



"It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one."
—C.S. Lewis

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Witness and Warning to the Powerful

The Bible contains an interesting phenomenon, one found especially in the [Old Testament](#), in which [God](#) coordinates events to place one of His servants in a position of high visibility and sometimes great power at the center of world events. In this way, He sounds a warning and makes a witness of His will and His way among the "greats" of the time.

The Bible hints that such placements happened more often than we generally realize. A few of His servants may have held such positions or at least been highly visible to the powers that were then in control, but we are not given any Scriptural details. For instance, Noah, "a preacher of righteousness" ([II Peter 2:5](#)), may have done something of the sort before the Flood, warning the rulers of the pre-Flood world of their imminent doom. Early myth/history drops clues that his son, Shem, proved a thorn in the side of early Mesopotamian and Egyptian kings post-Flood.

Nevertheless, the Bible explicitly ties several of God's servants to rulers of kingdoms and great empires:

» When **Abram** hears that Lot and his family have been taken captive by a host out of Mesopotamia, he gathers his 318 trained servants and goes in pursuit. He not only recovers his relatives, but he also brings back to Sodom all of the city's captives and their plundered goods. This earns him the boundless gratitude of the king of Sodom, but Abram and [Melchizedek](#), priest of God Most High, give all the credit to the Almighty (see [Genesis 14:14-24](#)). His rescue of Lot and his refusal of reward make a witness to all of Sodom, which would soon be destroyed by God for its sins (Genesis 19).

» Though his brothers cruelly sell young **Joseph** into slavery, he is eventually promoted to second-in-command over Egypt, the world's superpower of the day. The Pharaoh tells him in [Genesis 41:40](#), "You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." When the prophesied great famine comes, he garners even more power as the one to whom all have to come if they want to buy grain. Significantly, Joseph gives God all the credit for his [wisdom](#), telling Pharaoh, "It is not in me [to interpret your dream]; God will give Pharaoh an answer of [peace](#)" ([Genesis 41:16](#)). Through Joseph, God saves Egypt and provides for Israel throughout the famine, as well as arranging for Israel's astounding growth in Goshen while "the iniquity of the Amorites" ([Genesis 15:16](#)) ran its course in Canaan.

» A few generations later, God again manipulates events to allow [Moses](#) to be brought up by the crown princess in the very house of Pharaoh, giving him the title "son of Pharaoh's daughter" ([Hebrews 11:24](#)) and putting him in line for the throne of Egypt. He also has access to "all the wisdom of the Egyptians" so that he becomes "mighty in words and deeds" ([Acts 7:22](#)). When God later brings him out of the wilderness to confront Pharaoh and bring His people out of Egyptian slavery, Moses has both the access and stature to

bring God's message directly to the king. Through ten terrible plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea, he delivers a tremendous warning and witness to Egypt.

» We may not consider the prophet ***Jonah*** in this light, but his prophecy finds its way into a palace. Once the prophet finally arrives in Nineveh, the capital city of the mighty Assyrian empire, his preaching reaches the king's ears: "Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with [sackcloth](#) and sat in ashes" ([Jonah 3:6](#)). It is the king who decrees that everyone in the city—even all the animals!—are to fast, cry out to God, and repent of their evils. A great tragedy is delayed by their [repentance](#) and a great witness made of the power and mercy of the God of Israel.

» In the story of ***Daniel***, God takes a youth from among the captives of the Jews in Babylon, and by interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, raises him to prominence in his court. "Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon" ([Daniel 2:48](#)). Later, Belshazzar makes Daniel third ruler in the kingdom ([Daniel 5:29](#)), behind only himself and his father. Darius, the first ruler of Babylon under the Medes and Persians, appoints Daniel to be one of three governors over the entire empire ([Daniel 6:1-2](#)), a position he holds under Cyrus when he takes up the reins of power not long thereafter. For six or seven decades, the prophet witnesses constantly before the rulers of these powerful empires, giving all the credit to God ([Daniel 2:28](#); [5:18](#); [6:22](#)).

» Less than a century later, another Persian king, Ahasuerus (most likely Xerxes I), appoints another Jew, ***Mordecai***, to great power in the empire: "For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and

speaking peace to all his countrymen" ([Esther 10:3](#)). The good service he gives to the king probably paves the way for both Ezra and Nehemiah to do their work in Jerusalem not long thereafter.

» ***Nehemiah*** , as cupbearer to the Persian king, is a highly trusted confidant of Artaxerxes (successor to Xerxes I). The cupbearer is with the king at all meals, ensuring that the king's drink is not poisoned (and perhaps his food as well). As soon as Nehemiah asks permission to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem, the king immediately appoints him governor of the region and sends forces with him to make sure he arrives safely. His every action shows him to be a trustworthy and godly servant.

» Finally, among these examples should be included ***the apostle Paul*** , who appeals to Caesar while imprisoned in Caesarea on charges trumped up by the Jews ([Acts 25:10-12](#)). Through many trials, Paul is eventually delivered to Rome, where he spends two whole years "preaching the [kingdom of God](#) and teaching the things which concern the Lord [Jesus Christ](#) with all confidence, no one forbidding him" ([Acts 28:31](#)). Although we have no biblical record of it, he must have come to trial before Caesar and been acquitted of all charges, as he is released to continue his ministry after the two years are up. So, Paul witnesses before the greatest ruler of his day, the Roman emperor!

In the not-too-distant future, Christ will raise His [Two Witnesses](#) to preach and warn the whole world that He is coming to bring His Kingdom to this earth (see [Revelation 11:3-13](#)). God always ensures that no one—and especially those with real power in the world—can claim ignorance before Him in the Day of Judgment.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

The Two Witnesses (Part Four)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The seven golden lamps (Zechariah 4:2; Revelation 1:20) are seven churches empowered by an abundance of oil (a symbol of God's Spirit, Zechariah 4:6), manifested as works or fruit. Zerubbabel, finishing the physical Temple, serves as a type of Christ, who finishes the spiritual one. The seven stars, lamps, and eyes appear to be interchangeable, representing the churches, the messengers of the churches, or the spirit of the churches (Revelation 1:16, 20; 5:6).

From the Archives: Featured Article

Who the Two Witnesses Are Not

by Charles Whitaker

Many prophecy watchers have made their guesses about who the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11 are, but not all of their ideas have solid, biblical foundations. Charles Whitaker tackles a common view among interpreters, explaining that Scripture precludes it on very solid grounds.

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