

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 16

Revelation 11 The Temple and Two Witnesses

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his teaching on the book of Revelation. This is session 16 on Revelation 11, the Temple, and the Two Witnesses.

In Revelation 11, we said there are two different images that the author utilizes, and the question is what those images portray and what they refer to and also the relationship between the two images.

The first one that we introduced was the image of a temple and a temple that John is told to measure in the first two verses of chapter 11. And then much of the rest of chapter 11 is dominated by an account of two witnesses who go out and witness, and at the end of the day, a beast arises out of the abyss, puts them to death, and after that, they are raised up and vindicated. Chapter 11 ends with the seventh trumpet finally being blown, which was broken off from the sixth trumpet back in Chapter 9. Now, what I want to do is look at those two images in a little bit more detail.

In Revelations 11, verses 1 and 2, we are introduced to the first image, which is the image or symbol of a temple. Again, the first question to think about is asking what this might signify, which is not a question but the first principle to realize. The starting point is realizing this is probably symbolic of something as we've seen over and over again, which is the case in the book of Revelation.

So the question is, what does this temple symbolize? What is it indicating? Is it referring to an actual temple or some kind of physical structure or what? There have been a number of options for understanding this. The starting point is to realize that John probably is drawing on the Old Testament background in the image of measuring a temple. For example, Ezekiel chapters 40 through 48, which is an important text that will influence John's own vision later on in Revelation 21 and 22, where John has a vision of the new Jerusalem slash temple.

The temple imagery gets applied to the city of Jerusalem, as we'll see, and that city is measured. That has its impetus in and its influence from Ezekiel 40 through 48, where the author or the seer Ezekiel is taken on a tour and he actually sees it measured the temple. And so that would fit here, where John is now given a read and told to measure the temple of God.

The other text that probably influences what goes on here is Zechariah chapter 2, 1 through 5, where Zechariah is also given a measuring read and is told to measure Jerusalem. So John's imagery here draws on apocalyptic visionary-type material from

Ezekiel, from Zechariah 2, and now John is told to measure this temple. So the question becomes, what is this temple? There have been a number of suggestions, and as with other issues of interpreting Revelation, I don't want to survey all of them.

But first of all, one common option has been that this is a reference to a literal rebuilt end-time temple, often associated with that view of Revelation that sees chapters 4 through 22, the entirety of it still future, referring to a future end-time scenario that takes place right leading up to, at the very end of history leading up to, and then including the events that surround the second coming of Jesus Christ. Part of that would then be to read chapter 11, which predicts an actual rebuilt temple in fulfillment of texts like Ezekiel 40 through 48. Another common understanding of this is that this refers to the temple, the literal temple in the first century that was later on destroyed in 70 AD.

So this view is associated with a view of Revelation where almost all of Revelation in chapters 4 through 22, all the events describe what was already going on in the first century, solely the first-century view known as the Preterist view. We talked a little bit about that earlier. And so the temple here that is being described is actually the literal physical temple standing in the first century AD before it was destroyed in 70 AD.

And that view is associated with a view of Revelation that was actually written back in the roughly the mid 60s AD. Another view of the temple here is to take it more figuratively; that is, the temple here symbolizes the people of God, but it is still a reference to a future temple that is the future people of God, taking the temple imagery figuratively or symbolically referring to the people of God themselves. Another view, the fourth view that I would subscribe to is that the temple here is indeed a metaphor for the church the people of God, but probably not referring only to the first century AD, not referring exclusively to a future temple, but probably simply refers to the church in its existence starting in the first century AD, but the church in its existence until the second coming of Christ or until Christ comes back to consummate history, which is what happens at the seventh seal later on in chapter 11.

So I take the temple here to be metaphorical of the people of God, or that is, throughout Revelation, it would be the people of God, the new people of God, the church consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. In other words, we've seen over and over again that John often used Old Testament imagery referring to Israel and now applied it to the new people of God, the church. Elsewhere in the New Testament, we've seen that New Testament authors can take temple imagery from the Old Testament and now apply it to the new people of God.

So Paul, for example, can say that the church is, and he can address his readers in 1 Corinthians 3, as you are the temple. Do you not know that you are the temple of

God? In Ephesians chapter 2, in verses 20 and 22, he describes the church as a temple built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus being the cornerstone of the temple, and the temple is growing to become a holy dwelling where God lives by his Holy Spirit using Old Testament temple language. And even back in chapter 3 in verse 12 of Revelation to one of the churches, John promises that if they overcome, they will become a pillar in the temple of God. So, not only in the New Testament but even in Revelation, John has taken temple imagery and physical temple imagery from the Old Testament and now finds it fulfilled in the church or in the people of God themselves.

So I take it that the temple here in chapter 11, verses one and two, is not referring to a literal temple, either in the first century, the temple that would have been standing, or referring to some literal rebuilt temple in the future, but instead is to be understood symbolically as a reference to the people of God as the temple, as the dwelling place of God. And here it probably refers then to the people of God as a temple in their existence starting in the first century, referring to John's own readers, but leading up to the entire period of time, leading up to the second coming of Christ, whenever he comes to consummate history. Interestingly, this is not new for John.

For example, the Qumran community and the Dead Sea Scrolls often took Old Testament temporal imagery and applied it to their own community. They saw their own community as the temple of God. They saw their own individual members as the building stones of the temple.

Yet the main difference was the Qumran community seemed to see themselves; that community by the Dead Sea seemed to see themselves as the temple of God because they thought that the Jerusalem temple was apostate and was evil and was not the true temple. But even the Qumran community still anticipated a future rebuilding of the temple someday. Where John seems to suggest that the reason the community is the temple of God is because Jesus Christ himself is the true temple.

Jesus Christ is the true fulfillment of the temple of God, and therefore, those who belong to Christ also constitute the temple. And so we'll see when we get to chapter 21, John does not see a temple, not because he thought the original one was evil, but John does not see a physical temple in the New Jerusalem because the Lamb itself is the temple and the entire people of God themselves are also the temple. So now John sees the people of God as a temple, and he's told to measure them, except interestingly, here he's told only to measure part of the temple.

The part that he calls the court, the outer court, is not to be measured and instead is to be given over to the Gentiles to be trampled for a period of 42 months. And the question is, what is this measuring about? Why is he told to measure the temple? And then second, why is part of the temple not measured and thrown out to the

Gentiles to be trampled on for 42 months? First of all, the act of measuring here seems to suggest and imply ownership and protection. So the fact that much like what one finds in Zechariah chapter 2, for example, the act of measuring.

So the measuring of the temple, the temple symbolizing the people of God, suggests the protection and the preservation of God's people. During this, all that's taking place in these seals and these trumpets is that now God's people are protected and preserved. Note that he also measures not only the temple, but the altar and those worshiping in it.

Probably, we should not take this too literally as if there are three different things. There's a temple, and then there's an altar, and then the people worshiping in it, or that these are three different types of believers or people within the church. But again, the author is simply using detailed descriptions of the temple and the altar and those worshiping in it.

All together, this is meant to not portray distinct elements within the temple, but all together, it symbolizes the people of God as a temple who now are measured, signifying their preservation and their protection. Now the question is, why is the altar court of the temple excluded? It's not measured and protected apparently, but now it is thrown out and subject to the nations and to be trampled upon. Two possible explanations.

One of them is that the altar court that is not measured is meant to symbolize the unfaithful members of the church. Remember back in chapters two and three, only two of the churches were faithful and suffering persecution because of that. Most of the churches were so intent on compromising and one church was so complacent that many of them received a very negative evaluation.

A couple of the churches had some who were faithful but others who were not and who were tolerating teachers who were saying it was okay to compromise. So, one possibility is that the part of the temple that is measured and protected would be the faithful churches from chapter two and the faithful members of the churches from chapters two and three. The part of the temple that is thrown outside then would represent the unfaithful, the compromising members of the churches.

One other possibility that I think may fit a little bit better with what we see in the rest of chapter 11 and what we've seen so far is that this measuring of part of the temple, but excluding the altar court, would suggest that this is the church seen from two different perspectives. That is the measuring of the temple, the heart of the temple, the holy of holies, and the dwelling place of God, where the altar is. This indicates the church as protected spiritually, as kept and preserved by God while still subject to persecution at the nations and at the hands of the Roman Empire.

So, the fact that part of the temple is preserved and protected indicates the church as it is preserved and spiritually protected by God, but the fact that part of it is thrown out to be trampled would be looking at the church from the perspective that it will still be persecuted. It will still be subject to suffering and persecution at the hands of the nation and at the hands of the Roman Empire, some of them even to the point of death. Again, in my mind, this makes sense in light of the rest of Revelation, where the saints are portrayed.

For example, back in chapter 7, they're portrayed as sealed and protected by God, yet they are still persecuted. In chapters 12 and 13 that come next, we'll see the same imagery of the church being protected yet still subject to persecution at the hands of Satan, at the hands of the beast, and at the hands of the Roman Empire. Now, the amount of time in which the church is permitted to suffer persecution, symbolized again perhaps by the outer court not being measured and being subject to trampling by the nations, is a period of 42 months.

If you do the math, you realize that the 42 months is another way of saying three and a half years, that time, times, and half a time that comes out of the book of Daniel that you find in Revelation chapter 12 and verse 14. You find that language of time, times, and half a time in Daniel, for example, chapter 7 and verse 25, chapter 9 and verse 27, and chapter 12 and verse 7 of Daniel. And you can look those texts up on your own, but that's probably where John gets the notion of the three and a half years or literally time, times, and then half a time, three and a half years.

Hopefully, by now, you've figured out that these 42 months, like the other numbers that we've seen in Revelation and the other temporal designations, should not be taken with strict literalness. It's not a literal period of time that is meant to be counted on a calendar so that you can mark off each day until you get to exactly 42 months. And as we said, 42 months equals roughly three and a half years.

Instead, again, the author's use of the number 42 is not so much meant to be literal as to indicate and interpret the character and the meaning of the time during which the church will suffer persecution. And I suggest to you that we'll see in just a moment that probably the 42 months is meant to span the entire existence of the church. So already in the first century, the churches were to understand themselves in this 42 month period.

But the idea is not that after 42 months, they're done. But the 42 months, not literally, but symbolically like the other numbers, is meant to interpret and to explain and describe the character of the church's existence until Christ comes back. Now, where did John get the number 40? The number 40 plays a key role in the Old Testament.

For example, Elijah's ministry. And later on, we'll see that in the rest of chapter 11, Elijah appears to play a role as the identity of one of the two witnesses. So for example, Elijah's ministry in 1 Kings 17 and 18, especially later on in the New Testament.

Read James 5.17, for example, where Elijah is seen to be one of three and a half years. But also in Numbers 33, we find that Israel's wandering in the wilderness took place in 40 encampments in Numbers 33. That would suggest then that 40 would indicate the idea of both judgment and testing.

So, 42 months would indicate that the church is now being tested. It's in for a time of testing. But in chapter 12, verse 14 of Revelation, we will also see that the number 40 suggests preservation as well.

So what the number 42 is saying is by recalling Old Testament texts especially, and the way Revelation uses it is 42 then, instead of being a designation of a literal period of time, is meant to interpret the character of the church's existence as one of preservation, yet one of testing, even judgment on the people of God. So John has told us by this image of measuring the temple, something about the nature of the church's existence. As the temple of God, as the dwelling of God, as the place where God dwells with his people, as a temple in the world, the church will be preserved.

Yet, at the same time, it will suffer at the hands of Rome and at the hands of the world through persecution. So, the character of the church's existence is a time of preservation, yet it is also one of testing and suffering. The next imagery, starting in verse 3, is the next image that John draws upon, then is two witnesses.

And we want to again ask the question, who are these two witnesses? And what is it that they do? And when do they do this? First of all, in verse 3, we're told that they witness for 1260 days. This is probably based on, or a version of Daniel's 1290 days in chapter 12, verse 11 of Daniel. And then John's number 1260 may reflect a more general rendering of 30 month, actually 30 day months.

But 1260 days again is roughly equivalent then to 42 months or three and a half years. So John uses these numbers, I think, interchangeably, three and a half years, 42 months, or 1260 days, depending on what he wants to say or depending on how he wants to characterize the period of the church's existence. So, in other words, I think the 1260 days, the 42 months, and the three and a half years are all symbolic ways of referring to the exact same period of time.

The church's existence started in the first century and led up until the second coming of Christ. And, of course, John had no inkling that it would go on for 2000 years. He simply understands the church's existence as one of testing and preservation until Christ comes back.

Now, in my opinion, there's no indication that John intends for us to add any of these numbers up to come up with a period of seven years of tribulation. In some theological constructions of the book of Revelation, or in some theological quarters, Revelation is read as portraying a seven-year period of tribulation. That arrived at number one, by connecting with Daniel back to his 70 weeks.

And I don't want to go into all that. Daniel's discussion of 70 weeks in chapter nine, I believe. But also by adding up two of these periods of three and a half years or 42 months or 1260 days, one arrives at seven years or a seven year tribulation.

But again, I see no evidence anywhere that John intends us to add any of these time periods up to arrive at a period of seven years. Instead, John simply uses different time periods or goes back and forth between 42 months, three and a half years, 1260 days in order to describe the same period of time. In other words, we said the period of time is the church's existence beginning in the first century and continuing until the return of Jesus Christ to bring it to an end, which we'll find in seal number seven.

But depending on what John wants to say, and how he wants to portray the church's struggle and its existence, John can use these different numbers. For example, all of them are to be taken symbolically. So, the question is, what is the meaning portrayed by using these symbols? So John can describe the period of the church's existence as three and a half years, three and a half years suggesting something that is intense, something that indicates the persecution and the suffering of the church, but it won't last.

Three and a half years is half of seven, seven being the number of perfection and completeness. Three and a half falls far short of that. So, three and a half years would suggest the church is in for a bumpy ride, so to speak.

It's a time of trial. It's intense persecution, but it will be cut off. It won't last.

And you think about it, the idea of time, times, and half a time. Time, and then it increases to times, but just as things get rolling, then only half a time, the time gets cut off. So, the idea is the church's existence will be one of intense persecution, but it won't last.

It will be cut off, and it falls short of the perfect number seven. By using the term 42 months, then John can portray the church's existence in the light of the Old Testament background as a time of testing, but also a time of protection as it was for Israel in the wilderness. By using 1260 days, the author can recall the period of testing that Daniel himself anticipated and now suggesting that the church has entered that period and the church again is fulfilling what it was that Daniel was prophesying.

So when does this event occur, or when is this period of 42 months or 1260 days, or three and a half years? Those are simply different ways to symbolically describe the character of the church's entire period. Again, from our perspective, we look at it 2000 years later, but John was more interested in describing the character of the church's struggle and its existence that would lead up to the second coming of Christ whenever that would take place. When we look at Revelation, though, I think we're going to see that John suggests that this period of tribulation, this three-and-a-half year, 42 months, 1260-day period begins with the death of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ's own suffering and his own faithful witness to the point of death was the beginning of this period of tribulation. And now the church, now his followers, participate in the same faithful witness in the face of suffering and death. In fact, to move beyond this, if one wants to be convinced that this characterizes the rest of church history, one only needs to pick up something such as, say the Fox's Book of Martyrs and a number of other even descriptions of what happens in the church in third world countries, et cetera, to see the extent to which Christians continue to suffer and even be persecuted for their faith.

Something that is eye-opening for those of us who live in places where we still enjoy a considerable amount of religious freedom without worrying about having to sacrifice our lives for that. Now, in chapter 11, beginning with verse three, this period of 42 months or 1260 days or three and a half years now is meant to describe the time of these two witnesses. In the rest of chapter two, we said the two witnesses and their careers, so to speak, had two phases during this period of time.

The first part of it is the two witnesses go out and engage in witnessing in the world. And they seem to do so with a considerable amount of success. And by that, I mean they do so without seeming to experience any harm or opposition.

In fact, the text tells us that anyone who tries to harm them will actually suffer serious consequences. So apparently the church is allowed to perform, or these two witnesses are allowed to perform their witness. Yet at the end of the day, we'll see it starting with verse seven.

It says, now when they have finished the witness, a beast is allowed to come out of the abyss and put them to death. So in three through six, they appear to be invincible. And starting in verse seven, all of a sudden they appear to be vulnerable.

A beast comes out of the abyss, puts them to death, and all the world basically throws a party because they're happy that these two witnesses have been put to death. So I want to ask then, how do we explain what seems to be going on in chapter 11 with the apparent invincibility but then the vulnerability of these two witnesses? And again, who are these two witnesses? What I want to start with is

who the identities of these two witnesses are. Who are they? Now, the starting point is to realize that whatever or whoever these witnesses are, they should be taken symbolically, as we've seen with all the other images. That is, although the two witnesses could refer to two actual individuals, they don't necessarily have to refer to only two witnesses.

They could refer to much more, much in the same way that in our political cartoons, Uncle Sam, for example, and this may not be the best example, but Uncle Sam represents the entire government, represents an entire group of people, not one solitary person. In the same way, these two witnesses could represent more than just two persons. The two witnesses most likely have their background in the Old Testament figures of Moses and Elijah, and in much Jewish apocalyptic, there is some expectation of Moses and Enoch, for example, returning.

There is the expectation that Moses and Elijah will return. Some of that seems to lie; the expectation of the return of Elijah seems to lie behind not only a couple of Old Testament texts but also the understanding of John the Baptist in the Gospels. So, the expectation of a prophet like Moses is to arise, the expectation of the coming of Elijah, and it's interesting in the Old Testament that both of them appear to be removed from this earth in very unusual ways.

In verse 6 of chapter 11, notice it says, these men, these two witnesses, have the power to shut up the sky so it will not rain during the time they are prophesying. Causing it not to rain or shutting up the sky so it does not rain was one of the miracles performed by Elijah. But then notice next, it says, and they have the power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want, which is exactly what Moses did in the book of Exodus, recalling the Exodus plagues.

So, the primary model for these two witnesses is probably the Old Testament figures of Moses and Elijah. But interestingly, note that it's not that one of them does the miracles of Elijah and the other does the miracles of Moses. Both of them are Elijah and Moses.

So, John is interested in saying that one of them is Moses and the other is Elijah. They both perform the miracle of shutting the sky up so it doesn't rain. And they are both able to turn the water into blood and strike the earth with plagues.

So, both of them perform the works of Moses and Elijah, not one or the other. It's interesting, too, that by calling them prophets, both Elijah and Moses had prophetic functions and prophetic ministries in the Old Testament as these two witnesses do here. Now, once again, we need to ask who these witnesses are. Some people have been convinced that this is actually Moses and Elijah coming back to life during this time.

Often this is associated with a time in the future right before the coming of Christ during this final period of life on the earth for that period of time. Some have actually tried to associate the two witnesses with historical figures in the first century, a common one being that one was Paul and one was Peter. And this is describing their ministry.

That's possible. But once again, I think we should perhaps look at the two individuals as symbolic and maybe not symbolic of two precise individuals or to be identified as two exact individuals. But following a number of commentaries, I would agree that the two individuals are symbolic of the entire witnessing church.

Looking at the entire church during this period of time, beginning in the first century until Christ comes back. We'll see at the end of chapter 11 and with the seventh seal in chapter 11 as well that until Christ comes back, this is a symbolic vision or image of the church in its faithful witness and its prophetic role in the world. And again, we shouldn't take these as the two.

Some have suggested these two witnesses are part of the church. Probably, the two witnesses symbolize the entire church in its prophetic function as it is meant to perform its faithful witness in the world in the face of persecution and opposition. Now, a couple of the reasons for concluding this is, first of all, by being called God's witnesses in verse 3, by going out into the world and witnessing, this is the exact same task that the church was expected to do back in chapters 2 and 3. And so, one of the issues back in chapters 2 and 3 was that the church, at least some of the churches, were compromising their faithful witness by compromising with pagan Roman rule.

The two churches that were faithful were actually suffering because of their faithful witness and their refusal to compromise. So, the notion of witness is one that we were introduced to all the way back in chapter 1. That's what Jesus did. Jesus was the faithful witness.

Antipas is a faithful witness in chapter 3 who dies for his faith. John is now witnessing to these things he saw. The churches in chapters 2 and 3 are meant to carry out a faithful witness for Jesus Christ in the world in the face of opposition and persecution.

But the problem was so many of the churches in chapters 2 and 3 had so compromised with the pagan world that they were in danger of completely losing their witness if they hadn't already. The second thing to note is that these two witnesses in this text are identified in verse 4 as the two lampstands. The author actually uses language from Zechariah chapter 4 to identify them as two olive trees.

But they're also identified with the two lampstands from Zechariah 4 and from the temple. Another indication of using temple imagery to apply to the church is their two lampstands. But by identifying them with two lampstands, one of the keys to understanding this is to go back to chapter 1 in verse 20 where the lampstands that Christ walked in the midst, the golden lampstands, were identified as the seven churches.

And so by identifying these two witnesses, and we'll ask why two in just a moment, but by identifying these two witnesses as two lampstands, given what we've seen so far all the way back in verse 20 and the identification in chapters 2 and 3 of the churches as lampstands, we should then understand these two witnesses as symbolizing the entire church in its prophetic ministry, but in its witness as well. So the theme of witness, as well as the fact that John has already identified the lampstands as churches back in chapter 1, I think, leads us to the conclusion that these two witnesses symbolize the entire witnessing church. And again, when they do this, this is not referring to some period only in the future, but is referring, I take it, to John's understanding of what the church should be doing starting in his own day until Christ comes back to consummate history and reward and vindicate his people.

In the midst of that, the church should function as a faithful witness, even in the face of hostility and biting persecution. Now, if this is the case, the next question is, well, why the number two? Why only two witnesses? If John doesn't intend to be literal, why not seven or ten or some number like that? There are probably at least two possibilities, and they might not be exclusive. First of all, again, to go back to the Old Testament, according to the book of Deuteronomy, in order for a case to stick, in order for a testimony to stick in court, according to the book of Deuteronomy, requires two or three witnesses.

And so that would fit perfectly. The theme of witness, the church being a witness, John goes back to the Old Testament and draws on this concept in Deuteronomy, now envisioning two witnesses based on the stipulation in Deuteronomy that there must be two or three witnesses. A second possibility is when you go back to chapters two and three, only two churches were faithful in their witness.

And we saw the other five were compromising to some extent. Only two of the churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, were commended for their faithful witness in the face of suffering. This may also provide the model for John's; in other words, those two churches were the model for what the church was to be of an uncompromising faithful witness in the world.

So, both of those together might probably explain why John portrays the witnesses as only two. Furthermore, when we ask the question of what the relationship between the two witnesses then and the temple back in chapter 11, verses one and

two, the temple that was measured, probably these, as we've seen John do several times, these are simply two different perspectives or two different ways of looking at the same thing. That is the church as preserved but subject to persecution.

The church is a temple that is preserved by God in which God dwells, but it is also subject to persecution. Now, I am looking at the church from a different perspective, from the standpoint of its faithful witness. And notice the other connection too.

There's also a connection and relationship to the temple. In one and two, the church is clearly symbolized by a temple, but the fact that it's identified with a lamp stand from Zechariah 4, which is a vision of God's temple. Zechariah 4 is one of the Old Testament passages that lie behind Revelation chapter 11, and the two witnesses in identifying them with olive trees and the two lampstands suggests a connection in terms of the temple.

So, temple imagery does not finish in verse two. It continues with the description of the two witnesses by the use of the lamp stand from chapter 4 of Zechariah. So, in verses one and two, they're seen from the perspective of the temple and the churches, and now they're seen in verses three and following from the perspective of a faithful witnessing church. One indication of what they do is found in verse three already.

And before they ever do anything, John describes them as clothed in sackcloth. This could suggest the notion of repentance but could also suggest the idea of mourning because of judgment. Therefore, the two witnesses are already indicating what it is and what the primary role, at least in chapter 11, is that they are going to undertake.

And that will be a message or a ministry that actually results in judgment. And in fact, that's what one finds in verses four and six. The two witnesses symbolizing the church then begin its ministry or are described as witnessing, and intriguingly, what happens in verses five and six is they don't appear to have success as far as evangelism.

And it's not that they don't; it's just, that's not Paul's point. John's point is to demonstrate, as we've said, how the church is or what the theological underpinning is. How do the church and its suffering witness relate to what took place in chapters eight and nine and the trumpet judgments? These chapters describe that in more detail. So now the trumpet judgments in chapters eight and nine are related to the church's suffering witness.

That is the reason why God pours out his judgment on humanity in chapters eight and nine is because of their rejection of the faithful witnessing church and even their persecution and even putting to death the faithful church. So note in verse five, if anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouth and devours their enemies.

Verse six, as we've already looked at, these men have the power to shut up the sky so it won't rain.

And they have the power to turn the water into blood, especially that, and strike the earth with any plague they want, which seems to go back to chapters eight and nine. So the idea here is not so much that we should interpret these literally and that there's going to be a period of time sometime when there's no rain. But again, the author is recalling Old Testament texts.

He wants you to recall the ministry of Elijah and Moses and now see that the witnessing church in chapter 11 is now performing a similar role. And so the judgment of chapters eight and nine is clearly a response to the rejection of the faithful witness of these two witnesses in five and six. Now we said that apparently, in verses four and six, the witnesses are unhindered and unopposed in their witness.

And it says anyone that tries to harm them will actually be subject to the plagues. Chapters eight and nine. Yet, starting with verse seven, the scene changes abruptly.

In seven, the witness appears to be over, and a beast comes out of the abyss, who is able to oppose them and put them to death. Now, here are a couple of things about this beast. We'll see that this scene of a beast coming out of the abyss and putting them to death, this brief mention of the beast doing this will get unpacked in more detail in Revelation 12 and 13, where a beast comes out of the sea to persecute and harm the people of God.

So, chapters 12 and 13 will expand in more detail on verse seven. But there are a couple of things about the beast and the abyss that we'll look at in more detail in chapters 12 and 13. The abyss, or starting with the beast, the beast actually has a long history in Jewish apocalyptic literature, but in the Old Testament itself, the beast is a demonic figure, an evil figure often associated with oppressive, using the Old Testament to refer to oppressive rulers or oppressive nations that oppose God and are idolatrous and oppress and harm God's people.

So this image of a beast is one that already comes to John with a history of use and interpretation and identification with evil rulers and evil empires that oppress and harm God's people. And now John uses the beast again, probably to refer to another oppressive, godless, idolatrous empire. And for his day, that would have been the Roman empire.

We've already been introduced to the abyss in chapter nine, where these locust figures come out of the abyss. The abyss also has a history of meaning and use that it carries with it into the usage John gives it. And that is, the beast was seen as the home or the prison of evil demonic beings.

So, by reading of a beast that comes out of the abyss, the readers now recognize the true source of their persecution. And that is, it's nothing less than the same spirit, the same anti-God spirit, the same oppressive, evil, demonic spirit that inspired other governments and nations and people and rulers to harm God's people and to oppose God's people is now acting again to oppose God's people in the first-century church, in the form in the first century, at least in the form of the Roman empire. And we'll see more about that.

We'll return to that in chapters 12 and 13. But intriguingly, then, apparently, the beast wins a victory so that, as we said in verses four and six, the two witnesses appear to be invincible, but now the beast wins the victory so that the two witnesses seem to be vulnerable. The way to look at this, I think, is that it's tempting to read this as a chronological account or a sequential story of these two witnesses.

That is, first of all, there will be a period of time when they have success and then they're invincible. And then there will be a period of time, a brief period of time where they're actually vulnerable. Instead, I think we should not take this with quite that strict literalness as far as a sequence of events or a temporal progression.

Instead, I like what Richard Bauckham said about this. A British scholar said that probably the best way to take chapter 11 is to see it not as predicting a series of events in the life of the church but more to read it as a parable about what the church is supposed to be doing. That is, instead of seeing the church as having a period of success and then being vulnerable, it's rather to read this as once again seeing the church from two different perspectives.

On the one hand, the church will be protected and even invincible, while on the other hand, it will still be subject to persecution at the hands of the world. On the one hand, it will be protected and invincible. On the other hand, it is still vulnerable to the attack and persecution of the Roman Empire and other ungodly nations.

So, I think Bauckham might be right. This sort of function is like a parable of what is true of the church. How does the church maintain its faithful witness? How does it carry out its world? It will be both invincible and carry out its witness.

At the same time, it will also be vulnerable to persecution and death. The response to the two witnesses who get put to death is twofold. First of all, the text tells us they leave their bodies unburied.

In the first century, this would have been a sign of extreme dishonor or shame not to bury the body. So, this is just kind of heaping up insult upon insult. So, it would have been a great insult to leave their bodies out in the streets.

Not so much a grotesque thing, again, as much as an insult. The city in which they are left exposed and unburied is called the Great City. Actually, it's called a number of things.

First of all, it's called the Great City. A term that elsewhere is applied to Babylon, and when we get to that term elsewhere, especially in chapters 17 and 18, we will demonstrate that Babylon, in this case, was probably a code for the city of Rome. But in chapter 16, verse 19 of Revelation, in chapter 17, verse 18, in chapters 18, verse 10, and 16, and 18, and 19, and verse 21, all of chapter 18, we find references to the Great City in reference to Babylon, which probably is to be equated with Rome.

However, the city here also appears to be the city of Jerusalem since, in verse 8, it's described as the place where our Lord is crucified. And furthermore, it's identified as Sodom and Egypt. So, what appears to be going on it's as if the author is combining all of these cities into one great city in opposition to God, and who opposes and oppresses God's people, so that you almost have a trans-temporal city, one that now is embodied in Rome, but was embodied in other great cities, such as Egypt and Sodom.

And we know the story of Egypt as an oppressive, godless, idolatrous empire, and Sodom being a city equivalent to evil, and even Jerusalem, the place where Jesus Christ was put to death and crucified for his faithful witness so that now all of those are embodied and wrapped up in Rome. But this also allows it to apply beyond Rome to any other city; that is, this city exists until the second coming, and any other city that cares to embody rebellion and evil and idolatry and oppress God's people fits exactly what we find here. But now, a symbol that finds its fulfillment, particularly in Rome, but wherever there's a rebellious, idolatrous city that rejects God and persecutes his people.

One commentary labeled this a world city. So, the first is that in this city that has persecuted and put to death God's people, they leave the bodies unburied, a sign of insult and dishonor, a sign of shame. The second thing they do is celebrate.

They throw a party and rejoice because these two individuals have caused them torment and harm. The reference to the three and a half days that they lie dead before finally, in verses 11 and 12, they're raised, the three and a half days is probably meant to recall both the three and a half years, but probably as well roughly the period of time that Jesus Christ himself lay in the grave until his resurrection. Now, these people lie dead in the street for these two witnesses for three and a half days, leading up then to verses 11 and 12, where they are raised up before the entire world and for everyone to see.

The notion of resurrection here is one of vindication. So now, in verses 11 and 12, this is where the saints are vindicated for their suffering witness. The world's

evaluation of them in the previous verses in chapter 11 is one of rejection, persecution, putting to death, and rejoicing because of their death, and now the verdict is reversed in a sense, and these two witnesses are raised and they are vindicated in before the eyes of the watching world.

Given the apocalyptic and symbolic nature of the symbolism here, there's no need to invent modern ways for the whole world to see these three witnesses, such as satellite TV or a webcam or something like that. All of these have been suggested, but again, the author is working with apocalyptic symbolism, and we have to remind ourselves what would the first readers have understood when they read this, and they would have no notion of some of our modern-day technology. So the whole point is this is simply meant to represent their vindication, and in fact, the text that lies behind this, when it says, for three and a half days they lay in the streets, and people gazed on them, they threw a party, then in verse 11, but after three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet.

This is almost verbatim; much of this verse comes right out of Ezekiel chapter 37 and verse 10, where Israel experienced death because of exile, and now God promises a day when his breath will enter into them and they will stand up. The picture of the dry bones now comes together, and it stands up on its feet. Now, that language is utilized to apply to the witnesses who are vindicated.

The beast put them to death. The world gloated over them. The world's verdict was that they had been defeated, and their witness appeared to be in vain.

Now, God vindicates them by raising them up and giving them life, showing that their faithful witness indeed was not in vain. Actually, I'll demonstrate later on that this text develops in more detail in Revelation 20 and 4-6 in the well-known Millennial Kingdom passage. After the ascent to heaven in verses 13 and 14, especially in verse 13, we find this interesting scene where, following the resurrection, now we find an earthquake, and a tenth of this great city collapses.

Intriguingly, the response is that although at least a tenth of the city collapsed and 7,000 people living in the city died from this earthquake, the rest of them were terrified or feared, and they gave glory to God in heaven. Now, there's been a lot of debate on exactly how we are to understand this response. Elsewhere, this language is sometimes used in the context of a response of conversion.

So, some would suggest that those who were not put to death are actually converted. They give God glory. That is the very thing that people refused to do earlier in chapters 8 and 9 in response, for example, to the trumpet judgments.

They refused to repent. They refused to give God glory. Now, some do give God glory.

Others understand it as simply a forced acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, such as one finds in Philippians 2, 9-11. For example, every knee will be forced to bow. Every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, some of them unto salvation.

But many understand that text as a forced homage. Some would take this simply as an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, which is not necessarily a true repentance or a true turning. Perhaps we should understand this, though, that maybe we should understand it as a both-and that some of the responses will be forced acknowledgment, but that some of these are to be understood as giving God glory in terms of actually repenting.

Now, Richard Bauckham understands that these individuals actually repent. The giving God glory is actually an act of repentance, but they do so in response to the faithful suffering witness of the church. In other words, Richard Baucom says chapters 8 and 9 did not bring about repentance.

In other words, judgment does not bring about repentance. What does? It's the faithful witnessing of the church that will finally bring about the repentance of the nations. The only difficulty here is that the response of giving God glory comes not in response to the faithful witness, but it comes in response to the earthquake and the final judgment.

So primarily, what we have at the end here is that even in the midst of God's judgment, some end up still responding in repentance. Now, what I want to look at next then is at the beginning of verse 15, the final trumpet is finally going to be blown. We'll begin the next section by looking at the seventh trumpet.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his teaching on the book of Revelation. This is session 16 on Revelation 11, the Temple, and the Two Witnesses.