

Chapter 11

The Two Witnesses and the Seventh Trumpet

- A. Chapter 11 concludes the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets.
 - a. The primary purpose of the interlude was to explain what the church should do during troubled times.
 - b. Three special challenges are given to God's people here:
 - i. Appreciate and appropriate God's Word (10:1-11)
 - ii. Conduct a thorough self-examination on the basis of that Word (11:1,2)
 - iii. Preach and teach the Word regardless of the consequences (11:3-13)
 - c. The chapter ends with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (vv. 14-18)
- B. Some be Chapter 11 to be the most difficult, and yet the most important, of Revelation.
 - a. Reasons for the difficulty:
 - i. Obscure symbolism – not every symbol is able to be clearly defined, yet the overall message seems clear.
 - 1. Be careful, again, not to make the symbolism literal – it's easy to do.
 - 2. Remember, symbolism inherently means one thing representing another.
 - ii. Wide array of different interpretations – mostly due to the varied approaches to Revelation.
 - b. Reason for the importance:
 - i. The story of the two witnesses could serve as a summary of the entire book
 - ii. 11:15 may be a key verse for understanding the whole Book of Revelation (we will explain at the appropriate time).

THE TEMPLE TO BE MEASURED (11:1,2)

- C. Verse 1
 - a. The measuring rod
 - i. Most likely a "reed" based on the original word for rod – kalamos.
 - b. Three things were to be measured here:
 - i. The temple of God
 - 1. More specifically, this was the *naos* or the sacred part of the temple; not the more general *heiron* or temple complex.

- ii. The altar
- iii. Those who worship in it
 - 1. The priests, more specifically, since this was the sacred part of the temple.
 - 2. Remember, today all Christians are priests (1 Pet. 2:5,9)

D. Verse 2

- a. Some things were left out of the measuring:
 - i. The court which is outside the temple – that is, outside the sacred area.
 - ii. The reasoning had to do with whom it belonged to:
 - 1. *ethnos* or nations
 - 2. Some translations say "Gentiles"
 - 3. In Revelation, nations refer to those in rebellion to Christ or outside of Christ.
- b. "holy city"
 - i. Two possibilities:
 - 1. Jerusalem – as it was referred to in the NT twice as such (Matt. 4:5; 27:53)
 - 2. "the great city" of verse 8 (see verse 8 for more on this)
- c. What is the temple here?
 - i. Keep in mind that the "temple" and the "holy city" most likely do not refer to the literal temple and the earthly Jerusalem.
 - ii. In the midst of a vision that has been full of symbolism, it hardly seems likely that taking a literalist view here is appropriate.
 - iii. The temple, generally, is symbolic of a spiritual reality.
 - 1. More specifically, this is a symbolic reference to the church of Christ – the spiritual temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; 1 Peter 2:5).
 - 2. Keep in mind this is not the temple of God in heaven but the temple of God – the church – on earth!
 - a. Remember where the strong angel was standing when John took the little scroll and ate it – the land and the sea!

3. Batsell Barrett Baxter spoke of the kingdom of God as a two-storied house, with the church being the bottom floor and heaven being the upper floor – one kingdom with two expressions.
- iv. If the temple is the church, then why measure it?
 1. This passage makes us mindful of Ezekiel 40 – 43.
 - a. Ezekiel had a vision of a new temple being measured after the old one had been destroyed in 587 B.C.
 - b. It was part of the prophet's message from God that assured Israel that God had not forgotten them and would restore them to their land.
 - i. That divine promise was fulfilled when the Jews returned from bondage in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.
 - c. The measuring in Ezekiel's case anticipated restoration.
 2. The measuring here in Revelation seems to anticipate protection.
 - a. The context may reveal this best – John was told to “leave out the court that was outside the temple”.
 - i. This phrase “leave out” literally means “reject”.
 - ii. Therefore, that which was left unmeasured was “rejected” by God where that which was measured would naturally be “accepted.”
 1. Unmeasured = vulnerable and unprotected
 2. Measured = secure and protected
- v. What is the standard of measurement?
 1. Eldred Echols, among many others, define the “measuring rod like a staff” as the Word of Truth or Word of God – the only true measurement of spiritual things.
 2. The people of God would be measured; only those who “measured up” and were truly His and would be protected.
- vi. What about the unprotected?
 1. The “unmeasured”, simply put, were those in the world who would “tread under foot the holy city” and also the court.

- a. Jesus said something similar when he predicted Jerusalem's fall in Luke 21:24.
- vii. The primary message of 11:1,2:
 1. During the troubled times ahead, the Lord would protect His people!
 2. A very similar message to the message of the interlude in Rev. 7.
- viii. What about the 42 months?
 1. This relates to the concept of protection during troubled times.
 2. While the city would not be protected during that time, it is likely implied that the temple would be protected.
 3. Note the symbolic number pattern:
 - a. Seven = completeness
 - b. Half of seven, or $3 \frac{1}{2}$ = incompleteness; in Rev. it is associated with trial, hardship and testing, though it hints that better times are ahead.
 - c. $3 \frac{1}{2}$ is expressed in Revelation several ways – 42 months is the first.
 - i. 42 months is exactly $3 \frac{1}{2}$ years.
 - ii. But this is not a literal 42 months or $3 \frac{1}{2}$ years.
 1. Premillennialists make this literal and insist there are two $3 \frac{1}{2}$ year periods: one before the beast and one after (chapter 13).
 2. These two $3 \frac{1}{2}$ year periods add up to the magic number of a seven year tribulation.
 3. But this number merely seems to mean that trial would come upon the people of God, but it would not last forever and only be temporary!
- ix. What do the city and the court represent?
 1. Note, these are both unprotected because they are both unmeasured.
 2. No one knows for sure.
 3. Suggestions:
 - a. The city is the world, while the court is the "in-betweens" – those who may be "in the church" but still cling to the world.

- b. Some suggest that the temple, court and city are all three the church, but represent different aspects.
 - i. Temple is the inner man which God does protect
 - ii. Court and city are the outer man which God does not protect
- c. Unfortunately neither is conclusive.

THE TWO WITNESSES PROPHECY (11:3-6)

E. The series of scenes that follows illustrates a threefold message of victory:

- a. The conflict between good and evil
- b. The apparent defeat of good
- c. The ultimate victory of good

F. Verse 3

- a. The two witnesses appear
 - i. The word "authority" or "power" was added by translators – it is assumed by the context that God is in control and giving the instruction.
 - ii. They were to speak for God and give their testimony of the same good news that Jesus spoke of with a mixture of condemnation for those who rejected Christ as well.
- b. 1260 days
 - i. The same as 42 months
 - ii. The same as 3 ½ years
 - iii. This is the same amount of time that the court and city would be trodden down by the nations (v 2).
- c. They were clothed in sackcloth
 - i. Often worn by those who mourned due to sin or loss and was standard gear for prophets

G. Verse 4

- a. The two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth
 - i. Reminiscent of Zechariah 4:2,3
 - 1. There, the references are to Zerubbabel and his coworker Joshua the priest (different than the Joshua most familiar to us).
 - 2. They were referred to as anointed ones in Zech. 4:14

3. This vision in Zechariah was to Governor Zerubbabel as an assurance that with the Lord's help they would finish the task of rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem.
- ii. What about here?
1. Note, this is NOT Zerubbabel and Joshua as before
 2. Also note that in the original vision there was one lampstand where here there are two.
 3. Also, here, the witnesses were both the trees and the lampstands instead of God's message being the lampstand.
 4. These witnesses were like Zerubbabel and Joshua in that they were commissioned and empowered by God.
 5. We will discuss the identification of these two further a little later...

H. Verse 5

- a. The Lord's protection that was symbolically discussed in v 1,2 ("measured") for His people is now described symbolically.
 - i. Verse 5 speaks twice of the men desiring to harm the two witnesses.
 - ii. Whoever would do so, did at their own peril.
 - iii. Fire
 1. Come from their mouths to devour their enemies
 2. The message, therefore, was a searing indictment of the world and the sin in it.

I. Verse 6

- a. Shut up the sky and turning water to blood
 - i. "As they desire" means they were able to do it when necessary, not when they felt like it.
 - ii. Reminds us of Elijah and Moses – but, again, they are not Elijah and Moses.
 1. They come in the same spirit as Elijah and Moses
 2. Commissioned by God, empowered by God, and they would be triumphant as Elijah and Moses had been.
- b. Who then are the two witnesses?
 - i. Some prefer a literal identification (such as above)
 - ii. Some prefer a symbolic identification

1. Focusing on the number 2
 2. Identifying that the two represent the Law and the Prophets or the Old and the New Testaments.
- iii. Remember some key elements about the two:
1. They testified (v 7)
 2. They were described as lampstands (v 4)
 3. Compared to olive trees (v 4)
 4. People desired to harm them (v 5)
 5. They were killed (v 7)
 6. Who would this describe most fully? Faithful Christians in any age who would be willing to stand up for Christ and Truth regardless of the circumstances.
 7. But what about the number 2?
 - a. Two symbolically represents strengthening
 - b. Verse 7 also confirms that the number 2 is not literal – the beast wages war against them – killing 2 individuals doesn't usually represent a war – but killing many does.

THE TWO WITNESSES ARE KILLED (11:7-10)

J. Verse 7

- a. The war
 - i. It is a spiritual battle, not a physical one
 - ii. It is ongoing, not a one-time clash
- b. The beast
 - i. This is the first of 36 references to "the beast" in the later half of the book.
 - ii. This creature is a major factor in the vision
 - iii. At this point, not much is known except the beast is a powerful enemy of God.
 1. More will be revealed later
- c. The finished testimony
 - i. The testimony itself, or preaching of the Word, awakened the beast – it usually has that effect on sin.
 - ii. Reveals to us that there was an end to their objective – to spread the Word.

- iii. But even though they were killed, the testimony was not – the beast couldn't touch them until their aim had been reached.
- iv. Just goes to show that even though physically we may be harmed to the point of death, God's Word goes on...and cannot be killed.

K. Verse 8

a. The dead bodies...

i. Three references here

- 1. In original language, the first two are singular – dead body
 - a. Seems to indicate a oneness in the work and fate
 - b. Just as if we would speak of "the church" as one made of many
- 2. Third is plural – dead bodies

b. The great city

i. ...called Sodom and Egypt

- 1. Several adjectives used here to describe how it was called this...
 - a. Mystically (NASB)
 - b. Spiritually (KJV, NKJV)
 - c. Allegorically (RSV)
 - d. Figuratively (NIV)
- 2. Clearly this is not literal

ii. "Where also their Lord was crucified" -- Jerusalem

iii. Why these?

- 1. These are descriptive names
 - a. Sodom was full of vice and sin
 - b. Egypt was run by a tyrannical Pharaoh
 - c. Jerusalem was full of blind disobedience
- 2. More importantly, all three of these places felt the judgment of God in some form or fashion in their history.

L. Verse 9

a. "peoples and tribes and tongues and nations..."

- i. Again, representative of all men everywhere
- ii. More specifically, non-Christians – those who did not believe in Christ

- iii. This phrase is used interchangeably it seems with “those who dwell on the earth” (v 10).
- b. The unbelievers left their bodies out in the open to rot and decompose – a humiliation to the man and the man’s family.
 - i. They would not allow the bodies of the witnesses of God to be buried properly
- c. Again, the number 3 ½ appears again – this time as the number itself
 - i. Again, temporary with greater things yet to come

M. Verse 10

- a. The “world” will be delighted over the death and (seeming) humiliation of the dead believer.
 - i. Why?
 - 1. Because they “tormented” those who dwell on the earth.
 - a. Torment was not their purpose in preaching nor was it something they did in how they preached the Word.
 - b. It was the pure, unadulterated Truth itself, the message they preached, that brought torment.
 - i. Examples from the Bible we have of just such “torment”
 - 1. King Ahab and Elijah (1 Kings 18:17)
 - 2. John the Baptist and King Herod (Mk. 6:17,19,22-24)
 - 3. Jesus and the Pharisees (Matt. 12:14, 15:12, 21:45)
 - 4. Paul and Felix (Acts 24:25)

THE TWO WITNESSES ARE RESURRECTED (11:11-13)

N. Verse 11

- a. AFTER the 3 ½ days, something tremendous happens!
- b. The breath of life from God comes into the lifeless bodies of the two witnesses and they stand up!
 - i. Reminds us of Ezekiel and his dry bones – Ezek. 37:10
 - ii. No matter how hopeless the situation may seem, God can bring life where none exists or seems to be able to exist!
- c. Regardless of how many Christians may suffer at the hands of Rome’s persecution (or any persecution!), Christ’s church will survive and God will always be the victor!

i. Isaiah 40:8 – The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever!

d. Great fear fell upon those who were watching...and with good reason!

O. Verse 12

a. "...a loud voice from heaven..."

i. God calls to the witnesses to "Come up here."

b. Heaven

i. They ascended into heaven and as they did, their enemies watched.

ii. For the early Christians, this would have brought reassurance that even if they died in service to God, their death would not be in vain.

iii. It would be a reminder that those who are faithful, even to death, will be risen again and taken home to be with God.

P. Verse 13

a. The great earthquake

i. This one does partial damage

ii. God is still working on the impenitent so there is a type of warning issued here: a tenth of the city falls and seven thousand people die.

1. This is the only mention of the fraction 1/10th

a. Again, this is representative of a portion, not a whole.

2. This is also the only mention of the number 7,000.

a. Both 7 and 1000 are numbers that represent completeness

b. No one knows for sure what the 7,000 represents

i. Could simply be a sign of completeness in God's warnings – the seventh trumpet sounds after this.

ii. Some believe it to be a number signifying 1/10th of the population of a large city...

b. What about the survivors (or the rest)?

i. We only know two things:

1. They were scared/terrified

2. They gave glory to God

ii. Does this mean the survivors were penitent?

1. Not necessarily...but they did recognize God's power and perhaps it shows hope that some will come to repentance
2. Stands in contrast to those who did not repent when a third of mankind was wiped out in chapter 9.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET SOUNDS (11:14—18)

Q. The three woes of 8:13

- a. First – 5th trumpet
- b. Second – 6th trumpet
- c. Now the third...and the 7th trumpet sounds at the announcement of the second woe's passing and the third woe's arrival (v. 14,15)
 - i. Note the progression of each trumpet's sounding...and how it gets more horrible each time:
 1. hail and fire mixed with blood (8:7)
 2. water turned to blood (8:8,9)
 3. water turned to poison (8:10,11)
 4. the darkening of the universe (8:12)
 5. torturing by locusts (9:1-11)
 6. an evil army from hell (9:13-19)
- d. 11:15-19 has a two-fold message:
 - i. Emphasis on the triumph of God's plans and God's people over the Roman Empire
 - ii. And that same emphasis as it pertains to the second coming

R. Verse 14

- a. The last of the trumpets – God's warning to the impenitent – is about to sound!
- b. When the seventh angel sounds, the "mystery of God" will be "finished" (10:7) – and the opportunity to repent will be gone forever.
 - i. Why repent NOW? Because God's patience will not last forever.

S. Verse 15

- a. Regardless of what we may live through and see in our ruling authorities on this earth, we must keep several thoughts in mind:
 - i. God has allowed these governing rulers to exist and be what they are

- ii. One day, God will “reclaim” what he has graciously given to us to be stewards of...
- iii. As he reclaims the world, he will put down all rebellions and will judge mankind for the choices they've made and the lives they've lived.
- iv. And His reign will be the only one standing forever and ever.

T. Verse 16

- a. After the announcement of victory, there is an acclamation of praise.
 - i. The 24 elders show up again from chapter 4
 - 1. In chapter 4 they praised God as Creator
 - 2. In chapter 5 they worshipped Him as Redeemer
 - 3. Here they proclaim Him Conqueror and King (vv 17,18)
 - ii. Some see their praise here as a type of ‘table of contents’ for the remainder of the Book of Revelation.

U. Verse 17

- a. They first speak of the supreme reign of God here.
- b. In chapter 1, they spoke of God who “is to come...”; the same is said of Him in chapter 4.
 - i. In this passage, this phrase is left off in the original text – even though the KJV includes this phrase.
 - ii. Here it is left off because in this part of the vision God *has* come to punish the wicked and reward the faithful.
- c. The reign of God
 - i. Two things are not being taught here (as well as vs 15)
 - 1. That God has not reigned and will not reign until the end of time.
 - 2. That God’s kingdom will be established at the end of time.
 - ii. Keep in mind that throughout the Bible we are taught that God has always reigned over his creation (Rev. 1:9)
 - iii. The Bible also teaches that the kingdom has already come (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; Col. 1:13).
 - iv. What lessons can be learned here:
 - 1. Someday all resistance to God’s reign will be put down.
 - 2. Someday all people will acknowledge God’s sovereignty.

- v. In short, the celebration here is of the ultimate victory of God's cause!
- vi. God wants his people to know that the victory is certain!

V. Verse 18

- a. Next, the 24 elders speak of His judgment.
- b. And the nations were enraged...
 - i. Why? Seems to be a reaction like a child not getting their way...their defiance will be seen in chapters 13, 17, and 19.
- c. God's wrath came...
 - i. Someday the people's childish anger will meet God's righteous anger...it is a just anger.
- d. ...the time came for the dead to be judged
 - i. The Greek word translated "time" more literally means "a fitting time"
- e. God will "destroy those who destroy the earth..."
 - i. The Greek word used for destroy here more literally means "to corrupt or change for the worse."
 - ii. At the top of the first century Christians' list would have been Rome as the worst offender of "earth-corrupters"
- f. God's justice
 - i. For first century Christians, God would bring down the great corrupters of the earth – and ultimately bless the faithful.
 - ii. For all Christians for all time, God's judgment is not simply a settling of the score, but a day when God recognizes and rewards His own.

THE TEMPLE OF GOD OPENED (11:19)

W. Verse 19

- a. This verse contains God's response to the words of praise found in verses 17 & 18.
- b. Two images would have brought great joy to the early Christians:
 - i. The temple of God – representative of where God could be "found"
 - ii. The ark of the covenant – synonymous with the glory and presence of God
 - 1. The ark represented the promise – or covenant – made between God and His people.

2. Jewish tradition states that it was hidden to keep it from being destroyed with the temple.
 - a. Most likely it was destroyed when the Babylonians destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
 - b. Regardless of what happened to it physically, its spiritual counterpart is said to be “in heaven” – in other words, it rests in the place where God truly resides and will keep his promise that the faithful will reside as well.
- c. The chapter ends with a great display of God’s power – lightning, thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.
- d. John was only allowed a brief glimpse inside the temple – but it will be opened again in chapter 15, verse 5.