the witness of one man can be disregarded, but on the testimony of two men truth is validated (John 8:17).

Last, John relies on an Old Testament prophecy, for he describes the two witnesses as two olive trees and two lampstands (v. 4). The prophet Zechariah mentions two olive trees and a solid gold lampstand (Zech. 4:2–3); olive oil placed in the lampstand functions to spread the light and dispel the darkness. And symbolically, a lampstand is the church (1:20) made up of believers who live by the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Thus, Zechariah identifies the two olive trees as anointed servants who serve the Lord of all the earth (Zech. 4:3, 11, 14). They seem to be Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor (Zech. 4:14), who represented the Jewish community of returnees. Similarly, I interpret the two witnesses in the Apocalypse to be representative of the entire church.<sup>217</sup>

John notes that the two witnesses are *clothed in sackcloth*. Although the sackcloth made of goat or camel hair was a garment worn by both men and women in distress (2 Kings 19:2; Judith 9:1), its use often assumed symbolic significance. This was true especially when prophets wore sackcloth to point out a disrupting sin in society, to call the people to repentance, or to warn them of

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7 <sup>21</sup> See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1974), p. 184; Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:504; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 602–3; Beale, *Revelation*, pp. 574–75.

imminent judgment and punishment.<sup>228</sup> Men like Elijah in the Old Testament era and John the Baptist in New Testament times recalled society to its God-given moorings. Symbolically dressed in sackcloth as a sign of repentance, the church has been called to prophesy the Word of God, the content of the little scroll, to the world. It is the duty of the church to call people everywhere to repentance and faith in Christ (10:11).

The voice from heaven tells John that the two witnesses receive power to prophesy 1,260 days. This number divided by thirty equals forty-two months, which is the same period as that during which the Gentiles profane the outer court (v. 2). It is the period from the Great Commission to the consummation, from the birth of the New Testament church to the end of the age (Matt. 28:19–20).<sup>9</sup>

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8 <sup>22</sup> See Larry G. Herr, “Sackcloth,” *ISBE*, 4:256; Gustav Stählin, *TDNT*, 7:63.

9 Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, [\*Exposition of the Book of Revelation\*](#), vol. 20, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 329–330.