

OBSERVATION STUDY SERIES

REVELATION

THE TWO WITNESSES

11:3-6

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Revelation 11:3-6

The Two Witnesses

What do 42 months and twelve hundred and sixty days have in common? Probably nothing on our own Gregorian calendars, but do the math on a Jewish calendar and you've got a match!

...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

There are two time phrases in the first three verses of chapter 11—forty-two months and 1,260 days. Are they related? They are on a Jewish calendar. (Try to do it on a Gentile calendar and it doesn't work.) On a Jewish calendar forty-two months, 1,260 days, and the upcoming “times time, time and half a time” are all the same time measurement—three and one-half years. We are going to start seeing these time phrases repeatedly. The nations will trample the court outside the temple of God for three and one-half years. The two witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days. They will be clothed in sackcloth for the entire three and one-half years.

The Greek word for witnesses is *martus* and by analogy refers to a martyr. The fact that there are two witnesses (who will indeed become martyrs) reminds us of the Mosaic Law which insisted on the need for a minimum of two witnesses, in other words a full and affirmed testimony, before a conviction.

These two witnesses are referred to as “my” witnesses. Who is the “my”? Well... it is the One Who grants them their authority. Many will try to stop these two, but the Lord has granted them authority to continue for 3 1/2 years—so they will... They will be dressed in sackcloth, which is used throughout the Bible to show mourning over sin and repentance toward God. They will prophesy, whether forth telling or foretelling, the judgments of God. If only the peoples would repent... but they will not...

There have been many suggestions on who these two witnesses might be: Moses and Elijah, Elijah and Elisha, Enoch and Elijah, Peter and Paul, the Law and the Gospel, the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Law and the Prophets, etc., etc., etc... Some of these suggestions are easy to eliminate, others seem reasonable. But the Bible doesn't tell us for sure, so guess what? We don't know who they will be. What we do know is that they will be actual persons—they are not just symbolic.

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

I have to say that what we are doing, thoughtfully and carefully observing the text, is just so very important. So many commentators divert from the text at this point and start offering possible hypotheses to the symbolism of the two olive trees and the two lampstands, thus missing the main and plain point of the passage. Whatever the symbolism of the two olive trees or the two lampstands are, they ultimately point to the light of the Word of God being spoken.

However, that does not mean that we should not study the Word of God to let it interpret this passage for us, because we should. We just do not have time to do so within the scope of our stated goal of observation. Some good cross-references as a starting point for further study would be Zechariah, especially chapter 4, and Revelation, itself, beginning with chapter 1.

There are many other cross-references we could sift through, but, as usual we are going to try and stay on the mountain tops to understand the main idea—and not try to determine all the specifics of the details. Don't ever forget our purpose... We are observing Revelation to glean the main structure of the book. Studying God's Word is a life-time endeavor and I encourage you to keep studying with all your heart (although please do it inductively) for as long as you can. There is much more to this book than what we have time for in our stated purpose—but it is of utmost important to understand the skeletal form before trying to add flesh.

What we know about these witnesses is this... They have been granted authority from God to prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days. They will be clothed in sackcloth. They are called the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. Now that is important—they stand before the Lord of the earth! He is watching all that they do... and has granted them the authority to do it...

And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way.
Revelation 11:5

What they prophesy will not please everyone (preaching God's wrath and repentance toward Him never does)—they will have enemies. Some will want to harm them, and others will even try. But those who actually try to harm God's witnesses will not succeed; instead, they will be devoured by fire that flows out of the mouths of the prophets. If anyone truly wants to harm these witnesses, he will be killed—it is predetermined.

These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.
Revelation 11:6

These two witnesses, who are actual persons, will have the power to shut up the sky so that rain will not fall during the days of the prophesying. No rain... no rain at all... How long will these two witnesses prophesy? 1,260 days. So how long do they have the

power to stop any rain from falling? 1,260 days. Amazing! Can you just imagine the devastation and desperation? I don't think any of us can really imagine just how horrific it will be...

I just have to insert some thoughts here... This period of time will bring about an amazing amount of death on the earth. Water is needed to bring life, but it won't be available. The Bible often talks about God's Word being the Water of Life. If only the people on the earth would listen to God and "drink" His Word by believing Him and responding rightly to Him, they could have life... Instead, they will (just as most do now) tell God to "shut up" His mouth and keep the "rain" of His Word from "falling" on their souls. They self-impose a drought on their lives that will bring nothing but death... If only they could see what they are choosing...

Back to Revelation...

For 3 1/2 years they will have the power to turn the waters on the earth into blood. If they shut up the sky and keep any rain from falling, there will be great drought, right? And that will make the waters on the earth all the more precious, right? So what kind of an impact do you think it will have on people when the two witnesses turn their only source of water into... yes, unbelievably... blood! Calamitous! Catastrophic! Cataclysmic!

For 1,260 days the Lord's two witnesses will have the power to strike the earth with any and every plague they choose—and as often as they desire... Once again, the plagues with which God struck Egypt come to mind. These two witnesses, it seems, will have authority to strike the earth with those plagues as well as any calamity they desire to use during their 3 1/2 years of testimony for God.

By the way, where do you think these two witnesses will take their stand and prophesy? In just a few verses we will find out that this will all take place in Jerusalem...

God is sovereign. He rules over all. His witnesses will speak every last word He intends them to speak. And no one will touch them until they are through speaking God's message... because He is God...

Perhaps some will bend their knee during this time and submit to His rule over their lives... Perhaps some will repent toward God and recognize their need for Him... Sadly, most will not...