

Revelation

Notes #11D

Seal #7 - Trumpet #6: Sackcloth

Chapter 11:3

Trumpet

#6
[Part 7]

Description

"And I will grant authority to my **two witnesses**, and they will **prophesy** for twelve hundred and sixty days [1,260], clothed in **sackcloth**." (Revelation 11:3 NASB)

Symbology

Sackcloth

Meaning(s)

Mourning; Call for deliverance

After being told to measure the Temple of God and then hearing that the holy city would be tread under foot by the nations for 42 months, John was introduced to the Lord's two witnesses who would prophesy for 1,260 days while clothed in sackcloth.

As with the Temple of God, there are various views on the identity of the two witnesses. It has been said by commentators that the witnesses are the most difficult to understand in Revelation. Some see them as two Jewish prophets, perhaps even Moses and Elijah in person, who will appear in Jerusalem near the end of our present age. Some spiritualize them to be the overcomers in our day. And yet, others see them signifying something that is repeated in history, meaning it existed at some point in the past and will appear again near the end of our age. There may be some merit to a double prophecy, but first we need to ascertain in what period of history they might have already appeared.

However, having stated this, I believe we must be careful not to inject ourselves *directly* into every scripture that speaks of overcomers or conquerors, as if it speaks of us *uniquely* in our day. It can speak *to* us without being directly *about* us.

Undoubtedly, all conquerors down through the centuries share common bonds, if not common experiences. To this extent, we can identify with our brethren who went before us, and we can learn from scripture how we are to reach the goal for the prize as they did or, as Paul testified, to finish the course, enduring to the end (2 Timothy 2:12; 4:7).

Besides, it appears that *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* is written to provide encouragement to the Lord's people during specific periods of Church history.

For example, the visions of the martyrs under the altar, the 144,000, and the great multitude are meant to be an encouragement to all who suffered through Pagan Rome and the rise of Romanism and Islamism.

Again, this does not mean we cannot take encouragement as well, for surely we can; however, the original or primary purpose of references to certain Christian groups was to encourage those who were part of the period of time in question.

We see other encouragements elsewhere in Revelation, such as the 144,000 firstfruits before the throne (Revelation 14:1-5), or the victors over the beast (Revelation 15:1-4), or the ones in the great day of God who are blessed because they stay awake (Revelation 16:15), or the ones who heed the exhortation and nudge of the Spirit of God to come out of Babylon (Revelation 18:4), which, by the way, is most likely the word to us for our day.

Now, with this in mind, the **historicist approach** to interpreting Revelation offers some insight into the probable identity of the witnesses.

Sackcloth

Perhaps the best place to start is with the sackcloth that was worn by the two witnesses, for this will help to identify the period of time that is in question. If we know the period, we will know the identity of the witnesses.

In Scripture, sackcloth was worn as a sign of mourning for the dead, of national disaster, of penitence for sins, or of special prayer for deliverance (e.g. Genesis 37:34; 2 Samuel 3:31; Esther 4:1; Nehemiah 9:1; Matthew 11:21).

Jacob put on sackcloth as he mourned over the apparent loss of his son Joseph (Genesis 37:34). David commanded the people to put on sackcloth to mourn the death of Abner (2 Samuel 3:31). Mordecai put on sackcloth and cried out in the middle of the city when he learned of the plan to kill all the Jews (Esther 4:1). Daniel sought the face of the Lord God while wearing sackcloth (Daniel 9:3). The king of Nineveh put on sackcloth when he heard of the judgment that would come upon his city if they did not repent (Jonah 3:6).

Given these few examples and what we know of the history portrayed in Revelation up to this point (i.e., 1517 AD and the Reformation that followed), we can assume that the two witnesses were raised during a period of time in which there was mourning for the dead and a need for deliverance from the evils that sought to snuff out the light of the Temple of God, that is, of the Body of Christ, the true Church.

Thus, the two witnesses must be seen in light of or in relation to the Temple of God as seen in the opening verses of chapter 11 when the temple was tread under foot by the nations. The two witnesses were intimately related or intertwined with the holy city of the Lord's people, notably the ones who conquered through the blood of Christ and the word of their testimony (Revelation 12:11).

Again, in that company, we have already seen the martyrs under the altar, the 144,000 and the great multitude standing before the throne, and these came through a very difficult time of Church history that occurred from about 96-313 AD, and then from 529-1517 AD, and continued on until about 1776-1801 AD, when the gospel was truly unshackled to go forth into all the world, hindered no more.

As a reminder, Constantine set Christianity free from persecution in 313 AD, but this was persecution from without; it was only a matter of a couple of centuries before the persecution came from within by the apparent, visible church of **Romanism**, and then from without again through the **Islamists**, and then again from within **Romanism** in reaction to the **Protestant Reformation**.

Truly, the mourning was great during these periods.

However, having stated all this, I do not mean to add any confusion, but I do want to explore all possibilities. Perhaps, there is one other possibility, and it is related to Jacob in sackcloth as he was separated from Joseph who he thought was dead. Today, those of us, especially the conquerors, are awaiting the arrival of God's Son, our King from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10). We are separated from Him and long to be with Him. Could it be that, in some measure, we are in sackcloth, mourning our bodies of death as we await our glorified bodies in His image. We do not know what we will be, but we know that when He appears, we will be like Him (1 John 3:4). In a similar fashion, we groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23). Of course, Jesus is not dead to us; He lives. Our mourning and groaning come from a longing and a waiting for the love of our life.