

THE TWO WITNESSES REV 11

Read Revelation 11:1-19 (NIV)

****What Scholars Say****

An amazing variation of interpretations of this portion of Scripture have been offered. Some say this chapter is one of the most difficult in the whole book of Revelation. The best guideline to follow in interpreting this section is to take each fact literally. In line with this principle there will be a literal temple. The city should be considered the literal city Jerusalem. The time periods of 42 months (v. 2) and three and one-half days (vv. 9,11) again should be considered literally. The earthquake will kill literally 7,000 individuals, and the two witnesses should be considered as two individual men.

REV 11:[1] I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. [2] But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.

THE MEASURING OF THE TEMPLE

Rev. 11:1-2. John was given a reed, a lightweight rod, to be used as a measuring instrument. John was instructed to **measure the temple and the altar** but not **the outer court**, meaning he was to measure the holy place and the holy of holies. While others could come into the outer court, only priests could enter into those two temple rooms. The explanation was given that this would be under the control of **the Gentiles** who would **trample on the holy city for 42 months**.

Why should John measure the temple? Measurement is usually taken of one's possessions, and the temple belonged to God. In a similar way the temple of Ezekiel 40 was measured and the New Jerusalem was measured (Rev 21:15-17).

John was also instructed to count the worshipers who came to the temple. Here the thought seems to be that God will evaluate both the temple and those in it.

Though Jews may possess Jerusalem temporarily, as they have in this century, they will lose possession for 42 months. The context indicates that this is the period when Gentiles will tread down the Holy City, implying ill treatment of God's people and desecration of the temple.

Rev. 11: [3] And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." [4] These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before the Lord of the earth. [5] If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. [6] These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

THE MINISTRY OF THE TWO WITNESSES

Rev. 11:3-6. It was revealed to John that the **two witnesses** would be empowered by God to serve as prophets for 1,260 days or 42 months. They would be **clothed in sackcloth** and would be called **two olive trees** and **two lamp stands**.

Numerous and varied interpretations have been given concerning the two witnesses. Some have suggested that they are not literal individuals. However, in view of the fact that they die and are resurrected, the implication is that they are actual people.

A common interpretation is that they are Moses and Elijah because the judgments inflicted by Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament are similar to those of these two witnesses (Rev.11:5-6). Further support is given the identification of Elijah because of the prediction (Mal 4:5) that he will appear "before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes." Christ said this prophecy of Elijah was partially fulfilled in His lifetime through the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13; cf. Luke 1:17). And both Moses and Elijah were involved in the transfiguration (Matt 17:3), which anticipated the Second Coming.

The description of the two witnesses as olive trees and lamp stands has an Old Testament background (Zech 4:2-14). The two witnesses in this passage were Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor. Their connection to the lamp-stands was that they were empowered by the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the olive oil. In a similar way the two witnesses of Rev 11 will be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Like other Old Testament prophets the two witnesses will be able to do supernatural miracles, and fire will destroy those who will try to harm them (Rev 11:5). Like Elijah they will have power to stop rain, and will have power like Moses to turn water into blood and to bring on plagues (Rev. 11:6). In the midst of the unbelief, apostasy, and satanic power these two witnesses will be a threat to the entire wicked world for a literal period of 1,260 days.

REV 11:[7] Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. [8] Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. [9] For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. [10] The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

THE DEATH OF THE TWO WITNESSES

Rev. 11:7-10. With the ministry of the two witnesses ended, God permitted the beast that comes up from the Abyss (Cf. 9:1-2,11; 17:8; 20:1,3) to overcome them.

The beast is mentioned nine other times in Revelation (13:1; 14:9,11; 15:2; 16:2; 17:3,13; 19:20; 20:10).

After the witnesses were killed, their bodies were left unburied in Jerusalem, figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, because of the people's apostasy and rejection of God.

For three and one-half days the whole world gloated over their dead bodies. This implies some worldwide display, now made possible by television and the internet. Their deaths were considered a great victory for the world ruler and Satan, and were celebrated by people sending each other gifts.

REV 11:[11] But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. [12] Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE TWO WITNESSES

Rev. 11:11-12. After three and one-half days in the street, suddenly the two witnesses were resurrected and **stood on their feet**. They responded to the invitation, **Come up here**, and **went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on** with great fear.

REV 11:[13] At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

REV 11:[14] The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

THE RESULTING JUDGMENT

Rev. 11:13-14. At the same moment an **earthquake** occurred in Jerusalem with a **10th of the city** collapsing and **7,000 people were killed**. In contrast with previous judgments where revolt and rebellion against God continued, **the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven**. The **second woe** ended, leaving only the seventh trumpet, the final and **third woe** to come.

REV 11:[15] The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever."

THE SOUNDING OF THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

Rev. 11:15. Though the full results from the sounding of **the seventh...trumpet** are only introduced here and not brought to finality (as they will be in chap, 16), the introduction of the seventh trumpet itself is dramatic. As the trumpet sounded, voices were heard in heaven: ***The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.*** (see other predictions of the earthly kingdom of Christ in Ezek 21:26-27; Dan 2:35,44; 4:3; 6:26; 7:14,26-27; Zech 14:9.) The fact that this will be fulfilled at the Second Coming makes it clear that the period of the seventh trumpet chronologically reaches to Christ's return. Therefore the seventh trumpet introduces and includes the seven bowl judgments of the wrath of God revealed in chapter 16. In contrast with previous trumpets where a single voice was heard, here a mighty chorus from heaven joined in the proclamation.

REV 11:[16] And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, [17] saying:

*"We give thanks to You, Lord God Almighty,
the One who is and who was,
because You have taken Your great power
and have begun to reign.*

*REV 11:[18] The nations were angry;
and Your wrath has come.
The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding Your servants the prophets
and Your saints and those who reverence Your name,
both small and great--
and for destroying those who destroy the earth."*

Rev. 11:16-18. After this announcement, the **24 elders who were seated on their thrones before God**, were seen by John as falling **on their faces** to worship **God**. Their song of praise indicates that the time had come for God to judge **the nations**, to judge **the dead**, and to reward God's **servants the prophets** and His **saints**.

God was described as the **Almighty**, eternal, and possessing **great power**. In general their hymn of praise anticipates the second coming of Christ and the establishment of His rule and reign on this earth.

REV 11:[19] Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within His temple was seen the ark of His covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

Rev.11:19. The chapter closes with this: John wrote, **Then God's temple in heaven was opened**. At the same time John was able to look into the **temple** where he saw **the ark of His covenant**. This refers to the heavenly temple rather than to a temple on earth. The corresponding results of what John saw included **lightning...thunder, an earthquake, and a great hailstorm** (Cf. 8:5).

Chronologically the time is close to Christ's return.

****My Thoughts****

This letter had to have some meaning to the saints John was writing to in his day. We often dispensationalize the passage to only apply to future events.

John was a prisoner on the island of Patmos for his testimony concerning Jesus the Christ. He was a prisoner of Rome. If John wanted to encourage the witnessing saints who were being persecuted and martyred he will of course use symbolic language in protecting this letter and at the same time give points of encouragement to the faithful.

I will give power to my witnesses ... v.3

If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. v. 5

These men have power ...during the time they are prophesying... v. 6 Miracles are following the preaching of God's Word.

Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. v. 7

Their bodies will lie in the street ...v.8

The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. v. 10

[11] But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. [12] Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on. vv. 11-12

At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. v. 13

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." v. 15

REV 11:[16] And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, [17] saying:

"We give thanks to You, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.

The message of Revelation must serve the people of John's day, the people of our time, and for the saints in the future. Interpretations vary, but God's truth remains forever.

****Questions****

1. What was John given? (11:1)
2. What was John told to do with the object he had been given? (11:1)
3. What was John told to count? (11:1)
4. What part of the temple was John to exclude from his "fact-finding mission"? (11:2)
5. What important "end times" individuals are mentioned in this passage and what will be their mission? (11:3-6)
6. What special protection will be given the ones called the "two olive trees and the two lamp stands"? (11:4-5)
7. What supernatural powers will the two witnesses possess? (11:6)
8. What will happen to the two witnesses when they have finished their God-ordained ministry? (11:7)
9. How will the two witnesses die? (11:7)
10. What will take place in the three and a half days after the two witnesses die? (11:8-10)
11. In John's vision, what happened three and half days after the two witnesses were killed by the beast? (11:11-12)
12. What catastrophic events will follow the two witnesses? (11:13)
13. What do the events in this passage tell us about the world?
14. What encouragement for Christians today does the story of the two witnesses offer?
15. What did John observe? (11:15)
16. What did John hear? (11:15)
17. What did the voices say about the world? (11:15)
18. What did the voices say about the reign of Christ? (11:15)
19. What group of people in addition to John heard the heavenly voices? (11:16)
20. Where were the twenty-four elders seated? (11:16)

21. How did the twenty-four elders respond in the wake of the message of the heavenly voices? (11:16)
22. How did the elders describe "the Lord God Almighty"? (11:17)
23. Why were the elders thankful to God? (11:17)
24. How did the elders describe the nations of the world? (11:18)
25. In the elders' prayer, what "time has come"? (11:18)
26. Who did the elders describe as deserving a reward? (11:18)
27. Who did the elders describe as deserving destruction? (11:18)
28. What happened in the heavenly temple of God after the prayer of the elders? (11:19)
29. What spectacular phenomena accompanied the opening of the temple? (11:19)
30. How is the promise that God will reign over the earth significant to you?
31. What does it say to us that even angels with awesome power and beauty and elders with great heavenly position worship God in total humility?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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