

Revelation 11:1–11

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months. And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. 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. 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. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

The Three Numbers — One Period of Time

Three distinct numerical expressions appear in connection with the last half of the seventieth week of Daniel: 1,260 days, 42 months, and a time, times, and half a time. All three refer to the same period. A time, times, and half a time is three and a half years. Forty-two months at thirty days to the month is the same. Twelve hundred and sixty days at thirty days to the month is the same. The Spirit of God uses all three expressions in different connections throughout Daniel and

Revelation, but they are the same three-and-a-half years.

The two witnesses prophesy for 1,260 days — the full last half of the week. They prophesy in Jerusalem, clothed in sackcloth. And when they have finished their testimony, they are killed. Their bodies lie in the street for three and a half days — one day for each year of their prophesying. Then the Spirit of life from God enters them and they stand upon their feet, and they ascend in a cloud while their enemies watch. There is an interval between the 1,260th day and the formal inauguration of the millennium: the 1,290 days and the 1,335 days of Daniel show a 75-day period in which, among other things, the war of the great day of God the Almighty is fought. The three and a half days of the witnesses' lying dead falls within that interval.

The Antichrist in Jerusalem — Anti-King and Anti-Priest

In Jerusalem during the last half of the week sits a false ruler — the Antichrist. He is called a king in Daniel 11. He pretends also to priestly authority: in 2 Thessalonians 2 the man of sin sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God, claiming divine honours. The second beast of Revelation 13 directs the religious worship of the western empire toward the first beast — he is the great director of religious affairs, a false priest. Together, the two beasts and the dragon behind them form a false triad, an imitation of the divine Trinity.

As anti-king, the Antichrist allows the Gentiles to tread down the holy city — the true king of Israel would never permit that. As anti-priest, he stops the sacrifices in Jerusalem and causes an idol to be set up in the temple site. He is a failure at both offices: an anti-king who dispossesses his own people, and an anti-priest who abolishes the worship and substitutes a false one.

Sons of Oil and Lampstands — What Their Character Points To

Verse 4 identifies the two witnesses as the two olive trees and the two candlesticks standing before the Lord of the earth. This is a deliberate reference to Zechariah 4, where two olive trees flank one great golden lampstand — the whole fed from a single great bowl of oil. In Zechariah, the two olive trees are the sons of oil, the anointed ones who stand before the Lord of the whole earth: they depict the two offices of Christ — king and priest — united in the one person of the coming Messiah.

In Revelation 11, the picture is not identical. There are two candlesticks, not one — because this is a testimony, and testimony requires two witnesses. The character of their testimony is stamped with the character of those offices of Christ that Zechariah 4 depicts. They are sons of oil — their testimony partakes of that anointed character. They are lampstands — bearers of light. But they are not Christ Himself. They point to Christ. They stand in Jerusalem — where the false king and false priest holds court — and their whole testimony declares: the true King is coming, and the true Priest is coming, and the offices this usurper has taken belong to the Messiah.

The title in verse 4 — the Lord of the earth — connects with Joshua 3:11, where the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the Adonai of all the earth, goes over before Israel into Jordan. It is an earthly scene, an earthly claim being made good. The scene of the witnesses' testimony is not the heavenly warfare of Ephesians 6, but an earthly conflict over earthly rights — the rightful lordship of Christ over the earth.

Moses-Like and Elijah-Like — The Character of Their Ministry

Verse 6 describes their powers: to shut heaven so that it rains not during their days of prophecy, and to turn waters to blood and smite the earth with plagues as often as they will. Elijah shut heaven and it did not rain. Moses turned the waters to blood and smote Egypt with plagues. This is an Elijah-like and a Moses-like

ministry — and that is all that Scripture authorises us to say. It is not Moses and Elijah. Speculation on the identity of the two witnesses goes well beyond what has been revealed, and creates problems rather than resolving them. The proper question is not who they are but why their ministry has this character — and the answer is plain: Moses was the lawgiver from whom Israel departed, and Elijah was the one who recalled Israel from its apostasy to Baal. Both a Moses-like and an Elijah-like ministry are exactly suited to recall a people that has abandoned the law of God and is bowing before a false worship.

Phinehas and the Covenant of the Everlasting Priesthood

The warrior-priest character of the two witnesses connects with a strand of Old Testament truth that is less familiar than the covenant with David but equally important: the covenant of the priesthood given to Phinehas in Numbers 25. When Zimri, a prince of Simeon, brought a Midianite woman into the camp in open defiance while the congregation wept before the tabernacle, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron rose up from his brethren, took a javelin in his hand, followed them into the tent, and thrust both through. The plague that had broken out was stayed. God said to Moses: Phinehas has turned away my wrath because he was jealous for my sake — and *he shall have the covenant of an everlasting priesthood*.

Psalm 106:30-31 records God's assessment: *that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations forevermore*. This is a priestly covenant complementary to the Davidic covenant of kingship. As the covenant with David finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus as the true King, so the covenant of Phinehas finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus as the true Priest after the order of Melchizedek — a warrior priest who makes no peace with sin. Psalm 110:4-5 joins the two together without a gap: *Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek — the Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath*. The priesthood and the smiting are inseparable.

The line of Phinehas was displaced when Eli and his sons occupied the priesthood — coming from the line of Ithamar rather than Eleazar. But Solomon, as a type of Christ in his reign, thrust Abiathar from the priesthood to fulfil the word of the Lord to Eli, and made Zadok the priest — who came from the line of Phinehas. And in Ezekiel's millennial temple chapters, the sons of Zadok are consistently named as those who kept the charge of the sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray, and who will minister before the Lord in the millennium. God has his eye on every son of Zadok. When the Melchizedek priest comes — Christ himself — he will know every one of them and pronounce authoritatively on their genealogies, as the Urim and Thummim will answer in his hand.

Zechariah 6:13 brings it all together: *he shall be a priest upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both*. Priest and king in one person. The javelin comes first — righteousness first, then peace. Wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable. Grace does not set aside that principle. The covenant of peace to Phinehas came after the javelin, not before. So it will be when the true Melchizedek takes his throne: judgment against evil first, and then the peace that only such righteousness can produce.

— Study ends —