

The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11

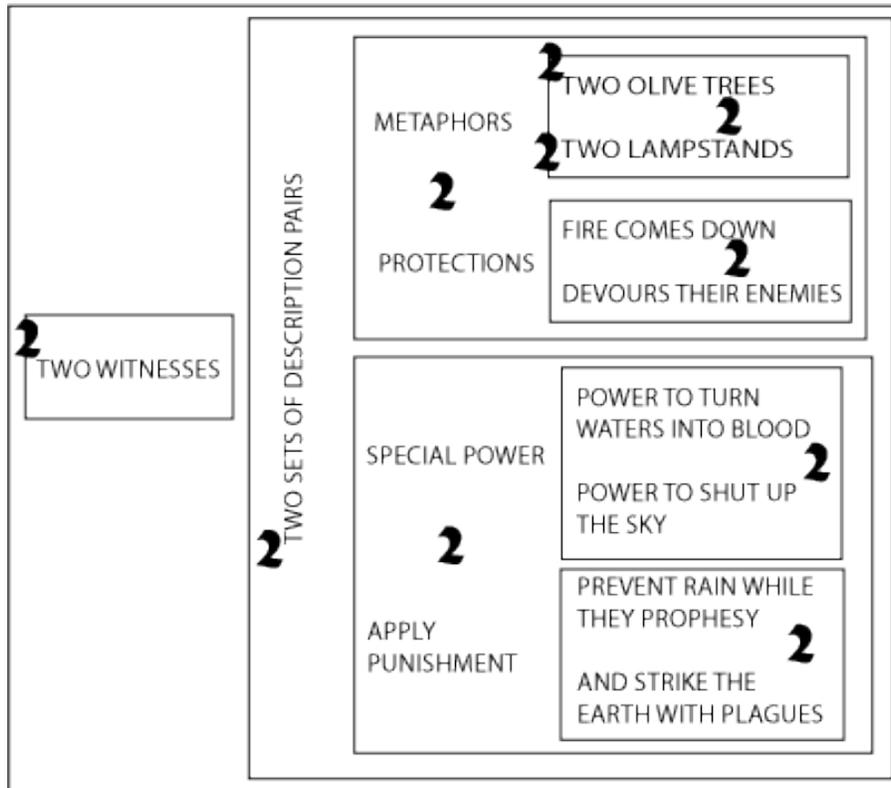
The two witnesses of Chapter 11 are among the most confusing for many students of the apocalypse. But these images and their meaning would have been immediately recognizable to the 1st century Christians who were the recipients of this message.

Throughout the first part of Chapter 11 we see the dominance of the number 2. As we learned in our examination of numbers, the number 2 is always about witness. It had that meaning from the earliest days of the Law of Moses, and remains to the present day where many legal documents are attested to by the signing of two witnesses.

The Two Witnesses REV 11:

3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 If anyone tries to harm them, two things happen fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. 6 These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

Look at this graphically



Well, anything jump out at you?

How about the number 2? John is leaving us no question that this section is about witness.

Now go back to the beginning of the chapter and look how John helps us identify what these two are witnesses too.

It was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshippers there. 2But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.

John is specifically told to measure, or evaluate, the worshippers at the temple, but not the outer court because it is given to the Gentiles. This is definitely a call to take stock of Israel. So the two witnesses are going to tell us something about Israel.

Now we have to take a moment and go sideways a little bit to figure out the 42 months. This of course is the heart of pre-millennial interpretation of a future tribulation and the division of events into three and a half year time lines. This comes because we have so many occurrences of this calculation.

What we find is

In Chapter 11 (the time of the witnesses)

42 months (verse 2)

1,260 days (verse 3)

Three and a half days (verse 9 and 11)

In Chapter 12

1,260 days (verse 6)

Time, Times and half a Time (or three and a half times) (Verse 14)

Because John uses so many different “periods” we can be sure he is NOT pointing to a specific time length – that is, this not about three and a half years. The emphasis is on the 3 ½, not the incremental measure. Of course 3 ½ only makes sense in apocalyptic numerology as half of seven, this is the clue that points in the direction of a solution. While many people will try to attach this to the period of siege by Antiochus Epiphanies in 167 BC, I think the answer is easier than that.

The answer is found when we identify the witnesses of Chapter 11a; the woman and child in Chapter 12 and look at what happens in between – or in 11b.

Let's go back to the witnesses.

The clues obviously point to the identities of Moses and Elijah. Many people think this indicates others will come “like” Moses and Elijah, or perhaps Moses and Elijah themselves would reappear. Interestingly enough, these are two for whom we have no

specific death or burial recorded. Moses was left on the mountain where God showed him the Promised Land and buried him there and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

But more importantly, why not accept the witness of Moses and Elijah directly. Moses was the lawgiver, and was forever attached and identified with the law. Elijah was certainly considered the greatest of the prophets.

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Matthew 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Luke 16:16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. (see also Matthew 11:13)

John 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Anything stand out here? Jesus was constantly talking about "the Law and the Prophets." Jesus came to fulfill "the Law and the Prophets." The "Law and the Prophets" were proclaimed (can we say testified to) until John. And in John, our author's own words, we hear Philip's epiphany, "We found the one MOSES WROTE ABOUT IN THE LAW and about whom the PROPHETS ALSO WROTE – JESUS of NAZERETH!!!

Jesus was the SUM of the Law and the Prophets and he came to fulfill them. We know he did this on the cross. Following the resurrection, the Law and the Prophets would be vestigial remains within the narrative and person of Jesus.

So the two witnesses who take a measure of Israel are the voices who reigned during the period of Israel before Christ. That is, the LAW and the PROPHETS were the testimony up until Jesus. We think in terms of Old and New Testament, but the apostles probably thought in terms of Before Christ and After Christ, a little like our B.C. and A.D. The BC was the time of Moses and Elijah and it represents half of the story. If the whole story of God's work on earth were reduced to a single 7, then the period of the Law and the Prophets would be 3 ½ of that story, regardless of how long it was.

Continued in the Woman of Chapter 12