

Revelation 11:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

Analysis

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.... This verse from Revelation's vision of two witnesses and seventh trumpet - faithful testimony, Christ's kingdom proclaimed employs apocalyptic imagery rich with Old Testament allusions and symbolic meaning. The Greek text uses vivid apocalyptic language characteristic of Jewish prophetic literature, drawing heavily from Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zechariah.

The symbolism must be interpreted within its first-century context while recognizing timeless spiritual realities. The imagery would resonate powerfully with persecuted believers facing Roman imperial cult worship, providing hope that despite present suffering, Christ reigns sovereign and will consummate His kingdom. The apocalyptic genre uses symbolic numbers (seven, twelve, 144,000), colors, beasts, and cosmic imagery to convey theological truth rather than photographic descriptions.

Christologically, Revelation consistently exalts Jesus as the victorious Lamb, the faithful witness, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Every vision ultimately points to Christ's supremacy, His finished redemptive work, and His certain return to judge the living and dead and establish the new creation.

Historical Context

John received this revelation circa AD 95 during Domitian's persecution, exiled on Patmos for his testimony. The seven churches of Asia Minor faced increasing pressure to participate in emperor worship and pagan religious practices. Refusal meant economic hardship, social ostracism, and potential martyrdom. Understanding this context illuminates Revelation's encouragement to faithful endurance.

The apocalyptic genre was familiar to first-century Jewish and Christian readers. Rather than newspaper-style predictions, apocalyptic literature uses symbolic imagery to reveal spiritual realities behind earthly events, encourage the faithful, warn the unfaithful, and assert God's ultimate sovereignty over history. Parallels with Daniel, Ezekiel, and intertestamental apocalyptic writings would help original readers decode the symbols.

Rome's imperial cult demanded worship of Caesar as divine, placing Christians in impossible situations—compromise their faith or face persecution. Revelation identifies Rome as "Babylon" and assures believers that despite appearances, the Lamb conquered through His death and resurrection, and all earthly kingdoms will submit to His reign.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 11:3 reveal God's character, particularly His sovereignty, holiness, and justice?
2. What specific encouragement or warning does this verse offer for maintaining faithful Christian witness amid cultural pressure?

3. How does this passage point to Christ's victory and the hope of new creation, and how should that shape your present priorities?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	δώσω	τοῖς	δυσὶν	μάρτυσιν	μου	καὶ
And	I will give	G3588	two	witnesses	power unto my	And
G2532	G1325		G1417	G3144	G3450	G2532
προφητεύουσιν	ἡμέρας	χιλίας	διακοσίας	ἑξήκοντα		
they shall prophesy	days	a thousand	two hundred	and threescore		
G4395	G2250	G5507	G1250	G1835		
περιβεβλημένοι	σάκκους					
clothed in	sackcloth					
G4016	G4526					

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 12:6 (Parallel theme): And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

Revelation 11:2 (Parallel theme): But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

Revelation 13:5 (Parallel theme): And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

Deuteronomy 19:15 (Witness): One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

Isaiah 22:12 (Parallel theme): And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth:

Acts 1:8 (Witness): But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 13:31 (Witness): And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

Matthew 18:16 (Witness): But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

Genesis 37:34 (Parallel theme): And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

Luke 24:48 (Witness): And ye are witnesses of these things.

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