

Faithful Witnesses

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 February 2024

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] It's great to worship with you all. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Sean, and I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Campus Church. It's my joy to preach God's word to you this morning. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand.

We'd love to give you a copy that you can have and bring with you. We are in a series in the book of Revelation, and if you are here and wondering why we're in a passage like this, it's because we just happen to be going through the series in the book of Revelation.

This is, I think, one of the most difficult passages in the entire book of Revelation, which means it's one of the most difficult passages in the entire Bible.

So I have my hands full this morning, and the sermon's dense too, so I pray that God helps you guys with this.

And let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Father, give us your wisdom.

[1 : 06] Give us understanding so that we might know your word and cherish it. Lord, may any confusing things I say or things that are not of you just be forgotten, but may what you want to say to your people this morning be remembered, and may it lodge in our hearts and bear fruit in the days and months and years to come.

We humble ourselves before you, God. It is your word. Speak to us. So that we might be faithful witnesses to Jesus, our Savior.

It's in his precious name we pray. Amen. I'm honestly going to skip right through the introduction because I have a long sermon.

And this is the main point of this passage is that Christ will preserve his people as they bear witness to him despite satanic persecution.

And we're going to see the three points that I have outlined there. Christ's preservation, the church's proclamation, Satan's persecution. There's a lot of difficult and controverted aspects to this passage.

[2 : 27] And so, but even if you don't, you know, agree with me on everything or fully understand everything, my hope is that you can still walk away with the main point of this passage, which I think is straightforward, that God will protect his people as they bear witness to their Lord despite satanic persecution.

After receiving his commission to prophesy and to proclaim the gospel in the last chapter, John continues to tell us of his prophetic vision in verses 1 to 2. This is, This symbolic act of measuring the temple comes from Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48.

Earlier in Ezekiel in chapter 8 to 11, we see a vision of a temple that has been desecrated by idolatry. It is no longer a worthy place for the glory of God.

And so the glory of God departs from that temple. And then later in Ezekiel, there's prophecy of the Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city of God falling and the temple being destroyed. And then in chapters 40 to 48, Ezekiel prophesies of a new temple, of the, when the glory of God will return to his abode.

And, and from that temple, a river flows and, and the river that's flowing from the temple gives life wherever it goes. And, and it's, that's kind of, that's what's in view here with the measuring rod.

[4 : 09] And in, in that chapter, in those chapters in Ezekiel, an angel takes a measuring rod and painstakingly measures every part of the temple. And the point of those detailed descriptions is to show that God knows the temple inside and out.

He's going to surely establish that temple and he's going to secure his temple. That's what the, the measuring implies and explains. It's, it's him. Um, he's not just, you know, eyeballing the dimension.

So imagine a construction worker was trying to build something. Uh, it needs to fit properly. If it's going to be a secure building that doesn't collapse, he needs to know its dimensions. So he doesn't eyeball it.

He measures it out in a similar way that, that act, that act of measuring the temple shows how God is paying careful attention to it, watching over it and firmly establishing it and securing it.

And, and that's the meaning of what's going on here. When Jesus, I think it's his voice, he instructs John to take the measuring rod and measure out the temple. God's paying attention to it.

[5 : 14] Now, some people, uh, take this temple literally, um, and they think that revelation must've been written before the destruction of the, uh, Herodian temple in 70, 80, but, uh, evidence suggests that revelation was written.

Historical evidence suggests that revelation was written after that period. So this is not talking about that temple that was standing in the first century. And, um, um, it's also, I don't think predicting that there will be a new physical temple built in Jerusalem, uh, in the future.

Uh, I think the reason why I don't think that is because the temple that is in view in Ezekiel, which is the one that's being referenced here, uh, is not a literal physical temple, but a figurative and spiritual one.

There, that river that I mentioned to you that flows out of temple, it gives life to everyone, uh, to all the creatures, wherever it goes. And on its banks grow trees. Uh, and these are kind of healing trees.

Their trees leaves give healing to the nations. Uh, and, and that's referenced later in revelation 21 to 22, when the bride of Christ, the wife of the lamb descends as the, the new city of Jerusalem down to earth, an angel measures that holy city.

[6 : 25] And then, and that city represents the church of Christ. Its foundations have the names of the 12 apostles of the lamb. And it says there specifically that in revelation 21, 22, there is no physical temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God, the almighty and the lamb.

And from the throne of God and of the lamb flows the river of the water of life. And that on the banks of the river grows the tree of life on the banks of the river.

And those leaves from those trees are for the healing of the nations. Sounds familiar, right? That's exactly what's, uh, what John is referring to in revelation 21.

And so then if the Ezekiel's temple, which is fulfilled in revelation 21 is not a literal physical temple, but a figurative one referring to God's presence with his people, then likewise, John's temple in revelation 11 also is a figurative one.

Already in the old Testament, we have seen foreshadowing of how the temple will no longer exist. Jeremiah 3, 16, 17 prophesied that there will be a day when the ark will be no more, uh, and that no one will look for it and it will never be made again.

- [7 : 35] Uh, it says, you know, in John two, 19 to 22, Jesus said that his body is the new temple, uh, which will be destroyed and then, and built again or raised up on the third day.
- Uh, and then, and then we see, uh, how Jesus in Hebrews 10 to one to 12, he says he offered up his body as a once for all sacrifice to abolish all sacrificial system.
- There's no longer any need for sacrifices and there's no longer any need for a physical temple where those sacrifices will be offered because Jesus has already come as the new temple and has offered himself once for all.
- And that's why in the new Testament over and over again, we see that the temple is not a physical temple that they're trying to build, but rather the church of Christ, the people of God. First Peter two, five Ephesians two, 21 to 22.
- We are the ones who are being built up together, Jews and Gentiles in Jesus Christ so that we can be together a dwelling place for God by the spirit. And we've seen that already in revelation three, 12, where Jesus promises to the church in Philadelphia that the one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.
- [8 : 47] Never shall he go out of it. And I will write on him the name of my God. And the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven and my own new name.
- So we've seen already in the book of revelation that it's the people of God who are the temple of God, which is the city of God. These images are all saying the same thing.
- And so when it says in verse one, rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there. I think John's tipping his hat and telling us that he's referring to the people of God.
- Because why would you, you don't need to measure, you might measure a temple. You might not, you don't measure the people who worship there. But, but here, John says, measure those who are worshiping there because it's a reference to the people.
- So then what's this business about? The inner sanctuary of the temple being measured and therefore protected. But the outer court of the temple is left out. And the holy city, it says, is trampled by the nations for 42 months.
- [9 : 53] Because the court outside the temple is associated with the holy city, it's also a symbol for the people of God, as we've seen. And I don't think God is here, where John is here, making a distinction between true believers and fake believers.
- True believers are measured and protected and fake believers are not. I don't think he's making a distinction here between Jews who are protected versus Gentiles who are not. Because the court outside was, you know, was where the God-fearing Gentiles would worship.
- I don't think that's what John has in mind here, especially because we've seen in Revelation 2, 9 and 3, 7 already, that John refers to all true believers, Gentiles and Jews, as Jews.
- And ethnic Jews are not the ones who are truly Jews, if they are only Jews in name only, or ethnicity only, if they don't actually have faith in Christ.
- And so I think what's going on here is possibly related to 2 Corinthians 4, 7 to 11, which describes Christians as common jars of clay that hold a precious treasure of the gospel, and it says, that we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, but not crushed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.
- [11 : 19] And then a few verses down, he says, so we do not lose heart, though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

So I think it's here, it's describing the inner temple, and this connection with the temple and the body is also biblical, because you see that in 1 Corinthians 6, 19, where our bodies are described as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And so I think it's making the connection that while the inner temple, so to speak, we are protected spiritually as the members of the body of Christ, but the outer temple, our flesh, our physical bodies are vulnerable to persecution and opposition and harm and affliction that comes from the evil one.

Now, if this is the meaning of verses 1 to 2, then it fits very well with what we saw of the seal that God puts on his elect, his chosen 144,000 earlier in chapter 7, because we mentioned there that the seal that God puts on his people is not a literal physical seal.

Nobody has the name of God written on their foreheads to be visible, but rather it is a spiritual seal. And it's a spiritual seal that offers spiritual protection, because it is a Holy Spirit who preserves us and enables us to persevere till the end in faithfulness to God, in our allegiance to Jesus.

[12 : 56] And so I think that's what's in view here, that the inner court is measured and protected. We will be preserved, but the outer court is trampled. The Holy City is trampled for 42 months.

I think this interpretation is further confirmed by the mention of the 42 months. Like all the other numbers we've seen so far in the book of Revelation, this number is also symbolic. First, we should note that this period, 42 months, is exactly the same as the 1260 days mentioned in verse 3.

So if you have your Bibles, please be looking at that. During which Christ's two witnesses are granted authority to prophesy. If you approximate 30 days to a month, and then you multiply 30 by 42, that's the 42 months, then you get 1260 days.

So verse 3 is just expressing in the number of days, the same period that verse 2 expresses in the number of months. But if this is a symbolic number, why did John pick this number?

It seems a little random, right? 42 months. This is not Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, right? It's based on the prophetic vision of Daniel, recorded in Daniel 12.

[14 : 10] Do you remember from last week in Revelation 10, when a mighty angel standing over the seas and the land raises right hand to the heavens and swears by the one who lives forever and ever that there will be no more delay, but when then the seventh trumpet is blown that the mystery of God will be revealed, fulfilled, and the final judgment of God will come.

That's what we saw last week. That's taken from Daniel 12, 7, when an angel who was above the waters of the stream raises his hands to the heavens and swears by him who lives forever and ever, and at that time, the angel proclaims that the end of the world would be for a time, times, and half a time.

That's what it says in Daniel 12, 7. A time, times, and half a time. It refers to a year, then two years, and half a year, which adds up to three and a half years, which is exactly 42 months, and 1,260 days.

So Daniel prophesied in his day that the end of the world will be preceded by a period of time, times, and half a time, and John is giving us more insight, prophetic insight, about what that period is like.

That time period, that 42-month, 1,020, 60 days, that three and a half year period is the church age. It's the age of the temple of God, of the two witnesses, and the two olive trees, and the two lampstands.

[15 : 40] It's the time period in which God's people are protected inwardly and spiritually, but they are persecuted outwardly. The same 1,260 days during which Christ's two witnesses prophesy and bear witness to Jesus is that 42 months.

Any remaining doubt is erased by Revelation 12, 14, if you turn there. It says that the woman, which represents the people of God, is taken to the wilderness where she is to be nourished for guess how long?

A time, times, and half a time. And we know that that's referring to the 42 months because earlier on, Revelation 12, 6, that same woman is protected and nourished by God in the wilderness for 1,260 days.

So these are all referring to the same time period. And Revelation 11 to 13 is structured chiastically, and by that I mean the first half of Revelation mirrors the second half of Revelation.

There's these matching, corresponding elements that give further insight to what the book means. And the judgment of the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11, 15 to 19 that Andrew will be preaching on next week is the very center of the book.

[16 : 57] And so the preceding chapters to 11 in 11 and then the following chapters in 12 to 13 mirror each other. So in 11, 1 to 14, the holy city is trampled for 42 months while the two witnesses are given authority to prophesy for 1,260 days.

And that's mirrored by chapters 12 and 13 where the woman is sheltered from the dragon and nourished for 1,260 days. And the beast is given authority to blaspheme for 42 months.

It's all referring to the same period. Notice 11, notice the beast in verse 7 of our chapter, chapter 11. It says that the beast that rises from the bottomless pit makes war on the two witnesses and conquers them and kills them.

This image of the beast is taken from Daniel 7 and represents worldly rulers and powers that do Satan's bidding and wage war against the saints, against the people of God, the church.

Later in Revelation 13, 5 to 7, we're told a little more about this beast. It says that the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words and it was allowed to exercise authority for 42 months.

[18 : 11] It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also, it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them and authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation.

So notice the parallels between that and our current chapter, 11, verses 2 to 3. Like the two witnesses of Jesus, the beast is given authority. The two witnesses are given authority to prophesy and to proclaim the gospel and the beast is given authority to blaspheme the name of Jesus.

Now, during that same period, the inner temple is protected for 42 months but the outer temple is trampled. So that's the time in which this beast is doing his trampling.

But, and who are the, who is the, what is the dwelling place that the beast is trampling? Revelation 13 told us explicitly the dwelling place that is those who dwell in heaven.

So again, that confirms our interpretation of verses 1 to 2. It's not referring to a literal physical temple but to the dwelling place of God which is the people of God who have a dwelling place in heaven.

[19 : 25] People who have a citizenship in heaven. That's John's technical way of referring to Christians. Christians are those who dwell in heaven. The unbelievers, the non-Christians are those who dwell on earth.

That's how John uses those terms. Now, and then, so during that, this is, the number, the 1260 is also, it also recurs.

In Revelation 12, 6, a woman who represents the people of God from whom Jesus is born is protected and nourished by God in the wilderness for 1260 days and that's the same period during which the two witnesses are protected as they prophesy.

So, they're in the wilderness. However, while the woman is protected and nourished for 1260 days, it says that the dragon who is, this represents Satan, who is furious that he cannot harm this people of God and then he goes and makes war against the rest of her offspring on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

So, once again, there's this juxtaposition between the people of God being protected on the one hand and the people of God being persecuted on the other hand. On the one hand, Satan's frustrated by his inability to harm God's people but on the other hand, Satan makes war against them and conquers them.

[20 : 50] This is the juxtaposition we see in Revelation 11, 1, 2, 3. And so, I think John is using the two different expressions for the same time period, 1,260 days and the 42 months because he wants to convey these dueling realities that are in tension with each other of the church's witness on the one hand and the devil's blasphemy on the other, of God's protection of the church on the one hand and Satan's persecution of the church on the other hand.

So, these things are not happening sequentially but rather they're happening one after, they're happening together simultaneously. Church is simultaneously protected and persecuted.

So then, don't be surprised if you are ridiculed or persecuted for your faith. Jesus said in the world we will have tribulation. Jesus said that he's sending us out as sheep in the midst of wolves and everyone knows what happens to sheep in the midst of wolves.

and people will deliver us to courts to flog us and drag us before governors and kings for Christ's sake. That people will revile us and persecute us and save all kinds of evil falsely against us because of Jesus.

All of these things are in scripture. But remember also that despite satanic persecution, God will preserve and keep us as we bear witness to Jesus.

[22 : 16] Remember, we are afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed because we have been measured by God.

Every inch of who we are is known by God and cared for by God and every second of our lives is known by God and watched over by God and he will preserve his people and keep us till the very end.

We might be trampled upon we might even be killed, we might be cast out from the synagogues and from the halls of power and places of social clout in this world but as Jesus promised in John 6, 37 and 39, all that the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never cast out for I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me and this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up on the last day.

I want to assure you if there are people some of you here are believers who are not assured that you will make it till the end if you don't know what you will do when you are persecuted by satanic forces if you fear what might happen to you in the future bank on this promise from the Lord Jesus himself it doesn't depend on you holding on for dear life to Jesus as so much as Jesus holding you in his hands and saying I will never cast you out and nobody can ever snatch you out of my hand.

There is no broken link in that chain. The Father gives and the Son keeps and all those whom the Son keeps makes it till the end and are raised to eternal life on that last day resurrection life.

[24 : 19] The world might kill our bodies but they cannot kill our soul because that power and prerogative belongs only to the Lord. John Patton was a 19th century Scottish missionary to the New Hebrides.

It's a group of islands and at the time it was occupied by cannibals. People who practiced cannibalism but also infanticide and widow sacrifice.

And on one occasion John Patton was along with his companion missionary was surrounded by this group of cannibals cannibalistic natives and later he recounts in his autobiography what was going through his mind in that moment.

He did survive to tell the tale and this is what he wrote in his autobiography. My heart rose up to the Lord Jesus. I saw him watching all the scene.

My peace came back to me like a wave from God. I realized that I was immortal till my master's work with me was done. The assurance came to me as if a voice out of heaven had spoken that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevailed to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was held vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow or a killing stone the fingers.

[25 : 43] Without the permission of Jesus Christ whose is all power in heaven and on earth, he rules all nature, animate and inanimate and restrains even the savage of the south seas.

no savage power of Satan can prevail against us because Jesus is our good shepherd and he said concerning us in John 10, I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

No one. Not the most powerful people in the world. Not the most powerful kingdoms of this world. That's Christ's preservation of his saints and it's Christ's preservation that enables the church's proclamation of the gospel which is my second point.

I already hinted to you earlier that the two witnesses are referenced to the church and I think that's confirmed by verse 4 the two olive trees they're called the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

Those are both metaphorical and that shows that John is thinking figuratively here. Both of the images of olive trees and lampstands come from Zechariah 4. There an angel shows Zechariah a vision of the golden lampstand which has seven lamps on it with seven lips on each of the lamps and in the vision he also sees two olive trees by it one on each side of that lampstand and then the angel explains to Zechariah that the seven lights upon the golden lampstand represent the Holy Spirit.

[27 : 18] The light represents the Holy Spirit and the presence of God who is with the people of God. And then John 4.10 is even more specific than that. It speaks of the seven lamps represent the seven eyes of God which is the Spirit.

And then the seven lights of the golden lampstand the lampstand itself represents the people of God and the temple of God. And so we see that when Zerubbabel is rebuilding the temple that's recounted in Ezra 4 to 6 Zerubbabel was a descendant of David.

He was a ruler. He was in the line of kings and he leads the exiles from the Jewish exiles from the Persian exile back to Israel and to start the work on laying the foundations for the second temple to rebuild the temple that had been raised.

And in Zechariah 4.7-9 God promises that not only will Zerubbabel lay the foundations for it he will also complete the temple and finish it and that's what the lampstand represents because the lampstand sits in the temple of God.

And Zerubbabel oh and in that context also not only in Ezekiel 40 to 48 but Zechariah also measures out the temple as it's being an angel measures out Jerusalem rather in which the temple will be built.

[28 : 39] So if you've been with us through this Revelation series you know from chapter 1 that John saw a vision of seven golden lampstands and John told us explicitly in verse 20 of chapter 1 that the seven lampstands are the seven churches that Jesus addresses in chapters 2 and 3.

So the lampstands represent the church the temple represents the church they're all talking about the church of Christ. Then why are there only two lampstands here instead of seven like in chapters 1 to 3 because John is trying to emphasize the idea of two witnesses.

The Old Testament law requires at least two witnesses as a basis for establishing a legal charge against somebody. And this gets carried over into the New Testament as well.

That's why in 1 Timothy 5 when church members bring a charge against an elder it says to not admit a charge against an elder unless it's by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

That's why in Matthew 18 when a brother or sister sin against you and then you confront that brother and call him to repentance but he refuses to repent then you're supposed to bring two or three others along with you because they're witnesses to establish the fact that this person really is unrepentant.

[29 : 59] And when the church when that goes to its logical end and the sinner refuses to repent even after being confronted by two or three and then is confronted by the whole church and still refuses to repent then the church the gathered church is supposed to disfellowship from that person declare that that person is an unbeliever and that's supposed to happen according to Matthew 18 20 on the authority of the church for where two or three are gathered in my name there am I among them.

Again it's going back to that idea of requirement for two witnesses. This is why in Luke 10 when Jesus sends out his 72 disciples to go to the towns ahead of him to proclaim the gospel he sends them out two by two because it's by their testimony it will be established that some who have rejected Christ and therefore are liable to God's judgment.

This is why in John's vision there are two witnesses and there are two lampstands to represent the church. If there were seven lampstands here I think we would easily misunderstand it and think that it's referring to the seven churches mentioned in chapters two and three but instead to tell us that it's referring to the whole church throughout the church age there's only two lampstands here and so it's the witnessing church collectively that's why the two witnesses are described as standing before the Lord of the earth in verse four they are standing in the divine courtroom to bear testimony for Jesus bearing witness to Jesus but also bearing testimony against those nations who reject Jesus and that's why they're clothed in sackcloth in verse three sackcloth is the garb of mourning the church mourns as we bear witness to the world because of their stubborn resistance to the gospel and because we know that God's terrible judgment is coming upon the world and remember where we are in the book of Revelation we are in the intermission between the second and third woes intermission between the sixth trumpet and the seventh trumpet judgment we're immediately before the final climactic judgment of God in the seventh trumpet and we because we know that as we bear witness and because the church knows what is coming we mourn as we bear witness to the world

Charles Spurgeon once lamented the fact that there's so little mourning within the church and he says this beloved souls may be damned yet how few of you care about them sinners may sink into the gulf of perdition yet how few tears are shed over them the whole world may be swept away by a torrent down the precipice of woe yet how few really cried to God on its behalf how few men say oh that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I may weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people we do not lament before God the loss of men's souls as it well becomes Christians to do if we do not weep if we do not mourn if we do not bear witness with sackcloth on it's because we do not understand the gospel well enough it's because we don't truly grasp what is at stake what about the two olive trees going back to Zechariah 4 14 an angel explains to

Zechariah that the olive trees represent two anointed ones who stand by the lord of the whole earth the two anointed ones in Zechariah's days were the high priest and the governor the ruler the ruler is Reuel and Joshua the high priest so a king and a priest are the two olive trees and they were meant to be like olive trees supplying olive oil so that it doesn't run out so that the lamp stand of God the church or the people of God can continue to shine the light of God and be accompanied and dwelled by the Holy Spirit of God and so and so if the olive trees are Joshua and Zerubbabel in Zechariah that raises the question of why they can't be two individuals here in Revelation maybe there will be a king and a priest that will come later well that's because of what we've seen so far about the two witnesses and the two lampstands and temple of God they all represent the church of God but also because Jesus

[34 : 37] Christ has already come and Jesus is the ultimate high priest and Jesus is the ultimate Davidic king that is to come this was this was and because of what Jesus has done we were told we were told in Revelation 1 6 and 5 10 that all of God's people have been made have been turned into a kingdom and priests to God so no longer do we need priests as mediators for us we ourselves are a priesthood of God and we ourselves are a kingdom of God because Jesus Christ has come and fulfilled what the priesthood was meant to be by making that once for all sacrifice and by occupying the priestly order of Melchizedek forever as Hebrews 7 talks about and also coming as the son of David the ultimate king who establishes the kingdom of God the king forever that was prophesied of in first in first Samuel or second

Samuel 7 sorry and so because Jesus has come I don't think it's right for us to expect another king to come or another priest to come at the end of the age and so I think it's referring again to the church being the priesthood and a kingdom forever and now the two witnesses are not the two individual witnesses that will arise in some future time but they do represent the church however there are two individuals that are witnessed the church's prophetic witness is supposed to be patterned after and that's Moses and Elijah there are numerous allusions to them in this passage verse 5 says that if anyone would harm them the church the two witnesses fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes if anyone would harm them this is how he is doomed to be killed in 2nd Kings 1 fire literally comes down from heaven to consume the soldiers that King Ahaziah sends to arrest

Elijah and Elijah is also the same prophet who shuts the sky so that there is no rain causing famine to come upon the land during Ahab's rain and interestingly enough Luke 4 25 and James 5 17 tell us that Elijah shut the sky and stopped the rain for how long three years and six months right time times and half a time 42 months 1260 days so similarly verse 6 says that these two witnesses have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they desire that's an unmistakable reference to Moses who turns the water into blood as the first plague that God brings upon Egypt and the phrase striking the earth with every kind of plague is a summary statement that comes from 1 Samuel 4 8 describing all the Exodus plagues in Egypt so both of these witnesses are patterned after Elijah and Moses and Moses of course is also the one who led

Israelites out into the wilderness out of Egypt and if you look at Numbers 33 which recounts Israel's journey through the wilderness they had exactly 42 encampments they had 42 stops on their journey which also matches the 42 months that are in view here so 42 is a significant number even if it's not doesn't answer the ultimate question of life the universe and everything now why should the church's witness be patterned after the ministry of Moses and Elijah they're the two men who appear with Jesus at his transfiguration to bear witness to who Jesus is that he really is the son of God and that's what we're supposed to do as the church but even more than that there's more also Moses and Elijah both ministered at a time of great conflict and great confrontation and opposition from the wicked kings and kingdoms of this world for for for

Elijah it was King Ahab in Israel and for Moses it was Pharaoh in Egypt and that's the context in which the first century believers at the time Revelation was written are in they're being persecuted they're being oppressed by the rulers and the kingdoms around them and that kind of situation is still the majority context for the global church we enjoy unprecedented freedoms here and unparalleled freedoms here really compared to the rest of the world but in many parts of the world this is the condition of believers facing opposition and persecution and so we are supposed to minister like Moses and Elijah who with courage and faith stood up against those powers and bore witness to Jesus despite intense persecution from the beast from satanic forces were to bear witness to Jesus who preserves us now does that mean if we're supposed to be like

[39 : 54] Elijah and Moses we should literally call down fire from heaven upon non-Christians who reject the gospel I don't think so because in Luke 9 51 56 Jesus disciples actually ask him that exact question right they go to a town of Samaria they proclaim the gospel the town rejects the gospel and then the disciples are like Jesus this isn't right you're the Lord you're the son of God come on you want me to call down some fire from heaven upon judgment and then Jesus just rebukes them and then he moves on to the next town and so I don't think that's what we're supposed to do and I think that's confirmed by the fact that in verse 5 it says if anyone would harm them this is how he is doomed to be killed I don't think this is talking about fire immediately coming out from the mouth of Christians and killing people who reject the gospel I think it's rather a pronouncement of judgment that's how he is doomed to be killed because of his rejection of the gospel and the persecution of the saints and

I think this is confirmed by the fact that the fire doesn't come down from heaven like in Elijah's day but rather it says it pours from the mouth of the witnesses that symbolic language much like Jesus how he is described in Revelation 1 16 2 16 and 19 15 as having a double edged sword a sharp sword coming out of his mouth and that represents the word of God which is a living and active and a two edged sword that pierces the division of soul and spirit it says in Hebrews 4 12 and so when prophet and so this is not referring to fire but the fire of God's word and the judgment that comes from their mouth because those people reject the gospel and that foretells that they are doomed to be judged in that way by fire in the judgment to come I think it's confirmed in Jeremiah 5 14 when God says to the prophet behold I am making my words in your mouth of fire and this people would and the fire shall consume them again it's the word of

God that is fire that proceeds from the mouth of the prophet and pronouncing God's judgment over them and I think this is also referring to the fact that like I mentioned before you needed two witnesses in order to prosecute someone and establish a charge against someone and Numbers 35 30 says if you translate it literally it says a murderer shall be put to death on the mouth of two witnesses basically based on testimony of two witnesses and so when the church goes around and proclaims the gospel as the two witnesses of God and when people reject the two witnesses and deny Jesus and reject the gospel it is based on our testimony that they will be judged in the end by God that's our function our witness is an opportunity for sinners to repent and be saved but our witness also is a testimony against those who reject the gospel declaring that they will in the end be doomed to be judged and consumed by the fire of

God's word in this way this is how serious our proclamation of the gospel is I mean you don't go to the court you don't go to the courtroom of God flippantly and casually and just say whatever you want when we bear witness to our unbelieving neighbors and friends and family members we are solemn witnesses before the throne and the judgment throne of God himself if the fire proceeding from the mouth in verse five is figurative then verse six which speaks of the church's power to shut the sky and the power to turn the water into blood and strike the earth with every kind of plague might also be figurative and I don't think in light of how Jesus lived and what he taught us in his pattern that our posture should be to whenever people reject the gospel immediately struck out with a plague like hey you reject the gospel here's a plague

I don't think that's the posture that is taught in scripture however what it is talking about is that we as God's people as God's authorized witnesses have great authority and power as we go in James 5 16 to 17 James talks about the power of prayer and as he talks about how prayer of a righteous man has much power has great power he uses the example of Elijah to prove his point how he shut the sky for three and a half years and then he says Elijah was just a man like all of us we have the authority of Elijah we have the authority of Moses we have all authority in heaven and earth because Jesus in his great commission told us all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me and now therefore go and make disciples of all nations so we go with this great authority we have the power to do all of these things because there's salvation in no one else but the name of

[45 : 28] Jesus Christ and I think so as we proclaim the gospel we're also pronouncing God's judgment for those who refuse the gospel and I think that's paralleled these judgments that are in view here like the fire that's burning up the earth water being turned into blood and the people being tormented and harmed and some even being killed these all have parallels in the revelation so I think it's pointing to the fact that the church is given that authority so that when people refuse and reject them the judgment of God ultimately comes upon people who deny them because Luke 10 16 Jesus says the one who hears us hears Jesus and the one who rejects us rejects Jesus and the one who rejects Jesus rejects God the Father who sent him that's the kind of authority for Jesus Christ and the two lampstands that are shining the light of the gospel in the world it's no wonder then that

Satan opposes us so fiercely that brings me to my last point Satan's persecution it says in verse 7 and when they have finished their testimony the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them note the peril with Revelation 13 7 where the beast is given authority to make war on the saints and to conquer them so this confirms that the two witnesses again are the saints the people of God but interestingly in 13 7 it doesn't mention killing them it just mentions making war against them and conquering them to be sure there are Christian witnesses who are martyr for their faith throughout the entire church age and we see that in Revelation in Revelation 24 we see the souls of those who have been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus Christ because they refused to bow down to the beast and to worship the beast so there are believers who are killed even in our day and throughout church history and until

Jesus comes there will be disciples Jesus Christ will be killed for their testimony however I think what's in view here in 11 7 to 10 is something that's a little more conclusive that occurs at the end of the end if you recall from Todd's sermon a few weeks ago he preached from Matthew 24 14 which says that and this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come so the end doesn't come until the end and here it tells us in verse 7 when they have finished their testimony so this is the end of the world the end of the church age and the testimony of the church of Christ is finished and then at that point the beast has the final this authority to not only make war and conquer them as he has done throughout the church age but also to kill them and this elsewhere that's unlike anything that preceded it and it's going to be so devastating for the church that it will look as if the church is dead

I'm sure there will be still some believers alive as we see in 1 Thessalonians 4 when Jesus comes back but the church will be driven underground the church will be decimated and it will seem to the sinful world as if they've triumphed and that the church is gone and it says in verses 8 to 10 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt where their Lord was crucified for three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in the tomb and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth these verses reveal just how much the sinful world hates the lampstands that expose their darkness they will not even give them a burial which is like the height of indignity for the dead in the

Bible if you look at the kings and there's a lot of really bad kings and you think that these bad kings why give them a dignified burial why bury them with the rest of their fathers but they all get buried with their fathers they're given the dignity of a decent burial even when they're terrible human beings who do terrible things to the people of God people who are left out not to be buried are the very worst of them all like queen Jezebel in 2nd Kings 9 10 and that's how the church gets treated by the world but notice that this is only for three and a half days they rejoice they make merry the seeming death of the church is to them they celebrate it with gift exchanges like it's Christmas but that rejoicing only lasts a short three and a half days which is a fraction of the three and a half years of the church's witness and so that serves to reassure us that time of the seeming defeat of the church is short it is short lived and then in verses 11 to 13 after the three and a half days a breath of life from

[51 : 11] God entered them and they stood up on their feet and great so this phrase a breath of life entering them is taken directly from Ezekiel 37 where the prophet Ezekiel is taken by God to a valley that is full of dry bones and he's commanded to prophesy to the dry bones to make them live and when he prophesies the breath of life from God enters these dry bones and they stand up on their feet and they become an exceedingly great army and that's a prophetic vision of God reviving the house of Israel the people of God making those who are as dead as dry bones live again and that's what God will do for the church at the end of the age the church that seems dead

God resurrection like much of what's happening in this passage is symbolic maybe a renewal and revival of the church but because they're not only described as being raised from the dead but also described as ascending to heaven in a cloud as their enemies watch them and because this is right at the end of the church age when Christ will return and raise the dead as 1 Corinthians 15 talks about I also think it's possible that this is a literal resurrection 1 Thessalonians 4 16 to 17 speak of this is for the Lord himself will descend from heaven with the cry of command with the voice of an archangel and with the sound of the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first then we who are alive who are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will always be with the Lord so a lot of people think that that passage teaches the rapture but this is not the rapture because for one this is definitely not a pre tribulation rapture because these people have gone through the tribulation they suffered greatly for the gospel and then they are raised so it's not a rapture where you're taken before all the bad stuff happens that's not what happens you go through all the bad stuff and then they're raised here so this is not that kind of rapture it's also not a rapture because a rapture is when you're taken away to heaven and you're not here on earth anymore but the word that is used here for meet is not a word that means to meet in certain cultures when you have a guest you walk them out the door or you go out to meet them and bring them into the house it's something you do for an important person a dignitary that's what's in view here

Jesus uses that same word in the parable of the bridesmaids in Matthew 25 Jesus is compared to the bridegroom that's coming to his home so they can consummate their marriage but as they wait to do that there are bridesmaids who are attending to the bride and they're supposed to be waiting with lampstands you can see a lot of parallels here but these bridesmaids some of them are foolish and they don't keep their lampstands burning and so they fall asleep and they're not ready when the actual bridegroom comes however some are wise and they keep the lampstand burning and so they're able to stay awake and they're able to meet the bridegroom and accompany him back to the home of the bride that's what this word means so it's not a rapture where Christians are taken away but rather as Jesus descends we rise to meet him in the air and then we accompany him back down to earth where Jesus then establishes his kingdom on earth so that's the meaning that's why

I don't think revelation or any part of the scripture actually teaches the kind of rapture that is popularized today now and I think this is plausible because this is immediately before the final judgment there's a great earthquake and in Revelation 6 12 a great earthquake preceded the last and final seal the seventh seal and here again the great earthquake precedes the final seventh trumpet and there's retributive justice the justice of God is beginning to take place in verse 13 7,000 people were killed this is likely because in 1 Kings 19 18 God tells Elijah that he has preserved 7,000 of his faithful people who have not bowed their knees to the idols to Baal and so likely here that 7,000 are killed because they killed the 7,000 remnant it's a symbolic number but 7,000 remnant of God's people the faithful the church have been killed by the beast and so now it's the 7,000 of those who killed them are now killed by this earthquake so there's justice happening and then the rest of the people who witness this are terrified and give glory to the God of heaven but it's too late these people are not repenting this is just terror not faith-filled fear of God but terror at what at the might of

God at the authority of God because they have no choice but to acknowledge it and give glory to him if you're not yet a believer among us this morning I urge you to put your faith in Jesus Christ because one way or another you will bow your knee before him one way or another you will confess his name you can do that willingly and live for him and for his glory in his love or you will do it unwillingly at the end of the age when the judgment comes this promise of resurrection and final vindication offers us great comfort as we endure Satan's persecution in verse eight the way the two witnesses die are killed is compared to how the Lord was crucified in Jerusalem like Jesus who was crucified we too will be persecuted and God's people too will be killed Jesus ministered for about three years or three and a half years depending on how you count it because you see him go through three

[58 : 04] Passovers in the gospel of John with his disciples after he began his ministry and so that matches the time period of the three and a half years of ministry of the church here and also when Jesus dies he's raised on the third day which matches the three and a half days before which the two witnesses are resurrected so this pattern is ultimately following the pattern of Jesus if they persecuted Jesus they'll also persecute us and we're commanded to follow in his footsteps Jesus died for the cross on the cross for our sins Jesus died so that we might live and he did it for the joy that was set before him so that he might obey his father and redeem us and that's the call for us as well we will be persecuted some of us will be killed but we must bear witness as Jesus did bear the cross pick up our cross and follow him and as we follow in his footsteps we can rest assured that resurrection awaits us vindication awaits us and that

God's judgment is still to come let's pray father give us eyes eyes of faith so that we do not walk by sight but we walk by faith faith in the eternity that awaits us faith in the reality of the invisible God who is sovereign over us and will judge the world faith in the son of God Jesus who died and was raised for us faith that even through all affliction and persecution and perplexity of this life that we will not be crushed that we will not be destroyed because you preserve us oh Lord embolden us as witnesses

Lord use us for your glory in Jesus name we pray amen amen