

**UNDERSTANDING END TIMES PROPHECY
FOCUS #6—THE TRIBULATION PERIOD
REVELATION 6:1-18:24**

We have been focusing on the tribulation period. Remember that the Scriptures are full of passages that mention this period of time in a general way or mention one of the specific events that occur during this period. Thus far, our focus has been on Matthew 24 and Revelation 6.

Keep in mind that the church has been raptured, has gone or is going through the judgment seat of Christ and is in the presence of God in worship before the throne (cf. Revelation 4-5). While the church is in the presence of God in heaven, the world is facing the outpouring of God's divine wrath upon the world. This outpouring will take place by the breaking of the seven seals on the scroll.

The first 4 seals are the "beginning of birth pangs" (Matthew 24:8). The first four seals will make up the first 3 ½ years of the tribulation. The fifth seal will begin in the first half and carry into the second half, while the sixth seal seems to be initiated at the mid-point of the tribulation (Matthew 24:15-6, Revelation 6:15-17).

The seventh seal reveals the trumpet and bowl judgments, which are considered to be the outpouring of God's wrath during the second half of the tribulation often termed the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21). John is given a vivid, symbolic description of literal events that will take place on the earth.

We have covered the first 6 seal judgments already:

The First Seal Judgment: The Rise of False Messiahs, The Antichrist & Apparent Peace (Matthew 24:5; Revelation 6:1-2)

The Second Seal Judgment: War (Matthew 24:6-7; Revelation 6:3-4)

The Third Seal Judgment: Famine (Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:5-6)

The Fourth Seal Judgment: Death (Matthew 24:7-9; Revelation 6:7-8)

The Fifth Seal Judgment: Martyrdom (Revelation 6:9-11)

The Sixth Seal Judgment: Various Natural Disasters (Revelation 6:12-17)

- *A Great Earthquake*
- *The Sun Darkened/The Moon Like Blood*
- *The Stars of the Sky Fell to the Earth*
- *The Sky Will Be Split Apart*

- *Mountains & Islands Moved Out of Place*
- *The Reaction of Earth's Residents*

The Seal Judgments have been severe. The rise of false messiahs and the antichrist with his pseudo peace, widespread world war, a devastating worldwide famine, the spread of death and disease, extreme persecution and slaughter of Christians, a great worldwide earthquake accompanied with volcanic eruptions darkening of the sun and moon, destructive meteor and asteroid showers pummeling the earth, strange atmospheric conditions, and the movement of all the earth's mountains and islands, as the earth's plates slip and slide across its surface. This will obviously result in widespread fear and panic across the world. It will truly be a time of great tribulation, but this is only the beginning. But, before we move on to focus on further judgments, I wanted to turn our attention upon some key individuals who are major players during the tribulation period.

KEY INDIVIDUALS OF THE TRIBULATION PERIOD:

- **The False Prophet**

The Appearance of the False Prophet: Revelation 13:11 “*And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon.*”

And I saw another beast: The Greek term for *another* [ALLO] means, “another of the same kind.” He will have a similar nature and character as the first individual mentioned in 13:1-10. The term *beast* here means a wild beast or monster and indicates his ferocious nature. He will be of a similar ferocious and hostile nature as the first beast and both will be hostile toward God and His people.

Coming up out of the earth: There appears to be some contrast being made here in the origin of this second beast as opposed to the origin of the first. The picture of the first beast in 13:1-10 was that of coming up out of the sea. The sea as noted in that section likely denoted the Mediterranean Sea and identified the first beast as rising up out of the peoples of the Mediterranean area. The emphasis was on the Gentile origin of the first beast. Some have wrongly concluded that since this second beast is said to come up out of the earth, that it is a reference to the land of Israel and denotes the Jewish origin of this second beast. The problem with this view is that the term for earth is not used in this way anywhere else in the book of Revelation. It is usually a more broad term speaking of the world in general. In addition it would be difficult to see a Jew going along with the first beast's plan to annihilate the Jewish people. Thus the best conclusion is that this second beast comes up from the people of the world with no further identification as to his origin.

And he had two horns like a lamb: First of all in the Scriptures the term “horn” is often used figuratively to refer to strength, power or ruling authority. So the two horns of this beast refer to some sort of strength or ruling authority. The small horns of a lamb are relatively minor when compared to the 10-horned beast. Since the two horns are like those of a lamb, most commentators view this statement as depicting some sort of religious authority. This view is supported by the fact that this same individual is referred to as a false prophet elsewhere in Revelation (Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10), that he leads the world to worship the first beast (13:12), and he commands the people to set up an image of the first beast in the temple (13:14-15). It is also noted that this statement represents the false prophet as being one who **appears** to be of a mild and gentle nature. Although he is truly of ferocious nature (*another beast*), he represents himself or appears before the world as one of a mild and gentle nature (*like a lamb*). He is truly a false prophet, a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

And he spoke as a dragon: The dragon is a reference back to the great red dragon of Revelation 12. Thus it is a reference to Satan. This second beast spoke as Satan. “Although docile in appearance, his speech will be subtle, seductive, and satanic, structured to lead people away from belief in Christ and into the cunning, corrupt worship of the Antichrist.” So this second beast is an individual who appears to be peaceful in nature, but is truly ferocious and deceitful in nature. He is truly motivated by Satan as he deceives the people of the world into worshipping Antichrist. He appears to be some sort of a religious leader, but is truly just a false prophet.

The Activity of the False Prophet: (Revelation 13:12-18).

In this section of verses the Greek text automatically provides our outline for us. Four times a specific word is repeated in an identical form. The Greek word [POIEI] usually translated “to do or make” is used to identify the specific work or activity of this false prophet. This is not so clearly revealed in the English text as it is translated “he exercises (vs. 12a); he makes (vs. 12b); he performs (vs. 13); and he causes (vs. 16). All of which are legitimate translations of this verb, but make it much more difficult to see the structure of the passage. So let’s examine the activity of this false prophet.

He Exercises Authority: Revelation 13:12 “*And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence.*” The first activity listed of this second beast, the false prophet, is that of exercising authority. Notice that it is not his own authority that he exercises, but the authority of the first beast. What authority the false prophet has is given to him by the Antichrist. Notice also that this authority is exercised in the presence of Antichrist. “The Greek phrase ENOPION AUTO translated “in his presence” implies that the first beast has general oversight of the second beast’s activities.” However, the Antichrist places enough confidence in this false prophet to entrust him with his authority.

He Causes the World to Worship the Antichrist: Revelation 13:12 “*And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.*” His second activity mentioned here is that he directs or causes the world to

worship the first beast. Actually the better sense here is that this false prophet **makes** the world worship the first beast. The phrase *the earth and those who dwell in it* is a comprehensive way of speaking of the unbelieving people of the world. It does not, however, speak of believers or even of the Jewish people who have already fled into the wilderness. This activity takes place specifically at the mid-point of the tribulation period when the Antichrist has been healed of his fatal wound.

Once the Antichrist is restored to life, the false prophet makes the people of the world worship him. The repetition of the phrase *whose fatal wound was healed* (see vs. 3) emphasizes this as the dramatic action that enables the false prophet to motivate the world to worship the Antichrist. The phrase as mentioned when dealing with verse 3 seems to be clearly suggestive of a literal death and resurrection. Remember at the least it **appears** to be a death and resurrection to the people of the world. The false prophet will have no problem motivating the majority of the world to worship the Antichrist because they will be amazed by this great healing act. There will be some however that will not be so convinced and will be killed according to verse 15.

He Performs Great Signs: Revelation 13:13-15 “*13 And he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. 14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who ^had the wound of the sword and has come to life. 15 And there was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast might even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.*”

The next activity of this false prophet is the capability to perform great signs. Signs in the Scripture are usually used to prove the authenticity of a particular message or individual. Here these great signs of this false prophet serve a similar purpose. It is an attempt to prove the authenticity of the message of the false prophet and the person of the Antichrist. These are likely real supernatural miracles that are performed by this individual in which God allows this activity to take place. This false prophet using the power of Satan is able to perform many great and convincing signs to the point of deceiving the elect if possible (Matthew 24:24). His great signs extend to include making fire come down out of heaven to the earth. This is a miracle that James and John desired to perform, but were denied (Luke 9:54). It is also similar to the miracle Elijah performed on more than one occasion (1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:10). The purpose of this false prophet's signs is deception (*And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast*). The deception is that this false prophet will deceive men into worshipping a false god, the Antichrist. He does so by telling them to make an image of the beast. This obviously will be some sort of a statue of the Antichrist.

At this point in the text it once again reiterates the death and resurrection of the first beast. The continuous repetition of this fact throughout chapter 13 leads to the conclusion that this may have indeed literally happened as opposed to being a staged

event for deception. While it is impossible to know for sure, it does seem quite convincing from the strength of the language used and the consistent repetition of the event that Antichrist is indeed killed and returned to life. Not only does this false prophet command the people to erect such an idolatrous image, but he performs an additional great sign of giving the image the ability to breathe and speak. Such an ability of enabling an inanimate object to breathe and speak would be quite convincing to many people that these two individuals are who they claim to be. Obviously all will not be convinced to worship the Antichrist for it is necessary for some to be killed because they do not worship him. Evidently the false prophet somehow enables this image to not only breathe and speak, but also to cause those who do not worship the beast or his image to be killed. From this point on it will be very difficult for the tribulation saints. Their refusal to worship the first beast and his image will result in death and as we will see shortly their refusal to take the mark of this beast will result in the inability to buy or sell.

He Causes the Placing of a Mark. Revelation 13:16-18 “16 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead, 17 and [he provides] that no one should be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, [either] the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.”

The final activity of this false prophet mentioned is the causing of all to be given a mark. “The regulation is issued that all classes of people who worship the beast are to receive a mark in their right hands or in their foreheads and that possession of this mark is necessary to buy or sell. All classes are included in three contrasting pairs: the small and the great, referring to status; the rich and the poor, alluding to possessions; and the free men and the slaves, referring to their state in society.”

“The word *mark* [CHARAGMA] was used in the first century. It referred to the imprint from an imperial seal of the Roman Empire bearing the name and date of the emperor and used on official documents or coins. This mark is a visible brand or tattoo signifying ownership, loyalty, and protection—similar to that given to soldiers, slaves, and those who worshipped the emperor in the first century.”

“This mark will allow people to engage in daily commerce, including the purchase of food and other necessities. Without the identifying mark, individuals will be cut off from the necessities of life.” This mark will consist of either the name or number of the first beast, the Antichrist. “Whatever his name is it will be inherent in a numbering system. It is not clear exactly what this name or numbering system will be or what its significance will be.”

John also provides the calculation of the number of the beast as being 666. “This is the essential number of a man. The number 6 falls one short of God’s perfect number, 7, and thus represents human imperfection. Antichrist, the most powerful human the world

will ever know, will still be just a man. The ultimate in human and demonic power is a 6, not perfect as God is. The 3-fold repetition of the number is intended to reiterate and underscore man's identity. When Antichrist is revealed, there will be some way to identify him with this basic number of a man, or his name may have the numerical equivalent of 666. (In many languages including Hebrew, Greek, or Latin, letters have numerical equivalents.) **Because this text reveals very little about the meaning of 666, it is unwise to speculate beyond what is said.** The purpose of this mark is to drive the people of the world into the worship of and service of the Antichrist.

- Next week we will take a look at the 144,000 of Revelation 7, and the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11.

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*Turmoil reigns on earth. People wander through vacant rooms, looking for loved ones. The only churches that could offer any solace are empty. Ethical Standards are replaced by vague value systems and truth is relative. After the mass disappearing act of millions, those who remain will be tense, wondering what will happen next in this time of uncertainty. [David Jeremiah, *Escape the Coming Night*, p. 95]*

What will happen next? The events of the Tribulation Period!

What we have covered already—the first 6 seal judgments:

The First Seal Judgment: The Rise of False Messiahs, The Antichrist & Apparent Peace (Matthew 24:5; Revelation 6:1-2)

The Second Seal Judgment: War (Matthew 24:6-7; Revelation 6:3-4)

The Third Seal Judgment: Famine (Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:5-6)

The Fourth Seal Judgment: Death of ¼ of the world's population (Matthew 24:7-9; Revelation 6:7-8)

The Fifth Seal Judgment: Martyrdom of the Saints (Revelation 6:9-11)

The Sixth Seal Judgment: Various Natural Disasters (Revelation 6:12-17)

- *A Great Earthquake*
- *The Sun Darkened/The Moon Like Blood*
- *The Stars of the Sky Fell to the Earth*
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The Seal Judgments have been severe. The rise of false messiahs and the antichrist with his pseudo peace, widespread world war, a devastating worldwide famine, the spread of death and disease, extreme persecution and slaughter of Christians, a great worldwide earthquake accompanied with volcanic eruptions darkening of the sun and moon, destructive meteor and asteroid showers pummeling the earth, strange atmospheric conditions, and the movement of all the earth's mountains and islands, as the earth's plates slip and slide across its surface. This will obviously result in widespread fear and panic across the world. It will truly be a time of great tribulation, but this is only the beginning.

But remember, before we move on we are turning our attention on some of the key individuals of the Tribulation Period. Who have we covered already?

1-The Antichrist: Remember that this individual's character can be described as arrogant, belligerent, and deceitful. He will appear to be peaceful, but will really be warlike, and assume great power as he seeks to take control of the world. He will rise to power out of a European nation or group of nations that will be some form of a revived Roman Empire. He will sign a covenant with Israel for 7 years, but break that covenant half way through. As he does so he will turn on the people, defile the temple, proclaim to be God and seek to kill all genuine believers and Jews alike.

2-The False Prophet: Remember that this individual's character will be similar to the ferocious and hostile nature of the Antichrist. His speech will be subtle, seductive and satanic in nature. He will be given the Antichrist's power and authority. With such authority, he will cause the world to worship the Antichrist, he will perform great signs and wonders, and he will cause the placing of a mark on the people of the world. Only true believers in Christ will refuse to take this mark.

Now let's move on.

3. The 144,000

The 144,000 are mentioned for us in Revelation 7:1-8.

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."

And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon

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twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

Here in this passage these 144,000 are described as being sealed. These who were to be sealed were called bond-servants of God and thus can be identified as redeemed individuals. They were believers in Christ!

The number of sealed individuals as 144,000 is best understood in a literal way and not symbolic of anything else. They are not representative of a larger number. It literally means 144,000 people will be sealed. This is further reinforced by the context of 12 listings of 12,000 individuals to be sealed.

The identities of the sealed individuals are those who are sons of Israel. These are Jewish believers who are sealed. This refers to physical descendants from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel means Israel here. It is not symbolic of the church or of all believers during this time. 12,000 from every tribe of Israel will be sealed. Although the Jewish records of who was part of what tribe were lost during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, we must recognize that our Sovereign God knows who is part of what tribe and is capable of sealing those whom he has determined to seal.

There are questions raised in the listing of the 12 tribes here. It should be noted that there is no standard way of listing the twelve tribes. There are at least nineteen different ways of listing them in the Old Testament, none of which agree with the list given here.

Dr. Robert Thomas notes:

“In the Old Testament lists, sometimes the order of birth is followed (Gen. 29:32-35:18). At other times, it is the order of Jacob’s blessing them (Gen. 49:3-27), the order of encampment (Num. 2:3-31), the order of the census before the invasion of Canaan (Num. 26:4-51), the order of blessing and cursing (Deut. 27:12-13), the order of Moses’ blessing (Deut. 33:6-25), the order of “the princes” (Num. 1:5-15), the order of inheritance (Josh. 13:7-22:34), the order by the wives and concubines (1 Chronicles 2:1-8:40, and the order of the gates of the city (Ezekiel 48:31-34).”

Although there are 12 tribes listed in verses 5-8, some substitutions have been made from previous lists. For example, Dan is eliminated and Levi is added to the list, while Ephraim is replaced by Joseph. Many reasons have been given for the substitutions. Most scholars believe that Dan and Ephraim were omitted because of their continual promotion of idolatry in Israel (1 Kings 12:28-30). It is important to note that the Scriptures are silent as to the exact reason that Dan and Ephraim are replaced with Levi and Joseph here. The tribe of Dan was drawn into idolatry, while the tribe of Ephraim separated from Judah (Isaiah 7:17) and like the tribe of Dan fell into idolatry (Hosea 4:17). This of course is only speculation, but it is the best guess as to the substitutions made here.

Whatever the case, the apostle John seems to be quite clear on the identity of the 144,000 as a literal number of Jewish believers in Christ. These will evidently function in the role of evangelists during the tribulation period.

4. The Two Messengers

The two witnesses are mentioned in Revelation 11:3-14:

“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

Their Ministry: Revelation 11:3 *“And I will grant [authority] to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”*

The Nature of their Ministry:

As Witnesses: The term witnesses from *MARTUS* is a legal term denoting the confirmation of a fact or event. In the Old Testament two witnesses were needed for competent legal testimony necessary to secure a conviction (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Num. 35:39; Heb. 10:28). Jesus also made the number 2 essential to confirm a point of discipline (Matthew 18:16), and for confirmation of truth (John 8:17). Paul also alluded to the need for at least two witnesses to validate a judgment (2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19). The term was used by Christ in Acts 1:8 speaking of believers testifying the truth about Christ. It is the same word from which we get the English word “martyr.” The point is that these two messengers will be coming to confirm and testify of the truth about Jesus Christ. These two will come to testify under the authority of Christ Himself.

As Prophets: In the book of Revelation the term *prophecy* carries both the notion of foretelling as well as forth-telling. Not only have these two witnesses come to proclaim the truth about Jesus and to preach repentance, but they also have come to proclaim the coming wrath and judgment of God. The two witnesses will proclaim to the world that the disasters occurring during the last half of the tribulation are the judgments of God. They will warn that God's final outpouring of judgment and eternal hell will follow. At the same time they will preach the gospel, calling all people to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. [John MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary on Revelation*, p. 298]

The Length of Their Ministry:

Twelve hundred and sixty days: This is exactly three and one-half years or forty-two months of thirty days each. The period of ministry for the two witnesses is the same as that for the trampling of the holy city (11:2). This period of ministry is clearly the last 3 ½ years of the tribulation period. From the fact that the two witnesses pour out divine judgments upon the earth and need divine protection lest they be killed, it implies that they are in the latter half of the seven years when awful persecution will afflict the people of God, as this protection would not be necessary in the first three and one-half years. It is also important to recognize that the chronology of Revelation necessitates that this 3 ½ years is the last half of the Tribulation period.

The Attitude of Their Ministry:

Clothed in sackcloth: John MacArthur in his Revelation Commentary has a good treatment on the significance of being clothed in sackcloth. "Sackcloth was rough, heavy, coarse cloth worn in ancient times as a symbol of mourning, distress, grief, and humility. Jacob put on sackcloth when he thought Joseph had been killed (Gen. 37:34). David ordered the people to wear sackcloth after the murder of Abner (2 Sam. 3:31) and wore it himself during the plague God sent in response to his sin of numbering the people (1 Chron. 21:16). King Jehoram wore sackcloth during the siege of Samaria (2 Kings 6:30), as did King Hezekiah when Jerusalem was attacked (2 Kings 19:1). Job (Job 16:15), Isaiah (Isaiah 20:2), and Daniel (Daniel 9:3) also wore sackcloth.

The two witnesses will put on sackcloth as an object lesson to express their great sorrow for the wretched and unbelieving world, racked by God's judgments, overrun by demon hordes, and populated by wicked, sinful people who refuse to repent. They will also mourn because of the desecration of the temple, the oppression of Jerusalem, and the ascendancy of Antichrist."

Their Identity: *11:4 These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before the Lord of the earth.*

- *Are these two witnesses literal individuals or symbolic of something else?*

First of all these two witnesses are specific persons. They do not represent Israel and the Church. They do not represent Israel and the Word of God. They are not symbolic references. They refer to two very literal individuals. This is understood by the terms used. They are referred to as “my witnesses” (v. 3). They have a specific assignment to prophesy for a specific period of time (1260 days). They are also to be considered real literal persons because of the description given. They have real literal bodies that are clothed in sackcloth, that are killed, that lie in the street, that are resurrected, and that ascend into heaven. The terminology here suggests that these are literal men and not a symbolic reference to some larger entity.

There is also disagreement as to whether these two witnesses are from ages past or are unidentified men born at the end of the age.

- *If these are two figures from the past, then who are they?*

Most believe that the identity of these two witnesses is none other than Moses and Elijah. This is supported by the following reasons:

First, the miracles they will perform (destroying their enemies with fire, withholding rain, turning water into blood, and striking the earth with plagues) are similar to the judgments inflicted in the Old Testament by Moses and Elijah for the purpose stimulating repentance.

Second, both Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ at the Transfiguration, the preview of the Second Coming (Matthew 17:3).

Third, both left the earth in unusual ways. Elijah never died, but was transported to heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11-12), and God supernaturally buried Moses' body in a secret location (Deut. 34:5-6; Jude 9). Other individuals of the past have been suggested such as Enoch or John the Baptist, however most agree that the most likely candidates are Moses and Elijah. It must be stated that it is impossible to be dogmatic on this issue since the Scriptures remain silent on their exact identity.

- *Why are they referred to as two olive trees or lamp stands?*

This terminology is drawn off from Zechariah's vision in Zechariah 4:1-14. “Zechariah had been granted a series of remarkable visions, which evidently had a twofold application, first to the current project of temple rebuilding and second to the end times. In Zechariah's time (between the times of Ezra and Nehemiah), the rebuilding of the temple, though authorized in the days of Ezra, was languishing and Zechariah's mission was to encourage Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest to proceed with the task. One of these visions was of a golden candlestick (or lamp stand) with seven lamps, flanked by two olive trees yielding golden oil for the lamps. The olive trees were interpreted as...the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth (Zech.

4:14). Just as these two witnesses, Joshua and Zerubbabel were raised up in Zechariah's time to be "lamp stands," bearers of true light, empowered by olive oil representing the Holy Spirit, so the two witnesses of Revelation 11:14, perhaps Moses and Elijah, will likewise carry out their prophetic office through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Their Power: *11:5 And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed. 11:6 These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.*

Four distinct miraculous powers are mentioned here in the text. These two messengers are authenticated by these miracles as God has often authenticated His messengers in the Scriptures by means of miracles (2 Cor. 12:12).

The Power to Protect Themselves: The first miraculous power mentioned is used as a means of self defense. These two messengers will be hated by the people of the world. They will be hated because "they will fearlessly proclaim God's judgment, wrath, vengeance, and the need for repentance. Many will desire to harm them and attempt to kill them, but will be unable to because of God's divine protection over His two witnesses. These two witnesses will be equipped with the miraculous ability to flow forth fire out of their mouths. This is best understood as literal fire coming forth from their mouths. The result of this miracle of protection is that those who seek to harm or kill these witnesses will be literally devoured by the fire from the mouths of the witnesses. The phrase, "so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way" emphasizes that it is necessary for those who seek to harm God's messengers to be killed. God is supernaturally protecting His witnesses from all harm and from His enemies. Those who will seek to kill the witnesses are clearly the enemies of God.

The Power to Shut up the Sky: Not only will these two witnesses be capable of miracles of protection, but they will also be able to inflict miracles of judgment upon the world. It is important to note that this miracle as some have suggested is **not** simply inflicted on Jerusalem or Israel alone. It seems best to understand this as miracle of judgment as affecting the entire globe. As these two messengers proclaim God's wrath and judgment, they will be capable of closing up the heavens so that it will not rain. In fact it will not rain for the entire 3 ½ years of their ministry. This is reminiscent of the judgment of God imposed on Israel when in answer to Elijah's prayer it did not rain for three and one-half years. This will cause extreme suffering upon the earth. They have already experienced a world-wide famine during the first half of the Tribulation at the 3rd seal judgment. They have already experienced the poisoning of 1/3 of their water supply from the 3rd trumpet judgment. Now with a 3 ½ year world-wide drought, crops will wither away, animal and plant life will die and there will be severe thirst and starvation as the lack of rain will result in further famine on a widespread scale. This will

give the people of the earth further reason to hate these two messengers and further motivation to attempt to harm or kill them.

The Power over the Waters: The two witnesses will also be capable of turning the waters into blood. There was a similar result during the 2nd trumpet judgment, when 1/3 of the oceans were turned to blood. This is also similar to the power given to Moses in Exodus 7:17-19 just prior to the Exodus from Egypt. This will cause further suffering as the entire water supply will be turned to blood. This along with the 3 ½ year drought will cause extreme torment for the people on the earth and they will seek any means possible to destroy the two messengers.

The Power to Strike the Earth: Not only will these two messengers be capable of protecting themselves with fire, and pronouncing judgment upon the earth through drought and turning the waters to blood, but they will also be able to strike the earth with every kind of plague. It is unclear exactly what kind of plagues could be brought upon the earth, but most believe they will be similar to the plagues brought against the land of Egypt. This is believed because of similar wording to a statement made in 1 Samuel 4:8 in reference to the Egyptian plagues. The Egyptian plagues also have many similarities to the judgments during the Tribulation. Whatever the case, these two messengers will have divine power to strike both land and sea. They will be capable of wreaking widespread havoc upon the earth. People will no doubt search desperately for a way to destroy them, but to no avail. They will be invulnerable and unstoppable for the duration of their ministry.

Their Death: *11:7 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. 8 And their dead bodies [will lie] in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9 And those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations [will] look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. 10 And those who dwell on the earth [will] rejoice over them and make merry; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.*

The completion of their ministry: The first part of verse 7 indicates that the following events occur after the 3 ½ year ministry of the two messengers. The phrase “*When they have finished,*” indicates that the whole period of their testimony will be completed before they are killed. The most natural sense of *teleo* (finished) here is not in a sense of time, but rather, it should be understood as the fulfillment of a duty or the accomplishment of a task. The two messengers had completed their testimony. Their divinely appointed ministry of 1260 days had come to a close. “Sinful men will try desperately and unsuccessfully to get rid of the two witnesses throughout their ministry in a kind of kamikaze effort that results in their own incineration. God, however will protect them until they have finished their testimony, having achieved His purpose during the time He sovereignly determined for their ministry. At this point the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with the two messengers and kill them.

The killing of the 2 messengers: The first action of this beast (Antichrist) is to make war with the 2 messengers. The making of war pictures a single combat in which he *overcomes* the 2 messengers. *Overcomes* signifies a literal physical victory in which the Antichrist has finally become victorious over these hated and despised witnesses. Antichrist will not only be victorious over the 2 messengers but will kill them. The world will likely be shocked that the two will have finally been put to death and they will likely breath a sigh of relief.

The Antichrist will have conquered the two who have brought plagues upon the world and as a result they will rejoice. The bodies of these 2 messengers will be left to rot in the street. This action describes the extreme contempt that the people of the world have for these two. To expose one's body in this way is the height of dishonor. Their bodies would be left there in the street for 3 ½ days as the people of the world rejoiced over their death. The city that they were ministering in, killed in, and left to rot in was mystically called Sodom and Egypt. The term "mystically" is better translated "spiritually." The true identity of the city is described as the place *where their Lord was crucified*. This city is none other than that of Jerusalem. In this future time the great city of Jerusalem will have become a city of immorality like that of Sodom and a city of oppression and slavery like the nation of Egypt. This wicked city will have contempt and hatred toward God, His Word and His messengers.

The reaction of the world: The people of the world described by the phrase *peoples and tribes and tongues and nations* will look at these dead bodies for 3 ½ days. Until the 20th century this was a difficult phrase to understand, but with modern day media it is no longer a mysterious statement. Obviously the entire world will be able to view not only the murder of these 2 messengers but also extended coverage on their dead bodies laying in the street. The hatred of these two will be so great that they will not even allow their bodies to be properly placed in a tomb. They will be left to rot for all to see. Not only that, but the world will greatly rejoice over their death. It will be such a great celebration that they will give gifts to each other. People will be throwing parties to celebrate the end of their torment because their great world ruler will have saved them from these two messengers. Antichrist will likely be praised and honored for this deed of death. It will be a Christmas like celebration in honor of Antichrist.

Their Return to Life: *11 And after the three and a half days the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were beholding them. 12 And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them. 13 And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14 The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.*

They were raised to life: "The conjunction KAI (and) introduces a new stage in the drama. The merriment of the world was cut short by the resurrection of the two witnesses. This resurrection to life will take place 3 ½ days after their death. This is

obviously the same 3 ½ days that their bodies will be laying in the street. They will be killed, their dead bodies will lay in the street for 3 ½ days and the world will rejoice and celebrate their death. In the midst of their celebration and rejoicing something shocking happens. The breath of life from God came into them and they stood up.

The term PNEUMA (breath) literally means “spirit”. “The implication is to the resuscitation and restoration of human life to these two dead bodies so that they again become living persons. Needless to say, *great fear fell upon those who were watching them*. Panic will seize the unregenerate world as their hated and reviled tormentors suddenly spring to life.

The phrase “great fear” emphasizes that these people will be utterly panic-stricken and terrified. Since murder is the ultimate weapon of mankind, no means remains for them to silence the witnesses who have been raised from the dead.

They went up into heaven: It is at this point that the people of the world fearing their return to life had obviously anticipated further prophecy and plagues being issued by these two messengers. However that is not the case as a loud voice from heaven called for them to “*Come up here.*” This loud voice is probably the voice of Christ as it was in 4:1 when John was summoned to heaven to receive his prophetic revelations.

The resurrected witnesses are summoned to heaven and their bodies are then taken up in the cloud to heaven as their enemies watched. There exist some similarities to the ascension of Christ in Acts 1:9. In both instances the resurrected individuals were received in a cloud up to heaven and both ascensions record that there are eyewitnesses. Unlike Christ’s ascension where there was gathered a small group of Apostles, these two witnesses will be taken up into heaven before the eyes of their enemies (the hostile watching world).