



WHO ARE THE TWO WITNESSES IN REVELATION 11?



Olive Tree



Lampstand

Revelation 11 tells us of two people, or two groups of people, that will prophesy and spread the Word of God for 1,260 days (symbolically) or literally 1,260 years: Revelation 11: 3-6 (NIV).

3 And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” 4 They are “the two olive trees” and the two lampstands, and “they stand before the Lord of the earth.” 5 If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die.

6 They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

Revelation 11 should be read in conjunction with Ezekiel 37. Both are describing many of the same events.

Many people have speculated about the Two Witnesses that die and then live--symbolized as two olive trees and two lampstands--in Revelation 11. Much of the language is nearly identical to Ezekiel 37--which clearly refers to Jews brought back by God to Israel in the end times. Some believe the two in Revelation 11 are literally Enoch and Elijah. The most likely explanation is two groups of people, meaning Christians and the Jewish Remnant.

ENOCH, MOSES, ELIJAH, OR MORE LIKELY, TWO GROUPS OF GOD’S PEOPLE?

Early Christians, such as Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus of Rome, concluded that the two witnesses would be Enoch and Elijah, prophets who did not die because God “took” them. Others have proposed Moses as one of the witnesses, for his ability to turn water into blood and the power to plague the earth.

Modern theologians, such as John Walvoord of the Dallas Theological Seminary have furthered the point of individualism by comparing the “two lampstands” and the “two olive trees” of Revelation 11 to the two golden pipes and two olive trees/branches of Zechariah 4.

By the identification of the two olive branches as “two anointed ones” or “two sons of the oil”, in Zechariah, this reinforces the literalist interpretation that the two witnesses are two people. Walvoord also pointed out that because the Revelation passage does not specifically identify who the two witnesses are, it would be safer to conclude that they are not related to any previous historical character.

The two witnesses have been interpreted as representing the Church or a similar concept. The 1599 Geneva Study Bible has asserted that the two witnesses are the exclusive purview of the church. Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible gives one church interpretation as consisting of believing Jews and that of the Gentiles.

John Wesley in his commentary on Revelation 11 suggests a more spiritual, almost ambiguous, application. Ross Taylor's Verse by Verse Commentary on Revelation clearly defines the Church as the “two olive trees and the two lampstands.”

Most likely, the two witnesses can be identified as Israel and the Christian Church. The number two has been associated with the witness of Israel to the Gentile nations during the 70th Week of Daniel's prophecy. The olive tree in the Scripture signifies Israel. The “witness of the Church” is signified by the two lampstands, whose identity was disclosed by the seven golden lampstands (i.e., candlesticks) revealed in Revelation 1-3 as the “churches.” Revelation 1:19-20 makes clear the golden lampstands are churches and not a single person.

Revelation 1: 19-20 (NIV)

19 “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. 20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT LANGUAGE POINTS TO PEOPLE TOGETHER AS ONE

According to Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Ephraemi, as the oldest manuscripts, as well as early church theologians such as Arethas of Caesarea, the original Greek text of Revelation 11:8 uses the singular word 'body' instead of 'bodies', whereas later the text switches back to using the plural form 'bodies' in verse 9. The plural v. singular ambiguity is reinforced in Rev. 11:5 where the original Greek text of the oldest manuscripts uses the singular term 'mouth' instead of 'mouths' in the plural.

Therefore, verse 11:5 reads: "If any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their **mouth**, and devoureth their enemies," and verse 11:8 reads "And their **dead body** shall lie in the street of the great city"

Since the original Greek text requires that the "two" witnesses have one common i.e. shared mouth, and one shared dead body, and if interpreted literally, therefore "they" would have to be just a single person.

However, this literal one body should be interpreted as Christians and Jews as groups "grafted in among the others", "and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root", as Paul writes in Romans 11:

Romans 11: 13-20 (NIV)

13 I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry 14 in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, 18 do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.

19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

JEWES WERE "SLAIN" AND "IN GRAVES" BEFORE RETURNING TO ISRAEL

Revelation 11 describes the Two Witnesses: 1) killed, 2) given breath by God, 3) coming alive, 4) rising to their feet, and 5) being taken up to Heaven in the clouds after three and one half days (symbolic days, or literal years).

Ezekiel 37 describes the Jews trapped in enemy (Islamic) countries as being 1) slain, 2) given breath by God, 3) coming alive, 4) rising to their feet, and 5) taken from their graves to Israel as God opened the graves. Ezekiel describes their number as a vast army.

Revelation 11: 7-12 (NIV)

7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. 8 Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city—which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified. 9 For three and a half days some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. 10 The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

11 But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

Ezekiel 37: 9-14 (NIV)

9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"

10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. 11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'

12 Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them.

14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'

EZEKIEL 37 LANGUAGE IS VERY SIMILAR TO REVELATION 11—IS IT THE SAME EVENT?

- ✓ The dry bones are the people of Israel, cut off from Israel with no hope
- ✓ They are "slain"
- ✓ They are dead in graves
- ✓ God's breath entered them
- ✓ They came to life
- ✓ They stood on their feet
- ✓ They were a vast army
- ✓ They went back to Israel in the end times

Ezekiel 37:11 makes clear this is about Jews without hope returning to Israel in the end times: Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'"

Revelation 11 is easier to understand when read with Ezekiel 37 and 39.

GOD SAYS: "COME UP HERE", "COME OUT OF HER"

Revelation 11:12 says God told the dead bodies to "Come up here."

Revelation 11:12 (NIV)

"Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on."

This is very similar language to Revelation 18:4, when God says "Come out of her, my people" and brings his people out of Babylon (the Islamic world) before destruction in the end times.

Revelation 18: 1-6 (NIV)

1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. 2 With a mighty voice he shouted:

"'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!' She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal.

3 For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: **'Come out of her, my people,'** so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; 5 for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

6 Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Pour her a double portion from her own cup.

Both of these Biblical phrases in Revelation have language that is very similar to the actual manifesto Zionists used to bring 180,000 trapped Jews out of Baghdad in 1951:

*O, Zion, flee, daughter of Babylon,
Jews! Israel is calling you — Come out of Babylon!*

	Revelation 11	Ezekiel 37
Event	Beast attacks, overpowers them, "Killed"	Living Jews cut off with no hope to return to Israel, "Slain"
Buried?	Not Buried	"In Graves"
Location	Figuratively Sodom, Egypt and where also their Lord was crucified	Out of the many nations where they have gone, gathered them from the countries of their enemies
How Many	2 Olive Trees and 2 Lampstands	Vast Army
God's Action	Breathed into the Dead	Breathed into the Dead
Next Event	They Came to Life	They Came to Life
Next Event	Rose to their Feet	Rose to their Feet
Command	"Come Up Here"	"I will bring you back to the land of Israel"
Final Event	Went up to Heaven in a cloud while enemies watched	Went to restored Israel
Time	3 1/2 Days	Unknown

COMBINING EZEKIEL 37 AND REVELATION 11 FOR A COMPLETE PICTURE

1. Dispersed living Jews cut off with no hope of return to Israel (Ez)
2. Occurs in the last days (Both)
3. The Beast is attacking and overpowering them (Rev)
4. From many nations, from the countries of their enemies (Ez 37, 39)
5. A vast number of people (Ez)
6. God breathes on them (Both)
7. They come to life (Both)
8. They stand on their feet (Both)
9. Time is 3 1/2 days—[years] (Rev)
10. God says: “Come Up Here” (Rev)
11. They travel in the clouds (Rev)
12. They safely return to Israel in the last days (Ez)
13. Their enemies are terrified (Rev)
14. Earthquake with 7,000 killed (Rev)

The time frame is 3 ½ years from May 1948 until December 1951.

THE PROMISE OF ELIJAH PROPHECY HAS BEEN FULFILLED (MALACHI 4:5-6)

Malachi gives a future prophecy that mentions Elijah specifically. To this day, Jewish Seders include an empty chair at the table in anticipation that Elijah will return to herald the Messiah in fulfillment of Malachi’s word. I have had discussions with Orthodox Jews who claim that because Malachi was not fulfilled before Jesus appeared, he could not have been the Messiah. So how was Malachi fulfilled at the time of Jesus? Some Christians believe this prophecy will be fulfilled in the end times. But it has been fulfilled already.

Jesus makes clear Elijah has come, and this prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptist. Thus Elijah need not return again—unless God wills.

Malachi 4: 5-6 (NIV)

4 “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. 5 See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

Specifically related to Malachi 4:5-6 are Matthew 11:7-14 and Matthew 17:10-13. John the Baptist denied he was Elijah in a physical sense. But Jesus said in Matthew 11:14 that John the Baptist was really the Elijah. Jesus also said in Matthew 17:12-13 that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished; then the disciples understood that Jesus spoke to them of John the Baptist.

Matthew 11: 7-14 (NIV)

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? **8** If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. **9** Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **10** This is the one about whom it is written:

**"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."**

11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. **13** For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. **14** And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. **15** Whoever has ears, let them hear."

Matthew 17: 10-13 (NIV)

10 The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

11 Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. **12** But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." **13** Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

A brief look at the ministry of John the Baptist reveals many notable ways that he was "Elijah." First, God predicted John's work as being like that of Elijah (Luke 1:17). Second, he dressed like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8 and Matthew 3:4). Third, like Elijah, John the Baptist preached in the wilderness (Matthew 3:1). Fourth, both men preached a message of repentance. Fifth, both men withstood kings and had high-profile enemies (1 Kings 18:17 and Matthew 14:3).

Some argue that John the Baptist was not the Elijah to come because John himself said that he was not Elijah. "And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not'" (John 1:21). There is a simple explanation for this apparent contradiction. Because Elijah had never died (2 Kings 2:11), many first-century rabbis taught that Elijah was still alive and would reappear before the Messiah's arrival.

When John denied being the physical Elijah, he was countering the idea that he was the actual Elijah who had been taken to heaven. There is no contradiction, then, simply a humble prophet giving an honest opinion of himself. John rejected the honor, yet Jesus credited John as the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy regarding the return of Elijah.

In Luke 1:11-17, we learn that the angel Gabriel told Zacharias, John's father, that John would fulfill Malachi 4:6, stating that he would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah."

Luke 1:11-17 (NIV)

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,

15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Finally, John the Baptist did not apply Malachi 4:6 to himself, but instead quoted Isaiah 40:3 to explain his purpose. Some have concluded from this fact that John did not realize he was Elijah. However, this is extremely unlikely, since Zacharias would surely have told John of Gabriel's reference to Malachi 4:5-6. It is also noteworthy that Isaiah 40:3 is parallel in thought to Malachi 3:1 (which is closely related to Malachi 4:5-6).

In Mark 1:1-5, Mark quotes Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 together to explain John's ministry, introducing the quotations with the words, "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet." These facts indicate that John saw the "voice" in Isaiah 40:3 as a humbler way of expressing the same functional role as described in Malachi, and that he realized he was to function in that role "in the spirit and power of Elijah."

Mark 1: 1-8 (NIV)

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"— 3 "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

6 John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

GOD SAYS: “NOT LEAVING ANY BEHIND”

Ezekiel 39: 27-29 (NIV)

27 When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will be proved holy through them in the sight of many nations.

28 Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. 29 I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

The return of the Jews from their graves is nearly complete. In 2016 less than 1% remain in enemy Islamic countries when compared to when Israel was born in 1948, and the Revelation 11 prophecy began to be fulfilled.

Islamic Country or Territory	1948 Jewish population	1967 Jewish population	1948-1967 reduction	2015 Jewish population	1948-2015 reduction
Aden	8,000	0	-100%	0	-100%
Afghanistan	5,000	500	-90%	0	-100%
Algeria	140,000	1,000	-99%	0	-100%
Bahrain	1,000	0	-100%	0	-100%
Egypt	80,000	500	-99%	100	-100%
Iran	175,000	60,000	-66%	4,000	-98%
Iraq	180,000	500	-100%	50	-100%
Lebanon	20,000	2,000	-90%	1,000	-95%
Libya	44,000	50	-100%	50	-100%
Morocco	265,000	31,000	-88%	2,000	-99%
Pakistan	2,500	250	-90%	0	-100%
Palestine	10,000	0	-100%	0	-100%
Sudan	1,500	0	-100%	0	-100%
Syria	30,000	4,000	-87%	100	-100%
Tunisia	102,000	8,000	-92%	800	-99%
Turkey	80,000	20,000	-75%	5,000	-94%
Yemen	61,000	500	-99%	40	-100%
Totals	1,205,000	128,300	-89%	13,140	-99%