

Revelation

Notes #11E

Seal #7 - Trumpet #6: Two Witnesses Prophesying

Chapter 11:3-6

Trumpet

#6
[Part 8]

Description

(3) "And I will grant authority to **my two witnesses**, and they will **prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.**" (4) These are the **two olive trees** and the **two lampstands** that stand before the Lord of the earth. (5) And if anyone wants to harm them, **fire flows out of their mouth** and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. (6) These have **the power to shut up the sky**, so that rain will not 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 plague**, as often as they desire. (Revelation 11:3-6 NASB)

Symbology

Meaning(s)

Olive Tree	Word of His Grace; Holy Spirit; Covenant relationship; Kingdom of God
Lampstand	Word of God; Light of the world; Conquerors of the true Church
Fire	Word of the Lord; Law of God; Judgment according to the Word
Rain	Famine or feast of the Word of God; Judgment by drought
Blood	Blood of Christ; Judgment unto death
Plague	Judgment by illness and disease

Period

Interpretation

529-1801 AD **Word of God and the true conquering Church of God**

It should be no surprise that there are many interpretations of the meaning of these two witnesses. Several commentators state that they are one of the most difficult things to explain in all of Revelation. After spending weeks of study on this topic, I must agree.

Some of the background material for these notes can be found in the appendices. In particular, please see **Appendix #51 – Two Witnesses in Types**, and **Appendix #34 – Olive Tree in Scripture**.

Frankly, I began writing these study notes with the intention of addressing some of the many interpretations of the two witnesses, but this turned out to be too complex, so I abandoned this approach. Instead, I decided to simply present what I have settled on as the most probable interpretations of the two witnesses.

I emphasize "most probable" because I realize there is room for modification of or alternatives to the interpretations that follow. Obviously, if two prophets clothed in sackcloth appear on the world scene, then what follows goes out the window. Yet, on the other hand, if the King comes and ushers in His kingdom in the absence of some obvious manifestation of these prophets, then what follows most likely was closer to the truth. But, then again, at that point, who will care? I know I won't as I look into the lovely face of our Beloved.

The first thing to note in this portion of scripture is that John did not state that he saw the two witnesses; he simply was told about them by the voice he heard from heaven. Someone told John to get up and measure the Temple of God, and he was told about the two witnesses clothed in sackcloth. The fact that John did not see them may indicate that the two witnesses are to be understood symbolically (spiritually discerned) and not literally (seen with the natural eye).

The second thing to note is that the number *two* signifies that **their prophesying is true and in accord with God's will**. This is confirmed in the fact that they stand before the Lord of the earth, meaning their witness is from the Lord for all the earth. Their judgments are true and righteous according to **the law of two witnesses**.

At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses a thing shall be raised up to judgment. (Deuteronomy 19:15b LITV)

And in your Law it has been written that the witness of two men is true. Deut. 19:15 (John 8:17 LITV)

Having two witnesses with each, in turn, represented by two like witnesses (double witness) makes it clear that the judgments of the two witnesses, whoever or whatever they signify, are true according to God's Law.

The third thing to note is that John identified the two witnesses as **prophets** whose prophesying brought **torment** (i.e., pain and vexation) to those who dwell on earth, and this period lasts for either a literal 1,260 days or a prophetic 1,260 years.

The fourth thing to note in light of the 1,260 days or years is that the two witnesses are clothed in **sackcloth**, meaning they are in mourning. This was covered in the last study notes; however, this is an important point, for it means there is some uniqueness to the time of their prophesying. In other words, it most likely takes place during a time of trial and tribulation, or even persecution, or, perhaps, during an era leading up to the coming of the Lord.

The fifth thing to note is that the witnesses are **killed and then resurrected after 3½ days (or, years)**, and this ends the second woe, which means a third woe is yet to come. The death and resurrection of the two witnesses are vital in explaining the two witnesses because there must be an identifiable event that corresponds with this, whether it is a literal death of men or a spiritual or figurative death of some other kind. Further, there is a time period attached to this as well, which is either in literal days or prophetic years. If the witnesses prophesy for 1,260 years, then their death must continue for 3½ years as well. Obviously, this would require that they be interpreted spiritually or figuratively and not literally, for mortal men do not live this long and their dead bodies would decompose fully after being exposed for so long.

The sixth thing to note is that the two witnesses are symbolized as *two olive trees* and *two lampstands*, symbols that were given to Zechariah (chapter 4) in reference to Zerubbabel and Joshua, types of king-priests according to the order of Melchizedek, who were charged with rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem.

John described the ministry of the two witnesses in the context of these two symbols. So, the key to interpreting the witnesses is discovered not only in their actions but also in the meaning of the olive trees and the lampstands that are connected to each other. Another way of stating this is that the two witnesses are both an olive tree and a lampstand, and herein is where we must search for the meaning of these prophets.

The seventh thing to note is that the actions of the two witnesses coincide with the ministry of both Moses and Elijah, who represent **the Law** (Moses) and **the Prophets** (Elijah).

(5) **And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth** and devours their enemies [Elijah called down fire on the false prophets]; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way [Elijah killed the false prophets]. (6) These have **the power to shut up the sky**, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying [Elijah withheld the rain]; and they have **power over the waters to turn them into blood**, and to strike the earth with **every**

plague [Moses turned water into blood and called forth plagues upon Egypt], **as often as they desire.** (Revelation 11:5-6)

Now, after considering the many varied interpretations of the two witnesses in light of scripture and these seven points, I have concluded that the two witnesses are explained on two levels, one being primary, and the other being secondary. The **primary** explanation is that the two witnesses signify the **Word of God**. The **secondary** explanation is that they signify the **remnant of conquerors of the true Church of God**.

Let us start with the primary explanation.

Word of God

In the following verses, please note the descriptors of the Word of God. It is prophetic; it is a lamp and a light; it is the fire of God; it is the fiery Law; it is powerful; it divides spirit and soul; and it comes forth from the mouth of the Lord Himself to consume enemies and to strike down nations; all images associated with the two witnesses.

And we have something more sure, the **prophetic word**, to which you will do well to pay attention as to **a lamp shining in a dark place [murky place]**, until the day dawns and the **morning star [Light-bearing One] rises in your hearts....** (2 Peter 1:19 ESV [LITV])

(25) Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, and the proclaiming of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery having been kept unvoiced during eternal times [eonian times; age-during], (26) but now has been made plain, and by **prophetic Scriptures [scriptures of the prophets]**, according to the commandment of the everlasting God [eonian God; God of the Ages], made known for obedience of faith to all the nations.... (Romans 16:25-26 LITV [ASV, CV, WNT, YLT])

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105 NASB)

"Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, **"and like a hammer which shatters a rock?"** (Jeremiah 23:29 NASB)

The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire. (Psalm 29:7 NASB)

"Out of the heavens **He let you hear His voice** to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and **you heard His words** [commands, law] **from the midst of the fire.**" (Deuteronomy 4:36 NASB)

From his right hand went a fiery law for them. (Deuteronomy 33:2 KJV)

(12) For the **Word of God is living, and powerfully working, and sharper than every two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of both soul and spirit**, of both joints and marrow, and able **to judge of the thoughts and intentions of the heart**; (13) and there is no creature unrevealed before Him; but all things are naked and laid open to His eyes, with whom is our account. (Hebrews 4:12-13 LITV)

The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:17 NASB)

(7) For the mystery of lawlessness already is working, only he is holding back now, until it comes out of the midst. (8) And then "the Lawless One" will be revealed, "whom" **"the Lord" "will consume" "by the spirit of His mouth,"** and will bring to nought by the brightness of His presence. Isa. 11:4 (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 LITV)

(11) And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and **in righteousness He judges and wages war**. (12) **His eyes are a flame of fire**, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. (13) **He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God**. (14) And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. (15) **From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty**. (16) And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Revelation 19:11-16 NASB)

So will **My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it**. (Isaiah 55:11 NASB)

Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for **I am watching over My word to perform it**." (Jeremiah 1:12 NASB)

Obviously, there are many verses that could be cited of the Lord speaking forth His Word. However, these few verses are enough to open the door wide to the possibility that Revelation 11 spiritually signifies the Word of God and not two literal men. All of these verses are found, in some measure, within the following verses pertaining to the witnesses.

(5) And if anyone wants to harm them, **fire** [the Word of God; the fiery Law] **flows out of their mouth** [the Word goes forth as a witness] and devours their enemies [by the Sword of the Spirit that divides soul and spirit]; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way [by the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God]. (6) These have **the power to shut up the sky**, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying [the prophetic Word of God is prophecy and it is shut up for a time; heaven is as brass over them (Deuteronomy 28:23); and they have **power over the waters** [peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues (Revelation 17:15)] **to turn them into blood** [the blood of Christ that saves], and to strike the earth with **every plague** [judgments manifested in the natural realm], as often as they desire [the Word dictates]. (Revelation 11:5-6)

Is this not a better and more scriptural interpretation of these verses than two men with literal fire spewing out of their mouths?

Turning the many waters into blood may be the one verse that might give some heartburn, so to speak. However, think about the spiritual truth that Jesus gave His disciples.

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has the Life of the Ages, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:54 WNT)

He was not telling them that they had to literally drink His blood, although the Roman Catholics come very close to believing this. It was a spiritual truth that needed to be discerned in spirit. The wine is emblematic of His blood, not literally His blood through some metaphysical transubstantiation.

(28) **For this is my blood which is to be poured out for many for the remission of sins--the blood which ratifies the Covenant**. (29) I tell you that I will never again take the produce of the vine till that day when I shall drink the new wine with you in my Father's Kingdom." (Matthew 26:28-29 WNT)

Even within John's Patmos revelation there is support for such an interpretation of the blood. John wondered about the great multitude robed in white standing before the throne.

I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have **washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** (Revelation 7:14 NASB)

We could say that peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb; they overcame by the Word of God.

If this isn't enough evidence, then consider what the Jews said to Pilate as they rejected the King of the Jews: "**His blood shall be on us and on our children**" (Matthew 27:25). Consequently, the Jewish nation of rotten figs was turned into blood.

Given what has been presented so far, it seems clear that the Word of God is personified as the two witnesses; that is, the Word is presented as if it were animated. In a sense, this is true for it is the Living Word; however, in this case, the symbology seems to go beyond this to personify the Word as if it were two men. This is not without scriptural precedence. Case in point is the personification of *wisdom* in Proverbs 8:12-36.

I am not alone in identifying the Word as the primary signification of the witnesses. Frankly, after coming to this conclusion through my own study, I was encouraged to learn that I was not alone.

In his *People's New Testament, Commentary on the Two Witnesses*, Barton Warren Johnson (1833-1894) suggested that the entire Bible, divided into the Old and the New Testaments, could be the two witnesses of Revelation 11. He did not make a distinction between the two olive trees and the two lampstands; he simply grouped them together as the two witnesses. Here is an excerpt from what he wrote:

"There are a number of facts recorded here which must be true of witnesses, and the business of the interpreter is simply to ascertain whether there is anything of which they are true and which would correspond with these facts.

(1) The first one of the fourteen facts I have noted is that **there were only two witnesses.** I have lying before me an open Bible. I find that the book of Revelation is in what is called the *New Testament*. **The whole Bible is divided into two great divisions, which are called the Old and New Testaments.** There are, then *two* Testaments. Note further that the term *testament* is a word that signifies to bear *witness*. It is derived from a Latin word, *testor*, which means "I testify." The two testaments, then, imply *two* witnesses. **We have, therefore, in the Old Testament and New Testament, two witnesses,** whether they are those described by John or not.

(2) **These two witnesses of the Bible each testify of the Lord.** He said to the Jews concerning the Old Testament Scriptures, "They testify of me." The Apostle John says concerning his life of the Savior, "These things were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." One of these witnesses testifies of the Lord in type and prophecy; the other testifies by its history of facts.

(3) **The two witnesses are the Lord's.** He gives them their power and they testify of Him. Thus far the two witnesses of the Bible correspond exactly with the two witnesses of the prophecy.

(4) The two witnesses of the Word are fed with **the oil of inspiration** and give forth **light.**

(5) These two witnesses speak by **inspiration**, or "**prophecy**."

(6) Passing over some marks of minor importance, we come to the statement that the two witnesses have **power to destroy**. The Word of God can save and it can destroy. It can justify and it can condemn. In the Judgment the fate of men will be decided by the Word. If the reader will turn to Revelation 19:11-15, and read what is written of the conquests, triumphs, and destruction by the Word of God, he will require nothing more upon this point. In fact everything stated of the power of the two witnesses has been affirmed of the Word of God.

(7) It is said that for 1,260 days the witness shall prophesy in **sackcloth**. Every reader knows that for ages the Bible was forbidden to the people and locked up in the **dead languages**. It was even a crime, for which many suffered death, to have the Bible in the tongue of the people. It is proper that we should consider here this period of mourning in which, **if I am correct, the witness of the Old Testament and New Testament shall be given in sorrow.**"

Another delineation of the Word that seems to be just as valid given the similarity to the ministry of Moses and Elijah is the Law and the Prophets. Thus, the two witnesses could signify the Law and the Prophets. There seems to be room for both delineations.

Now, this is the primary signification of the two witnesses, but what about the secondary one? As I studied this subject, especially the olive tree in scripture I began to see that on a secondary level the two witnesses could signify the conquerors or overcomers of the true Church. I use the term *true Church* to differentiate it from the **apparent or institutional visible church of Romanism** that was most notably present during the period in question. The true Church is the spiritual Church that Christ is building.

Halley's Bible Handbook by Henry H. Halley (Zondervan Publishing House; 1927, 1965; page 721) offers a similar perspective as Johnson; however, he sees the true Church as included in the two witnesses.

"Two Olive Trees and Two Candlesticks" (11:4) is an obvious reference to Zechariah 4:1-14, where it is explained that the Candlestick represents the **House of God**, and the Olive Trees the **Spirit of God**, as if to include the Spirit in the Testimony of the Church. Or, since this is the message of the "Open Book" (10:2, 10, 11), and since the Spirit works through the Word, the Two Witnesses may thus be **the True Church and the Word of God**, faithfully bearing their Testimony while the Apostate Church is on the Throne of the Leopard-Lamb-Beast, as told in chapter 13."

As will be shown later, I carry this one step further by singling out a remnant in the true Church, the conquerors or overcomers.

Throughout my writings, I purposely insert the words *conquering* or *conquerors* when referring to the remnant within the true Church of God **that have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death** (Revelation 12:11 ESV). This distinction is used to make the point that not all believers within the true Church will conquer during their life; a point made clear by Jesus Himself in His letters to the seven lampstand churches in Revelation 2-3. I do not believe that all believers will have a part in the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6); most **will be saved, yet so as through fire** (1 Corinthians 3:15), meaning they will be raised up in the second resurrection, **a resurrection of life**, along with the rest of mankind that is raised up to **a resurrection of judgment** (John 5:29).

See **Appendix #8 – Two Resurrections**.

With all of this in mind, let us briefly consider the lampstand first, followed by the olive tree.

Lampstand – The Word and the Conquerors of the true Church

A lampstand can be a symbol for both the Word of God and the true Church. As quoted already, Psalm 119:105 states: **Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.** In other words, the Word of God is synonymous to both the lamp and the light. As far as being a symbol for the Church, this is made clear within Revelation itself.

At the beginning of his Patmos vision, John saw the Lord Jesus standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands. Surely, John knew what lampstands looked like and their purpose in the Temple, but these lampstands were different. There were seven of them and they stood individually, not as one lampstand as was in the Temple. The Lord made a special point to tell John what these seven lampstands signified.

"As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." (Revelation 1:20 NASB)

Each of the lampstands represented an individual church or ecclesia that the Lord proceeded to speak to by name, and within each church were those who conquered or overcame evils within the church of their day, and those who were conquered or overcome by evils within the church of their day.

Thus, allowing scripture to speak for itself, the *lampstand* symbolizes both the Word of God and the true Church of God.

Metaphorically and technically speaking, one could argue that a lampstand is not light per se but the vessel that holds the fuel that is burned to produce the light. However, it would seem that scripture sees the Church, which is the embodiment of Christ Himself, as both a lampstand and its light.

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, **"I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."** (John 8:12 NASB)

"While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." (John 9:5 NASB)

(14) **"You are the light of the world.** A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; (15) nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, **but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.** (16) "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16 NASB)

Notice the progression of thought in the above verses. First, Jesus proclaims that He is the Light of the world as long as He is in the world. Then, in His sermon on the **Kingdom of the Heavens**, Jesus tells His disciples that they are the light of the world and, as such, are likened to a lampstand that gives light to all who are in the house.

In other words, His disciples are representative of both the lampstand and the light. Another way to state this is that the lampstand is the light. But take special note that Jesus stated the lampstand is to give light to all who are in the house. The house is the **House of God** (or, His Kingdom), which means that some, meaning a remnant, in the Lord's House (Church) are to give light to the rest in the House (Church).

If all in the house do not give light, then who are these light bearers? Again, they must be the conquerors or overcomers that Jesus commends in Revelation 2-3. In particular, in His letter to the church in Ephesus, the Lord Jesus warned that He would remove their lampstand if they did not repent and conquer [i.e., overcome].

(4) 'But I have this against you, that **you have left your first love**. (5) 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else **I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent**. (Revelation 2:4-5 NASB)

To each of the seven churches, the saints who hear what the Spirit is saying and conquer or overcome the many challenges faced by the true Church from within and without are commended and given millennial Kingdom promises. For this reason, I emphasize that there is a remnant within even the true Church. Some might argue that the true Church is a remnant of conquerors, but I do not see it this way.

See **Appendix #9 – A Remnant Within the True Church**.

In other words, there is a remnant in the House of God that serves as lampstands giving forth the light of Christ. Again, this is intimated in Jesus' letter to the church in Ephesus that had left their first love.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**' (Revelation 2:7 ESV)

It is no coincidence that first love, the lampstand or light, and the tree of life are joined together. Love, light, and life are inseparable. **God is Love** (1 John 1:5). **God is Light** (1 John 4:8, 16). Jesus is **the Light and the Life** (John 8:12; 11:25; 14:6). **In Him was life, and the life was the light of men** (John 1:4 ESV).

See **Appendix #7 – Light, Life, Love**.

Now, let us consider the olive tree.

Olive Tree

In Zechariah's vision (chapter 4), the golden oil to keep the lampstand lit comes from the olive trees by pressing the olives that hang on the branches. John was not told of any fruit or branches; he was simply told that there were two olive trees. Nevertheless, John's two olive trees must have the same relationship to the two lampstands as they did to the one lampstand in Zechariah's vision.

(2) He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see, and behold, **a lampstand** all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; (3) also **two olive trees by it**, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side." (Zechariah 4:2-3 NASB)

Spiritually speaking, they provide the oil or the fuel to keep the lampstands lit. Or, another way to state it is that the olive trees are the source of life and strength for the conquerors of the true Church.

Through my study of the olive tree in scripture, I learned that it is rich in symbolism as seen in all its parts (e.g., leaves, olive fruit, branches, root, etc.) Taking these many symbols into account, I concluded that the olive tree is best explained as follows:

Christ is the root and trunk of the tree, and the oil is the Spirit of God that gives life.

The branches of the tree are collectively *spiritual* Israelites, the remnant of conquerors who draw their life from Christ through His Word and by His Spirit and His Grace. They are destined to receive the adoption as sons in the Kingdom of God in the next age. They will be sons of the Kingdom to rule and reign with Christ for 1,000 years.

As a whole, the olive tree signifies the covenant relationship between Christ the Word, which is the rich root, and His conquerors that live by the Word of His Grace and by His Spirit, and shine forth as His Light in the world and in the midst of the House of God (Church of God).

Again, to see how I came to this conclusion, you need to read **Appendix #34 – Olive Tree in Scripture**, if you have not already done so. By the way, at the end of this appendix is a chart that summarizes the many symbols of the olive tree and its parts.

So, to summarize, it appears that the primary signification of the two witnesses is the Word of God or the Word of His Grace that both encourages and judges. The Old and the New Testaments, as well as the Law and the Prophets, are personified as the two witnesses.

If you recall, as He concluded a series of parables on the Kingdom of the Heavens, Jesus said to His disciples: "**Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old**" (Matthew 13:52 ESV).

All 66 books of the Bible are a treasure and a witness to every conquering disciple of Christ, which leads to the secondary signification of the two witnesses. On a secondary level the two witnesses signify the conquering remnant of the true Church of God. Another way of stating this is that the Word of God is the primary meaning, and the conquerors are the secondary meaning.

The reason for making this distinction is based on the fact that John was told that the two witnesses were killed and resurrected. It seems unlikely that a whole company of dead bodies will remain in the streets, especially for 3½ years. It is much more likely that what is killed and resurrected is the Word of God or the testimony that is contained in the Word. It appears that something happens that thrusts the Word of God out of society as the people turn from God completely.

However, the Word must be manifested through a company of **brethren who hold to the testimony of Jesus**, which is **the spirit of prophecy** (Revelation 19:10). Otherwise, all would be lost, for who would be on earth to testify of Jesus as not only the Word of God but also the Son of God who saves the world. Given this, of necessity, there must be a remnant of conquerors that are embodied in the meaning of the two witnesses.

The question is whether this has ever happened in the history of the Church, especially during a discernible period of 1,260 days or years.

So, let us consider the historical side.

Historical Perspective

Looking back on Church history, there does appear to be one period of time that closely matches the prophetic ministry of the two witnesses and the 1,260 day-years, and that period is notably before and after the Reformation but no farther out than the French Revolution, a period that ran from about 529-1801 AD, give or take a few years either way.

Keep in mind that Revelation 11 follows the opening of the little book (Bible) after being closed to the masses through dead languages and the action of the Roman church. Yet, in spite of this, the Word of God continued like a light shining in a dark place that will not be snuffed out.

(24) Because "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of men as the flower of grass; the grass was dried, and its flower fell out, (25) but **the Word of the Lord remains forever.**" And this is the Word announced as gospel to you. Isaiah 40:6-8 (1 Peter 1:24-25 LITV)

Here are a few points to consider.

First, again, the two witnesses symbolically wore sackcloth, meaning they prophesied during a time of mourning, which indicates a time of trial and tribulation, possibly even persecution. In other words, it was a tough time for the Word of God and the Church. Simply, the Word of God was in mourning, for it did not have full sway over the hearts of the masses, only of a remnant that were in a covenant relationship with Christ. These too were also in mourning over the condition of society around them, as well as the condition of the Church herself.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (Matthew 5:4 NASB)

If there was ever a period for wearing sackcloth as a sign of mourning, the period in question fits the bill. No doubt there were other periods prior to 529 AD; the persecutions of the early church and of Diocletian come to mind. However, it seems that the magnitude of darkness during this 1,260-year period was truly a season for wearing sackcloth, spiritually speaking.

Rather than make an attempt at originality with my own words, I defer again to Barton Warren Johnson and his commentary in the *People's New Testament*.

"This period of mourning, during which the witnesses shall prophesy in sackcloth is 1260 days. ... The day being used as a symbol for a year, we know that 1260 years, the horn spoken of by Daniel, which speaks great words against the Most High, shall have dominion; that for the same period the Gentiles, the enemies of the saints, shall be in power; the two witnesses prophesy in sackcloth, and the woman, the type of the true Church, flee into the wilderness. This remarkable period is that of the power and glory of Papal Rome. It becomes us, once for all, to settle when this period began and when it ends. It is somewhat difficult to mark the exact point in this development of the Romish power, which may be regarded as the beginning of the 1260 years. But I believe that the consummation of the usurpation can be pointed out to the year."

"In A. D. 527 Justinian ascended the throne of the Eastern Empire. Before his reign the schism had begun between the Greek and the Roman churches. He healed that schism by force in favor of Rome. If the reader will open Gibbon, Vol. IV., p. 528, he will find an account of a terrible persecution, inaugurated by this monarch, in order to make all conform to the Papal rule. "His reign," says Gibbon, "was a uniform, yet various scene of persecution. . . Churches with their congregations were surrounded by *Catholic* soldiers, and the houses were burned with the congregations in them." At this period, then, the Church is drenched in blood in order to make the Romish power universal. The witnesses certainly prophesy in mourning. What more? **In A.D. 531, Justinian**, the ruler of the

Eastern half of the old Roman world, the ruler of the countries where the churches still protested against the arrogant claims of Rome, **decreed and enforced by arms the subjugation of the whole Church to the Roman Pope**, and in **A.D. 533**, he bestowed upon him the title of *Rector Ecclesiae* or **Lord of the Church**. (D'Aubigne's Reformation, Vol. I., p.42.) **In A.D. 533** the "Man of Sin" was certainly fully revealed. **The Papacy was completely established**. The universal claims of the Pope were sanctioned by imperial power. Here, then, is the beginning point."

"During the long period extending from **A.D. 533 to 1793**, a prophetic period of 1260 years, the two witnesses, the Old Testament and New Testament, remained in sackcloth. Even where the light had begun to spring up and the **Protestant Reformation** had taken the place of Romish faith, there was still intolerance. Puritans were persecuted in England, Baptists in Lutheran Germany, Calvin burnt Servetus in Geneva, Quakers and Baptists were punished for their religion in the American colonies."

Second, it seems that the conquerors of this period did not have miraculous powers to literally stop the rain or turn water into blood or bring plagues to their land, but their testimony most definitely did in the sight of God who heard their prayers that the Holy Spirit had lined up with His will. God knew their persecution and mourning, and responded by bringing judgment upon the land. Revelation seems to support such a conclusion.

When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and **golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints**. (Revelation 5:8 NASB)

(3) Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that **he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne**. (4) And the smoke of the incense, with **the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand**. (Revelation 8:3-4 NASB)

As already seen in the opening of the first six seals, God sent judgments upon the nations of the western and eastern Roman world in various forms, from invading armies to plagues. The rivers turned into blood from the deaths that ensued. The Black Death killed millions. And, all the while, the Word of God (the rain) was shut up and hidden for a very long season until the 1500's when the skies were shut up no longer.

As an aside; this might seem contradictory to the previous suggestion that the blood refers to the blood of Christ that saves. However, blood shed through a literal judgment by death and the blood applied spiritually to save are not mutually exclusive to the other. Simply, there could be both physical (natural) and spiritual applications in the imagery of John's vision.

Third, as emphasized by Johnson, the papacy of the Roman church rose to **temporal and ecclesiastical authority** during this time as it vied with the monarchs for control over the people and the land. In this regard, the two witnesses signify a witness against the rise to power of the papacy. After all, the Word of God speaks to both civil and religious authorities, for no authority exists apart from Christ (Romans 13:1; Colossian 1:16).

Fourth, as stated already, the secondary application is not about any one individual but about all the conquerors that were in the midst of the churches of this era. They did not have to stand on the street corners to be known by all as witnesses. They were known by the testimony of their lives, which often led to their death, and heaven knew them by their testimony and prayers.

Fifth, again, the two witnesses did not have literal fire coming from their mouths. Fire signifies the Word or Law of God, which, in many respects, are one and the same. The Word itself is the fire that brings judgment upon the nations and the Church.

Sixth, although the written Word was shut up to the masses, it obviously was not shut up to the conquerors who overcame by the blood and by the word of their testimony. It may be hard to imagine that this could be possible during this time; however, we must be reminded of the 7,000 in Elijah's day. He thought he was all alone, but he was not. God knows His own, and He alone keeps them and gives them all that they need to reach the end.

Seventh, John was told of the two witnesses for the same reason he was told of the 144,000 and he saw the great multitude. It was an encouragement not only for him but also, and mostly, for those who would find themselves in the midst of this dark and dangerous time of 1,260 years. It was given as a call to conquer in the midst of trial and tribulation, for, by God's Word, His Grace, and the Spirit of God, they would ultimately prevail, just as Joshua and Zerubbabel prevailed in the midst of adversity. The victory was and belongs to the conquerors, for they were (are) in the Victor, and He is Faithful and True. Obviously, this applies to all generations and all periods of Church history as well.

Eighth, in the history of the Church, there are two possibilities for churches in which the two witnesses resided. The first possibility suggested by some commentators is that of the **Roman (Latin) Catholic** and the **Greek Orthodox** churches that split in the schism of 1054 AD, a split that continues to our day. Consequently, the two witnesses would have resided in the midst of these churches. The second possibility suggested by more commentators is that of **Thyatira** and **Sardis**.

See **Notes #2A – Seven Churches**.

According to this thinking, **Thyatira** started with **Justinian (~529 AD)** and ended with **Luther** and the beginning of the **Reformation (1517)**, and **Sardis** started with the **Reformation** and grew throughout the **16th-18th centuries** and ended with, not only the **French Revolution (1789-1799)**, but, most notably, the formation of a new Christian nation (**1776**) called **America** that would later constitutionally guarantee the **freedom of religion (1791)** and be affirmed as a **Christian nation** by its Supreme Court (**1870**), and be associated with the **Philadelphia** church that is dated from **1776-1914**. The city of Philadelphia was the place where the **Declaration of Independence** was signed and where the first capital of the new union of states resided.

Stating that they "ended" does not mean that they ceased to exist altogether; it means that their predominance ended. Surely, these churches continued on and, in some measure, are with us even today. After all, Roman Catholicism is still a mighty force in the world today with over a billion members. The same could be said for the Protestant Reformation churches that morphed into many of our present-day "dead" denominational churches.

But this still leaves us with the question of the historical significance of the two witnesses being killed and resurrected. This is taken up in the next study notes.