

If you've ever studied or read through Revelation at least once, there's probably one part of the book that captures your imagination. For some people, that is the antichrist. For others, it is the seals of judgment. Personally, for me, it's always been the two witnesses. There is something about these seemingly super heroes. They stand against the antichrist and the enemy and they work miracles. They face the worst the enemy has to offer them and yet they still triumph.

We are going to attempt to see what the Bible says about these two witnesses.

We will only briefly talk about different interpretations.

I'll go into more detail on Wednesday.

And I do just want to say that if you have a question about this passage, and I don't answer it this morning.

Because I probably won't answer all of your questions.

But if there's something you really want to know, come and ask me, and if I don't know the answer off the top of my head, then I'll go back and study it and I'll come back on Wednesday and I'll give an answer then.

Because you are probably not the only person with the question.

And if you are unable to join us for some reason, we have been recording our Wednesday night services and placing them on the website.

But what I want us to see as we look at this passage is the main idea.

Because even though the interpretations may often differ, the main ideas can usually be agreed on.

And I do not just want to see what these passage says about the witnesses.

But I want us to see what it says about us as well.

Turn with me to Revelation 11:1-14

I. God appoints His people (v.1-3).

We are gonna see four things that God does for his people.

The first thing is He appoints particular people.

This is a general spiritual principle.

God often chooses a particular person or particular people in a particular place to serve a particular purpose.

Moses was chosen by God to come and be the one who would set His people free.

Abraham was particularly chosen by God to be the one that all the nations would be blessed by.

Josiah was chosen and used by God to be the one that would bring his people back to God and restore their faith.

And so God is going to appoint to particular people again to serve a purpose.

As we look at them, I want us to see that it also is something that God does again and again and again

Look at verse one, **"Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, 'Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there,'"**

John is given a measuring rod, and I told him to go and measure something.

This happens other places in the Old Testament.

The prophets are given a kind of basic mundane task that is actually filled with deep prophetic significance.

And he is told to measure the altar, the temple and the people who worship.

Now there is some disagreement over what is it that John is measuring. But where everybody agrees is actually what the measuring signifies.

Because this is rather similar to what Ezekiel does for God in Ezekiel 40. He is told to measure the temple and he measures over and over all of these different parts of the temple.

And everybody agrees that when God asks his prophet to measure something, it is not just to figure out how big something is.

It is symbolic of God noticing and God protecting.

So people might disagree about what it is God is protecting, but everyone agrees that the measuring is God paying attention and seeing something and saying this is mine and this I will protect.

Verse two shows us what God protects and what He does not
"but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months."

So the outer court of the temple is not being protected, and that is being given over to the nations to the pagans and to God's enemies.

So what is it that God is protecting here?

Some see this, just a symbolic of God's people because it mentions that part of what God is measuring is those who worship

So the actual people that love God who worship God will be measured and protected by Him.

So then it would make sense that these three things that are mentioned really just symbolic of the church as the people of God.

And some may want to split hairs on if that's the church that endures the tribulation or if that's just Jews who have come to faith or just the most faithful Christians or others.

Others might say that God is protecting is part of the temple, but He's actually letting other parts of the physical temple be destroyed.

So this would be a place people would point to and say the temple is gonna be rebuilt and God's gonna protect the sanctuary and the altar, but he's gonna let the outer court be destroyed.

Personally, I think it seems like this is mostly talking about people.

Because much of the other prophecies in other places that we have in Daniel and Matthew about the abomination of desolation or the temple being destroyed seem to be complete destruction.

And the most despicable act happen in the altar, and in the holy place, not in the outer courts.

God does seem to be protecting His people, but not everyone.

Because not everyone who is a member of a church is a Christian.
Not everyone who says Lord, Lord will be with Jesus.
This day it seems God will protect the true worshippers and not the pretenders.
And we see that He mentions He is letting the holy city or the outer court be trampled for 42 months.
Or another way to say it is 3 1/2 years.

Verse three, here's where we get the appointing.

"And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

There will be two witnesses.
And these witnesses will prophesy for 1260 days.
Which if you have 30 day months like they did, that's 42 months or 3 1/2 years

This could be referring to the exact same amount of time.
Or it could be referring to different parts of time.
It seems to me that anytime we have 42 months mentioned in Revelation. We'll see as we go further. It's almost always negative.
The 42 months in Revelation is referring to the time of the tribulation with the antichrist is ruling and reigning and making war and winning against the people of God.
And then the 1260 days are often in the time period where God is protecting his people and watching over his people.
So it could be that is referring to the same exact period of time and just one is from the world's perspective of the enemy winning, and the other is from God's perspective who is spiritually sustaining people, even as they were persecuted.
Or it could be in this is part of what I think where you have the first half of the tribulation and you have the witness of these witnesses and if the people of God in the church and in the second half of the tribulation is the 42 months when the church is persecuted and killed, and the wrath of God finally comes all the way on the Earth.

However you see it, God does appoint two people at this point in time. This is a unique moment in time.

This is a unique moment where someone needs to rise up.

There have been many of these throughout human history where there is a time that we need someone to stand up and speak and it's a unique moment.

You could just think about it in the life of an average church where there's lots of Sundays it's just an average Sunday

And then there's a Sunday that comes the way we need a special word.

The church has been floundering. The last pastor just had an affair. The church is crumbling. They're not sure they're gonna make it. They need someone who's gonna come in and be a witness.

Someone that God has chosen to lead them through this moment.

And so as the world is going through this moment in the book of Revelation during these trumpets and these bowls and these seals, God has appointed two witnesses.

And these two witnesses are really either the church.

Or they are two particular individuals.

Either Old Testament saints or someone new in the future.

And plenty of people have given guesses, we will talk about them Wednesday.

My guess if it is two actual people, is Enoch and Elijah.

Either way God is choosing and picking and giving these people in this place a job to do for the kingdom. It's at a particular place at a particular time.

II. God empowers his witnesses (v. 4-6).

So God does not just choose people at a particular place at a particular time to do something.

He then gives them what they need in that moment to carry out as well.

God doesn't send us out ill-equipped.

There's a scene in the WW2 movie Enemy at the Gates.

It's all about the battle of Stalingrad.

There's a moment where they're sending out all the new recruits to the front.

As they're walking down the line they just keep saying "OK one guy gets a gun. The other guy get some ammo."

"When the first guy dies, you can take his gun and keep going,"

"and if you're trying to run away, we'll shoot you."

It is horrific.

To be sent into battle ill-equipped to face what will be in front of you.

God never does that with His people.

Now we might feel like at points, but when God chooses us, and when God gives us a mission and God gives us a job, he gives us just what he thinks we need in order to make it happen.

And we see that with the two witnesses, they are empowered and they're given what they need for this mission.

Verse four, **"These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth."**

John sees the witnesses not as people but as lamp stands and trees.

Which is why some people think this is just the church not actual prophets.

And these trees and these lights perform miracles.

There is certainly something symbolic happening here.

But don't go overboard, but it does seem like they are empowered to do exactly what God needs them to do.

Verse five, **"And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed."**

Anyone who wants to oppose them.

Anyone who wants to harm them.

Anyone who wants to fight them.

Fire just comes out of their mouths and kills them.

So maybe that is what actually will happen when this takes place.
But the main thing that we're supposed to get from it is that no one would be able to harm them.
And those who intend harm on the witnesses of God will themselves be harmed and consumed.
They doom themselves.

He goes on in verse 6, **"They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire."**

They have the power of Elijah to stop the rain.
Elijah prayed, and there was no rain in Israel for years until he prayed again.
They will also have the power of Moses to turn the water into blood
The same power of Moses who brought plagues on Egypt.
They will bring those plagues on the earth.

It seems like they are ready to handle whatever they need.
And God has chosen them and He's placed them in a really difficult place in a really difficult time, but He has given them what they need to do it.
He has given them the extraordinary gifts for the extraordinary time.

And they whole time they use these gifts, they are proclaiming the gospel.
They are bearing witness to Jesus and God.
It also seems like they could be the ones bringing the seals and trumpet judgments on the earth.
Or this are just extra bonus judgments that fall to make things worse.

We might read this and wish God empowered us this way.
That fire could come out and consume our enemies.

James 5:17 tells us Elijah was a man with the same nature that we have.
And the prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much, so go and pray.

James tries to tell us that we have been empowered in the same way that Elijah was empowered and the same way that Moses has been empowered.

And the same Holy Spirit that filled them actually fills you as well.

This is something we need to understand.

It is something we must remember.

In the Old Testament, only some people got the Holy Spirit.

Prophets, some kings, and some individuals here and there for moments.

But here now on this side of the cross, if you put your faith in Jesus, if you have professed faith, you're following Jesus and you have been baptized not just in water but in the Holy Spirit then He lives in you and He empowers you.

And He equipped you with every good work that you can do His will.

God promises not just the two witnesses, but that every believer.

Every single one of us has been given what we need.

You don't need to compare yourselves to somebody else.

You don't need to worry that God has empowered someone else more than you.

Stop wishing you had someone else's gifts or calling.

We are all in the body of Christ and we are all working together.

We are all a part of the kingdom of God and we all have our own mission.

And God knows what he's called you to do.

And God knows what he's called me to do, and it's all different.

And what I know is that whatever it is, God is given to you.

He's given you everything that you need.

You don't need more ability or more talent.

You might just need more faith and more obedience.

God gives us what we need.

He empowers the two witnesses in miraculous ways.

And He has empowered you.
He has filled you with the Spirit.
He has given you new life.
He has given you His word and spiritual gifts.
And now need to go use them.
To accomplish what He has put in front of us.

III. God allows His witnesses to (suffer) and even (die) (v. 7-10)

God empowers us.
He gives us everything we need to do.
But God does not promise that it will always be successful.
He does not promise we will always be blessed and highly favored.
Sometimes God calls people to plant churches that die.
Sometimes God calls you to go speak to somebody and share the gospel with them and they reject you immediately.
Sometimes the path God calls us to walk is filled with suffering.

The two witnesses begin and it is awesome.
But it does not stay that way.

Verse 7, **"And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them,"**

When they finish the mission and the work that God has called them to do.
After they have done God's Word,
He allows them to be killed by the beast.
We will learn more about the beast in chapter 13.
But this appears to be the antichrist.
God has allowed them to kill their enemies.
But here he lets them die.

Verses 8-10, Describe the shame that they will face.

"and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. 9 For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes

and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, ¹⁰ and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth."

Not just that they will be killed.

They will experience one of the worst things that can happen to you in the ancient world, as they won't be buried.

That their bodies will lie probably naked in the streets to be spit on eaten by beasts.

They will be mocked and gazed at.

Everyone might wish to be one of the two witnesses are when you see the beginning of the way they could serve God and the power they get to carry.

I think we might be less excited to sign up if we know that it involves getting killed by the antichrist, the beast himself and your body laying in the streets.

It's hard to know where this will take place because God says spiritually. It could be Jerusalem, but He is calling Jerusalem, Egypt, and Sodom.

So it either is actually Jerusalem that no longer is Zion in the place of God, but is now become the place of the greatest enemies of God's people and the worst sinners.

Or it's another city that the world thinks is important and the capital of the world where the greatest city in the world, but God says it's actually a horrible place.

I am not sure we can identify the place.

But wherever it is, it is a place where God's people suffer as Christ did, as the righteous did in Sodom, and as the slaves did in Egypt.

And the whole world celebrates the death of the witnesses.

Which should tell us how they were treating the witnesses and how they felt about the witnesses while they were alive.

This one of the things that we kinda have to get on our minds as American Christians who are used to unbelievable prosperity and wealth and blessing.

We are tempted to see good things as blessings and suffering and bad things as an attack from the enemy.

Or it means that something's wrong.

But suffering and death are the normal Christian experience.

Now, I do believe what is gonna happen to these two witnesses is something that actually takes place.

But they're also just following in the footsteps of Jesus and carrying their crosses as we are to do as well.

Did they die and are murdered like Jesus was.

And the expectation for us is followers of Jesus should be the same thing.

Jesus tried to warn His disciples and tries to warn us.

Don't be surprised when the world hates you.

Don't be surprised when the world persecutes you.

Don't be surprised when the world thinks that you're crazy.

Don't be surprised when those who say that they are believers think that you were insane or your radical for trying to follow what Jesus teaches.

Jesus tells us not to be shocked when we encounter various trials and suffering, as if something strange is happening because it is the most normal thing in the world.

Suffering comes and when pain comes the question that we often ask is why is this happening? Why me why now?

If you follow Jesus, suffering is gonna come.

If it came for Jesus, and if it came for these two witnesses, it's also gonna come for you and for me just in our normal experience of fall of Jesus

So do not be surprised.

But the promised land only comes after the wilderness.

In this world, we will have trouble.

You will find yourself lost and confused.

You will find yourself asking God why He has allowed this in your life.

When you come to that place, remember God has not forgotten you.

But we can take heart, because He has overcome the world.

IV. God will vindicate His witnesses (v. 11-14).

This is the hope that we see in the book of Revelation.

It is one of the themes and ideas of the entire book.

Yes, there will be suffering and death.

Yes, the end and the worst you can imagine is coming.

Yes, God's people will suffer.

But, they will be vindicated and resurrection awaits on the other side.

And we see this with these two witnesses.

Verse 11, **"But after the three and half days a breathe of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and a great fear fell on those who saw them."**

They will die and stay in the street.

But God will breathe life into them again.

He will create life into their bones like He did in Ezekiel.

When a whole valley of dry bones arose.

He will breathe life into them just as He did with the dirt in Eden.

I believe God will bring these two witnesses back to life.

And this will make everyone who has been rejoicing afraid.

Because they have been brought to life.

And this comes after three and a half days.

Another three and a half.

It seems to be both a reference to the three and a half years.

And to the three days of Christ in the grave.
They get to follow Christ in suffering and death.
And they get to follow Him as well in His resurrection.

Now, this is what God will do in the future for the witnesses.
And this is what God will do for us.
All who put their faith in Jesus will be asked to arise.
They will hear their names called.
And there will be resurrection.

This is why we do not have to fear death.
We do not have to fear the power of the enemy or the suffering.
Because we know that our story ends with vindication.
God will allow suffering for a moment, but not forever.
And He will bring us back to life.
Just as with the witnesses,
Just as with Christ.
It will be with us.

This is why we do not have to be afraid when things go wrong.
When we lose our jobs.
When we get diagnosed with cancer.
When our marriage falls apart.
Or when our memory is getting bad and we fear the worst.
Because there is vindication.
There is resurrection.
There is new life awaiting us.
And one day, everything we have faced will be made right.

Verse 12, **"Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here!' And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them."**

They will be vindicated by the very voice of God.
He will audibly call out to them.

The crowds will hear the voice like the crowd at Christ's baptism.

And they will ascend into heaven with the cloud.

Everyone will watch and see.

Everyone will know.

Everyone will see where they went and understand.

Verse 13, **"And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven."**

Part of God's vindication of His people is the bringing of judgment.

The witnesses have been warning the world.

They have been explaining the plagues and horrors falling on the world.

And they have told them it is God's judgment for sin.

The only way to escape is to repent of their sins and turn to Christ.

But the people have refused.

And instead of repenting, they have persecuted the witnesses of God.

This is why God's judgment falls at their resurrection.

Because the people were glad.

They were hoping the witnesses were just full of it and that God is not real.

That repentance is not truly required.

And so for their continued sin, an earthquake comes.

I am not sure that this is a revival.

The people do not seem to make a great change in their behavior.

But they are forced to glorify God.

They are forced to acknowledge that the witnesses were right and God is real.

Because some people will only bow to God when they are forced to.

They refuse to come willingly and joyfully.

But one day, they will bow.

The vindication of God will be twofold.

Those who have put their faith in Jesus will be raised to life.
All the suffering and wrong we have suffered will be redeemed.
All who bore witness to Christ here on earth will be rewarded.
And those who refused.
Those who have mocked the witnesses of God.
Who have refused the free offer of the gospel.
Those will be rejected and judged.
They will suffer and be punished.
Just as God said.

Again, this should give us hope.
Because God will keep His promises.
We see a lot these two witnesses will do.
I believe these are actual individuals in the future.
But what we see most of all in them, is how God works.
And the same things He will do in those two witnesses, He does in us.

He appoints us.
He empowers us.
He allows us to suffer.
And He will vindicate us.
Let us go forth into the places God has appointed us.
And let us bear witness to Him in the fullness of His power.
Trusting that He has given us what we need.
And that whatever we face will be worth it in the end.