

# GOD'S TWO WITNESSES

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Revelation 11:3-6 describes the work of God's "two witnesses." God would give these two witnesses power, and they would prophesy for 1,260 days (Rev 11:3). This is also equivalent to 42 months (dividing 1,260 by 30), or 3½ years. Thus, the two witnesses would be prophesying for the exact same period of time that the Gentiles would be treading the church under foot (Rev 11:2). This is truly uplifting as we realize the truth that God's word would continue to be preached and would spread even during the midst of heavy persecution.

## **Two olive trees**

Concerning these two witnesses, Revelation 11:4 says, "*These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth,*" an allusion to Zechariah chapter four. The two olive trees in Zechariah 4 are associated with the rebuilding of the temple. Zechariah 4:9 says, "*The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you.*" Zerubbabel's work in rebuilding God's temple with the captives who had returned from Babylon is recorded in Ezra chapters 1-6. The two witnesses of Revelation 11 are also called "the two olive trees" that stand before the Lord. In comparison, Zechariah 4:11-14 says, "Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, *These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.*" Like the two olive trees in Zechariah which were there for the rebuilding of the physical temple, the two olive trees (witnesses) in Revelation 11 were there for the rebuilding and growth of the spiritual temple, the church, during this persecution by the Gentiles.

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(continued)

## **Old Testament symbols for persecuted Christians**

We are reminded of God's assurance that Zerubbabel's temple would be built by God's power, not man's. Zechariah 4:6-7 says, "Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, *Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.* Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." Similarly, God would protect the two witnesses for the duration of their work: "*And if any man will hurt them, fire proceeds out of their mouth, and devours their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed*" (Rev 11:5). Along these lines, verse six says these two witnesses "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." The power to stop the rain in the days of their prophecy is a comparison to Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1,7; 18:1; Jas 5:17). The power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues as often as they would is an obvious comparison to Moses (Exod 4-12). The language of verses 5-6 beautifully represents God's powerful protection of His servants. The witnesses themselves are powerful symbols of the triumph of the church, her continued growth, and the spread of the gospel even during times of severe persecution. That is the significant message of this part of chapter 11. We can easily see that Revelation repeatedly uses Old Testament passages as symbols to comfort and give hope to persecuted Christians. We should keep in mind that the Romans, who might have read this shortly after it was written, would have intensified their persecution had they understood its meaning. These symbols rooted in scripture were beyond the comprehension of unbelievers, but were quite clear to faithful Christians who knew the word of God. We should gain the same hope and strength from these words as they did.