

Eschatology

The 144,000 & Two Witnesses of God

Thus far we have covered the chronology of the tribulation period by way of Daniel's 70th Week prophecy and Jesus' Olivet Discourse. The stage and setting of the tribulation period has been set with our study of the Seal, Trumpet and Bowl judgments. And with our study of the role of the Holy Spirit during the tribulation period from last week, we are now ready to embark on studying the characters of the end times and how God will use them to accomplish His purposes in His story of the end of the ages.

“Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”

And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel... Rev. 7: 3,4

The term “bond-servant of our God” is only found in the NT (25x) in reference to the Christians relationship to his “master” Christ Jesus. The scene that John is describing here is that Jesus is selecting 12,000 Jewish people, from every tribe of Israel, for a specific purpose. That purpose is to bring revival to the nation of Israel and that can only be accomplished with the gospel of Jesus.

Ezekiel prophesied Israel's spiritual revival in chapter 37.

Remember that Jesus came first for the Jew (Matt. 10) but because they rejected their king, Israel was left spiritually desolate until Jesus comes back (Matt. 23).

We learn through Revelation that these “sealed bond-servants” are exempt from the plaques and physical harm caused by the Seal, Trumpet and Bowl judgments (9:4). In 14:4 we learn that God has chosen only men and these men have been kept pure before God and Jesus.

These Jewish preachers not only bring salvation to Israel but also to the Gentile who hears the gospel message and surrenders their life to Jesus (7: 9-17).

Throughout history God has faithfully sent His spokesmen to call sinners to repentance. Prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Johah, and the others confronted both wayward Israel and sinful Gentile nations. In the last days, God will raise up two exceptional and powerful preachers (11: 1-14).

“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophecy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” (11: 3)

Their Duty:

To prophecy, meaning “to speak forth”, “to proclaim”, or “to preach”. The two witnesses will proclaim that the disasters occurring are from God. They will warn that God’s final outpouring of judgment and eternal hell will follow. At the same time, they will preach the gospel as Jesus said “**the gospel of the kingdom shall be reached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.**” (Matt. 24:14)

Their Attitude:

It’s important to take notice that they these two witnesses are clothed in “sackcloth”. Sackcloth was rough, heavy coarse cloth worn in ancient times as a symbol of mourning, distress, grief and humility:

Gen.: 37:34; 2Sam. 3:31; 1Chron. 21:16; 2Kings 6:30

The two witnesses will wear sackcloth to express their sorrow and grief for the unbelieving world. They will also mourn because of the desecration of the temple, the oppression of Jerusalem, and the rise of Antichrist.

Their Power:

The witnesses will have miraculous powers given to them by God. They will have power of the elements, water and plagues. They will also be able to kill anyone who tries to harm them with “fire, flowing from their mouths.” (11:5)

There is no reason to doubt that this is literal fire, since God has in the past used fire to incinerate His enemies:

Lev. 10:2; Num. 11:1; 16:35; Psalm 106:17-18

No doubt that their preaching will cause the world to hate them and seek their death, but they will be unstoppable during the 3 ½ years that God has appointed them to prophecy. They will have His protection.

Their Death:

At the appointed time, God will allow Antichrist to “overcome and kill them.” When this happens, the world will rejoice, have parties and celebrating their deaths because the witnesses will no longer be preaching to a hard-hearted world about their sins and the coming judgment.

In vs. 8, the two are connected with the death of Jesus, and notice that they are left in the streets of Jerusalem for 3 ½ days so people can see that they are really dead.

Their Resurrection and Impact:

After 3 ½ days of their dead bodies laying in the street, the “breath of life from God came into them” and they stood on their feet, which caused great fear to come upon all who witnessed this resurrection.

Then a loud voice (most likely the Lord) said, “Come up here!” This is the same manner in which John was summoned up to heaven in Rev. 4:1. Like the apostles watching Jesus ascend into the clouds (Acts 1:9,10), the enemies of God will watch these two resurrected witnesses ascend up to heaven, thus proving the one, true God has power over life and death.

Punctuating their resurrection will be a great earthquake that will cause 1/10th of the city to fall, which will result in 7,000 people dying. (11:13)

It is at this point we see a different response from the people who survived the great earthquake. Instead of “blaspheming the God of heaven”, as will be the general response from the people in relationship to the judgments:

Rev. 6:16-17; 9: 20-21; 16:11; 21

These people will “give glory to the God in heaven.” (11:13)

The fact that giving glory to God in heaven is a mark of genuine repentance in Revelation and elsewhere in scripture:

Luke 17:18-19; Romans 4:20; Rev. 4:9; 14:7; 16:9; 19:7

This passage (11:13) then, describes the reality of the salvation of Jews in Jerusalem, during the tribulation period. More proof that the Holy Spirit is at work during the tribulation and God has not abandoned Israel.

Who are the Two Witnesses?

The question of who the two witnesses will be has intrigued Bible scholars over the years. John identifies them as “the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before the lord of the earth.” (11:4) This is a description drawn from Zechariah’s vision and prophecy in 4: 1-14.

Since the identity of the two witnesses is not revealed anywhere in scripture, we must be careful not to get dogmatic or over-spiritualize who these two might be. There are several theories as to their identity, let’s explore three of them...

Theory 1:

One very popular theory is that the two witnesses are Enoch and Elijah. These are the only two people in the Bible that have not experienced physical death, by being translated into heaven. (2Kings 2:11; Hebrews 11:5).

This theory is supported by Hebrews 9:27 which states “it is appointed for men to die once and after this the judgment.” So the reasoning is that these two men were spared physical death because God will use them in the last days to show His power by allowing them to “die” (once) then be resurrected and called back to heaven.

Theory 2:

Another popular theory is that they are Moses and Elijah. Comparisons of the miracles that the two witnesses in Revelation perform and that of Moses and Elijah show remarkable similarities:

1Kings 17:1; 2Kings 1:10,12; Exodus 7:17-21; Exodus 7-11

Also Jewish tradition expected Moses and Elijah to return in the future (Mal. 4:5), which is backed up by the fact that they were both related to the second coming at the transfiguration in Matt. 17:3.

Both men left the earth in unusual ways as well. Elijah did not die (2Kings 2:11-12) and God supernaturally buried Moses’ body in a secret location (Deut. 34:5-6; Jude 9).

Theory 3:

The scholar William Easton best articulates this final thought when he said, “Who they may be, can be but speculative, and is best left in the obscurity in which God has surrounded them with.”