

# THE TWO WITNESSES OF REVELATION

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"And I will give power unto My two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies; and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. 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" (Rev. 11:3-6).

A lot of speculation and differences of opinion surround the identity of these two witnesses. The two witnesses are called "the two olive trees and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth." This clearly identifies them as Zechariah's two olive trees, also referred to as "the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." Zechariah describes his vision of the two witnesses:

"I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof; And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof... 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, Know-est 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" (Zech. 4:2ff).

Zechariah's question suggests that he was as puzzled about the identity of the two olive trees as some people today are about the identity of the two witnesses of Revelation. The angel's reply to Zechariah's question, that they are "the two anointed ones, that stand

by the Lord of the whole earth," leaves many readers still scratching their heads and wondering who exactly these guys are.

Because of the powers that the two witnesses possess in Revelation, many Christians believe that they will be Moses ("power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with plagues") and Elijah ("power to shut heaven, that it rain not"). Other Christians believe they will be Elijah and Enoch because according to Hebrews 9:27, "it is appointed unto men once to die." Since both of these men were taken up to heaven without dying, they must return to earth for an appointment with death. Their appointment with death will take place in the context of their role as the two witnesses, the argument goes.

Various rabbis commenting on Zechariah 4 have suggested several different pairs of candidates: Joshua the High Priest and Zerubabel; Aaron and Moses; Moses and David; Aaron and David; Aaron and the Messiah; Messiah ben Yosef and Messiah ben David. David Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary* discusses the various candidates, then adds this interesting comment: "Meanwhile, believers in Jerusalem have grown used to being presented with other candidates. They appear every few months, often dressed in sackcloth like the Prophets of the *Tanakh*, and claiming to be 'in the spirit and power of Elijah' or even to be Elijah himself." (I know what David Stern is talking about. My wife and I saw and heard about such people when we lived in Jerusalem in 1976. When our daughter Shoshanna lived there a few years ago, she met a nice lady who claimed to be the wife of Jesus Christ. Psychologists in Israel have a name for this affliction. They call it "The Jerusalem Syndrome.")

So, who exactly are the two witnesses? I do not get real dogmatic about the details of end-time prophecy, because there are usually several possible ways that a yet-unfulfilled

prophecy can be legitimately understood and interpreted. And until the prophesied events actually happen, there is no way to prove with 100% certainty whose understanding is the most accurate. So I have a wait-and-see attitude when it comes to the details of end-time prophecy.

One thing to remember about Revelation is that it is a book filled with symbolic language. Everything in Revelation does not need to be taken literally, and some things *cannot* be taken literally. (For example, Jesus does not have a literal metal sword coming out of His mouth.)

Without getting into all the details and without being dogmatic, I would like to suggest that perhaps the two witnesses are not two individual men, but rather two *corporate* men, i.e., two distinct bodies of people. The angel told Zechariah that they are "the two anointed ones [*b'neiha-yitzhar*, 'sons of clear oil'], that stand by [or, stand *upon*] the Lord of the whole earth." If Yahweh's two witnesses are indeed two distinct bodies of people, let me ask a question: Which two groups of people historically have stood by Yahweh, the Lord of the whole earth (stood by Him in the sense of standing with Him and for Him, and stood "upon" Him in the sense of trusting Him as the foundation of their faith)? Which two groups of people could be called "sons of clear oil" because their anointing has its origin in clear Divine revelation, unlike the muddled, contaminated "anointings" that exist in pagan religions? Which two groups of people have historically borne witness to Yahweh, the one true God of the Holy Scriptures? The obvious answer is Jews and Christians.

Both of these groups have made many serious mistakes and continue to do so, but they are the only two collective bodies of human witnesses that Yahweh has. A witness does not need to be perfect in order to be a true and reliable witness. To be a true and reliable witness, one only has to testify of the truth that he has seen and heard. John wrote, That which we have seen