

The Two Witnesses



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 11:3–6; Zech. 4:14; Rev. 12:5, 6, 14, 15; Dan. 7:25; Isa. 54:17; Ps. 119:89; Rev. 11:15–18.*

Memory Text: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (*Isaiah 40:8, NKJV*).

Through the centuries, God's Word has been dissected, doubted, and discarded. It has been chained in monasteries, burned in public squares, and torn to shreds. Its believers have been ridiculed, mocked, imprisoned, and even martyred. Through it all, God's Word has prevailed.

The medieval church persecuted faithful, Bible-believing Christians. Yet, God's Word illuminated the darkness. Oppression and persecution did not stop the proclamation of the Word of God. As English Bible translator William Tyndale was tried for his faith, he was asked who aided him most in spreading God's Word. He pondered the question and then answered, “the Bishop of Durham.” The magistrates were shocked.

Tyndale explained that on one occasion, the bishop purchased a supply of his English Bible translation and publicly burned them. What the bishop did not know at the time was that he was greatly aiding the cause of truth. He had purchased the Bibles at a much higher price than usual. With such a large purchase, Tyndale was able to print many more Bibles than were burned. Truth crushed in the dust has risen again and again to shine in all its brilliance.

This week, we explore one of the most vicious attacks on the Scriptures and the Christian faith. During the French Revolution, blood flowed in the streets of France. The guillotine was set up in Paris's public square, and thousands were slaughtered. Atheism became the state religion. Nevertheless, the witness of God's Word could not be silenced.

* Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 12–17 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, May 11.

Two Witnesses

Read Revelation 11:3–6. List five identifying features of the two witnesses you discover in this passage.

In Zechariah 4, the prophet saw two olive trees on either side of a golden lampstand—the same imagery that we find here in Revelation 11. Zechariah is told that this represents “ ‘the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth’ ” (*Zech. 4:14, NKJV*). The olive trees feed oil into the lampstand so that it continues to give light. We are reminded of what the psalmist wrote: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (*Ps. 119:105, NKJV*). Oil represents the Holy Spirit (*Zech. 4:2, 6*). John’s vision in Revelation 11 is describing God’s Word being proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit to lighten the world.

These two witnesses can prophesy and keep rain from falling for as long as they predict. They can turn water to blood and smite the earth with plagues. By the word of God, Elijah said no rain would fall on Israel, and in answer to his prayer, there was no rain for three and a half years (*see James 5:17*). Then he prayed to God, and rain returned after the false prophets of Baal failed to end the drought (*1 Kings 17, 18*). Moses, through the Word of God, brought plagues of all kinds on the Egyptians, including turning water to blood, because Pharaoh refused to let God’s people go free (*Exodus 7*).

Those who seek to harm the Scriptures will be consumed by the fire that comes from their mouth. God says, “ ‘Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them’ ” (*Jer. 5:14, NKJV*). God’s Word pronounces judgment upon all those who reject it. His word is like fire in the mouth.

In John 5:39, Jesus declares that the Old Testament scriptures testify (bear witness) of Him. He also says that the gospel will be proclaimed “as a witness” to the whole world (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*), and the New Testament, together with the Old Testament, is the basis of that witness. A word from the same root (*martys*) as the words for witness used in these two verses appears in Revelation 11:3.

Who are these two witnesses? In view of these biblical points and the characteristics given in Revelation 11, we can conclude (not dogmatically, however) that the two witnesses are the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, communicating God’s light and truth to the world.

Many Christians today tend to downplay the Old Testament, to label it irrelevant and not needed, because we have the New Testament. What is so terribly wrong with that attitude?

Prophetic Time Periods

Compare Revelation 11:3 and Revelation 12:5, 6, 14, 15 with Daniel 7:25. What similarities do you see in these prophetic periods?

The two witnesses “ ‘will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth’ ” (*Rev. 11:3, NKJV*). This is the same time period as the 42 months during which the “Gentiles” (those who oppose God’s truth) will tread the Holy City underfoot (*Rev. 11:2*). The enemies of God tread underfoot God’s truth for 1,260 days ($42 \times 30 = 1,260$, each day symbolizing a year in apocalyptic prophecy), and God’s two witnesses, the Old and New Testaments, prophesy against them during this same time.

As we already have seen (see lesson 4), Daniel 7:25 says the little-horn power that would arise out of the breakup of the Roman Empire would persecute God’s people “ ‘for a time and times [literally, “two times”] and half a time’ ” (*NKJV*). A “time” is one year (360 days). So, three and a half times equals 1,260 days.

Revelation 12:6, 13 talks about 1,260 days of persecution for the people of God. Revelation 12:14 talks of a time, times, and half a time. Revelation 13:5 talks about 42 months. We find both 42 months and 1,260 days mentioned in Revelation 11:2, 3. All these prophecies describe different aspects of the same historical time period.

When the authority of Scripture is neglected, other (human) authorities arise instead. This often leads to persecution of those who uphold the Word of God, which happened during the time of papal domination from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798, when the medieval church descended into deep spiritual darkness. The decrees of men substituted for the commandments of God. Human traditions overshadowed the simplicity of the gospel. The Roman Church united with the secular power to extend its authority over all of Europe.

During these 1,260 years, the Word of God—His two witnesses—were clothed in sackcloth. Their truths were hidden under a vast pile of tradition and ritual. These two witnesses still prophesied; the Bible still spoke. Even amid this spiritual darkness, God’s Word was preserved. There were those who cherished it and lived by its precepts. But in comparison to the masses in Europe, they were few. The Waldenses, John Huss, Jerome, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, John and Charles Wesley, and a host of other Reformers were faithful to God’s Word as they understood it.

What are some of the teachings today, held by many Christians, that are based on tradition and not on the Word of God?

The Two Witnesses Are Killed

Read Revelation 11:7–9. Remembering that the language is symbolic, what do these verses predict would happen to God’s two witnesses, the Old and New Testaments?

By A.D. 538, the pagan Roman Empire had collapsed. Justinian, the Roman emperor, surrendered civil, political, and religious authority to Pope Vigillius. The long period of the medieval church’s domination began. It continued until A.D. 1798. The French general Berthier, on orders from Napoleon, marched unopposed into Rome on February 10, 1798. Pope Pius VI was taken captive and brought back to France, where he died. This date marks the prophetically predicted end of the Roman Church’s secular authority, the 1,260 days or years as depicted in Daniel and Revelation (see yesterday’s study).

What a powerful manifestation of the truth of biblical prophecy! Daniel, writing more than 500 years before Christ, so accurately predicted events more than 2,300 years later. We can, indeed, trust the prophecies given in the Bible.

Meanwhile, during all this, the truth of the gospel was kept alive by the witness of the Word. But even greater challenges threatened biblical truth. The beast that ascended from the bottomless pit (Satan) made war against the Scriptures. He initiated new assaults on the Bible’s authority through the French Revolution that began in 1789.

In the French Revolution, the government officially established the Cult of Reason as a state-sponsored atheistic religion, intended to replace Christianity. A Festival of Reason was held nationwide on November 10, 1793. Churches across France were turned into Temples of Reason, and a living woman was enthroned as the Goddess of Reason. Bibles were burned in the streets. God was declared nonexistent, and death was pronounced to be an endless sleep. Satan worked through godless men to kill God’s two witnesses. Their dead bodies would “lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified” (*Rev. 11:8, NKJV*).

Egypt was a culture of many gods that denied the true God (*see Exod. 5:2*). Sodom represents gross immorality. In the French Revolution, God’s two witnesses—the Old and New Testaments—lay dead as a result of the atheism and immorality that ran rampant as normal restraints were loosed in revolution and bloodshed.

Revelation 11:9 says that the bodies of God’s two witnesses would lie unburied for “three-and-a-half days” (*NKJV*), i.e., prophetic “days” representing three and a half literal years. Atheism was at its height in the French Revolution, at least for about three and a half years. This period extended from November 26, 1793, when a decree issued in Paris abolished religion, to June 17, 1797, when the French government removed its restrictive religious laws.

The Two Witnesses Resurrected

Read Revelation 11:11. What prediction does this text make about the Word of God?

At the end of the French Revolution, God's Word would, figuratively, come to life again. There would be a mighty revival. Great fear would fall on those who saw God's Word once more become the living power of God unto salvation. At the end of the eighteenth century, God raised up men and women who were committed to taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. People spread the message of the Bible rapidly. One such person was William Carey, who traveled to India and translated the Bible into dozens of local dialects. Propelled by the power of the Bible, missionaries were sent around the world.

It is not by accident that these worldwide mission endeavors arose after the French Revolution. God's Word is a living Word, and although to many it seemed "dead," it was still living in the hearts of believers and would rise again to full life, as Revelation's prophecies predicted. "The infidel Voltaire once boastfully said: 'I am weary of hearing people repeat that twelve men established the Christian religion. I will prove that one man may suffice to overthrow it.' Generations have passed since his death. Millions have joined in the war upon the Bible. But it is so far from being destroyed, that where there were a hundred in Voltaire's time, there are now ten thousand, yes, a hundred thousand copies of the book of God. In the words of an early Reformer concerning the Christian church, 'The Bible is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 288.

Read Psalm 119:89 and Psalm 111:7, 8. What do these passages tell us about the Bible, and why we can trust it?

God's Word may be attacked, or suppressed, but it will never be eradicated. Even many professed Christians undermine its authority in various ways, questioning parts of the Bible or so emphasizing the human elements that it all but loses its divine stamp, and God's truth is undermined.

We must never, in any way, allow ourselves to be seduced by these attacks on the Word of God. It is still alive today, speaking to human hearts, breathing new life into those who are willing to listen to the Word and follow its teachings.

What prophecies in particular speak to you, personally, and why?

Truth Triumphant

Despite the attacks of the enemy, God's work on earth will come to a glorious climax. The gospel will be preached to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). The great controversy between Christ and Satan will end with Christ completely defeating the powers of hell. God's kingdom will triumph over evil, and sin will be eradicated forever from the universe. Revelation 11 begins with Satan's attempt through the French Revolution to destroy the Christian faith and eradicate belief in God, but the chapter ends with the triumph of God's kingdom over the principalities and powers of evil. It provides encouragement to all who go through fiery trials for the cause of Christ and His truth.

Read Revelation 11:15–18. According to these verses, what events take place at the close of time when the seventh trumpet sounds?

The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord. Christ is victorious. Evil is defeated. Jesus wins and Satan loses. Righteousness triumphs. Truth reigns. We would do well to heed the following instruction: "Whatever is built upon the authority of man will be overthrown; but that which is founded upon the rock of God's immutable word shall stand forever."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 288.

Read Revelation 11:19. What did John see opened in heaven? And what did he see as he looked up into heaven?

The temple of God in heaven was opened to John's view. As he gazed into the Most Holy Place, he saw the ark of the covenant. In the Old Testament sanctuary, which was a type patterned after the great original in heaven, the glorious presence of God was revealed between the two angelic figures fashioned on the cover of the ark of the covenant. Within the ark was the law of God. Although we are saved by grace alone through faith, obedience to God's law reveals whether our faith is genuine. The law of God is the basis or the standard of judgment (*James 2:12*). This fact becomes especially important and relevant at the end of time (*see Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12*).

How does the striking contrast between the godlessness of the French Revolution and the glorious climax pictured in Revelation 11 speak to us today?

Further Thought: “When the Bible was proscribed by religious and secular authority; when its testimony was perverted, and every effort made that men and demons could invent to turn the minds of the people from it; when those who dared proclaim its sacred truths were hunted, betrayed, tortured, buried in dungeon cells, martyred for their faith, or compelled to flee to mountain fastnesses, and to dens and caves of the earth—then the faithful witnesses prophesied in sackcloth. Yet they continued their testimony throughout the entire period of 1260 years. In the darkest times there were faithful men who loved God’s word and were jealous for His honor. To these loyal servants were given wisdom, power, and authority to declare His truth during the whole of this time.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 267, 268.

“When France publicly rejected God and set aside the Bible, wicked men and spirits of darkness exulted in their attainment of the object so long desired—a kingdom free from the restraints of the law of God. . . . The restraining Spirit of God, which imposes a check upon the cruel power of Satan, was in a great measure removed, and he whose only delight is the wretchedness of men was permitted to work his will. Those who had chosen the service of rebellion were left to reap its fruits until the land was filled with crimes too horrible for pen to trace. From devastated provinces and ruined cities a terrible cry was heard—a cry of bitterest anguish. France was shaken as if by an earthquake. Religion, law, social order, the family, the state, and the church—all were smitten down by the impious hand that had been lifted against the law of God.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 286.

“Unless the church will follow on in His [God’s] opening providence, accepting every ray of light, performing every duty which may be revealed, religion will inevitably degenerate into the observance of forms, and the spirit of vital godliness will disappear.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 316.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How are the principles of the great controversy revealed in the French Revolution?
- ② When arguing that there is no God, one person wrote that “we are free to establish our own goals and to venture across any intellectual boundaries without looking for no-trespassing signs.” Why is that phrase “without looking for no-trespassing signs” so instructive to the motives many have for rejecting God? How might such ideas help explain some of what happened in the French Revolution?
- ③ What is the significance of John’s vision of the sanctuary as it relates to final events?

One Angel, Four Encounters

By NELSON CINCO REIS CHITAONGA
and CALAVETE SABONETE OSSIFO

Few people can say that they have seen an angel. Oyele says he has seen an angel—not just once, but four times.

Oyele slipped away from his childhood faith as he labored for three years away from home, helping construct a 250-mile (400-kilometer) road between the cities of Mocuba and Nampula in Mozambique. It was tough work, and he sought relief in ways that he knew violated God's law.

One day, several strangers approached Oyele, who was drunk after work, and asked if he was aware that the Bible taught that the Sabbath was on the seventh day of the week. Oyele was convinced that the strangers were wrong. "Prove it to me from the Bible," he said.

The strangers, who introduced themselves as Seventh-day Adventists, opened the Bible to the fourth commandment and read, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (*Exod. 20:8, NKJV*). Then they turned to Ezekiel 20:20 and read, "Hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God" (*NKJV*).

Oyele read and reread the verses over the next few days. He wondered if he was reading truth from God. Even though he had gone to church since he was a boy, he had never noticed the verses before.

As he thought and prayed, a shining angel appeared at night over the house where he was staying. "Strength!" the angel said. "You are on the right path." The next night, he saw the angel again in the same place. "Strength!" the angel said. "You are on the right path." The same thing happened the third night. Oyele went to an Adventist church the next Sabbath. After that, he worshiped regularly with the Adventists.

When his three-year contract ended, Oyele returned home and was surprised to find that his wife and children had joined the Adventist Church. He had had no contact with them during his extended absence.

"What a coincidence!" his wife said when she learned that Oyele had been going to an Adventist church. "Is this by chance?"

Back home, Oyele went to the Adventist church on Saturdays and his childhood church on Sundays. He wasn't sure what to do. Then the angel appeared for a fourth time. "What you are studying is true," the angel said. Oyele decided on the spot to become a Seventh-day Adventist.

There are few Adventists where Oyele lives, but God has blessed his efforts to share the good news that Jesus is coming soon. Oyele has helped start three house churches. "Evangelize anyone, even if they're drunk," he said. "God is the one who converts, and there are many people who God has prepared to accept the gospel. They only need to be touched by you."

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel in Mozambique and around the world.

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY



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Study

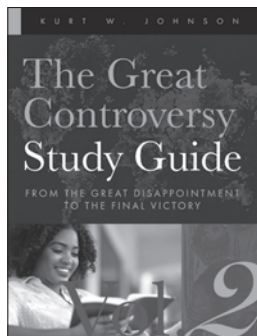
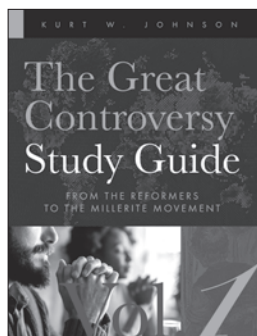
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Kurt Johnson, DMin

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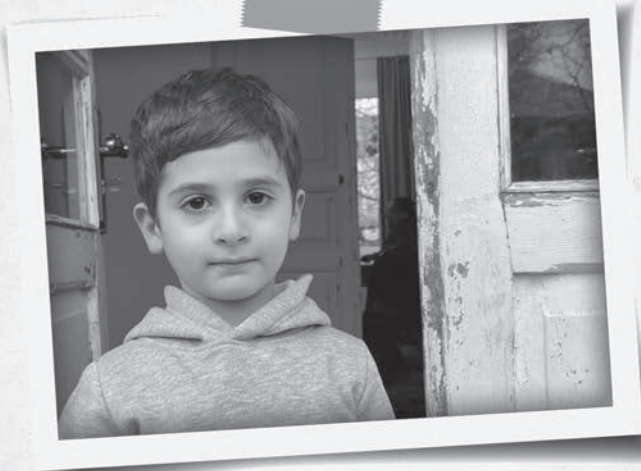


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A STORY TO TELL



Two options for sharing the mission story about Khachik in Sabbath School:

Option No. 1: Open the *Children's Mission* quarterly and show a photo of Khachik as you tell the story of how God saved his life in the former Soviet republic of Georgia. Give the children a drawing of Georgia's flag, printed in the quarterly, to color as they listen.

Option No. 2: Make Khachik's story come alive with photos of him, Georgia, and a mission map with the Thirteenth Sabbath projects. At the end of the story, show a short video of Khachik acknowledging that his life is in God's hands.

How will you share the mission story next Sabbath?

Learn more in the *Children's Mission* quarterly (bit.ly/childrensmisson) and the youth and adult *Mission* quarterly (bit.ly/adultmission).



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