

Revelation

*Part Twenty-Nine
An Undeniable Witness
(Revelation 11:3-14)*

With Study Questions

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Review

In brief review, what we have here is the continuing conversation between John and the colossal angel of the previous chapter, who may very well be Christ Himself. We are in the sixth trumpet of judgment (Revelation 9:13), the seventh coming later in this chapter (Revelation 11:15).

John is no longer a mere conveyer of information; he is now part of the drama. He had been called to eat the **“little book”** of prophecy (Revelation 10:9), which I take to refer to the judgment on Rome which we will find in chapters thirteen through eighteen. Here he is commissioned to make some measurements.

John is to measure the **“temple,”** the **“altar”** and the **“worshippers”** (ones worshiping, *proskynountas*) (**Revelation 11:1**). He is specifically told not to measure the court outside the temple because it will be given to the **“Gentiles...and tread underfoot for forty-two months”** (**Revelation 11:2**).

We discussed previously how the **“temple”** the **“altar”** and the **“worshippers”** represent to true church. These will be (and, in fact, were) spared the judgment that fell upon Jerusalem, who are now relegated to the outer court. Those who believed and obeyed the teaching of Christ in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), headed for the hills of Pella and escaped, as history indicates, the horrifying siege.

Sometimes faith and obedience to Christ means to face death. Sometimes it results (as here) in escaping death. But it always grants life eternal. Escaping the swords of Rome is minute compared to escaping the wrath of God. Now verse three through fourteen.

And I will give *power* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹² And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. ¹³ In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. ¹⁴ The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly (Revelation 11:14).

Forty-Two Months

In verses two and three we see a number that appears with some regularity, "forty-two months." We also see "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (Revelation 11:3) and "time, times, and half a time" (Daniel 12:7; Revelation 12:14). What are these time periods?

There is great speculation regarding this time frame. Some put a couple of these end to end, adding to seven years of tribulation after the rapture (assuming a pretribulational rapture). Others say it's the entire church age (the idealist view). Others use the year for a day method and view this period as some 1260-year period in church history, e.g., the period of the Roman Catholic church. I respectfully disagree with all of these.

This amount of time does carry a message in a spiritual sense. It is the amount of time first seen in Daniel anticipating Antiochus Epiphanes' siege of Jerusalem (Daniel 7:25). It was also the length of the drought in Israel through the prayer of Elijah, who some view as one of the "two witnesses" (1 Kings 17-18; James 5:17).

I think it makes most sense to view this as the period of time that Rome sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD. History indicates that war to be that length of time. It may also be referring to the Nero's persecution against Christians from 64 AD to 68 AD. These references may be pointing to both, depending on whether these time periods are referring to the exact same event.

Speculations are numerous. But here is something that appears obvious. It is not a terribly short period of time compared to the three-and-a-half days we'll see in verse nine. It is also not a terribly long period compared to the thousand years we'll see in chapter twenty. What we have here is a time of judgment against the wicked and of difficult testimony by the witnesses (hence the "sackcloth"). It is a long enough time to be fatiguing, but it is not so long as to be unendurable.

How many of us during the Covid illnesses and protocols have uttered the words, "I'm over it" or "I'm done with it." The two years have seemed very long. But most of us are here and moving forward. It would be quite a different picture if were to last forty years. Three-and-a-half years is difficult, but doable.

God's Two Witnesses

We are then introduced to one of the most enigmatic parts of the cast of Revelation, Christ's "**two witnesses**" (**Revelation 11:3**). I would love to tell you with absolute certainty who these two witnesses are. I will briefly give you the options. Some say they are Moses and Elijah (either past or future); Enoch and Elijah; the law and the prophets; the law and the Gospel; the Old Testament and the New Testament; the church and the state; the martyrs or the Christian church as a whole, or the Christian church at the end of the age.

We won't spend a great deal of time ferreting this out. But the passage does tell us a bit about them. Verse four gives a metaphor worth examining.

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth (Revelation 11:4).

This is an undeniable reference to the fourth chapter of Zechariah.

And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. ³ And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left” (Zechariah 4:2, 3).

The immediate context of the Old Testament passage is the power of the Spirit of God in the rebuilding of the temple. In the process of giving this message, we see a candlestand next to two olive trees. The olive oil is continually feeding the lampstand.

The two **“anointed ones” (Zechariah 4:14)** (the two olive trees, or branches), in context, are Joshua and Zerubbabel. This leads some to say this must mean the church and the state, since these were the two offices represented by these two men. You may, at this point, think that settles it; the two witnesses are identified. Except the power to **“shut heaven”** and **“turn water into blood”** speaks more to Elijah and Moses. So, calm down.

What is more important (at least more clear) here is the never-ending source of fuel for the lamps. The witnesses here, whoever they might be, are eternally fueled by the Holy Spirit. It is in this context of ultimate and unstoppable success that we read,

Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts (Zechariah 4:6).

If I were forced to make a choice, I would likely conclude that the two witnesses are the testimony of the true prophets of the Old Covenant, which will appear to be dead when the temple is destroyed, and the true testimony of the New Covenant church will arise after the three-and-a-half days. Or perhaps it's general and special revelation. General revelation which leaves us without excuse (Romans 1:20) and special revelation, being authoritatively and self-evidently true (John 12:48)

But while we're guessing a bit at this, let us plant our feet on that which we know for certain: The witness is by the Spirit of God, therefore is without fatigue (Isaiah 40:31). And there are two of them, therefore, certain.

A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established (Deuteronomy 19:15).

The point here is that God has sufficiently given witness and when we deny Him, we are denying something we know to be true.

We are told that their enemies will not be able to harm them (at least for a while) and that they have significant power, which appeals to that which God accomplished through Moses and Elijah (Revelation 11:4-6).

The Witnesses Killed and Despised

Nonetheless, when they **“finish their testimony” (Revelation 11:7)**, they will be killed. Here, for the first time in Revelation, we are introduced to **“the beast.”** I will seek to show later that the beast is the Roman Empire. What we need to grasp here is the hatred Rome had for both the Jews and Christians. At this juncture, the Christians would have been viewed by the Romans as a mere sect of Judaism. Rome was killing Jews and Christians alike.

Let’s seek to clarify here. Whatever true testimony that was coming forth from the faithful prophets of the Old Covenant would be killed by Rome. Along with this, they had already killed many of the church. Bottom line here is that the truth—the true witness, for a time, appeared to be dead.

In all candor, there are times when I find myself quite discouraged examining the western theological landscape. The most popular ministries, the best-selling books, etc., leave me a bit empty. I don’t want to overstate it. Ligonier Ministries is a fountain, as is my access to the Bahnsen Project and other, valuable resources. But in light of the overpowering darkness, the true faith can appear to be a corpse.

In our passage, the true witness is not merely a corpse. It is a humiliated corpse in the very midst of the city where Jesus was crucified. The ‘holy land’ as it is often called, has become Sodom and Egypt—the very antithesis of holy. It’s the way one might feel when they see a rainbow banner hanging on the steeple of what was once a Christian church. A people in desperate need of truth and a Savior, are being encouraged to

find comfort in darkness and call it faith. All of this done in the name of love, peace and true religion, when it is none of those.

And to seek to proclaim a truth that people have sought to entomb will be met with ridicule. To leave their **“dead bodies in the street”** was an act of aggressive mockery and derision. The ungodly will unite (at least for a brief time) and **“make merry and send gifts.”** Like Pilate and Herod (who had been enemies) uniting in friendship during their trial of Christ. The truth is a source of **“torment,”** and the world will not have it. The great pre-reformers, John Huss and John Wycliffe would have their bones exhumed, burned to ash, and thrown in the river. Evil will not live in tolerance for Christ, who is Himself the Truth.

I am not suggesting for a moment that we should be looking for trouble. But as Thomas Torrance said:

The church which is comfortable and undisturbed is a church not true to the word of God.

John’s readers needed to know when they would suffer through a time when the truth would be met with contempt and scorn. We fantasize that we would do well under such circumstances. But I have, sadly, seen many deny the faith when it no longer socially, politically or psychologically accommodated them. This seems to be the prime directive of our current educational system. Denigrating the Christian faith is fatiguingly repetitious in almost all forms of current entertainment. It can be discouraging and influential.

The Witnesses Live

But the apparent death of the truth would be short-lived. After three-and-a-half days **“the breath of life from God”** would enter them. Three-and-a-half days versus three-and-a-half years. The triumphs of darkness are short-lived. As the Third Commandment indicates, the iniquity of man remains a curse **“to the third and fourth generations of those who hate [God],”** but the mercy of God extends a **“thousand”** generations to those who love Him and keep His commandments (Exodus 20:5, 6).

The witness will again stand **“on their feet.”** Like the valley of the dry bones in Ezekiel.

Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live...¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army (Ezekiel 37:5, 10).

This elicits **“great fear...on all who saw them” (Revelation 11:11)**. Jesus rose from the dead to the fear of His enemies (Matthew 28:4). Perhaps this fear is a saving fear or a dread in light of a revived church and its message of eternal life or death. Maybe it’s a bit of both. And perhaps the ascension into heaven is to be understood as Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:6 where believers are already **“raised up with him and seated in the heavenly places.”** The imagery and symbolism of Revelation makes this also very difficult to be precise.

We also read that at the conclusion of the sixth trumpet, there is the natural calamity of an **“earthquake”** which instills fear resulting in many giving **“glory to the God of heaven.”** In our next message we will move on to the seventh and final trumpet, which is the **“third woe”**. But before we leave this second woe behind, let us not lose the ministerial value found in this sixth trumpet.

The seven churches receiving this letter were called to overcome and persevere in the midst of false religion and oppressive government. They/ we must ever reevaluate that which keeps us moving forward. There is a heavenly perspective given often in the Revelation. Whether it’s in Revelation, in Scripture or our own lives. What the children of God must realize is that all of history, as someone said, is a **“string of God’s triumphs disguised as disasters.”**

Questions for Study

1. Review what has been happening during the sixth trumpet (page 2).
2. What are some of the options given for the forty-two months (page 3)?
3. Discuss what you think the forty-two-month period is and why that amount of time is significant (pages 3, 4).
4. What are some options given regarding who the two witnesses are (page 4)?
5. Are there any things we know for certain when it comes to the two witnesses (pages 4-6)?
6. In what respect are the two witnesses killed and what do we learn through this (pages 6, 7)?
7. How long are the witnesses dead and why is this significant (pages 7, 8)?