**The Testimony of the Two Witnesses (**[**Rev. 11:1-14**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A1-14)**)**

***The ministry of the witnesses (***[***vv. 1-6***](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A1-6)***).*** The place is Jerusalem and the time is the first half of the Tribulation. Israel is worshiping again at its restored temple, built under the protection of the Antichrist, whose true character has not yet been revealed. To spiritualize [Revelation 11:1-2](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A1-2) and make the temple refer to the church creates a number of serious problems. For one thing, how could John measure an invisible body of people, even if the church were still on earth? If the temple is the church, then who are the worshipers and what is the altar? And since the church unites Jews and Gentiles in one body ([Eph. 2:11ff](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+2%3A11)), why are the Gentiles segregated in this temple? It seems wisest to interpret this temple as an actual building in the holy city of Jerusalem ([Neh. 11:1](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ne+11%3A1), [18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ne+11%3A18); [Dan. 9:24](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Da+9%3A24)).

John's measurement of the temple is a symbolic action. To measure something means to claim it for yourself. When we sold our house in Chicago, the new owners brought in an architect to measure various areas and recommend possible changes. Had the architect shown up previous to the buyers' commitment, we would have thrown him out. The Lord was saying through John, "I own this city and this temple, and I claim both for Myself!" The Old Testament background is found in [Ezekiel 40-41](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eze+40-41) and [Zechariah 2:1-3](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Zec+2%3A1-3).

What John did was especially significant because the Gentiles had taken over Jerusalem. Antichrist had broken his agreement with Israel ([Dan. 9:27](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Da+9%3A27)) and now he was about to use the temple for his own diabolical purposes ([2 Thes. 2:3-4](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=2Th+2%3A3-4)). All of this will be elaborated in [Revelation 13](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+13). "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles," said Jesus, "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" ([Luke 21:24](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Lk+21%3A24)). The "times of the Gentiles" began in 606 B.C. when Babylon began to devastate Judah and Jerusalem, and it will continue until Jesus Christ returns to deliver the Holy City and redeem Israel ([Zech. 14](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Zec+14)).

Note that the two witnesses minister during the *first* half of the Tribulation ([Rev. 11:3](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A3); 1,260 days). Jerusalem is then overrun by the Gentiles for forty-two months, the *last* half of the Tribulation.

Their witness is related to Israel and the temple. How tragic that the power of God and the Word of God will be *outside* the temple and not within as in former ages. Like the temple that Jesus left, this new house will be desolate (see [Matt. 23:38](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mt+23%3A38)). These two men are specifically called prophets ([Rev. 11:3](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A3), [6](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A6)), and I take this to mean prophetic ministry in the Old Testament sense, calling the nations to repent and return to the true God of Israel.

Not only do these witnesses declare God's words, but they also do God's works and perform miracles of judgment, reminding us of both Moses and Elijah ([Ex. 7:14-18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ex+7%3A14-18); [1 Kings 17:1ff](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Ki+17%3A1); [2 Kings 1:1-12](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=2Ki+1%3A1-12)). Some students cite [Malachi 4:5-6](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mal+4%3A5-6) as evidence that one of the witnesses may be Elijah, but Jesus applied that prophecy to John the Baptist ([Matt. 17:10-13](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mt+17%3A10-13)). John the Baptist, however, denied that he was Elijah returned to earth ([John 1:21](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Jn+1%3A21), [25](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Jn+1%3A25); see also [Luke 1:16-17](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Lk+1%3A16-17)). This confusion may be explained in part by realizing that throughout Israel's history, God sent special messengers—"Elijahs"—to call His people to repentance; so in this sense, Malachi's prophecy will be fulfilled by the witnesses.

Instead of relating the ministry of the witnesses *to* Moses and Elijah, the angel who spoke to John connected their ministry with Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest ([Zech. 4](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Zec+4)). These two men helped to reestablish Israel in Palestine and to rebuild the temple. It was a discouraging task, and the Gentiles made it even more difficult; but God provided the special power they needed to get the work done. This truth is an encouragement to God's servants in all ages, for the work of the Lord is never easy.

***The martyrdom of the witnesses (***[***vv. 7-10***](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A7-10)***).*** This comes only when they have finished their testimony. God's obedient servants are immortal until their work is done. "The beast" (Antichrist) is now in power and wants to take over the temple; but he cannot succeed until the two witnesses are out of the way. God will permit him to slay them, for no one will be able to make war against "the beast" and win ([Rev. 13:4](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+13%3A4)).

The witnesses will not even be permitted decent burial (see [Ps. 79:1-3](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ps+79%3A1-3)). But even this indecency will be used by God to bear witness to mankind. No doubt the TV cameras in Jerusalem will transmit the scene to people around the world, and the news analysts will discuss its significance. The earth-dwellers will rejoice at their enemies' removal and will celebrate a "satanic Christmas" by sending gifts to one another. It thus would appear that the power of the two witnesses will not be limited to Jerusalem, but that they will be able to cause things to happen in other parts of the world.

These two prophets will definitely have a relationship with Israel; and the world, for the most part, has not approved of the nation Israel. In the middle of the Tribulation, "the beast" will turn against Israel and begin to persecute the Jews. The two witnesses will not be around to protect the nation and a frightening anti-Semitic movement will ensue.

Jerusalem is called a "great city" ([Rev. 11:8](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A8)); and from a human viewpoint, this is a true statement But God looks at men and nations from a *spiritual* viewpoint. To Him, Jerusalem will be considered as polluted and worldly as Sodom and as rebellious and proud as Egypt.

***The resurrection of the witnesses (***[***vv. 11-14***](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A11-14)***).*** Miraculously, the two witnesses are not only raised from the dead, but caught up into heaven! God rescues them from their enemies and gives a solemn witness to the watching world. The world's great joy suddenly becomes great fear. (Note the word *great* in [Rev. 11](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11), repeated eight times.)

Are we to interpret the three-and-a-half days literally? Or does the phrase simply mean "after a short time"? It seems too specific to mean that Does it symbolize a longer period, say three-and-a-half years? It is not likely that two dead bodies would be kept lying in a city street for more than three years. Perhaps this is a picture of a rapture of all the saints in the midst of the Tribulation, and the three-and-a-half years covers the first half of the period. If so, then what is symbolized by the *death of* the two witnesses? This interpretation solves one problem only to create another.

These days appear to be literal days, just as the forty-two months in [Revelation 11:2](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A2) are literal months. The Bible does not explain why this length of time was chosen and it is useless for us to speculate.

Our Lord's *friends* watched Him ascend to heaven ([Acts 1:9-12](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+1%3A9-12)), but the witnesses' *enemies* will see them resurrected and will be shaken with fear. Their fear will increase when a great earthquake occurs, killing 7,000 men and destroying a tenth part of Jerusalem. A great earthquake occurred when the sixth seal was opened ([Rev. 6:12](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+6%3A12)), and there will be a greater one when the seventh vial is poured out ([Rev. 16:18-20](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+16%3A18-20)).

**The Testimony of the Elders (**[**Rev. 11:15-19**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A15-19)**)**

We have been waiting since [Revelation 8:13](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+8%3A13) for this third "woe" to arrive and now it is here. When the seventh angel blew the trumpet, three dramatic events occurred.

***An announcement of victory (***[***v. 15***](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A15)***).*** These "great voices" were probably the choirs of heaven. The great announcement is that the kingdom (John uses the singular because "the beast" now has the world under his control) of this world belongs to Jesus Christ. Of course, Christ does not *claim* His royal rights until He returns; but the victory has already been won. Satan offered Him the world's kingdoms, but He refused the offer ([Matt. 4:8-9](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mt+4%3A8-9)). Instead, He died on the cross, arose, and returned victoriously to heaven; and there the Father gave Him His inheritance ([Ps. 2:4-9](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ps+2%3A4-9)).

However, we must not incorrectly assume that our Lord is not reigning *today,* because He is. According to [Hebrews 7:1-2](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Heb+7%3A1-2), Jesus Christ is "King of righteousness" and "King of peace." He is enthroned with the Father ([Rev. 3:21](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+3%3A21)), and He will reign until He defeats all His foes ([1 Cor. 15:25](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Co+15%3A25)). Today, He rules over a spiritual kingdom; but in that future day, He will reign over the nations of the world and rule with a rod of iron.

No matter how difficult the circumstances might be, or how defeated God's people may think they are, Jesus Christ is still King of kings and Lord of lords, and He is in control. One day, we shall triumph!

***An acclamation of praise (***[***vv. 16-18***](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A16-18)***).*** The elders left their own thrones and prostrated themselves in worship before God's throne. They gave thanks for three special blessings: that Christ reigns supremely ([Rev. 11:17](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A17)), that He judges righteously ([Rev. 11:18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A18)), and that He rewards graciously ([Rev. 11:18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A18)).

In [Revelation 4:10-11](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+4%3A10-11), the elders praised the Creator; and in [Revelation 5:9-14](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+5%3A9-14), they worshiped the Redeemer. Here the emphasis is on the Conqueror and the King. Keep in mind that in John's day the church on earth looked as though it were defeated, for Rome was the conqueror and king. John was reminding the saints that *they* were "a kingdom of priests" reigning with the Saviour ([Rev. 1:5-6](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+1%3A5-6)). It may seem at times that the throne of heaven is empty, but it is not. Jesus Christ has both power and authority—in fact, *all* authority ([Matt. 28:18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mt+28%3A18), where the word *power* means "authority"). "Thou ... hast begun to reign" is a good translation.

Christ not only reigns supremely, but He judges righteously ([Rev. 11:18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A18)). The Lamb is also the Lion! In [Revelation 11:18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A18), we have a "table of contents" for the remainder of the Book of Revelation. These events did not take place the instant the angel blew his trumpet; he simply signaled the beginning of the process, and now these events would take place as planned.

"The nations were angry." What do the nations have to be angry about? Certainly the Lord has been good and gracious to them. He has provided their needs ([Acts 14:15-17](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+14%3A15-17); [17:24-31](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+17%3A24-31)), assigned their territories, and graciously postponed His judgment to give men opportunity to be saved. Even more, He sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. Today, God offers forgiveness to the nations! What more could He do for them?

Then, why are the nations angry? *Because they want to have their own way.* "Why do the heathen [the nations] rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed [Christ], saying, 'Let us break Their bands asunder, and cast away Their cords from us'" ([Ps. 2:1-3](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ps+2%3A1-3)). They want to worship and serve the creature instead of the Creator ([Rom. 1:25](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+1%3A25)). Like adolescent children, the nations want to cast off all restraint; *and God will permit them to do so.* The result will be another "Babylon" ([Rev. 17-18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+17-18)), man's last attempt to build his Utopia, a "heaven on earth."

Note the change in attitude shown by the nations of the world. In [Revelation 11:2](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A2), the nations ruthlessly take over Jerusalem. In [Revelation 11:9](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A9), they rejoice at the death of the two witnesses. But now they are angry; their arrogance and joy did not last very long. This belligerent attitude finally will cause the nations to unite to fight God at the great battle of Armageddon.

"And Thy wrath is come." The word translated "angry" in [Revelation 11:18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A18) is the verb form of the word translated "wrath." But man's wrath can never equal the wrath of the Lamb ([Rev. 6:16-17](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+6%3A16-17)). Even Satan's wrath, as cruel as it is, is no match for God's wrath ([Rev. 12:17](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+12%3A17)). There was intense suffering in the first half of the Tribulation, but only the last half will reveal the wrath of God ([Rev. 11:18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A18); [14:10](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+14%3A10); [16:19](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+16%3A19); [19:15](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+19%3A15)). There are two Greek words for anger: *thumos,* which means "rage, passionate anger," and *orge,* used here, which means "indignation, a settled attitude of wrath." God's anger is not an outburst of temper; it is holy indignation against sin. Both of these Greek words are used in Revelation to describe God's anger: *orge* is used only four times; *thumos,* seven ([Rev. 14:10](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+14%3A10), [19](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+14%3A19); [15:1](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+15%3A1), [7](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+15%3A7); [16:1](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+16%3A1),[19](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+16%3A19); [19:15](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+19%3A15)). God's anger is not dispassionate, for He hates sin and loves righteousness and justice; but neither is it temperamental and unpredictable.

"And the time of the dead, that they should be judged" takes us to the very end of God's prophetic program. In one sense, every day is a "day of the Lord" because God is always judging righteously. God is longsuffering toward lost sinners and often postpones judgment, but there will be a final judgment of sinners and none will escape. This judgment is described in [Revelation 20:11-15](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+20%3A11-15).

There will also be a judgment of God's children, known as "the Judgment Seat of Christ" ([Rom. 14:10-13](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+14%3A10-13); [1 Cor. 3:9-15](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Co+3%3A9-15); [2 Cor. 5:9-11](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=2Co+5%3A9-11)). God will reward His faithful servants ([Matt. 25:21](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mt+25%3A21)) and the sufferings they experienced on earth will be forgotten in the glory of His presence. Though God's children will not be judged for their sins (that judgment took place on the cross), they will be judged for their works and rewarded generously by the Master.

The Judgment Seat of Christ will take place in heaven after Christ has called His people home. When He returns to earth to establish His kingdom, the saints will be ready to reign with Him, with every blemish of the church removed ([Eph. 5:25-27](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+5%3A25-27); [Rev. 19:7-8](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+19%3A7-8)). Today, we groan as we serve God, because we know only too well our handicaps and blemishes; but one day, we shall serve Him *perfectly!*

"Them that destroy the earth" refers to the rebellious earth-dwellers who will not submit to God. How ironic that these people live for the earth and its pleasures, yet at the same time are *destroying* the very earth that they worship! When man forgets that God is the Creator and he is the creature, he begins to exploit his God-given resources, and this brings destruction. Man is a steward of creation, not the owner.

As mentioned before, [Revelation 11:18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A18) is a summary statement of events yet to come. It is heaven's song of praise for the Lord's faithfulness to accomplish His purposes in the world. Again, it appears strange to us that heavenly beings can sing about judgment. Perhaps if we had more of the throne's perspective, we would be able to join their praises.

***An assurance of God's faithfulness (***[***v. 19***](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+11%3A19)***)****.* This chapter opened with a temple on earth, but now we see the temple in heaven. The focus of attention is on the ark of God, the symbol of God's presence with His people.

In the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, the ark stood behind the veil, in the holy of holies. God's glory rested on the ark, and God's Law was within the ark, beautifully illustrating that the two must never be separated. He is the holy God and must deal righteously with sin. But He is also the faithful God who keeps His promises to His people. It was the ark of God that led Israel through the Jordan and into their inheritance ([Josh. 3:11-17](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Jos+3%3A11-17)). This vision of the ark would greatly encourage God's suffering people to whom John sent this book. "God will fulfill His promises!" John was saying to them. "He will reveal His glory! Trust Him!"

Once again, John saw and heard the portents of a storm (see [Rev. 4:5](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+4%3A5); [8:5](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+8%3A5)). Greater judgment is about to fell on the rebellious people of earth! But God's people need not fear the storms for He is in control. The ark reminds them of His presence and the faithfulness of His promises. And on that ark was the mercy seat on which the blood was sprinkled each Day of Atonement ([Lev. 16:15-17](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Lev+16%3A15-17)). Even in wrath, God remembers His mercy ([Hab. 3:2](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Hab+3%3A2)).

The stage is now set for the dramatic appearance of "the beast," Satan's masterpiece, the false Christ who will control the world.

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