

The Two Witnesses (Part 5)

The Golden Bowl and Fire from Heaven

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It's become clear, at least in my own mind, that the Two Witnesses are probably the most important servants of God at the time of the end. I can see little reason to doubt this conclusion. And, as we'll see today, they are vital for the church at the end time and maybe equally vital for the world - but especially for the church at the end time.

Last time we studied into Zechariah 4 in some depth, seeing how the lampstand (topped by the golden bowl, with the olive trees beside it) figures prominently in the assurance that God will complete His work in building the temple. We found out that Zerubbabel is a sign that whatever problems crop up, at any time really, will not hinder God's work. It is not actually he - Zerubbabel, or the servant of God - that is doing the work. It's God and His Spirit. As we saw, Zerubbabel is just a type. The real Zerubbabel, the antitype, is Christ Himself building His church.

The overall idea that we need to understand from this is that God's work will get done. God's church will be prepared. The Bride will be ready when the time comes to marry the Bridegroom. And even when nothing seems to be happening, something *is* happening. It's just a "day of small things." God is at work, in many cases, behind the scenes - or nudging people and things to happen in small ways that we don't see, because they are a little bit behind the scenes. They are not right up in your face.

We also looked at the problematic ***seven eyes of the Lord***, seeing from the scriptures that it appears as if God's eyes are the seven messengers to the seven churches. We went through all the things about the lamps, the eyes, the angels, the stars, the seven spirits; and they all seem to be making one big circle. They are all describing the same thing. Now, this is not certain. I don't want to be dogmatic about that - that the seven eyes of the Lord are the seven messengers to the seven churches. But, to me, it's the only conclusion that makes any sense.

And remember that we also went over the fact that the Hebraic imagery for **eyes** is different from how we consider "eyes" to work. They looked at eyes as being expressive (or communicative, or revelatory) - meaning that they were outward in their approach. They weren't *gatherers* of information. They *provided* information. We saw this in such examples as, if your child lies to you, you can usually see it in his eyes. The lie is almost written in his eyes. The eyes reveal so much about us. Our feelings, our thoughts, our intentions come right out of the eyes. So the Hebrews, in a great degree, had that right.

The eyes are expressive when you are looking from outside to inside. Of course, inside to outside they are receptive; but they looked at the world in this more outward approach. At least, in this case they did.

A secondary image that we just went over very quickly is that of a **spring**. The word 'ayin in Hebrew is also the word for spring, or fountain. And we know from springs and fountains that they don't gather in anything. They allow water to flow out. Some even bubble up, or fount. So a spring or a fountain is expressive. It's out flowing, or out going. And **the eye** is very similar, if we are going to take anything from this root word 'ayin.

I want to pick up the flow again back in Zechariah 4:10, because we didn't quite get finished with this particular verse. We went over the "small things." We went over the seven "eyes." But we pretty much stopped right there. We didn't go into the plumb line in the hands of Zerubbabel. As a matter of fact, we just kind of skipped right over that. I mentioned that it measures verticality; but I didn't go into it, really, any further than that. So I want to go into what the **plumb line** is.

Zechariah 4:10 For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

The seven eyes - we'll say they are the seven messengers of the seven churches - are glad when they see the measuring of the church beginning. They see something happening within the church that is going to bring them back to a **standard**. The 'plumb line' in Zechariah 4 is the counterpoint to the 'reed like a rod' back in Revelation 11:1. So this gives you an idea of the timing of things. Revelation 10 and 11 seem to work on a straight chronology. It starts with the thunders pealing - one at a time, successively seven thunders. And when the seven thunders are about to be over, then John (in the type here) is given a reed like a rod; and he's told to measure the temple, and the altar, and the worshippers.

The time that the plumb line, or the measuring line, is placed in the hand of this servant of God is this time here that we are talking about now. The seven eyes - the seven messengers - are glad to see that God is moving by placing this measuring rod (or this plumb line) in the hand of His servant in order to measure the church. And we shouldn't even go that far, maybe. Let's just leave it at Christ. That God has put in Christ's hand the authority - or the go-ahead (maybe that's even a better term) - to go ahead and measure the church because now is the time when things are going to start moving forward.

Then we have, right after that, the beginning of the Great Tribulation - after the measuring is done. So this seems to be the timing of this particular verse here. When the plumb line is put into the hand of Zerubbabel, it's the same as the measuring rod being given to John in the type. I hope we can say that time has already begun. It's my hope that it's already begun. It says here that God's servants should be happy, glad, to see that's beginning to happen - not only because the end is near, but also because it's something the church needs so the temple (the church) can be finished. The Bride can be prepared.

So there's rejoicing there. There's gladness. There's a great deal of hope. And there's also a motivation, hopefully, to participate in this work of measuring the temple. If these seven eyes are the seven messengers to the seven churches that are around at the end time, they are all going to pitch in then to get their flocks ready.

Let's look at this **standard**, or this instrument. I'm particularly going to look at the plumb line.

Amos 7:7 Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand.

This is very similar to what's happening there in Zechariah 4, because remember what I just said. The real One who is given the go-ahead to begin measuring the church is Jesus Christ. He's the head of the church. And so here you have Christ, the Lord, with a plumb line in His hand - standing on a wall that is vertical. "Made with a plumb line," it says. It is upright.

Amos 7:8-9 And the LOORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said [Now, here's the interpretation - what you are supposed to get out of it.]: "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore. The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste. I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam."

We need to remember that this was given, originally, to ancient Israel. And the wording here applies first of all to Israel - the physical people Israel. But there's a spiritual anti-type in it that we can take out of it. Christ is doing the judging here in both. In the end time fulfillment, this is what happens right before the catastrophe of the Great Tribulation. It's the time of Jacob's trouble. This is when things are going to get really

bad. When the Lord stands on the wall, and He says, "Look, this is what you have to be like. You have to be able to stand here next to this plumb line and measure yourself to the vertical, to see how vertical or upright you really are."

And He says, "I will not pass by...any more." Do you understand what that means? It means that there is going to be this judgment; and however this **judgment** falls, that's it! If you'll look into the first six verses of this same chapter, you'll find that there were two other visions. And in those two other visions, the prophet had said, "Please God, Israel's such a small people. Will you please pass by us this time?" Meaning, "Will you please have mercy and not punish us?" And both times God said, "Okay, Amos. Because you have done this, because you have asked Me for this, I will pass by." But now He says, in this vision of the plumb line, "This time I am going to exact My judgment. I'm going to pass sentence."

And what does He pass sentence on? The "high places of Isaac," which is idolatry. The "sanctuaries of Israel" would be the same. And He says He will "rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam," which would mean that He is going to take a great deal of vengeance upon the leadership for leading the people in the way that they have. So this is very serious. At the time of the end, when God appears with the plumb line, that's it. That's the judgment. And then He's going to move. He's going to react. He's going to exact the sentence that He thinks is fair and necessary.

Isaiah 28:16-17 [He's speaking about Christ Himself here.] "Therefore thus says the Lord Good: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation. Whoever believes will not act hastily. Also I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plummet. The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters will overflow the hiding place."

This is very interesting. **The plumb line** here is defined as *justice* and *righteousness*. We've seen that already. It's in our word "upright," which is a synonym of vertical. Whatever is upright is righteous, and He will judge according to that. So what He means here is that He will set us up so that we can see - and He can see - how close we are sticking to godly judgment and right doing. That is, see how much we are living by the standard.

It says here that the process of this judgment will sweep away (1) the deceptions that we've allowed ourselves to believe and (2) the hidden, secret sins that we've allowed to go on, to continue. I believe that's what it means with "the hail will sweep away the

refuge of lies, and the waters will overflow the hiding place." We won't be able to hide from the lies and the sins that we've allowed to continue on in our lives. So this plumb line is nothing to sneeze at. God's serious. When He brings the plumb line about and holds it up next to His people, that's deadly serious. That's "eternal life and death"-type of serious - especially to those who are converted. So we'd better measure up.

Now to Lamentations 2 for another example of God bringing a plumb line among His people. One of the things that is really interesting here, and throughout the whole chapter, is that Jeremiah (likely the author of this) makes it very clear that it is God that is doing this. Every section begins with "*The Lord has done this.*" And it's the same here.

Lamentations 2:8-10 The LOORD has purposed [or determined] to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion. [Remember, the Lord was standing on the wall that was made with a plumb line.] He has stretched out a line. He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying. Therefore He has caused the rampart and wall to lament. They languished together. Her gates have sunk into the ground. He has destroyed and broken her bars. Her king and her princes are among the nations. The Law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from the LOORD. The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground and keep silence. They throw dust on their heads and gird themselves with sackcloth. The virgins of Jerusalem bow their heads to the ground.

It didn't say plumb line here, but the word **line** was there - the measuring line in verse 8. "He has stretched out a line," it says; and it's the same image. When you do something in concrete, let's say, or you put up posts for a fence, you stretch out a line to make sure that everything meets the measurements that you need for that particular project. God has done this as well. He's stretched out a line; and the implication is that, in this case, the daughter of Zion has crossed it (you might say). And He said, "*That's enough!*" And He has done all these things. He's destroyed the wall, and all these things have happened.

What He has done in this case, in destroying the wall - because there's no more protection - He will determine who trusts Him, and who does not. Who is going to stick by Him and by His way of life, and who will not. When the wall is destroyed, you are **exposed**. Your character is going to be exposed as well. So He will see then just where you stand - which side of the line you stand on: His side, or the other side.

Verse 9 here mentions **scattering**. "Her king and her princes are among the nations." It also mentions a disregard of His law. It says, "the Law is no more." And it also says "her

prophets find no vision from the LOORD," meaning there is a kind of disconnect between God's people and God Himself. They are not getting the instruction that they need. Does that sound familiar?

Back to Zechariah 4, it's interesting that the seven eyes **rejoice** to see this happening. Their joy is obviously tempered by their sorrow at the destruction. When a measuring line (or a plummet, or a measuring rod) is set up to do the measuring, of course there are going to be those who pass. But it seems like, the way it's worked out, there are going to be a great many more that will fail. There's a great deal of sadness in that - that they didn't measure up. The context, though, here in Zechariah 4:10 is very positive. It's the joy at the completion of the temple that comes to the fore. So the sorrow is tempered by all of that. The big thing is that the return of Christ is near, and we can have a great deal of joy in that.

I want to go, too, over this word **scan** here in the New King James. "The eyes of the LOORD, which *scan* to and fro throughout the whole earth." I looked in several versions of the Bible, on this word "scan." Scan tends to go along with the English idea of the eyes being receptors. They are looking. These eyes are looking throughout all the earth. They are gathering information. The Hebrew word is kind of funny. It's the word *shuwt*. It means literally "to push forth," which really simply means to go, or to run. So the King James has that the eyes *run* throughout the whole earth, and that is literal. The New American Standard, the Revised Standard Version, and the New International Version have the word *range* - they range throughout the whole earth. The New Living Translation has *search* throughout the whole earth.

Keil & Delitzsch use the word *sweep*. They sweep throughout the whole earth. And it sounds like they are making it a synonym for scan. But when they explained it, they said that this word "sweep" has the implication of **influence** - that their influence sweeps throughout the whole earth (which is interesting). If that's the case, that the messengers of the seven churches are the seven eyes, what it is saying then is that these seven eyes - or these seven messengers - have influence that runs throughout the whole earth.

It's not a localized thing as in, let's say, Judea where the original prophecy was given and which it was for. At the time of Zerubbabel, there were just several thousand Jews and Levites that were interested in this prophecy. But he's saying that, in its fulfillment, the prophecy applies worldwide. It's not centered just on Jerusalem, or just on a small area of Judea; but the influence of these seven eyes is throughout the whole earth.

That's interesting and seems to fit what's happening today. It doesn't say that their

influence is strong throughout the whole earth, but it is there throughout the whole earth. So there are several things in this chapter that give the idea that there's a worldwide work being done. Or that this applies worldwide. The last three words in this chapter talk about "the LOORD of ***the whole earth***." So we can see very easily from Zechariah 4 that this is not a localized thing. This is a worldwide happening.

Let's get into Zechariah 4:11-14 and finally figure out what this *bowl* is.

Zechariah 4:11-14 Then I answered and said to him, "What are these two olive trees - at the right of the lampstand and at its left?" And I further answered and said to him, "What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?" Then he answered me and said, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." So he said, "These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth."

Depending on the translation that you use, this can seem quite confusing. Verse 12 is the one that is most confusing. It literally reads "What are the two olive clusters which through the two golden pipes empty out of themselves the golden oil?" I think that makes it a little bit clearer. The word *branches* there is an interpretation. The word is actually "ears" (like ears of corn) or "cluster" (like a cluster of grapes, or you might say a cluster of olives). It means a *bunch* of something. So, like on an ear of corn, you have a bunch of the corn kernels. The same thing is true here of these olive branches. It's a cluster of olives, or a bunch of olives. It's kind of a strange thing, so you can understand why they'd use the word "branches." You wouldn't necessarily use "clusters" or "ears" with olives.

Let's try to get the understanding of what's actually going on here. Remember we have the central pillar of the lampstand, and the golden bowl is on top of it. Out from the central pillar go seven arms. At the end of each one of the seven arms is a small lamp with oil in it, and probably a wick to light. From the bowl at the top of the central lampstand come seven pipes for each one of the seven lamps. So, in all, you have forty-nine pipes coming from this golden bowl at the top and down to the lamps.

Remember what I said about this work being worldwide. If you can picture the central post with this bowl and the forty-nine tubes (or pipes) coming down to these seven lamps that are around in 360 degrees (around the central pole, all the way around), what would that look like to you? To me, what I thought of first was a globe with the lines of longitude. I just wanted to throw that in, from the standpoint of this being a worldwide

work - or a worldwide church - because we are talking about the seven lamps which represent the whole church of God. The figure of this strange menorah (not like the one that's in the tabernacle, but one that's different) gives the appearance - from a distance - of being like a globe, with these tubes coming down from the top and looking like the lines of longitude on a globe. It's kind of interesting to look at it that way.

Next to this central pillar, on either side, are **two olive trees**. These olive trees have a branch, or a cluster, that goes right in towards the golden bowl. The golden bowl itself has two large pipes at the top of it; and these clusters of olives drip, or pour, golden oil into these pipes. It goes through the pipes and into the golden bowl. And then the golden oil that's there in the bowl flows out through the forty-nine pipes to the seven lamps.

Now, wait a minute. What do these two *olive trees* stand for? We are told in Revelation 11:4 that the Two Witnesses are the two olive trees. We have figured out that these are **two men**. What are two men doing pouring oil into this golden bowl? Wouldn't you think normally that it would be God that pours the golden oil into the bowl, because isn't Christ the dispenser of the Holy Spirit? It says that, if you want to check it out.

John 16:5-7 But now I [Christ] go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send it to you.

Who's the dispenser, then, of the Holy Spirit? Jesus Christ! But Jesus Christ is NOT one of these two witnesses. They are **men**. They are prophets. How can these two men - prophets though they are - supply the entire church with oil. It makes for a kind of pretty problem, because it doesn't seem to fit what we have understood.

Now, remember the quotation that I gave you last time from the Keil & Delitzsch Commentary about what the golden oil represents in this particular symbolism, or vision. Here it is:

Oil...is used in the Scriptures as a symbol of the Spirit of God, [Here comes the important part.] not in its transcendent essence, but so far as it works in the world, and is indwelling in the church.

What he is saying here is that **oil** is NOT necessarily the Spirit in its pure form. Remember we went over that. It is oil that has gone through a process through an individual person and comes out as a kind of work, or (as we mentioned) **words** - mostly words. The Holy Spirit comes in its transcendent form from Jesus Christ **into a man**. And then the man, if he is being led by that Spirit, uses that Spirit to produce works; and more often than not, the type of works that he does is in the form of words. Especially if he is a minister of God, he uses the Spirit to try to convince people of God's way of life - that it is true, and that God is the true God. And so what a minister would give you is NOT the pure Holy Spirit. He would give you a manifestation of the Spirit in whatever work it is that he is doing.

So what we have here in Zechariah 4 is that the golden oil, as we've seen, is a kind of **work**; and it is put into the bowl - which is a repository, a receptacle, a reservoir for these works. And it's mostly **words** that feed the rest of the church. All seven churches are able to draw from [it] abundantly, through seven pipes. Seven is the number of spiritual perfection. Every church has the ability to be **fed abundantly** from the reservoir of words, truth, that these two men produce.

So the *bowl* is not really anything more than what it claims to be. It's a bowl! It's a reservoir. You put something in a bowl to hold something. It also acts as a kind of conduit for these works - these words. And all seven of the churches are able to feed from it. So whatever you want to call it - a receptacle, a reservoir, a central clearing house, or whatever it is - all seven of the churches feed from what the olive trees produce. That's why they are so important to the church. They are the lifelines between God and the rest of the churches.

Think of it this way. Think of it in its natural form. Where do any olive trees get their nourishment? Well, they are rooted in the ground, so they get nourishment from the minerals in the soil. They are exposed to the air. They are exposed to the sun. And who sends the rain? God! So the figure here is correct. God does feed these two, and it's shown in a very natural process. They were planted by God. They were fed from the soil. They were watered from the clouds, from the dew that God provides; and He is the Sun of righteousness.

So, all of those things give them the growth; and then they synthesize all of this that God has given, and convert it into fruit. The fruit is squeezed. It goes into the reservoir. And it's there ready, waiting, to feed the churches. And it's this stockpile of information - of words - that the church (probably, mostly in the place of safety) will be able to survive for the 3½ years upon. That's my interpretation. Now you have it.

It's interesting that he calls them **the two anointed ones**. It's kind of sad that they chose to translate it as "two anointed ones." It would have been much clearer to us if they would have left it in its literal wording. That is, these two **sons of oil**. What does that tell you about the Two Witnesses? They too grew by the same process as everybody else. Somebody fed them the same way that they will feed the rest of the church. Somebody else received the Holy Spirit from God, synthesized it, processed it, bore fruit, made it manifest itself in some sort of teaching; and by it they grew.

You could also look at it as, when God calls someone "the son of" something, He means it's just like what it is that they are from. So these two *sons of oil* are, you may say, in a pure sense very reflective - like a son is reflective of his father - of Jesus Christ. Remember I said back several sermons that these Two Witnesses will be as much representatives of Jesus Christ (maybe as much like Him) as any two people have ever been. And so calling them, naming them, the two sons of oil - and Jesus Christ being the giver of the Holy Spirit - means that these two are very much like Jesus Christ. So it's very interesting - all the different symbolism that's in here, and all that we can draw out of it. The Holy Spirit is what gives one the mind of Christ, and these two are going to show in their work that they truly do have the mind of Christ.

There's also something here where it says they "**stand beside** the Lord of the whole earth." This is just a neat little way of saying that they **serve** God - whether it's as priests, or prophets, or ministers, or apostles, or what have you. I want to show you a few examples of this. First, Deuteronomy 10:8. In this particular place, it's about the tribe of Levi.

Deuteronomy 10:8 At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day.

So this adds one more thing. Not only are they ministering to, or serving, God; but they are also called to bless His name - or to bless in His name, which is a little bit different. It means that they are to be the conduit. In a way, they do His work. They do things in His name.

Deuteronomy 18:6-7 "So if a Levite comes from any of your gates, from where he dwells among all Israel, and comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which the LORD chooses, then he may serve in the name of the LORD his God as all his brethren the Levites do, who stand there before the LORD."

So, all the Levites *stand before the Lord* in doing His work.

I Kings 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LOORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

Elijah, in his office as prophet, is shown standing before God. This one is very interesting in terms of the next few verses in Revelation 11, but for now let's go to I Kings 18.

I Kings 18:15 Then Elijah said, "As the LOORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today."

In a way, he was swearing on his own office that he would do as he said. That's how highly precious he felt his office was - that he could swear on it.

II Kings 3:14 And Elisha said, "As the LOORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you, nor see you."

Here Elisha was doing the same thing that his master, Elijah, did - in swearing by it.

II Kings 5:16 But he said, "As the LOORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing."

This was when he refused to take Naaman's gift for his healing. So, again, it's almost used as a means to swearing to something.

Jeremiah 15:19 Therefore thus says the LOORD: "If you return, then I will bring you back; you shall stand before Me; if you take out the precious from the vile, you shall be as My mouth. Let them return to you, but you must not return to them."

He's speaking to Jeremiah here. If he would stop being so dejected and get on with his

work, then he could resume his place as the prophet. So He's saying that **standing before God** is a way of saying that (1) you are a servant that is in God's confidence and that (2) you are doing His work.

Back in Revelation 11:4, it says that these two are *the two olive trees* and *the two lampstands* "standing before the God of the earth." I've had a hard time with them being described as the two lampstands. It just didn't fit right, but I think I finally figured it out. We have to remember **the timing** of all of this. Remember that I said that Revelation 10 and 11 are chronological. At this time, the seven thunders have ceased. The two witnesses have been raised up. They are basically the only thing God has going as far as witnessing, preaching, and proclaiming His way on the earth.

Now, what does a lamp do? It gives light.

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

What are the Two Witnesses going to be doing at this time? They are the two lampstands that stand before the God of the whole earth. What are they doing? They are lighting the house, like it says here. What's the house? Who's the house of God? The church! Remember what I said. These two put their oil in the reservoir, and it feeds the whole church - to do what? To make light! At this time though, the church has been hidden in a place of safety. Right? Not even Satan can get there, as far as we know. We know certainly that no men can get there.

So, in a way, the church's light is now under a basket. Who's left then to be **the light of the world**? The Two Witnesses! They are, at this point, THE two lampstands. All the eyes of the world are going to be drawn to these two prophets. And (as it says here, in verse 16) they are the ones that are going to do the good works at that time; and they are the ones that are going to be glorifying God in heaven.

That's why they are called the two lampstands. They are the only things left shining visibly, at this time - during Jacob's trouble and the Day of the Lord. They are going to be, in effect, (pardon my French here) raising hell all over the world. We'll find as we go on here that the whole world hates them, and they rejoice when these two are dead - because they can't stand it that these two are shining so brightly for God. So now I know

why they are called *the two lampstands*.

The churches, at this point, are out of the picture. So the lampstands don't picture churches. They just picture these two bright lights for God. Not only are they going to be supplying the church with oil, but also they are going to be shining brightly as a result of the good works that they do.

Revelation 11:5 And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner.

That's an interesting verse. The information is repeated. Why? Why is it so necessary that we get a double barrel here? Well, there are two witnesses; but I don't think that's the reason. I think Jesus is trying to emphasize to us the **power** that He has unleashed in these two. Remember it says, "I will give power to My two witnesses." Or, I will give authority. Or, I will endow My two witnesses. It is being emphasized to reinforce to everyone how important the work of the two witnesses is. In this last 3½ years, it is so important that God gives them the power to kill - the ability to kill. God will let no one - or no group - stand in the Two Witnesses' way, or bring them to any harm, until their work is done. Then, quick as that, they are gone.

The word *harm* here is very general. It means any kind of persecution. It doesn't mean that if somebody tries to kill them, or somebody tries to break their arm, or anything specific like that. It means in any way! If any one tries to stop them, or hinder their work, boom. They'll be extinguished, like a light. Anything that people try to do against these two - in order to trip them up - exacts the death penalty. That's scary! It's like they are two James Bonds with a license to kill. You might even say that they are God's two "not so secret" agents, and they are given this tremendous power.

It says that **fire** proceeds from their mouth. We have to ask the question: "Is this literal, where fire actually comes out of their mouth and consumes their enemies? Or does it mean that, with a word from their mouth, fire (or some other lethal judgment) comes down out of heaven and consumes their enemies." Well, it's hard to say. The wording here can be taken either way. It could be literal, or it could be that it's just truncated to the point where the word comes out of their mouth and the enemies are killed.

No human in the Bible is shown to be a human flame-thrower, but we do have a few Old Testament examples of something like this happening. First let's go to Numbers 16. This is the example of Korah, and Dathan and Abiram - and their rebellion against Moses.

Most of us remember that the earth opened up and swallowed them, but let's see the story here.

Numbers 16:28 And Moses said: "By this you shall know that the LOORD has sent me to do all these works...

Listen to him! He's saying that what happens next is a sign that God is working through His servant, Moses.

Numbers 16:28 "By this you shall know that the LOORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will."

Just remember that this is Moses, and remember the connection between Moses and the two witnesses.

Numbers 16:29-31 "If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LOORD has not sent me. But if the LOORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LOORD." Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words [It's like the last syllable is out of his mouth, and then] that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly [congregation]. Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up also!" And a fire came out from the LOORD [probably from the tabernacle] and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

So this is an occasion where Moses spoke; and swoosh, God did the work. So if the Bible is going to be our guide here, it looks like these two will speak; and God will do the work. That's how Jesus did it. Jesus said, "I don't do any of these works. God does the works through Me. God gets all the credit."

We just looked at Moses. Now we are going to look at Elijah. Keep these people in the back of your mind - Moses and Elijah - because they keep cropping up whenever the

two witnesses are spoken of.

II Kings 1:2 Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was injured; so he sent messengers and said to them, "Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury." [Baal-zebub was an idol - a pagan god.] But the angel of the LOORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' Now therefore, thus says the LOORD: 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'" So Elijah departed.

It doesn't even sound like he said, "Hello." He just said, "Your king's going to die. Good-bye." And the king wondered why these men came back so quickly.

II Kings 1:9-15 Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. [He's sending this captain and fifty men to Elijah, because he wants an explanation.] So he went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill. And he spoke to him: "Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down! [Very demanding.]" So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. [It sounds a lot like what Moses did. He spoke. God reacted.] Then he [Ahaziah] sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty men. And he answered and said to him: "Man of God, thus has the king said, 'Come down quickly!'" [So there's added emphasis here - not just "Come down." but "Make haste, boy, make haste!"] So Elijah answered and said to them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. [Elijah doesn't respond with the same pique. He just says, "Okay. If I am who I say I am, you're dead." And they are dead.] Again, he sent a third captain of fifty with his fifty men. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and pleaded with him, and said to him: "Man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight. [A much different attitude.] Look, fire has come down from heaven and burned up the first two captains of fifties with their fifties [102 men.]. But let my life now be precious in your sight." And the angel of the LOORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So he arose and went down with him to the king.

These men were just sent there to kind of take Elijah into custody. They weren't even coming there to harm him necessarily, as we would think of it. But, as [similar to what's] mentioned there in Revelation 11:5, Elijah spoke; and fire proceeded out of heaven to kill these 102 men because their intent was evil in trying to stop the work of the prophet. So it's not just a matter of harm to their persons, but harm to their work. God won't let anything stop that.

One more - in Jeremiah 5:14, where I want to bring in the understanding that **the words** themselves are **a kind of fire**.

Jeremiah 5:14 Therefore thus says the LORD God of hosts: "Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them."

When these Two Witnesses speak, sometimes the penalty is not going to be exacted right away (if we look at it from this point of view). The word will go out of their mouth, and it will make a judgment. Or it will, at least, make a witness. And if the people don't change because of the word that was spoken, then eventually it is going to catch up to them and burn them - meaning the judgment will come eventually. It's very much like when God said to Adam and Eve, "If you eat of this tree, on the day that you do, you shall surely die." It didn't come for nearly 1,000 years, but they died. God's word was to them **fire**. And it surely burned them up, just as much as a literal fire would have done.

So there are two ways that we can look at it. Eventually, everyone who comes against them is going to be killed or tortured by fire. Even Satan goes into the Lake of Fire. So, it's very interesting that no one is going to get away with trying to stop these two.

Now, why are they given so much power? Well, in verse 10, God specifically calls them **prophets**. They are not apostles necessarily. They are apostles in the technical sense that they are sent from God and they preach a message. But they are a lot more like prophets in the way they act. That gives us a great big hint that - once the Tribulation begins, and these two are given their marching orders - it's a whole new ball game. It's not like it was in "the Church Age," let's say. That is, where the ministers of God are supposed to submit, and just preach, and be subject to all the higher powers. In this case, these two prophets are given *carte blanche* to destroy. (We'll see that in the next verses too.)

This is what Seiss's "The Apocalypse" - a commentary on the book of Revelation - says

about these two:

They are judgment prophets, sent to resist the gigantic blasphemies of the final antichrist, give to the infatuated world its last awful warning, assure of the coming avalanche of destruction, and put into condition for deliverance a people to be carried over to that new and better order of things which is then to follow. To this also agree the powers which they exercise. Everything is full of the spirit of judgment. They are proclaiming the coming judgment of God.

And what does it say in Revelation 14? The angel says to Christ, "Thrust in Your sickle...for the earth is ripe." And so these two are proclaiming the judgments of God. And it wouldn't be surprising to me if - like Moses and Aaron - they went before the Beast every time a plague is about to begin and say, "Look, if you are not going to change, this is what is going to occur." They will announce the seven last plagues, just like Moses and Aaron announced the ten plagues on Egypt. It's interesting to think of it in those terms. That'll become interesting (maybe more so) the next time, when we get to the types of these two witnesses in the Bible. I think that will be very interesting to go through.

Revelation 11:5 And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner.

The word **devours** here is interesting just from a gory standpoint. This word literally means *eats down*. The fire comes and eats them down. It reminded me very much of what is said there in Zechariah 14:12, about what happens to the people when Christ returns.

Zechariah 14:12 And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths.

That's pretty gruesome. It sounds like what the fire does from these two prophets is very similar. It just consumes them. If the language is any indication of how it will happen, it sounds like - from the head to the toe - they'll just melt. They'll be 'eaten down.'

One last thing here - it says in the last phrase "if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner." Notice, **"must be killed."** It's not that they might be killed. It's very, very emphatic. It's in the passive sense. "He must be killed." But it is emphatic. It implies inevitability. It's going to happen. It will happen!

So, these two are given a great deal of power, a great deal of leeway; but thankfully they'll have that bitter feeling in the belly (as we mentioned in the first sermon) - that controlled zeal that won't allow them to go beyond their authority. They are given a tremendous amount of authority, and it is by this authority that they will get their work done.