

# Living Word Fellowship Church

## An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 11

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### Part II

#### A. Key Words and Apocalyptic Definitions:

1. The reed - 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. <sup>[1]</sup>

a) Measurement is usually taken of one's possessions, and the temple belonged to God. Similarly, the temple of Ezekiel 40 was measured, and the New Jerusalem was measured (Rev. 21:15–17). The temple here will be constructed so that orthodox Jews can offer sacrifices according to the Mosaic Law in the first half of the seven-year period known as Daniel's 70th week. <sup>[2]</sup>

2. The tendency of some is to spiritualize the 42-month length of the Great Tribulation, but this should be taken as a literal period, as confirmed by the 1,260 days of 11:3, which are 42 months of 30 days each. From this, it is also clear that "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24) will not end until the second coming of Christ to the earth to set up His kingdom. Though Jews may possess Jerusalem temporarily, as they have in this century, they will lose possession in the Great Tribulation. <sup>[3]</sup>

a) At the beginning of the 42-month Great Tribulation, however, the sacrifices will stop.. The temple will be desecrated and become a shrine for the world ruler of the Great Tribulation, who will put an idol in it and proclaim himself to be God (cf. Dan. 9:27; 12:11; 2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 13:14–15).<sup>[4]</sup>

3. **The temple** - John is told to take a reed and *measure the temple of God, the altar, and them that worship therein* (v. 1), which implies that there will be some kind of temple building in Jerusalem at this time. The statement is made that the holy city will be trodden underfoot for forty and two months (v. 2), a period also found in 13:5 and equal to the 1,260 days of 11:3 and 12:6. I take this to be the first half of the seven-year terminus of our age, during the last half of which the Great Tribulation will occur when Antichrist is exercising universal power.<sup>[5]</sup>

a) The measuring is best understood against the background of the temple prophecy in Ezekiel 40–48. There the sure establishment and subsequent protection of the temple are metaphorically portrayed by an angel measuring various features of the temple complex (in the LXX of this section *διαμετρέω* and *μέτρον* each occur about thirty times). In Rev. 21:15–17, also in dependence on the same Ezekiel text, an angel “measures with a reed” (*μετρέω* with *κάλαμος*, as in 11:1) “the city and its gates and its wall.” There the measuring represents the security of the city’s inhabitants against the harm and contamination of unclean and deceptive people (so 21:27). This cordoning off guarantees the protection of God’s eschatological community. This temple community will be composed of Jewish and Gentile Christians (as is evident from 3:12; 21:12–14, 24–26; 22:2). What is figuratively established by the measuring in Ezekiel and Revelation 21 is the infallible promise of God’s future presence, which will dwell forever in the midst of “a purified cult and purified community.”<sup>[6]</sup>

b) Some modified futurist perspectives relegate the narrative to the future, like view one above, but understand the descriptions figuratively. The images of the sanctuary, the altar, and the worshipers refer to those within ethnic Israel whose salvation is secured at the end of history by “measuring.” The outer court and the holy city represent Jewish unbelievers whose salvation will not be secured.

Both groups will undergo persecution and suffering for about forty-two months.<sup>[7]</sup>

#### 4. **The Altar:**

a) Literally, τὸ θυσιαστήριον can be translated as “the place of sacrifice,” which here would be the suffering covenant community. The “altar” refers to the way God’s people now worship in the community. In line with 6:9–10, it represents the sacrificial calling, which entails suffering for the faithful witness (as affirmed by 11:3–9; see on 6:9–10). The close proximity of believers to the altar in 6:9–10 implies that both in that passage and here, they are not only worshipers but also priests who have brought themselves to be sacrificed on the altar of the gospel, to which they have been called to testify. The portrayal of Christians as both temples and priests worshiping in the temple is also found in 1 Pet. 2:5. Indeed, Rev. 1:6 and 5:10 allude to the exact OT text (Exod. 19:6) as 1 Pet. 2:5 in identifying Christians as priests. How this living temple on earth in 11:1–2 relates to the other references in Revelation to the heavenly temple must be clarified in later chapters. In brief, however, Christians are members of a heavenly community-dwelling on earth.<sup>[8]</sup>

5. **Two witnesses** now appear, sent by God to prophesy to this city, though what their message is, we are not told. They are likened to the two olive trees and candlesticks (v. 4) portrayed in Zechariah 4. They are given supernatural power, such as Elijah and Moses had (1 Kgs 17:1), to slay their enemies, to cause a drought, to turn water into blood, and to smite the earth with plagues at their will (vv. 5, 6). When they have finished the work God has assigned to them, the beast that cometh up out of the abyss shall make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them (v. 7; ASV). The bodies of these two prophets are placed in the street of this city, and from all over the earth men look upon them for three days and a half day, and enter upon a time of rather universal rejoicing because these men who had tormented them are now, they think, destroyed (vv. 8-10). To the astonishment of their enemies, when three and a half days have expired, God raises them to their feet, calls them into glory, and they ascend into heaven in a cloud (vv. 11, 12).<sup>[9]</sup>

a) Whereas God's people in heaven are dressed in white clothing (Rev. 7:9, 14), the two witnesses wear sackcloth during their ministry on earth. This sackcloth is black and made from goat's hair (cf. 6:12). The Israelites put on sackcloth on the day of judgment as a sign of lament while seeking to avert God's wrath (Isa. 3:24; Jer. 4:8; Ezek. 7:18). Conversely, Daniel expressed his true repentance by fasting and covering himself with sackcloth and ashes (Dan. 9:3). The sackcloth on the two witnesses symbolizes the message of judgment that they will proclaim to the earth dwellers. [\[10\]](#)

b) 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, that is, the Antichrist, 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. [\[11\]](#)

c) In the ancient world, the failure to receive a proper burial was the greatest insult at death (cf. Ps. 79:3–4; Jer. 22:18–19). When Pompey was assassinated in Egypt following his defeat by Julius Caesar, his body was abandoned and left unburied. Roman funerary law normally forbade such care of corpses: “Whoever strips or exposes to the rays of the sun a body entrusted to permanent burial or left for a short period of time in some place commits sacrilege.”<sup>83</sup> Josephus called the Zealots barbarous and an outrage to humanity because they forbade the burial of the dead during the siege of Jerusalem and in fact killed those who attempted to bury their relatives. This ultimate indignity expresses the great anger of the earth dwellers against the two witnesses. The deaths of the witnesses provoke a great celebration in which the residents from every nation rejoice over their release from torment (Rev. 11:10). A gift exchange often accompanied public festivals in the Greco-Roman world, and such an exchange now ensues. [\[12\]](#)

d) Olive trees produced the oil used as fuel in ancient lamps (Matt. 25:3, 8). Olive oil was also a core ingredient for the special anointing oil used by the priests in worship (Ex. 30:22–33). The lampstand, or menorah, was not a typical household item, but rather was used ceremonially in Israel's worship (see comments on Rev. 1:20). Zechariah saw similar imagery in a vision and asked what the olive trees represented (Zech. 4:3, 11). An angel explained, “These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth” (4:14). The two anointed men in Zechariah's day were Zerubbabel and Joshua, who represented Israel's kingship and priesthood, respectively. This suggests that the two witnesses, while also being patterned after actual individuals, are likewise representative of New Testament spiritual realities. [\[13\]](#)

6. **The Elders:** This declaration is followed by a song of praise offered by the four and twenty elders to God the Almighty. This is the only time the elders are described as prostrating themselves before God. With the announcement that the reign of God through Christ is near at hand, we are given a graphic summary (v. 18) of the events that are about to take place: (1) the nations are wroth; that is, there will be an attempted assault upon Christ and his own; (2) the wrath of God is about to descend; (3) the dead will be judged; (4) believers, here divided into three groups—the prophets, the saints, and those that fear His name, will be rewarded; and (5) the destroyers are now to be destroyed. From this, one may conclude that as the time nears for Christ to seize His kingly authority over this earth, the hatred of earthly nations for God’s people will intensify, and opposition to the Gospel will increase. [\[14\]](#)

7. **The Seventh Trumpet and the Scene in Heaven.** *11:15-18.* As with the opening of the seventh seal, when the seventh angel sounds the seventh trumpet, no events directly follow, and no immediate judgment is announced. Rather, with the sounding of this trumpet, we have a scene in heaven and one of the grandest statements concerning Christ in all the Bible: “The kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ: and he shall reign forever and ever” (v. 15). Note the difference here between the AV translation, “the *kingdoms* of the world,” and the more accurate ASV rendering of the **kingdom**, singular, as in the Greek text. The whole world now appears under one powerful universal government. [\[15\]](#)

a) The trumpet cycle ends with the characteristic eschatological earthquake that concludes each judgment cycle. This must complete the third woe; however, there is no explicit mention in this chapter of its completion. **Although John sees the heavenly temple in several of his visions, this is the only occasion where he sees the ark of the covenant.** The ark was the central fixture in the desert tabernacle as well as in Solomon’s temple. [\[16\]](#)

· After the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., the ark and its contents, including the jar of manna, were lost. [\[17\]](#)

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