

Revelation Ch. 11: The Two Witnesses and Seventh Trumpet

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We will see in this chapter the third and final woe that pictures the fall of Jerusalem (11:14). At this point the seventh trumpet sounds (11:15), which would signify the completion of the mystery of God (10:7). After taking a step back (Ch. 12-13), later chapters go into more detail into this final sequence of events that depict the wrath of God being completely poured out (15:1).

Verse 1

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.”

We have previously seen visions and descriptions of the temple of God, and have connected those with the church (3:12; 7:15). If this is the same temple as mentioned later (11:19), then this certainly must be the case. But why would it be measured? Perhaps this ties in with the letters to the churches (Ch. 2-3). At some point God would check to see, of those who claim to be Christians, who measures up to His standard (His word, Jn. 12:48; 17:17; Rev. 2:16), and then provide them with the seal of protection (cf. 7:1-3). Those who live according to God's measure are the true Israel (Gal. 6:16).

We later see the New Jerusalem measured with a golden reed (21:15-16), which carries a similar idea in that there is a standard of measure that one must live by in order to be part of the city of God. It has boundaries. It is not open to anyone who behaves in any manner they choose, but has limits (21:27; cf. Ezek. 44:5).

Since this temple is closely related with the “holy city” that would be trodden by the Gentiles (11:2), which is clearly identified as physical Jerusalem (11:8), this temple could also represent the physical temple in Jerusalem, and those who worship there, the physical Jews. This is contrasted with God's true temple (11:19). If this is the physical temple, the distinction between those who worship in the temple and those outside could be the difference between Jews who actually practiced Judaism, and the seditious who had forsaken all temple service (Josephus, Wars 6.2.1-3).

Along these lines, the temple itself is being measured and prepared for destruction. Though the Romans finished the job, Josephus records that the fall of the temple was initiated by Jews themselves (Josephus, Wars 4.3.6-10; 6.2.9; 6.4.5). In pleading for their surrender, Titus told the Jews that “you have set fire to your holy house with your own hands” (Wars 6.6.2). Josephus even says that Titus debated destroying the temple, though the zeal of his soldiers caused it to be completely burnt down (Wars 6.2.3; 6.4.3; 6.4.7).

Whether the temple here is the physical one measured for destruction, and ultimately destroyed, or the spiritual one in which tares were separated from wheat (7:1-3; 14:14-20), this is a picture of determining who measures up to God's standard. Those who did not face the consequences (Matt. 23:32-39).

Just as old Jerusalem was prepared for destruction, the new was prepared for glory (19:7; 21:2; Lk. 1:17; Heb. 11:16; cf. Ezek. 40-44; Zech. 2).

Verse 2

“But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.”

Regardless of the exact meaning of the temple, those found outside would be given over to the Gentiles. If the temple does symbolize the church, then those outside would not be protected (cf. 7:1-3). Those who claimed to be Christians and were not would be punished (Ch. 2-3), and the Jews who were beyond repentance would suffer.

The identity of the holy city is clear. In the Bible, the holy city is always Jerusalem (Neh. 11:1; Isa. 52:1; Dan. 9:24; Matt. 4:5; Matt. 27:53). In the book of Revelation, it is used to refer to both apostate, physical Jerusalem and righteous, spiritual New Jerusalem. Both are also called “the great city” (11:8; 14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10; 18:18; 21:2, 10; 22:19). In this case we are dealing with physical Jerusalem, the city where Jesus was crucified (11:8), in which a tenth would fall by a figurative earthquake (11:13), and would be trodden by the Gentiles, the Roman army (Lk. 21:24). It cannot be the spiritual New Jerusalem, the church, because it and everything outside the temple had been *given* to the Gentiles, and left for dead. Furthermore, God's people would be nourished during this time (12:6, 14).

The 42 months correspond to 3 ½ years, which matches Daniel's “time, times, and a half a time” (Dan. 12:7; cf. Rev. 12:6, 14; 13:5). The number 3 ½ was a symbol of trial and tribulation, but it is also worth pointing out that the bulk of the Roman-Jewish War lasted about this long (from the official beginning to the fall of Jerusalem, Spring 67 – Summer 70 AD).

Verses 3-4

“And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.

It should be noted that 1260 days is equivalent to 42 months, and so the same period of time is in view.

The two witnesses are described as the two olive trees, which are not mentioned elsewhere in Revelation, but can be found in the Old Testament. They are described as “the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth” (Zech. 4:11-14). In the same context, note also that the olive trees were the source of light for the seven lamps, which we identified previously as the Holy Spirit, “the eyes of the Lord that scan to and fro throughout the whole earth” (Zech. 4:10; Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:6).

Given the connection between these witnesses and the Holy Spirit, it is reasonable to conclude that these symbolize the word of God delivered by the Spirit, as spoken through men chosen by God (2 Pet. 1:20, 21; cf. Ps. 119:130; Jn. 16:13; Heb. 4:12, 13).

The reference to the “two anointed ones” by Zechariah (Zech. 4:14) likely symbolizes the authority of God's word. Prophets (1 Chr. 16:22), priests (Ex. 30:30), and kings (1 Sam. 15:1) were all anointed positions of authority. While Jesus is “The Anointed” (Messiah); a Prophet, Priest, and King; the greatest of all with all authority (Heb. 1:9; cf. Matt. 28:18; Acts 3:22; Heb. 3:1; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16), the symbols that follow remind us of Moses and Elijah, both prophets (Deut. 34:10; 1 Kings 18:22), who have elsewhere been shown as standing before the Lord (11:6; cf. Matt. 17:1-5).

Given the allusion to Moses and Elijah, it seems most likely that these witnesses represent the word of God as written in the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). In fact, these are described in the New Testament as witnesses to the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:21; cf. Acts 26:22; 28:23). They are

standing because their message is firmly established (cf. Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1).

The two lampstands are not mentioned by Zechariah, but we find them in Revelation as symbols for the church (1:12, 20). During the early stages of the church, the Old Testament was the only Scripture available, and so the Law and the Prophets were used by the church to validate the things concerning Jesus (Matt. 5:17; Jn. 1:45; Acts 3:22-26; 17:11; 28:23; Heb. 10:1). In this sense they were holding up the message of the True Light (Jn. 1:9), as were the churches, and can also be identified as lampstands.

The mention of both olive trees and lampstands may also signify the transition of the Law and the Prophets from being authoritative and in practice, to being for reference and learning (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6; Gal. 3:24, 25; Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:15; Heb. 8:13).

The Law and the Prophets were witnesses, in that they testified of all events of the first century. It was they who first prophesied, not only of Jesus (see above), but also of the end of the nation of Israel (Dan. 9:24-27; 12:1-13; Matt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14; Lk. 21:22; Rev. 10:7). They were mourning (sackcloth, cf. Gen. 37:34), because the very people who claimed to follow them, were in actuality rejecting their message and bringing destruction upon themselves. They were preached by God's faithful servants as a final message of warning before the fall of Jerusalem.

Verse 5

And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner.

This symbolizes God protecting His word and validating what He has said. In a very real sense, fire consumed the enemies of God during the time of Moses, when the people complained and rebelled against him (Num. 11:1-4; 16:23-35), and also Elijah, when he dealt with false gods (1 Kings 18; 2 Kings 1:5-17). This time, it was the Jews themselves rising against the words of their own law, and they would certainly pay for it (cf. Jer. 5:14). This is emphasizing the fact that they had brought these calamities upon themselves (Matt. 23; Heb. 2:1-3; 10:29-31; cf. Josephus, Wars 5.10.4).

Verse 6

These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

Elijah had the power to shut heaven (1 Kings 17:1-7; Jas. 5:17-18), and Moses to turn waters into blood and strike the earth with plagues (Ex. 4-12; Deut. 28:58-68). This is a clear picture of the Jews outright rejecting the word of God, as did Egypt, and the Israel of old. They were paying the price as witnessed by their own Law and Prophets.

Verse 7

When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.

The fact that the witnesses finished their testimony means their message of warning had come to an end. In other words, it was time for the Law and Prophets to vanish away (Heb. 8:13; Matt. 5:17, 18; Lk. 21:22; others above; cf. Matt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7). Though Jesus had rendered them obsolete and nailed them to the cross at His death in 30 AD (Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:15), they had prophecies yet to be fulfilled, and were still practiced until just before the temple was destroyed (cf. Acts 21:20-26; Heb. 8:13; Josephus, Wars 6.2.1).

The beast represents the Roman Empire, which will be described later (Ch. 13). Though this may seem like a picture of the Roman persecution of the messengers of warning, the Christians (13:7), it is in this context the message itself that is “killed,” not the messengers. It is the Romans that cause the Law and Prophets to be completely done away (Heb. 8:13) by destroying the temple and Jerusalem, fulfilling the days of vengeance (Lk. 21:20-22). The Old Testament was a great mystery that was once hidden, but has now been completely revealed (Rom. 16:25, 26; Rev. 10:7).

With the temple gone and the genealogical records destroyed, the Law and the Prophets were “dead,” never to be practiced again.

Verse 8

And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

Sodom and Egypt were two nations punished by God for their wickedness (Gen. 19; Ex. 7-12). Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified (Matt. 27:33-35; Mk. 15:22-41; Lk. 23:33), was now under the same condemnation (cf. Ex. 15:26). Spiritually, it is likened to that of these wicked nations (Sodom; cf. Deut. 32:32; Isa. 1:9, 10; Ezek. 16:44-49; Josephus, Wars 5.13.6; Egypt; Ezek. 23), because they had rejected God (Matt. 23:29-39; Lk. 11:47-51; Acts 7:52-60). This “great city” is later identified as a spiritual Babylon (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:1-24).

The reference to their dead bodies lying in the street ties in well with the fact that “all the righteous blood shed on the earth” would be required of Jerusalem (Matt. 23:35; Rev. 18:24). Josephus paints a vivid picture of this in the way the seditious Jews treated their own people during this time (Josephus, Wars 4.6.3; 5.1.3, 5; 6.2.3; 6.4.6).

Verse 9

Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves.

The Roman Army was composed of people from all over the world, and while they were laying siege to the city, the dead bodies continued to pile up (see above). From their perspective, so also were the Law and the Prophets figuratively lying just as those were who claimed to live by them.

This symbolizes not only the brutality of the Romans, but the attitude the rebellious Jews held toward their own laws, as they had no courtesy as to even attempt to bury their own dead. Josephus records that the Romans were indignant at the Jews for the “impiety in regard to their own religious customs” (Wars 6.2.3).

Verse 10

And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

The Jews, by virtue of their law, were distinct from other peoples, and were considered troublesome (cf. 1 Kings 18:17). When King Agrippa addressed the Jews and advised against war, he said “You are the only people who think it a disgrace to be servants to those to whom all the world hath submitted” (Josephus, Wars 2.16.4). Their demise was cause for celebration by all who submitted to Rome.

This idea also holds true of the hatred the people of the world have for the church and its message (Matt. 10:22; 24:9; Mk. 13:13; Lk. 21:17; Acts 17:6). Satan probably thought that with the fall of Jerusalem, he was also going to put an end to Christianity (cf. 12:17; 13:5-8). He was wrong (11:15; Matt. 16:18).

Verses 11-12

Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. The Law and Prophets figuratively ascended back from whence they came. The old law had served its purpose (Gal. 3:24, 25), and now went back home. Though it served its purpose as a law, and its prophecies have been fulfilled (10:7; Matt. 5:17, 18; Lk. 21:22; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14-17), it is a valuable learning tool for us today (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). Its physical rituals can never again be practiced, but its spiritual principles abide.

The 3 ½ days may symbolize the duration of the temple burning (Josephus, Wars 6.4.5-8), tying in with the next verse. The fact that their enemies saw them may indicate that even those who opposed the Jews realized that this judgment was from God, and that the testimony of the church was true. This resurrection symbolizes the validation of that testimony (cf. Rom. 1:4).

Verse 13

In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. This may symbolize the fall of the temple, which was a small part of the city. It was actually very close to one tenth of the city area (Ogden, p. 256). Josephus gives a detailed account of the temple burning, and estimates 10,000 were killed (Wars 6.5.1). It is likely that the 7,000 here is meant to be a complete representation of the many thousands that were slain.

Verse 14

The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

The first woe was the seditious Jews devouring their own people (9:1-12), and this second woe was the full unleashing of Roman power in laying siege to Jerusalem (9:13-11:13) and burning the temple (Josephus, Wars 6.4.1-8). It was now time for the city itself to be completely wiped out, which is implied here (cf. 10:7; 11:15), but described in more detail later (Ch. 18).

Chapters 6-11 describe how judgment would be carried out as prescribed from heaven, whereas Chapters 12-18 look at these events from another perspective, and detail how God's wrath was completely poured out, and judgment executed on the earth.

Verse 15

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

God has once again accomplished His will through the kingdoms of men, just as He had done with Assyria and Babylon (Dan. 4:17; Isa. 10:5-7; Hab. 1:5-6). Christ and Christianity reign supreme, and nothing will stand in the way (Dan. 2:44; Matt. 16:18).

Verses 16-18

And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God saying: “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.”

The elders, as God's faithful leaders, give thanks to God on behalf of all the righteous for avenging His people (6:10; 18:20; 19:1, 2). The nations were angry (either Romans against the Jews, 17:16; cf. Jer. 51:7; or those against Christ, Ps. 2; Acts 4:26), His wrath has come (6:17), and the spiritually dead have been judged (cf. Dan. 12; Heb. 10:30, 31; 1 Pet. 4:5-7). In doing so, He has also judged the plea of the righteous dead (6:10), and His servants and prophets have been rewarded by being avenged (Matt. 23:35; Rev. 18:24; 22:12).

Verse 19

Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

It is finished! (16:17-21) It is not the case that the spiritual temple of God was closed, but that it was now glorified (15:5; cf. Ch. 21). God does not dwell in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48; 17:24), but in heaven (14:17; 16:17), and His true temple, the church (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 6:16; Col. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:13; Rev. 3:12; 7:15; 21:3). The only temple and ark of God that exist today are the spiritual realities of what was foreshadowed in the Old Testament (cf. Heb. 9-10). This is a symbol of the presence of God in heaven and among His people (cf. Ex. 25:22; Heb. 9), as He repays the wicked (18:20).

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