The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 11**

* **11:1-2– Measuring the Temple**
  + **Verse 1**– John, conducting his prophetic role, is told to measure the temple of God. John’s commission at the end of chapter 10 was essentially identical to that of Ezekiel in Ezek. 2:8-3:3. Continuing the Ezekiel allusions, John does something similar like that which unfolds in Ezek. 40-48 which is the primary background for the understanding of 11:1-2.
  + In that latter portion of Ezekiel, Ezekiel observes a man with a measuring rod similar to what John is wielding and he is measuring the temple of God, the walls and all its entities. Many people understand this as the physical Herodian temple of Jesus’ day but that does not fit with the context of Revelation nor the message of Ezekiel.
  + The temple prophesied in that latter part of Ezekiel is clearly a spiritual temple to be established during the days of the Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom. Thus the temple here is none other than Christ’s body, that is, the church which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:22-23).
  + In the OT, the temple was always understood as the place where God’s presence dwelt in order that He could be among His people (1 Kings 8:1-11; 2 Chron. 5:11-14). The same is also true for its predecessor, the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-38).
  + In keeping with that very idea, the temple here refers to God’s presence among His people and accordingly in the NT, the temple was the church (Ezek. 43:1-9; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-5).
  + This conclusion is rooted in the reality that Christ Himself is the true temple and everyone who follows Him faithfully becomes a part of the temple of God (Jn. 1:14; 2:19-22; Rev. 21:22). God dwells among men in the church because of Christ’s sacrifice (5:9-10).
  + The altar is also supposed to be measured by John as well. This is the same altar of 6:9-11 and 8:3-4. Given that in these instances the saints are said to be associated with the altar, this is further support that the temple is the church and not a literal structure.
  + But its importance deals with the fact that Christ’s sacrifice has made people to become a kingdom and priests to God forever (cf. Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Borrowing illustrations from the OT priests, Christians are pictured in a metaphorical way as ministering and testifying on behalf of God with the altar imagery.
  + Having understood what the temple and the altar represent, what does it means that John must measure it? In Ezekiel’s use of the term, it referred to God’s spiritual protection against evil and wicked forces but in particular wicked priests and idol worship (cf. Ezek. 44:6-10).
  + Thus, John’s measuring is similar. To measure the temple and the altar is to connote God’s spiritual protection for His faithful disciples who worship Him and are persevering witnesses in the midst of evil and idolatry. It is essentially one and the same as the sealing of 7:1-8 (cf. Rev. 3:10).
  + **Verse 2**– The court outside the temple which is not measured is best understood as God’s people who will be persecuted and killed by God’s enemies (cf. Rev. 2:10, 13; 13:7, 16-17). The outer court is directly related to the “holy city” which is another way of describing God’s people (Heb. 12:18-23; Rev. 21:2, 10, 23).
  + The word “nations” is indicative of the enemies of God and “outsiders” who hate God and His people and they seek to rid themselves of anything associated with holiness at all costs. This is seen in the sixth seal as well as later in chapter 13 where all the earth is pictured as worshipping the beast.
  + The holy city will be trod underfoot for a period of 42 months. This seems to be the identical to the phrase: “time, times and half a time” and also the “1,260 days” which occur later in the book (11:3; 12:6, 14; 13:5-6). These descriptions are taken from Daniel which speak of tribulation to come (Dan. 7:25; 12:7, 11-12).
  + With that in mind, this figurative time period relates to an extended but finite period of physical suffering and persecution for the people of God but they are spiritually protected (cf. Rev. 3:10; 7:1-8; 11:1). It is best to think of vv. 1-2 in the words of Jesus in Matt. 10:28. The body (outer court) may be affected but He is in control of the soul (temple, altar).
  + These 42 months are still relatable to the time we are now living in. As long as God wills that human history keeps going, so too the church must continue to persevere and suffer at the same time. This time will come to an end when Jesus returns.
  + Additionally the 42-month figure may be used here as a reference to Elijah’s ministry (1 Kings 17; 18:1; Lk. 4:25; Jam. 5:17) but more so of Jesus’ ministry which lasted approximately the same time.
  + Like Christ, the saints are to minister and proclaim the word but they will be persecuted and even killed like their Lord (Jn. 15:20). But just as Jesus was raised from the dead to life and the glorious seat in Heaven, so too will the persevering saints be kept from eternal punishment (Jn. 11:25-26).
* **11:3-14– The Two Witnesses**
  + **Verse 3**­­– It seems that God or The Lamb is speaking since authority is being dispersed to the “two witnesses.” These two witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days (same as 42 months or time, times and half a time) in sackcloth. The question is who are these two witnesses?
  + The two witnesses mentioned here are best understood as the church who must witness on behalf of Christ. The idea of witnessing is related to Christ’s testimony that YHWH is God and He reconciles man to Him through His blood by which we can be forgiven of our sins and have the hope of eternal life (cf. Jn. 1:18; 3:32-33; 18:37; 1 Tim. 6:13).
  + Christ is presented repeatedly in Revelation as the faithful witness (1:2, 5; 3:14) and the saints must, like their Lord, testify concerning God and the gospel (Jn. 15:27; Acts 1:8; Rev. 1:9; 2:13; 6:9; 12:11). This is further solidified in the statement that they are to prophesy. As long as human history continues, saints are called to preach and teach the word of God (cf. Joel 2:28-32).
  + If the two witnesses represent the church, why are they said to be two and not one? The use of the number two is drawn largely from the OT pattern of testimony that was given and accepted. The OT law required at least two witnesses to make judgment on an offense committed (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15).
  + This idea is carried over into the NT as well (Matt. 18:16; Lk. 10:1-24; Jn. 5:31; 8:17; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19). The proper understanding is that the testimony of two witnesses (or more) is to be taken as valid and binding.
  + That they wear sackcloth is indicative of the prophetic ministry of calling the evil to repentance. It is also associated with a time of mourning and death (cf. Job 16:15; Isa. 22:12; Jer. 4:8). These witnesses must preach repentance like Christ but they may also suffer for their faith (11:7-8).
  + **Verse 4**– The two witnesses (the church) are further identified as the two olive trees and the two lampstands. This imagery is taken from Zech. 4. That lampstands is mentioned here should not come as a surprise since it has been mentioned previously (1:12-13, 20).
  + The lampstand connotation is derived from the tabernacle and temple setup in the OT which gave light so that the ministry of the priests could be carried out. It was also symbolical of the presence of God (Num. 8:1-4; Ex. 25:31-40). The idea is further illustrated by Jesus’ words on the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5:14-16).
  + The two olive trees in Zechariah 4 are said to supply the lampstand with oil. These olive trees are identified in Zech. 4:14 as Zerubbabel (governor from royal line) and Joshua (high priest). The work of building the temple was halted by God’s enemies but through Joshua and Zerubbabel, they would overcome and complete the temple (Zech. 4:6-9).
  + It is God Himself who ensures that His plan is executed and completed via Joshua and Zerubbabel. In John’s use of the text, God will ensure that His people (the church) execute their role by supplying them with strength (oil; Eph. 6:10) to persevere in their witness (lampstand).
  + That the olive trees and lampstands represent the church and God’s presence among His people is indicated by the fact that in Zechariah 4, the image of a king and priest is present. In Revelation the church is described as a kingdom and priests to God forever thus amplifying Zechariah’s vision (cf. Ex. 19:6; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).
  + The entire scene is further amplified by the fact that they stand before the Lord of all the earth. It is as if the scene is in a courtroom where the saints are called to give testimony and God is the judge who keeps a careful eye on them (cf. Zech. 4:10).
  + This illustration is powerful since it does two things: (1) God keeps a watchful eye on His people and grants them the strength and the ability to persevere and (2) God is not far from His people indicating that nothing can separate them from Him except themselves.
  + **Verse 5**– The emphasis of God’s spiritual protection for His people is further touched upon here with the idea that if anyone wants to harm His people, fire will devour them. This picture is likely intended to invoke the ministry of Elijah and in particular the scenes of 2 Kings 1.
  + The point is that God will ensure His people are able to testify and proclaim the word of God. The enemies who are opposed to this will face the wrath of God which is often described in the bible in terms of fire (Matt. 3:11-12; Mk. 9:43-49).
  + **Verse 6**– The two witnesses (the church) is said to have the power to make the rain stop producing famine and turning the waters into blood creating the same idea. They are also able to strike the earth with plagues. This verse is intended to remind us of two major characters in the OT: Elijah and Moses.
  + Both men dealt with kings and people who were idolaters and hardened their hearts such that they would not repent. Both men were the embodiment of the word “witnesses” as they lived lives attesting to the fact that YHWH is God and He is to be feared.
  + When their audiences failed to listen and desired their harm, God brought judgment upon them in the form of drought and famine. Elijah’s ministry recalls the 3.5 years of drought (1 Kings 17; Lk. 4:25; Jam. 5:17) and Moses’ ministry recalls the plagues in Egypt including the first one of turning the waters of the Nile into blood (Ex. 7:17-25; Psa. 105:29).
  + The point is that the saints like Moses and Elijah are carrying out the will of God and in the process they will call judgment down on their enemies because of their evil and unrepentant hearts. The “power” they have is probably that of their prayers (6:9-11; 8:3-5).
  + It is good to notice that the judgments described in vv. 5-6 reiterate the trumpet judgments of chapter 8. God is the force behind His people during the good and bad times. He will ensure their mission is executed and then He will execute His judgment on the hard-hearted unbelievers.
  + **Verse 7**– The saints will be allowed to finish their testimony and the beast will then make war with them and overcome them (cf. Dan. 7:3, 21: Rev. 13:7). This is a physical overcoming over the saints since the beast cannot harm their souls because God has measured it and sealed it (7:1-8; 11:1).
  + The beast here in Revelation is talked about more in chapter 13 and it is clearly associated with the fourth kingdom Daniel sees in the vision of the four beasts in Dan. 7. The purpose of this beast/fourth kingdom is to persecute the saints. God allows this to take place as it works in conjunction with His sovereign timetable.
  + **Verse 8**– As the beast makes war and overcome, it will seem as if though evil has won and the enemy has gained the upper hand via the death of the saints. Their bodies are said to lie in the *“great city.”* In Revelation this is parallel to Babylon the great (14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18-19, 21). This would not fit with literal Jerusalem.
  + Babylon was a symbol for nations in which God’s people were merely sojourners or exiles having to live under ungodly regimes and principles. This meant that God’s people were often tempted to compromise their faith but they were to remain faithful and steadfast despite these advances by their enemies (cf. Dan. 1-6).
  + Further emphasis that the phrase “great city” is used symbolically as opposed to literally is given by the statement it is spiritually called *“Sodom and Egypt.”* In the OT, Sodom stood as an example of wicked, evil and unrepentant people who were destroyed by God (cf. Gen. 18:20-33; 19:1-29; Deut. 29:22-26; Isa. 1:9-15; Jer. 23:14).
  + Egypt is a symbol of nations that oppressed the people of God (Ex. 1:13-14; 3:7; Joel 3:19). The reference to Jesus’ crucifixion shouldn’t be taken as an argument that this is in fact speaking of Jerusalem. The point is that Christ died in a very much ungodly society that oppressed God’s people and continues to do so (Acts 2:23; 7:54-60).
  + **Verse 9**– The citizens of this ungodly city (cf. 10:11) will prevent proper burial for the saints even after their deaths. God’s enemies want to ensure that the persecution done to His people is that which can do the most damage and hurt the most.
  + The lack of a proper burial was always indicative of indignity and mistreatment (cf. 1 Sam. 17:44, 46; 2 Kings 9:10; Psa. 79:1-7; Isa. 14:19-20; Jer. 8:1-2; 9:22; 16:4-6). They observe their bodies for 3.5 days. This defeat seems great in the eyes of the enemies but it is insignificant.
  + The saints are contrasted are being able to proclaim their testimony for 3.5 years. 3.5 days is a significantly shorter period of time than 3.5 years and thus the conclusion is that the saints are far more victorious than their enemies ever will be.
  + The fact that 3.5 days is used also indicates that they are certainly dead. This extended time is enough for their flesh to undergo the stages of decomposition which in the eyes of the enemy is a great victory. However, 3.5 also indicates that they will not remain that way forever because 3.5 is a broken 7.
  + **Verse 10**– The enemies who are often referred to as the *“earth-dwellers”* (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2) are rejoicing because of the apparent defeat of the saints. They rejoice to the extent that it becomes a national celebration with the inclusion of gift giving.
  + Their celebration is prompted because they are no longer being tormented. This torment is a spiritual one which affects the guilty conscience of those who stand in opposition to God and commit evil acts. This was the same attitude professed by the Israelites in the OT when they killed or persecuted God’s prophets.
  + **Verse 11**– The celebration of these earth-dwellers is cut short as God’s raises His saints from the dead. The wording and imagery here alludes to Ezek. 37:1-14 in which those who are dead (exiled) will come back to life (return after captivity) showing the power God has to give life and renew the spirit (cf. 1:17-18).
  + God’s people will not remain dead forever since He has control over life and death. More precisely, the resurrected Christ has this power and authority and just as He arose from the dead, so will His faithful followers rise to glory (Jn. 11:25-26).
  + The verse states that great fear fell upon those who were watching. This phrase is used in the OT of those people or nation who hate God and His people and have persecuted them with the idea that they will win (Ex. 15:16; Psa. 105:38).
  + **Verse 12**– The resurrection imagery continues with a further description of what the saints undergo. A voice (presumably God or Jesus) calls them home and they ascend in a cloud. The cloud is a symbol of divine approval and God’s presence (cf. Psa. 104:3; 105:39; Acts 1:9; Rev. 1:8; 10:1).
  + The saints, like Elijah, after finishing their ministry, will go to where they truly belong (2 Kings 2:1-12; 1 Thess. 4:17). This is a powerful demonstration of God fulfilling His promises to His people and the reality that Christians must not make their home on earth but rather in Heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20-21).
  + **Verse 13**– The timeline here seems to be at the end when Christ returns and the final judgment takes place. The wording here is drawn from Ezek. 38-39 and Zech. 14 which pertain to the final judgment. That an earthquake occurs here and also in 6:12; 8:5 and 16:18 make it likely that this is referring to the final judgment.
  + A tenth of the city is said to fall. This could be historically true for Rome but it’s also true for all the nations when Christ returns. A tenth is only the beginning of the consummation in which 7,000 is said to fall. This is probably a symbolic number indicating God will bring everyone into judgment for what they have done.
  + The verse states that all those who didn’t fall as yet will observe the terror in fear and they will be forced to give God the glory He is due (Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Pet. 2:12; Rev. 5:13). All men will one day bow down to God whether they do it of their own free-will or because of the overwhelming fear on the last day.
  + **Verse 14**– The verse here serves as a reminder of where we are in the series of seven trumpets. The interlude has concluded and this verse picks up on the heels of 9:21 where the second woe is finished.
  + The verse announces that the third woe is now coming. The interlude has served its purpose in terms of reiterating that Christ will take care of His people and He will judge the idolaters and earth-dwellers in due time. In the meantime, we must look to Him and stand fast and remain faithful!
* **11:15-19– The Seventh Trumpet (Third Woe): The Reign of Christ**
  + The seventh trumpet, like the seventh seal in 6:12-17, narrates the events surrounding the consummation of human history. There is clearly a sense where this is already unfolding because of the death and resurrection of Christ (1:5-6, 17-18; 5:11-14) but it is not yet all completed since we still await the return of Christ.
  + The sense in which these things are already unfolding is seen in the destruction of Rome to come in the near future as she mercilessly persecutes the people of God. While Rome’s destruction is great and overwhelming, it cannot compare to the final judgment in which God will pour out His wrath on all the ungodly.
  + **Verse 15**– As the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, loud voices are heard in heaven (cf. 8:13; 9:13-14). These voices are likely representative of heavenly host of some kind as seen throughout the book so far but especially in chapters 4-5. The loud voices proclaim the complete fulfillment of Dan. 2:44.
  + We are not to understand this verse as suggesting that it is only at the end of time that Christ will reign and His kingdom will come into existence. The early chapters have clearly suggested otherwise especially so 1:5-6.
  + The point of this verse is to point us towards the reality that Christ reigns now and His kingdom exists now but there is coming a time where all will realize His reign and His kingdom as every knee bows before Him (cf. Phil. 2:9-11).
  + The enemies of God and the world at large fails to recognize this as the case (11:7-10) but the day is coming where they will not be able to ignore God’s sovereignty and the everlasting reign of Him and His Son. The fullness of God’s plan will be completed when Christ returns (cf. Dan. 7:9-14, 19-27).
  + **Verses 16-17**– The twenty-four elders who were pictured in Rev. 4 and 5 are mentioned once more here as they fall on their faces to worship God (cf. 4:10; 5:8, 14). Here they fall down because of what God has accomplished in the consummation.
  + The elders speak in the past tense as if this has already taken place. They speak this way because of the fact that the consummation is guaranteed to take place. God will bring history to its foreordained conclusion on the day that He decides and there is nothing anyone or anything can do to change that (Matt. 25:31-46).
  + Again, we must not understand this verse as if God is not reigning now because of the tense used. God reigns now but the day is coming where all will very publicly recognize that He is the King of kings and Lord of lords as He reigns supreme for all eternity.
  + The surety of this event is further emphasized by the description given to God as the one who is *“the Almighty, who are and who were”* (cf. 1:4, 8; 4:8). This phrase and the variations thereof was used repeatedly in the OT as a way of proving God will accomplish His promises and His will despite seemingly impossible and overwhelming odds (Deut. 4:34; 11:2; Job 42:2; Isa. 43:11-13; 44:7-8; 45:21; 46:9-11; 55:10-11).
  + **Verse 18**– The nations (unbelieving, unrepentant, wicked earth-dwellers) are pictured in a state of rage against God. Those who want nothing to with God stand against Him enraged (cf. Psa. 2:1-3). When the end comes, God’s wrath shall be poured out in full and these who are enraged will become fearful and utterly terrified (Psa. 2:4-5, 9-10, 12).
  + On the day Christ returns, the unbelievers (dead) will be judged for their sin and their lack of repentance (cf. Matt. 25:41-46) while the faithful believers are rewarded (Matt. 25:34-40). The faithful believers are called the saints and prophets as it ties in their role from 11:1-13. They are the ones who fear God (cf. Ex. 20:6; Ecc. 12:13; Rev. 19:5).
  + In the picture of the consummation, the enemies of God are further pictured as experiencing His wrath as they will be destroyed for destroying the earth (cf. Psa. 2:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:6-9). That they are destroyed and judged shows the level of punishment awaiting them.
  + Jesus is pictured as shattering the nations like earthenware because they have not listened to Him and give Him the glory. Romans 1:18-32 show that unbelievers reverse the course of God’s good creation because of their sin and lack of repentance.
  + **Verse 19**– Further painting a picture of the consummation, the verse states that Heaven is opened and the ark was seen. In the OT, the ark was a symbol of God’s presence among His people (Ex. 25:21-22) and such is the case in Heaven. The ark imagery was also a part of the judgment and redemption themes in the OT (Josh. 6) as well which is here paralleled by the inclusion of the cosmic disruptions (cf. 6:12-17).