
The
TWO WITNESSES

Their Identities and Testimony

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"And I will give power unto My two witnesses"
(Rev. 11:3).

WHO of us has not wondered about the identities of the two witnesses? Since it is not the part of the Christian to speculate concerning that which the Spirit of God has not revealed, what do the Scriptures have to say about them? First, let us observe that the advent of the two witnesses is future; it will take place during the Tribulation, after the Church has been united with Christ in the heavens, and thus we know that believers of this age will not see them while here upon this earth. Second, inasmuch as they are not named by name, we can be sure that their work, which is clearly set forth, is more important than their identity.

The two witnesses have been variously identified by students of Scripture. There are three views which are most generally suggested. It is claimed by some that the two witnesses are Elijah and Enoch. Elijah is named because of

the prophecy found in Malachi 4:5: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord"; and Enoch, because he alone, aside from Elijah, is said to have been caught up into heaven while still living (Gen. 5:24). Others say that Moses and Elijah are the two witnesses of that coming day. Those who hold this opinion point to the fact that it was Moses who appeared with Elijah when our Lord was transfigured upon the mountain (Matt. 17:3), and that the power that the promised witnesses will display combines the powers which God gave to Elijah and to Moses in years gone by (Rev. 11:6). Still others teach that the two witnesses are not actually any of these men, not even Elijah in person, but that the witnesses are to come in the *spirit* and *power* of Elijah, and that there may be more than two of them—there may be a great number, for two is the number of testimony, according to Deuteronomy 19:15. Let us examine these three propositions.

If the Scriptures give us a right to identify the two witnesses by name, it would certainly seem that Elijah must be one of them. We refer again to Malachi 4:5: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." His coming at that time seems to be further confirmed by the word of our Lord Himself. You will recall that after the Transfiguration the disciples asked the Lord Jesus a question about His coming in power

and glory: "Why then say the scribes that Elias (Elijah) must first come?" To this our Lord replied: "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Matt. 17: 10, 11). If there were no other references concerning the coming of Elijah we should be obliged to conclude that he must be one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11. But let us see. Some time before the Transfiguration, John the Baptist, who was in prison, sent two of his disciples to ask the Lord Jesus whether He was the Messiah or whether they were to look for another. Our Lord sent a message back to John drawing attention to His miraculous ministry as sufficient testimony that He was the One foretold by the prophets, and then He told the multitudes of John's greatness, and that the Baptist was indeed the messenger of whom Malachi spoke (Mal. 3: 1). And then the Lord added: "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come" (Matt. 11: 13, 14). What did He mean? He was telling them this: that if Israel had been ready and willing to receive Him then, He would have established the Kingdom which He offered them, and that in that event, John's ministry would have been the fulfilment of the prophetic Elijah. It seems, therefore, that the prophecy of Malachi refers to one coming *in the spirit and with the power of Elijah* (as Luke 1: 17), and that he will not need to be Elijah himself, literally. Our Lord gave us another indication of this in the conver-

sation with His disciples to which we have already referred, which took place after the Transfiguration, for when He had assured them that Elijah must truly come, He added: "But I say unto you, that Elias *is come already*, and they knew him not," and we read: "Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist" (Matt. 17: 12, 13). It would seem that the Word of God clearly indicates that the one who comes will be a virtual rather than a literal Elijah.

If we cannot definitely identify one of the two witnesses as Elijah, there is even less proof as to who the other will be. Let us suppose for a moment, however, that the first witness is Elijah—is the other one Enoch, then? The only Scriptural reason¹ that Enoch is proposed is that

¹ Certain apocryphal writings and the works of leaders of the early Church declare that Enoch as well as Elijah will come again before the Lord returns in power; namely, *Apocalypse of John*: "I am Enoch, who was well-pleasing to God, and who was translated hither by Him; and this is Elias the Tishbite; and we are also to live until the end of the age; and then we are to be sent by God to withstand Antichrist, and to be slain by him, and after three days rise again, and to be snatched up in the clouds to meet the Lord" (9: 25); and Tertullian in *De Testimonio Animae*: "Enoch was translated, and so was Elijah; nor did they experience death; it was deferred; they are reserved for the suffering of death, that by their blood they may extinguish Antichrist." We do not admit these writings as inspired. Further, since the *Apocalypse of John* was not

“Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him” (Gen. 5:24). Enoch was translated. There was another who had a like experience—Elijah, who “went up by whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11). Some, believing that Elijah is to be one of the two witnesses, are convinced that since Enoch was the only other to have been raptured while still living on the earth in his mortal body, he must be the second witness. Thus, when these two men are slain by the Beast (Rev. 11:7), they will have had the same physical experience of death as all other men have had (“it is appointed unto men once to die” (Heb. 9:27). But this does not take into account three things: one, God’s love and grace, for having taken them to Himself in grace, He would hardly send them forth later in order that they might suffer physical death as other men; two, that the two witnesses will have mortal bodies, for it is hardly likely that after thousands of years, they will be given *mortal* bodies once more—Moses and Elijah, on the Mount of Transfiguration, did not have mortal bodies, but they “appeared in glory” (Luke 9:31); and three, it is not tenable that these two must die physically because all other men have died physi-

written before 150 A.D., while Tertullian wrote his *De Testimonio Animae* somewhere around 200 A.D., it is obvious that the authors had access to the New Testament manuscripts, and what they have written are their personal interpretations as to the identities of the two witnesses of Revelation 11.

cally, for we must remember that the death of the two witnesses is to take place in the future, during the Tribulation. At that time the Church will be gone, a whole generation of believing men and women will have been taken into the presence of the Lord without physical death, a generation of Christians who "alive . . . shall be caught up . . . in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall . . . ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4: 17, 18). Thus, even if Elijah were to come literally, there seems to be no basis for concluding that the second witness would be Enoch.

Again, let us assume that we can identify the two witnesses and that one of them is Elijah—if this be so, is the other Moses? While the Scriptures never speak of a second advent of Moses, there is more to point to him as Elijah's companion-witness than to Enoch. One of the two occasions when the Lord Jesus spoke of Elijah's coming was directly after the Transfiguration, and it was the scene that they had witnessed on the Mount which caused the disciples to ask the Lord about the coming of Elijah, to which He replied that "Elias truly shall first come" (Matt. 17: 10, 11). Two men appeared with the Lord on the mountain top; one was Elijah, and the other was Moses. They symbolized there that the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) bore witness to His eternal glory, and at the same time they also prefigured those who will be with the Lord when He comes in power and glory,

Moses being a type of all those who will have died in faith, and Elijah, all those who, as living believers in Christ, will have been caught up with them into the clouds at the sound of the rapture shout and the trump of God (1 Thess. 4:14-18). Thus, argue some, since Elijah, who was with the glorified Lord on the transfiguration day is to come as one of the witnesses, then Moses, Elijah's companion on the first occasion, will likewise be his companion in the second instance. There would be logic in this reasoning if we could prove that Elijah is to come literally, and it is further substantiated by the description of the miraculous power which will attend the two witnesses when they come. Revelation 11:6 tells us of them: "These 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." Even if Malachi had never prophesied of the coming of Elijah, and our Lord had never referred to it, had the Lord Jesus appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration entirely alone, or with two angels rather than with men—still, assuming that the two witnesses are to be men who actually once dwelt upon the earth, we should conclude, from the character of the power which they will display, that they would be Elijah and Moses. For who was it who had power to shut up Heaven so that it did not rain? Elijah, of course! "Elias was a

man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (James 5: 17; cf. 1 Kings 17: 1, 18: 41-46). Again, "fire proceedeth out of their mouth" (vs. 5), is reminiscent of Elijah's miraculous demonstration with the captains of Ahaziah (2 Kings 1: 10-12). As to the man to whom God gave power to turn the waters into blood, and to smite the earth with plagues, the smallest Sunday School child would answer, if asked, "Moses." There is no more thrilling historical record in all the Bible than that of Moses' dealing with Pharaoh, as found in Exodus 7 to 10. It has recently been pointed out,² in a very striking way, that there is a great similarity between the judgments which came upon the earth as a means for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt more than three thousand years ago, and the judgments which are yet to come, during the Tribulation, as God intervenes then for His people Israel. If it could be said of a surety that the two witnesses are to be identified as characters who appeared on the earth in Old Testament times, then we should have to conclude, I think, that they will be Elijah and Moses, the former because he is named as to come again, and the latter because of his association with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, because of the

² Dr. Arno C. Gaebelin: *Moses* (456 Fourth Ave., New York City: "Our Hope" Publications, \$1.00).

nature of his witness, and because he symbolizes the Law as Elijah represents the Prophets, both bearing witness to the coming Lord of Glory.

But now we come to the third premise, that these two witnesses cannot be identified, but that they will simply appear in the spirit and power of Elijah. Arguments which point to this view as the solution have already made themselves prominent in our discussion of the other two theories. The two witnesses are to have mortal bodies, and, though it is possible for God, to whom "all things" are possible, to send back to earth those who have long since gone to be with the Lord, we have no Scriptural precedent or word for such a re-advent of men. Yes, Lazarus, and the son of the widow of Zarephath, and others had mortal bodies when raised from the dead, but their demise was only a temporary experience, and allowed in order that God might be glorified through the miraculous power of His Son (or, His prophet) by their resurrection. Our Lord's reappearance after He was raised from among the dead was in His glorified body, and as we have already pointed out, Moses and Elias, on the Mount of Transfiguration, "appeared in glory" (Luke 9:31), that is, in bodies glorified for that occasion (though the ultimate resurrection bodies will not be theirs until all in Christ are raised—1 Cor. 15:51). Further, if John the Baptist could have been Elijah, had Israel been willing to receive it (Matt. 11:13, 14), then

those who will witness in that future day, coming *in the spirit and power of Elijah*, can assuredly fulfil the prophecies of Malachi and of our Lord (Mal. 4:5; Matt. 17:10, 11). From this we conclude that the two witnesses cannot be identified, but rather that they will fulfil in a future day a destiny that John the Baptist would have fulfilled had Israel's heart been receptive.

As to the number of witnesses (two being the number of testimony, as we have said—Deut. 19:15) we admit that there may be more than two. There may be a great number. But since the dead bodies are to lie "in the street of the great city" for three and one-half days, we cannot concede that those are right who claim that these "two" represent all those who are saved at that period of the Tribulation. They will be saved in places other than Jerusalem in that day. Rather, the two witnesses represent a faithful remnant, of two, or more than two, with special powers to bear a divine testimony in that awful day on the earth.

So, while we cannot speak of the two witnesses by name, we can know of their testimony, for the Scripture gives us considerable information about that (Rev. 11:3-12). Their work is to prophesy for "a thousand two hundred and three score days, clothed in sackcloth." The Tribulation, a period of seven years, is to be divided into two halves: the first three and one-half years is the time of the wrath of the Lamb, while the second

three and one-half years, the period of Jacob's trouble, is the time of the wrath of God. Mental arithmetic will quickly reveal that the period of prophecy entrusted to the two witnesses, twelve hundred and sixty days, is three and one-half years in duration. In which half of the Tribulation, then, will these witnesses prophesy? Or will their witness not be limited by either half of the seven years, but run from one half into the other? I do not think we can be dogmatic about it. There is thought-provoking logic in the argument that their testimony will be given during the first half of Daniel's prophetic week, and that their martyrdom will be the first persecuting act of the Beast, after he breaks his covenant with the Jews (Dan. 9: 27). Their ministry will be attended with power over their enemies, whereas, according to Daniel 7: 21, the "little horn" (who is this Beast) will make war with the saints and prevail against them, and this will be in the last half of the week. On the other hand, in Revelation 11: 12 the "forty and two months" undoubtedly refers to the second half of the Tribulation, and the period of the testimony of the two witnesses seems to be synchronous with this. Further, their witness is recorded just prior to the blowing of the Seventh Trumpet, and this event takes us right on into the Millennial Kingdom. But the exact period when the testimony will take place is unimportant to believers of this age—it will be in God's time,

that we know, and that will be the proper time.

We are told of the two witnesses that they will prophesy "in sackcloth." In the rude garments of an Elijah or a John the Baptist they will proclaim, with hearts burdened for needy men and women, the coming of the Kingdom to those who will repent and believe, and, just as surely, the coming of judgment to those who remain in their sins. Theirs is not man's testimony; it is a witness empowered of God. "These are two olive trees, and the two lampstands" (vs. 4). Both of these symbols designate "testimony." See, for example, Zechariah 4:1-6, where these figures are used and the word of the Lord is spoken: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Thus they will testify, anointed of the Holy Spirit, and against them, until their work is completed, no man will prosper. But "when they shall have finished their testimony, the Beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them" (vs. 7).

No believer can be touched until his work is done, none can be hurt without the permissive will of God. What a comfort we find in these words! For if He will keep us here until our testimony is completed, and when it is finished He will take us to be with Himself, which is far better, what has any Christian to fear? But when the work is finished, then we can expect

the call, and in God's way. Here we find that the witnesses who have borne His message in a chaotic world will meet their earthly end in martyrdom. But it will not be *the* end, for through it the Lord will be glorified and the wrath of Satan brought to naught. The one who has power to slay them is "the Beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit (the abyss)." We take him to be identical to the "little horn" of Daniel 7 and the "Beast out of the sea" of Revelation 13. He is, then, the head of the Revived Roman Empire, who will dominate the nations in the Tribulation, but who will, after three and one-half years, turn his full hatred and fury upon the remnant of Israel. And he will slay the two witnesses, but again, remember, not until "they shall have finished their testimony."

"And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (vs. 8). That this city is Jerusalem seems to be clear. We realize, of course, that nowhere else in God's Word is Jerusalem called "the great city"—Babylon is called great, and Nineveh, but not Jerusalem, except here. But speaking of the prophets of Jerusalem, through Jeremiah God said: "They are all of them unto Me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah" (Jer. 23: 14; cf. also Isa. 1: 9). And while Jerusalem is never referred to as "Egypt," which, as we know, is a type of the world, yet

"the great city" of that day will be, in large part, the work of men's hands, Christ rejecting men, and as such it can be symbolized by the word "Egypt." Certainly the place where our (or *their*, lit.) Lord was crucified is Jerusalem. As the dead bodies of the witnesses lie in the street for three and one-half days, they will be seen by the people of every nation, and there will be great rejoicing over all the earth because these two prophets, who prophesied of judgment to come, have been slain. "The heart of man is desperately wicked" in every age, and even in that chaotic day, when the wrath of God comes upon the earth, men will turn their backs upon Him, and will rejoice at the destruction of His holy prophets. A half century ago it was thought that those "of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations" who should see these dead bodies lying in the street would be those of various nationalities who would be in Jerusalem at that time. But science has brought us since the radio, and television, and one need not stretch his imagination far to see how very reasonable this prophetic Word from the inspired pen of the Apostle John is today. Even today motion picture films, flown by air from the scenes of action, can be viewed across the seas within a few days after they are made, while we see in our evening newspapers radio-photographs of events which occurred across the Atlantic Ocean early on the same day. God has allowed man

to develop and perfect science in order that His Word, which cannot fail, shall fulfil its promises to the very final letter.

But lying dead and forsaken in Jerusalem will not be the end of these witnesses of God, for "after three days and an half the spirit of life from God" will enter them, and they shall stand upon their feet, and great fear will grip all who have seen them. Fear indeed! It will be time that they are affrighted, for judgment is about to fall—an earthquake, and death; and the sounding of the last of the Seven Trumpets. And as the two risen witnesses stand there in the street, a great voice from Heaven will call: "Come up hither." And they shall ascend, as their Lord ascended, in a cloud, and thus they will be with Him forever.

The whole scene, irrespective of our entire agreement as to every detail, is a reminder of the program and grace of our heavenly Father in regard to His witnesses, which, indeed, all of us are or should be (Acts 1:8). Each child of God is appointed to bear testimony to His Name, whether in Jerusalem or in the uttermost part of the earth. The power of testimony is not ours, but in and through the Holy Spirit. Our work is ordained (John 15:16), nor can we be touched or harmed in any way until our testimony is finished. Satan may turn against us his greatest weapons, but in Christ we are safe, and even though, when the witness is completed, he

may seem to have conquered us through the death of our bodies, yet in it all, Christ is the victor, and He shall be glorified. For one glad day the trump of God shall sound, for His own, and the same voice which will speak to the two witnesses in a still more future day will call to us: "Come up hither." And we too shall ascend! With our loved ones, with the saints of all the ages, with Elijah who never died and with Moses whose grave was the special care of Jehovah, we shall be caught up to be with the One Who poured forth His blood with the ultimate purpose that we might ever dwell with Him in heavenly mansions and share His glory throughout all the ages of eternity. —E. S. E.

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