

24. The Ministry of the Two Witnesses

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand and explain that God continues and will continue to offer mercy to all who will repent and come to Christ in faith. In this topic, we will see that God sends two witnesses to preach the message of judgment and salvation during the last half of the tribulation, known as the Great Tribulation.

In Revelation 11:1-3, we read, “Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, ‘Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot *for* forty-two months. And I will give *power* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” Reeds, similar to bamboo, were plants that grew along parts of the Jordan River during the time the Bible was written. They were used as measuring sticks to measure distance. Ezekiel 40:5 says, “Now there was a wall all around the outside of the temple. In the man’s hand was a measuring rod six cubits *long, each being a cubit and a handbreadth*; and he measured the width of the wall structure, one rod; and the height, one rod.” A cubit was the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. A handbreadth was the length from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger (this rod was about ten to ten-and-a-half feet in length).

Here, we see that the angel said to measure three things: the temple of God; the altar in the temple; and the people who worshipped in the temple (the Jews). However, the courtyard around the temple was not to be measured because John was told that the courtyard would be under the control of the Gentiles for forty-two months (one thousand two hundred and sixty days). The Jewish calendar had twelve months of thirty days. Then, they would add an extra month about every six years to make the number of days match (that is why the date for Easter varies from year to year). God said that the Gentiles would tread Jerusalem (the holy city) under foot for forty-two months. Christ said, in Matthew 24:15, “Therefore when you see the ‘*abomination of desolation*,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand).”

Daniel 9:27 says, “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.” The Antichrist will set up his own image in the temple and it is called the ‘abomination of desolation’. In Daniel 11, we read about the willful king. Historically, that was Antiochus Epiphanes. The Antichrist will do things similar to what Antiochus did but in the time of the Antichrist it will affect the Jews and the entire world. Daniel 11:36 says, “Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done.” Then, Daniel 12:1 adds, “At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, *even* to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.” That time of trouble for the people of Israel will happen during the tribulation.

It is during this forty-two-month period that God will send His two witnesses to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. They will be clothed in sackcloth. We go on to read, in Revelation 11:4-6, “These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.” Here, we see that God describes these two witnesses as two olive trees and two lampstands. Olive oil was usually used in lamps and lampstands are used to give light. The ministry of these two witnesses will be like the ministry that Matthew 5:16 says all Christians should have. That verse says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Many will listen to their message, but many will also try to destroy the two witnesses.

We see that God will give these two witnesses special powers to protect them from those who want to destroy them. We see that if anyone tries to harm them that fire will come out of their mouth and destroy their enemies. In 2 Kings 1:10 and 12, we see that Elijah called down fire from heaven to destroy those who were sent by the king to get him. 2 Kings 1:10 says, “So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, ‘If I *am* a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.’” And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.” Here, we see that Elijah was given power in the Old Testament to destroy with fire. This is one of the reasons why many Bible teachers think that Elijah will be one of the two witnesses.

In addition, Malachi 4:5-6 says, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” Here, we have a specific statement that the Lord will send Elijah before the second coming of Christ to rule on the earth. In Matthew 17:1-13, we see that Moses and Elijah both appeared with Christ when He was transfigured on the mountain. Matthew 17:3 says, “And He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.” For these reasons many think that Moses and Elijah are the two witnesses who will prophesy for forty-two months.

We also see that the two witnesses will shut heaven so that no rain will fall for the one thousand two hundred and sixty days that they are witnesses on the earth. God gave Moses power to do miracles as signs to Pharaoh in Egypt. Then, James 5:17 says, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.” In addition to the reasons listed above, the fact that both of these men performed miracles in the Old Testament would be another reason why they might be the two witnesses. We also see that when God used Elijah to stop the rain in the Old Testament that it was for the same length of time.

We go on to read, in Revelation 11:7-10, “When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their

dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.” Once the two witnesses have finished the work the Lord has for them on this earth, we see that He will allow the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit to kill them.

We see that this beast comes from the bottomless pit. This means that he is a demon that is only released for a short time during the tribulation to do the evil that he desires to do. We see that he will make war against the two witnesses. God will allow this beast to overcome the two witnesses and kill them. However, the people will not allow their bodies to be buried. Instead, their dead bodies will be left in the street so everyone can see their dead bodies. Then, we have the city described where their bodies will be left in the street. We see that this city is a great city. God compares the spiritual life of that city to Sodom and Egypt. Sodom was so evil that Genesis 19:24 says, “Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens.” Then, Exodus 14:30-31 describe the way the Lord destroyed Egypt when those verses say, “So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses.” The last thing we learn about this city is that it was the city where the Lord was crucified. This means the two witnesses will be killed in Jerusalem.

We see that their dead bodies will lie in the street for three-and-a-half days so that the people throughout the earth can see them. We also see how the people of the earth will react to the death of the two witnesses. The people will do three things to celebrate their death. First, the people will rejoice that they are dead. By the way, this is the only time we see the people on earth rejoicing during the entire tribulation. Second, they will make merry. The word translated “make merry” means to be delighted with something. Here, we see that the people who are in rebellion against God will celebrate the death of His two witnesses. Third, they will send gifts to one another. Here, we see that their celebration will include the sending of gifts to each other to show their happiness that these two will no longer speak for God. These actions certainly show the condition of their hearts. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” That is the reason they will be judged.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why this is the only time that the people of the world will rejoice throughout the entire tribulation. This clearly shows the rebelliousness of their hearts. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.