

Who The Two Witnesses Are Not

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Who are the Two Witnesses? Looking at Revelation 11 in an essentially literal way, we in God's church have always understood them to be two individuals, two human servants of God. Others, however, see the Two Witnesses not as individuals at all. Believe it or not, they see them as concepts or as two corporate bodies.

For example, there are groups that maintain that the Two Witnesses are Israel—God's Old Testament people—and the church—His New Testament people. Others think that the Two Witnesses are the New Testament and the Old Testament. This belief is not an uncommon view at all in the world of prophetic interpretation. And by the two testaments they mean the two collections of books—the collection of inspired, canonized writings of the Old and New Testaments.

There is no way at the present time to know who the Two Witnesses are—they have not yet been revealed—but we can know who they are not. We can determine definitively that they are *not* the Old and the New Testaments, and they are not for very important reasons.

Anthropomorphic Language

To begin, we need to set the stage by seeing what God has already revealed about His Two Witnesses in the pages of Scripture:

"And I will give authority to my two witnesses to proclaim the message, clothed in sackcloth for twelve hundred and sixty days."

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire issues from their mouth and consumes their enemies. Indeed, if anyone should try to hurt them, this is the way in which he will certainly meet his death. These witnesses have power to shut up the sky and stop any rain from falling during the time of their preaching. Moreover, they have power to turn the waters into blood, and to strike the earth with any plague as often as they wish.

Then, when their work of witness is complete, the animal will come up out of the pit and go to war with them. It will conquer and kill them, and their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is called by those with spiritual understanding, "Sodom" and "Egypt"—the very place where their Lord himself was crucified. For three and a half days men from all peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze upon their bodies and will not allow them to be buried. Then the inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will hold celebrations and send one another presents, because these two prophets had brought such misery to the inhabitants of the earth.

But after three and a half days the Spirit of life from God entered them and they stood upright on their feet. This struck terror into the hearts of those who were watching them, and they heard a tremendous voice speaking to these two from Heaven, saying,

"Come up here!"

And they went up to Heaven in a cloud in full view of their enemies. (Revelation 11:3-12, *The New Testament in Modern English* by J.B. Phillips)

Notice the anthropomorphic language—all the descriptions of human traits and behaviors—of this passage. In verse 3, for instance, the Two Witnesses are clothed in sackcloth. How could this apply to two parts of a book? Most of our Bibles are "clothed," if you will, in leather bindings or cardboard and cloth covers. It takes quite a bit of mental gymnastics to see how one can fit this type of terminology into the idea of the Two Witnesses being the two books of the Old and New Testaments. A person must symbolize away nearly the entire description of them.

Also notice verse 6: "They have power . . . to strike the earth with any plague as often as they wish." In other words, these Two Witnesses have the power of volition, or will. They can make decisions, and they can execute them within the scope of the power God has given them. The Old and New Testaments are not animate beings with minds of their own, and as such, those two collections of books cannot express volition. They cannot make decisions, nor can they execute decisions in this sense.

In verse 7, the Two Witnesses die, and they are described as having bodies that lie in the streets of Jerusalem. Admittedly, we can refer symbolically to the death of an idea. We can describe the end of an era as a kind of death and so forth. However, death in this passage does not appear to be metaphoric because God speaks of their bodies lying in the street and remaining unburied. This type of language is not amenable at all to understanding the Two Witnesses as the Old and New Testaments.

Then notice verse 11: "The breath of life from God came into them" (*The New Testament* by Richmond Lattimore). Are there any known instances of God breathing life into books? The idea of them being the Old and New Testament becomes even more ridiculous when we realize that the Two Witnesses then stand on their feet—this is a real resurrection—and they are translated to heaven!

In verse 10, John actually uses the word "prophets." In Greek, it is the word *prophetes* (Strong's 4396), which appears about eighty times in Scripture. This word is always rendered in the King James Version as "prophet" or "prophets." For instance, Jesus uses the word in Matthew 13:57: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country." There is not one instance where this Greek word refers to the Scriptures; it always refers to a person or to people.

Let us not belabor the point. A careful textual analysis makes it clear that the preponderance of the language of this passage points to the Two Witnesses being individuals, not collections of books.

Additional Proofs

A great deal of other evidence exists as well. For example, Revelation 11:3 tells us that God empowers His Two Witnesses for a limited period of time, 1,260 days. But does God ever set a time limit on the power of His Scriptures? God does not, in fact, set a time limit on the power that He gives His Word. Notice Isaiah 55:10-11:

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and

bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

God is saying through an analogy here that, throughout the span of history—or as Solomon would say, "under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:3, 9, 14, etc.)—rain has always worked to produce food for mankind. In like manner throughout that same span of time, throughout all of history under the sun, God's Word has been effective to carry out His purpose. Isaiah 55 places no limitation of 1,260 days or any other. Therefore, Revelation 11:3 cannot refer to a limited period of time when God empowers the Old and New Testaments to be effective because God's Word is always effective.

As decisive as some of these points might be, still two other very important reasons militate against interpreting the Two Witnesses as the two Testaments. One of these factors is just this: There is no Old Testament, and there is no New Testament.

This statement requires some explanation. Nowhere in His revelation to mankind does God describe an Old and a New Testament. He never says that He divides His Scriptures—His written Word—into two parts, one old and the other one new. Rather, throughout the Scriptures, He refers to His Scriptures as just that—*the Scriptures, the truth, His Word*. It is a single, unified, and coherent revelation to mankind.

Our translations, however, are built around the concept of two Testaments. It is an arrangement that we have grown up with. But it is a false, unbiblical idea, and we need to be careful that, in using this terminology—and we use it all the time—we do not fall for what is one of the major lies of Catholicism. Theologians call this concept *supersessionism*. We probably already have a good idea of what it is because we use the verb "supersede" quite frequently.

Supersessionism is a theological term that means that the writings that we call the New Testament supersede—that is, have replaced, have been added—to those of the Old Testament. A so-called "father" of the Roman Catholic Church, Tertullian, first expressed this idea in the second century AD, coining in Latin the terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament." (By the way, he was also the person who coined the term "trinity.")

Tertullian wrote, "This may be understood to be the divine word which is doubly edged with the two testaments of the law and of the gospel." Observe what this cleric, a worldly, Neo-Platonist philosopher—who knew almost nothing of God's revealed truth—did: Without authority, he divided God's Word into two parts—one of law and one of gospel.

So was born the lie that the false church has foisted on this world ever since: that the writings of the New Testament replace those of the Old Testament, and thus that law is replaced by grace. This concept became enshrined in the various translations of the Catholic Bible, for instance, in the Vulgate. Later on, as if not daring to question it, Protestantism quietly retained it. Protestants simply accepted it and never really questioned the concept at all. To this day, this particular lie is alive and kicking as part of "dispensationalism."

The concept of an Old Testament as distinct from the New is not scriptural, yet it has served errant theologians and commentators for centuries. Some people, for instance, think of the Old Testament

as "done away," or at least of very limited value. Others actually distinguish between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament! Herbert W. Armstrong used to tell a story about the lady who just did not like the God of the Old Testament because He was too harsh.

The concept of two distinct collections of Scriptures fits well into the dispensationalist belief that the law of God has been done away, having been replaced by grace. We know, of course, that it has not (Matthew 5:17-18; Romans 3:31).

God's Pattern

Indeed, the term "New Testament" is used only six times in the King James Version (Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20, I Corinthians 11:25, II Corinthians 3:6, and Hebrews 9:15). But in every one of those six occasions, the Greek words mean "New Covenant," and all or nearly all of the modern versions of the Bible properly translate it so. These passages refer to the New Covenant that God has made with His called-out ones, not to a collection of books that we have mistakenly called the "New Testament."

Further, the term "Old Testament" appears only once in the King James Version (II Corinthians 3:14). Again, all modern translations render it as "Old Covenant," not "Old Testament." This scripture does not refer to a collection of books any more than the six "New Covenant" citations do.

Properly translated, there is absolutely no indication that the terms Old and New Testament refer to collections of inspired books in God's Word. God's revelation to man is single; it is not divided. There is one revelation, one inspired Word, one truth. And given the fact that God's pattern consistently expressed throughout His Word is to treat the Scriptures as a unified whole, there is no support at all for the idea that He refers to the so-called Old and New Testaments as the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11. That would be inconsistent with His pattern.

Another point finishes off this fallacious argument that the Two Witnesses are the two Testaments, and it may be the most conclusive one. It can be called "the pattern of the executor." Admittedly, we can say that God's Word is powerful and does great things, and we would be correct in saying so. However, when God does a work, either He does it, or He empowers some man to do it for Him or on His behalf.

So it was that Christ stilled the waters; Noah built the Ark; or Elijah prayed and the rains ceased, and then a little while later Elijah prayed and it rained. The pattern is that God executes His work through an agent, an executor, a person whom He has called to do the work. Thus, God gets His work done either by doing it Himself or empowering a man to do it.

The Scriptures, though, do not in themselves execute God's Work. So it is that the apostle Paul, in Romans 10:13-15, answers those who argue that the Two Witnesses are the Old and New Testaments. He is speaking about Israel:

For "whoever calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?

In Revelation 11:3, we see that this is exactly what God does. He tells us there that He will send His ministers, His preachers, His prophets, to proclaim His message. Paul continues in verse 15: "As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!'" The original of this, Isaiah 52:7, reads: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

Those will indeed be welcome words to anyone who has ears to hear the message that will be preached by God's coming Two Witnesses.