

Valley Bible Church – Book of Revelation

The Two Witnesses

Revelation 11:1-14

The Temple Measurement: (11:1-2)

Here in chapter 11 the second interlude between the 6th and 7th trumpet judgments continues. Once again John is an active participant in this vision. In fact this is a continuation of the action in chapter 10. In chapter 10 John saw the appearance of a strong angel. This angel makes a solemn announcement that there will be delay no longer in the unfolding of God's judgment upon the earth. After that announcement, John was instructed to take a little scroll out of the angel's hand and eat it. The eating of the scroll was symbolic of a re-commissioning of the apostle to continue to prophesy. It is at this point that John is given further instruction.

The Instrument for Measuring:

John is first given a *measuring rod like a staff*. "The term *kalamos* is an old word referring to a growing reed which grew in immense brakes in the Jordan River Valley reaching heights of 15 to 20 feet."³⁰⁹ "The plant was of a hollow stalk and because of its light weight was used often as a measuring stick. It was used too as a writer's reed (cf. 3 John 13) and as a walking staff (cf. Ezekiel 29:6; Mark 6:8)."³¹⁰ "In Ezekiel's vision, an angel used such a rod to measure the millennial temple (Ezek. 40:3-43:17)." John was given this measuring rod and then instructed to measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.

The Objects to be Measured:

The objects to be measured must be understood as literally as possible. They do not represent the church in any way as some commentators suggest. The terminology is literal as the text says John was to measure the temple, the altar and those who worship in it.

The Temple:

"*Naos* (temple) does not refer to the entire temple complex, but to the inner temple, made up of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies." (see map inserts) The term *naos* (temple) is used of the temple edifice itself, where the term *hieron* (temple) is used of the entire temple complex. So John was to measure the temple edifice not the entire temple complex. The mention of the temple here is significant in that it further demonstrates that during the Tribulation period under the protection of the Antichrist (cf. Daniel 9:24-27), the Israelites will be able to rebuild the Temple and restore the sacrificial system before the mid-point of the Tribulation. This is supported by other mentions of the temple such as in (Matthew 24:15 and 2 Thessalonians 2:4) where the Antichrist desecrates the temple (The Abomination of Desolation) half way through the Tribulation Period.

The Altar:

Because of the later reference to the worshipers, this altar cannot be identified as the altar of incense, which is located in the holy place. It must be the bronze altar in the courtyard just outside the inner sanctuary. This altar is often referred to as the altar of burnt offerings. (see map inserts)

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Those Who Worship in it:

"The worshipers spoken of are doubtless the people allotted to the courts directly in front of the altar. These are Israelite worshippers, the godly remnant of Israel. The courts directly in front of the altar were allowed to the worshippers (i.e. the courts of the Israelites or men's courts, and the women's court). The court of the Gentiles was not included." "The phrase in it means in connection with it referring to the altar. When incense was burning on the altar, all the worshipers bowed in connection with it and they worshipped in prayer." "The point is that these worshipers depict a remnant of believing Jews alive during the Tribulation who are worshipping God."

The Omission from the Measurement:

There was a significant omission from John's measurements. He was instructed to *leave out the court which is outside the temple and not to measure it*. This is a reference to the outer court of the Gentiles. This is located outside the court, which contained the brazen altar. There was a marked boundary, which Gentiles were forbidden to cross over. (see map inserts) "In New Testament times, the Romans had given the Jews the right to execute any Gentile who went beyond the court of the Gentiles. For a Gentile to do so was to defile the temple. In fact, it was the false charge that Paul had brought Gentiles into the temple that sparked the riot that led to his arrest and imprisonment (Acts 21:27-29)." It is important to note that there is a distinction being made here between the believing Jews and the unbelieving Gentiles. The reason for this omission is that this court had been given to the nations (Gentiles) and these Gentiles will tread under foot the holy city for 42 months. The holy city is a reference to Jerusalem. "*To tread under foot (patesousin)* gives the idea of trampling down with contempt as conquerors. It conveys the idea of defilement and domination." "Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome all oppressed Jerusalem in ancient times (cf. 2 Kings 25:8-10; Psalms 79:1; Isaiah 63:18; Lamentations 1:10). In more modern times the Turks, British and Arabs have ruled over Jerusalem. This verse refers to the future devastating destruction and oppression of Jerusalem by the forces of Antichrist." The 42 months is equal to 1260 days and 3 ½ years. It refers to the 2nd half of the Tribulation Period known as The Great Tribulation. At the mid-point of the Tribulation the Antichrist will break his covenant with Israel, enter into the Temple and proclaim himself as God (the Abomination of Desolation), and defile, dominate and oppress Jerusalem for the remaining 3 1/2 years.

The Significance of the Measurement:

It is important that this act of measuring the Temple as John is instructed here in this vision is a symbolic act. It is an act that John actually takes part in, but it is none the less symbolic. John Walvoord says, "The act of measuring appears to be an indication of possession, that which belongs to God in some special way. God is seen to be somewhat evaluating His property." John MacArthur says, "John's measuring is to be understood as signifying ownership, defining the parameters of God's possessions (cf. 21:15; Zech. 2:1-5). It is best to see it as God's measuring off Israel, symbolized by her temple, for salvation and for His special protection, preservation, and favor. The prophecies yet to be given to John will thus distinguish between God's favor toward Israel and His wrath on the pagan world." While this act of measuring seems to be somewhat difficult to understand, it does seem to signify God's protection or preservation of Israel and make a clear distinction between the believing remnant of Israel and the unbelieving world. Israel does have a future and is a specific part of God's unfolding plan during the Tribulation.

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The Two Messengers: (11:3-14)

Their Ministry:

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: Here in the book of Revelation the term *prophesy* carries both the notion of foretelling as well as forthtelling. 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."

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 1/2 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 1/2 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).

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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:

1) 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 lampstands?

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 lampstand) with seven lamps, flanked by two olive trees yielding golden oil for the lamps.

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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 "lampstands," 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:

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 _ 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 _ year world-wide drought, crops will wither away, animal and plant life will die and their 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 _ year drought will cause extreme torment for the people on the earth and they will seek any means possible to destroy the two messengers.

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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 (see chart). 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:

The completion of their ministry: The first part of verse 7 indicates that the following events occur after the 3 1/2 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."

The identity of the beast: At this point the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with the two messengers and kill them. **Who is the beast?** This is the first of 36 references to the beast in the book of Revelation. The identification of the beast usually falls into three different categories. One is that the beast represents the whole of an anti-Christian power in the world. So the beast is symbolic of an evil force in the world. Some who hold that Revelation represents past historical events would see this as the Roman Empire during New Testament times. Others identify the beast as Satan himself. The problem with this view is the further revelation about the beast given in chapter 13. The dragon in chapter 12 understood as Satan gives this beast his power, authority, and throne (Revelation 13:2). "The revelation about him in chapter 13 indicates that the beast is a world ruler who imitates the true Christ, rules over the people of the world, and demands their worship (Revelation 13:1-8)." The beast is none other than the Antichrist. This beast comes up out of the abyss. The abyss as mentioned in 9:1-2 is the prison of certain demons. The phrase *comes up out of the abyss* likely "reflects the demonic character and origin of the Antichrist." "Though he is a man, the beast is energized by the demonic presence and power coming up from the abyss."

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.

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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 1/2 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 1/2 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:

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 1/2 days after their death. This is obviously the same 3 1/2 days that their bodies will be laying in the street. They will be killed, their dead bodies will lay in the street for 3 1/2 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.

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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).

The concluding events: In that same hour there was a *megas seismos* (great earthquake). This almost seems to be in connection with the ascension of the two witnesses. In that hour could mean "simultaneous with" or "slightly there after". Whatever the case it was at least within an hour of their ascension. This was not just an earthquake it was a mega-quake. This quake in Jerusalem will be big enough to destroy a tenth of the city. Those who have been in California in recent years for some of our larger quakes have seen nothing in comparison with this mega-quake in Jerusalem. Not only will a tenth of Jerusalem be destroyed, but 7,000 people will be killed as a result of the earthquake. It will be a devastating event for the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. Those who will not be killed by this great quake will be so terrified that they will give glory to God. It appears that this could possibly refer to a genuine turning from apostasy in repentance and giving praise to God. It could be that these Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem are part of the 144,000 Jewish believers and they come to faith in Christ as a result of the ministry of the two witnesses, seeing their death, resurrection and ascension and lastly by the great earthquake. John MacArthur says, "The rest must refer to inhabitants of Jerusalem, Jews who come to faith in Christ. Supporting that interpretation is the fact that giving glory to the God of heaven is a mark of genuine repentance in Revelation and elsewhere in Scripture (cf. 4:9; 14:7; 16:9; 19:7; Luke 17:18-19; Romans 4:20)." It is noteworthy as well that the reaction of these people in Jerusalem is opposite to the response of mankind recorded in 9:20-21 after the 5th and 6th trumpet judgments. If this is genuine repentance then this interlude ends on somewhat of a positive note. It is at this point that John concludes this interlude with a warning. The warning is that the first two woes (the 5th and 6th trumpet judgments) have passed, yet the 3rd woe is coming quickly. "*Tachu* (quickly) means "soon" (cf. Rev. 2:16; 3:11; 22:7,12,20) and expresses the imminency of the last woe, which is the seven bowl judgments ushered in by the sounding of the seventh trumpet." This statement of warning serves as a conclusion to the interlude in chapters 10 and 11. It brings the reader back to the outpouring of the trumpet judgments upon the earth and reminds us that we have been in between the 6th and 7th trumpet judgments.