

Revelation 11 The Witnessing Church

Who knows what is on the temple mount in Jerusalem? a mosque
Is that a problem? For some Christians who are looking for a literal temple to be rebuilt, it is a problem. Perhaps Ch 11 of Revelation can help bring some perspective.

Here in ch 11 we get rest of the interlude, or we might say, intermission from ch 10.

The interlude of chapter 10 extends to the 13th verse of chapter 11. In chapter 10 we were introduced to the angel with the little scroll and in chapter 11 to the two witnesses.

Remember the bittersweet gospel from ch 10? It was bitter because of the opposition that seeks to harm or persecute believers. It is sweet because of God's spiritual protection over His people. Here in ch 11 we see the bittersweet paradox played out again.

THE LEAD:

There is a vision of the temple that is measured, i.e. **the church which is protected by God, yet it is also exposed to attack. God will protect the church spiritually even while she experiences persecution and suffering.**

The interpretation of the paragraph we are about to read is controversial. To help you cut through the thick welter of interpretations, let me begin by telling you what I think is a fair summary of the fourteen verses we are now to read. Let me paraphrase how Greg Beale summarizes these verses.

If you've been here for the previous 25 sermons and are reading along at home, you could probably give the following summary:

God wants to bring comfort to his people who are suffering threats. He wants to encourage them to remain steadfast in the faith. The Lord will protect his people as they bear witness to him. That witness is a message of salvation to those who believe and of coming judgment to those who do not. As such it provokes the opposition of the unbelieving world. That opposition in turn leads at the end to the apparent defeat of the church. But, in fact, the Lord will reward his faithful people with final and total victory. [Cf. Beale, 556]

In other words, what we have in these verses is another version of the main message of the book: trouble and tribulation await the church but so does eventual triumph. Jesus won, Jesus is winning, Jesus will win. The Lord will preserve his faithful people to ensure their vindication at the end.

This passage is thus a summons to the church to remain faithful in bearing witness to the world, no matter the opposition.

You may be thinking that Jesus through John is giving the same message over and over. In a way you would be right, but the images, symbols, and visions that are used vary from chapter to chapter as the story line intensifies. It may be too repetitive to us but put yourself in the position of the original audience and of many Christians over the past 2000 years. They can't get enough of this good news. I'll go out on a limb and say that we will have a growing appreciation of this message as our present age unfolds.

REVELATION 11 INTERLUDE 10:1-11:13

1 Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of I and the altar, and those who worship in it. 2 Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread underfoot the holy city for forty-two months.

3 And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. 6 These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

7 When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them and overcome them and kill them. 8 And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9 Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations *will* look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. 10 And those who dwell on the earth *will* rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

11 But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from I came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. 12 And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13 And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14 The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

This passage evokes Ezek, 40-48, Zech 4, Moses, Ex 7-8; Elijah 1 Kings 17, 2 King 1, Dan 7 along with Rev 5, 2, 6. 20

v. 1-2 The Measuring of the Temple

REMEMBER that this pastoral, prophetic, apocalyptic letter describes a VISION. John “saw” these things in a vision, not in real time and space – he was exiled on an island. If we forget that this is a vision, then we can get our heads spinning around trying to figure out all the details.

Taking the context of Revelation in light of the OT passages just mentioned, it seems that “measuring” the temple means to set it apart from that which is profane, or not holy. Thus separated, it is protected from harm. He is measuring the ‘temple’ and those who worship there, i.e. believers. I believe that the most biblical explanation is that John is referring to the church, not a physical temple.

The sanctuary is ‘accepted’ while those in the court are rejected, i.e. not measured.

While we don’t know the exact appearance of the “temple” that John saw, we might guess that it resembled the Herodian temple of the Jews prior to its destruction in AD 70.

He measures the holy place and altar but not the court outside – the court of the Gentiles. This outside court and even the ‘holy city’ are given over to be trampled for 42 months.

In Luke 21 Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles. This happened in 70 AD.

Again, we get a report of a vision, symbols, and numbers, but what do they mean?

Charles Spurgeon proposed that only a madman or a fool claims to know what Revelation means, so we tread lightly here. That said, it seems that the most coherent meaning is that the sanctuary of God symbolizes the true church. This is not a building, but a body of Christ, i.e. those who know and worship Christ in Spirit and in truth.

Jesus shocked the religious leaders when he spoke of his own body as the temple, but imagine the shock at the NT teaching that WE are the temple of God. That topic alone could be a sermon series, as it is a book by Greg Beale – God Dwells Among Us.

1 Peter 2:4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God', 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to I through Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of I and that the Spirit of I dwells in you?

2 Cor 6:

For we are the temple of the living I; just as I said,

"I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;

AND I WILL BE THEIR I, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

With all the talk and importance of the Temple in the OT and its destruction in AD 70, we should consider what the temple and the tabernacle symbolized?

They represented god's meeting place or dwelling place with man. They were the spatial representation of God's presence with His people. It was that way for over 1000 years. It was the place of sacrifice for sin for the people of God Then comes Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the visible image of the invisible God, God WITH US. He spoke of Himself as The Temple which if destroyed would be raised in three days. The people thought he was crazy. He was the final sacrifice for sin, and at his death the Temple veil was torn in two.

The temple was also to be a place of welcome for the nations. It was where god-fearing Gentiles could learn of God

In Christ the people saw the living temple. Then He died, rose again, and ascended into heaven. It was Ascension Day but Pentecost was coming.

Christ sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His people, so that now we are the temple of God

Now believers are the living stones being built up as a spiritual house. So, when John refers to the 'temple' he is talking about us. The church – the people, not a building- is the dwelling place of God on earth. The church is also to be a place that welcomes those who are weary and heavy laden, those who are tired of drinking at the dry wells of our culture or of our own making.

The same is true of the two witnesses and olive trees and lampstands. If we go back to Zech 4 and the letters of ch 2-3 we see that they all symbolize the church – not a building, but a people protected by God against eternal doom. Yes, the saints will suffer but will never perish.

The church may be trampled on; the church may be hated; the church may not win the 'culture war' in this present age, but Jesus and His church will triumph in the end.

v. 3-14 the two witnesses

During this age between Christ and His return, the church is called to bear witness to Christ. We are called to let our light shine in the darkness.

That theme runs through this pastoral letter.

The numbers used also indicate a symbolic period of time that refers to this present age after the resurrection and before the return of Jesus.

The 42 months of the holy city's trampling by the nations coincides with the 1,260 days of the witnesses' prophesying. These timeframes are derived from the "time, times, and half a time" ($1 + 2 + \frac{1}{2} = 3 \frac{1}{2}$ years) in Daniel 7 (see Rev. 12:14). There they represent the age dominated by the last "beastly" kingdom to oppress the saints of the Most High, before the Son of Man establishes God's unchallenged, universal reign (Dan. 7:14-27). These timespans represent the era that extends from Christ's ascension until the brief trauma that immediately precedes his second coming (Rev. 20:7-10). Dennis Johnson

The witnesses are clothed in sackcloth, a sign of repentance and mourning. **the church is called to repent and to mourn even as it calls the nations to repentance and mourning.**

Repentance means turning from the various idols of our age, including the alphabet idols of our culture, whether they be MAGA, BLM, DNC, RNC, LGBT, CPAC, DEI, ESG, WEF, UN, NATO, POTUS, SCOTUS, OR USA.
(if I left out your idol, please add it to the list)

V.5-6 evoke the characters Elijah and Moses who represent the prophets and the Law, both of which ultimately point to Christ and warn against idolatry. The church carries on their ministry today as believers are the royal priesthood and those who proclaim the excellencies of God.. 1 Pet 2:9

v. 7-10 There is an interesting arc of the ministry of the witnesses – great success until their task is complete, then the beast rises from the abyss, attacks them, overcomes them, and kills them. Their murders are celebrated by the ungodly represented by Sodom and Egypt. Those two words stir up the OT examples of immorality/ corruption and oppression/bondage. These names are symbolic or spiritual and represent EVERY city that sets itself against God, His kingdom, and truth.

EX: Narnia – when Aslan is killed, the enemies dance around. They don't know that it is not the end of the story.

IS ANYTHING REALLY DIFFERENT TODAY? Have things changed? NO, there are cities today known as “sin city” – Las Vegas, Phenix City, AL

The enemies of God and His truth dance around today. (Ps 12:8) They suppress the truth in unrighteousness and professing to be wise they become foolish (Rom 1). Given that the truth of Christ has been proclaimed for 2000 years, they should know better, but such is the grip of the true enemy.

Revelation reminds us that our ultimate enemy is not the person you block on FB or you turn off when he/she comes on TV. Our real enemy is the beast from the abyss (more on this coming soon). The person or group you think is your enemy is really a fellow broken sinner who needs the same Jesus you need.

EX From an unexpected place, this truth was told last Sunday following the slap heard around the social media world. Denzel Washington said to Will Smith, “At your highest moment, be careful, that’s when the devil comes for you.” I know nothing about the theological perspective of that messenger, but the message is true. The Devil is your enemy, and he is on the prowl. Be alert.

“It does not do to leave a dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him.” (The Hobbit)

v. 11-12

Following their defeat, the saints are vindicated, resurrected, and invited up to heaven. They follow the path of Christ – suffering, resurrection, and ascension.

I DON'T like the implications of this quote, but it's been around for ages – **“The blood of the saints is the seed of the church.”** i.e. we may not see effective witness for Christ until we suffer because of Christ. If that happens, scripture says that we are blessed.

1 Peter 4:14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

WHEN persecution arrives, It is the Spirit of God who protects us for eternity.

One lesson of v. 11-13 and all of Revelation is that there is no neutral ground in the conflict between Jesus and His enemies. There is no spiritual DMZ. As believers, we are a part of the BIG story that John is telling – the conflict between light and darkness, between Christ and his enemy, between the path toward eternal life and the path toward eternal death. In our daily lives there are many other details that must be filled in but the over-arching narrative is the STORY OF THE Kingdom AND THE KING.

Another lesson of v.11-13 is that the church cannot be destroyed because God is at work to preserve His people, if only a remnant.

Why then is the church so risk averse and so afraid of not being popular with the surrounding culture? Those who seek the applause of men are enemies of God.

Chesterton *The Five Deaths of the Faith* – “ five times the church has gone to the dogs and each time the dogs died.”

The original audience of this letter has received their reward, but we who are alive today hope in anticipation of the glorious return of Christ as we walk by faith in the sustaining power of God.

At the end of the day the church cannot be destroyed, and our witness will be effective – v. 13

v. 13 a symbolic city – one tenth will fall.

In Revelation, fractions = mercy

In God’s providence He uses the means of the witness of the church to bring people to salvation. It happens when we tell them, show them, and welcome them.

EX: 2006 The Amish community after the shootings at an Amish school – they went to the funeral of the killer and surrounded his widow with love and forgiveness.

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14900930>

Less dramatically but still in a real small way, you can have a witness in this community...

APPL – April 9th – join tom Hudson at the Highlands table at the EGG HOPP to meet and welcome people. Invite a friend to the Easter service or at least begin praying for specific people who don’t know Christ.

Given the big picture and the ultimate victory of Christ scripture tells us

1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

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