

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 11

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A. General Description:

This vision is given in anticipation of a major construction project during the Tribulation—the building of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4). Reference is made to the Gentile domination (cf. Dan. 8:9–14; Luke 21:24). To measure the temple and its worshipers (11:1) is to claim sovereign ownership and protection of them. Similar measurements take place in Ezekiel 40:5–43:17; Zechariah 2:1–13; and Revelation 21:15–17. [1]

The months and days mentioned in 11:2–3 may refer to the last three and a half years of the Tribulation. It is during the last half of the Tribulation that the Antichrist will overthrow Jewish worship and establish his own (cf. Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:4). The “beast” (11:7) refers to the antichrist (cf. 13:1). The names “Sodom and Egypt” (11:8) are used to refer to Jerusalem and suggest the spiritual condition of that city. God’s overall sovereignty is designed to encourage the readers as they go through their own tribulations. [2]

Revelation 11:18 records different aspects of judgment based upon Christ taking His dominion over the nations. The wicked dead will be judged (cf. 20:11–15); the prophets and Old Testament saints will be rewarded (cf. 20:4–6); and the destroyers of the earth will be destroyed (cf. 19:19–21). [3]

The message is one of judgment on those who reject the persevering witness of Christians and who persecute them. This message is secondarily included in the introduction of ch. 10 is now the central focus. The judgment is the first explicit answer to the saints’ prayer for vindication and retribution against their antagonists (in

development of 6:9–11; 8:3–5; 9:13). This explicitly expresses what the trumpets imply. We have argued that the events of 11:1–13 occur during the same time as the first six trumpets (see pp. 108–51 and 520–22 above). [4]

B. Background Information:

1. Now, after the sixth trumpet, these servants are presented as two new figures—worshippers and witnesses. John, like Ezekiel (Ezek. 8:1–11:25), receives a vision of worshipers in the temple in the “holy city” (cf. Isa. 52:1). While Ezekiel’s worshipers are marked for destruction because of their idolatry, John’s are preserved because they measure up to the divine standard. Reeds were commonly used as measuring rods in biblical times. They grew along rivers and in marshy areas in Palestine and Egypt, often to heights of twenty feet with a stem up to three inches in diameter. Reeds were either three or six-long cubits (approximately five or ten feet) for regular construction purposes. Ezekiel used a rod six cubits long to measure the new temple that he saw in his vision (Ezek. 40:3, 5). John is now instructed to perform a similar prophetic act. Still, unlike Ezekiel’s vision, few details are given. [5]

2. The best guideline for interpreting this section is to take each fact literally. In line with this principle, a literal temple will exist during the Great Tribulation. The city should be considered the literal city of Jerusalem in keeping with its identification in 11:8. 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 7,000 individuals, and the two witnesses should be considered two men. [6]

a. The New Testament speaks of the temple in three dimensions—heavenly, physical,
and spiritual—and in Revelation, John refers to the temple similarly. The heavenly temple, first mentioned in Revelation 7:15 and again in 11:19, is the heavenly reality

of which the earthly temple was only a copy (cf. Heb. 9:1–25). Paul, writing from

Ephesus, addressed the subject of the church as the spiritual temple, “Don’t you

know that you yourselves are God’s temple” (1 Cor. 3:16; cf. 6:19). Although the

temple here in Revelation 11:1 is primarily a figure for the church, there appears to

be a secondary reference to the temple still standing in Jerusalem. Historically, the

only group eligible to worship at the temple in Jerusalem were Jewish believers, and

these are numbered earlier as part of the 144,000 (Rev. 7:4–8). [7]

b. The outer court was the only court Gentiles were allowed to enter. Although the literal outer court was in ruins like the rest of the temple, the reference here seems to be to some danger, such as pagan spiritual domination over the church as Israel’s spiritual remnant (cf. 2:9; 3:9) or over the holy land or Jewish people, or to the lack of a temple; even while the temple stood, many felt that it was spiritually impure (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls). [8]

3. Its meaning is three and a half years. That is what forty-two months and twelve hundred and sixty days—by Jewish reckoning—are. A time, times, and half a time equals one year plus two years plus half a year. The phrase originates from that most terrible time in Jewish history when Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, tried to force Greek language, culture, and worship upon the Jews and was met with the most violent and stubborn resistance. The role of the martyrs was immense, but the dreadful process was finally halted by the rising of Judas Maccabaeus.[9]

4. Sackcloth was proper Old Testament apparel for mourning or repentance; the two witnesses are apparently wailing over the sins of God's people (e.g., Joel 1:13; Jon 3:6; Joseph and Asenath; clothing for prophets in Ascension of Isaiah, etc.). Two witnesses were the minimum number acceptable under Old Testament law (Deut 17:6; 19:15).[\[10\]](#)

5. The description of the two witnesses as olive trees and lampstands 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 lampstands was that they were empowered by the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the olive oil. Similarly, the two witnesses of Revelation 11 will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. [\[11\]](#)

6. Refusing to bury the dead was the most incredible cruelty one could offer throughout the ancient world (e.g., Is 5:25) and was usually a mark of grave impiety as well. [\[12\]](#)

7. As Paul contrasts the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:25–26), so Revelation may do here (the place of Jesus' crucifixion); the Old Testament prophets often compared Jerusalem or Israel with Sodom (e.g., Is 1:9–10; Jer 23:14). As Egypt had oppressed Israel, so Jerusalem's authorities had oppressed the true followers of God. [\[13\]](#)

8. Sodom and Gomorrah are the types of sin, the symbols of those who had not received strangers (cp. the story in Genesis 19:4–11) and who had turned their benefactors into slaves (Wisdom 19:14, 15). The wickedness of Jerusalem had already crucified Jesus Christ, and in the days to come, it is to regard the death of His witnesses with joy. [\[14\]](#)

9. The fact that this will be fulfilled at the Second Coming makes it clear that the period of the seventh trumpet chronologically reaches 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. [15]

10. God was described as the Almighty (*pantokratōr*; also used in 1:8; 4:8; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), eternal (who is and who was; cf. 1:8; 4:8) and possessing power (*dynamis*) (11:17). In general, their hymn of praise anticipates the second coming of Christ and the establishment of His rule on earth. [16]

11. The reference to the Ark of the Covenant is a reminder of God's special covenant with His people. Originally that covenant had been with the people of Israel, but the new covenant is with every nation who loves and believes in Jesus. Whatever the terror to come, God will not be false in His promises. [17]

[1] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). [Tyndale concise Bible commentary](#) (pp. 743–744). Tyndale House Publishers.

[2] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). [Tyndale concise Bible commentary](#) (pp. 743–744). Tyndale House Publishers.

[3] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). [Tyndale concise Bible commentary](#) (p. 744). Tyndale House Publishers.

[4] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 556). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

- [5] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, pp. 310–311). Zondervan.
- [6] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 955). Victor Books.
- [7] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 311). Zondervan.
- [8] Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 11:2). InterVarsity Press.
- [9] Barclay, W., ed. (1976). [The Revelation of John](#) (Vol. 2, p. 69). The Westminster John Knox Press.
- [10] Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 11:3). InterVarsity Press.
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- [12] Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 11:8). InterVarsity Press.
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- [14] Barclay, W., ed. (1976). [The Revelation of John](#) (Vol. 2, p. 71). The Westminster John Knox Press.
- [15] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 956–957). Victor Books.
- [16] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 957). Victor Books.
- [17] Barclay, W., ed. (1976). [The Revelation of John](#) (Vol. 2, p. 73). The Westminster John Knox Press.