

Revelation 11: The Temple and Two Witnesses

Author: Dr. Dave Mathewson

Session 16

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Abstract

In Lecture 16, Dr. Dave Mathewson examines Revelation 11, focusing on the symbolic images of the measured temple and the two witnesses. He argues that measuring the inner temple signifies God's spiritual preservation and protection of the church throughout the entire era between Christ's first and second comings. Conversely, the trampling of the outer court and the martyrdom of the two witnesses illustrate that the church remains physically vulnerable to persecution by worldly, godless powers like the Roman Empire. Ultimately, the prophetic ministry, death, and vindicating resurrection of the witnesses demonstrate that the church's faithful suffering serves as God's primary instrument to confront a rebellious world.

Outline

I. Introduction to Revelation 11 and its Core Visionary Images

- A. Recapitulation of the context following the sixth trumpet (Revelation 9)
- B. Transition to the seventh trumpet and two central symbolic images:
 - 1. The command to measure the temple of God (Revelation 11:1–2)
 - 2. The narrative account of the two witnessing prophets (Revelation 11:3–14)
- C. Conclusion of the sixth trumpet interlude with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15)

II. The Image of the Temple and Its Measuring (Revelation 11:1–2)

- A. Old Testament background of measuring a temple/city:
 - 1. Ezekiel 40–48: Vision of the measured temple and the New Jerusalem
 - 2. Zechariah 2:1–5: Zechariah given a measuring reed to measure Jerusalem
- B. Major interpretive approaches to the temple in Revelation 11:
 - 1. Literal future rebuilt end-time temple (Futurist view)
 - 2. First-century physical temple in Jerusalem prior to 70 AD (Preterist view)
 - 3. Figurative end-time future people of God
 - 4. Metaphorical representation of the church (Jews and Gentiles) from the first century until the Second Coming (Mathewson's view)

C. New Testament and historical parallels for the church as a temple:

1. Paul's epistles: 1 Corinthians 3 (readers as God's temple) and Ephesians 2:20–22 (church built on apostles/prophets)
2. Revelation 3:12: Overcomers made pillars in God's temple
3. Qumran community/Dead Sea Scrolls: Self-identification as God's temple, contrasted with John's Christological fulfillment where Jesus and the Lamb are the true temple

D. Meaning of measuring vs. non-measuring of temple courts:

1. Measuring temple, altar, and worshipers implies divine ownership, spiritual protection, and preservation
2. Exclusion of the outer court given to Gentiles to be trampled for 42 months:
 - a. Perspective 1: Distinction between faithful believers and unfaithful/compromising members (cf. Revelation 2–3)
 - b. Perspective 2 (Preferred): Dual perspective of the church—spiritually preserved at its core, yet physically vulnerable to earthly persecution by godless nations/Rome

III. Symbolic Temporal Designations (42 Months, 1260 Days, 3.5 Years)

A. Old Testament roots:

1. Daniel's 'time, times, and half a time' (Daniel 7:25; 9:27; 12:7)
2. Elijah's drought ministry of 3.5 years (1 Kings 17–18; James 5:17)
3. Israel's 40 wilderness encampments (Numbers 33), signifying testing, judgment, and preservation

B. Theological significance of the numbers:

1. Not a literal calendar period to be calculated mathematically
2. Represents the entire inter-advent age (from Christ's death/resurrection to the Second Coming)
3. Symbolic character breakdown:
 - a. 3.5 Years: Half of 7 (perfection/completeness); signifies intense trial that is limited and cut short
 - b. 42 Months: Characterizes the church's existence as a period of wilderness testing and preservation
 - c. 1260 Days: Echoes Daniel's period of prophetic trial fulfilled in the present age
4. Rejection of additive theories (e.g., combining 3.5-year periods to calculate a literal 7-year tribulation)

IV. The Two Witnesses and Their Prophetic Ministry (Revelation 11:3–13)

A. Duration and prophetic identity of the witnesses:

1. Prophesying for 1260 days clothed in sackcloth (signifying mourning, repentance, and judgment)
2. Old Testament prototypes: Moses (plagues/water into blood) and Elijah (shutting the sky/fire)

3. Both witnesses perform the works of both Elijah and Moses jointly, highlighting their prophetic role

B. Symbolic identity as the entire witnessing church:

1. Not two literal individuals (e.g., historical Moses/Elijah or Peter/Paul)
2. Designated as two olive trees and two lampstands (Revelation 11:4; Zechariah 4)
3. Connection to Revelation 1:20 and chapters 2–3: Lampstands represent the churches
4. The significance of the number 'two':
 - a. Legal requirement in Deuteronomy for two or three witnesses to validate testimony in court
 - b. Reflects the two faithful, non-compromising churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia (Revelation 2–3)

C. The dual paradox of invincibility and vulnerability:

1. Phase 1 — Invincibility (Revelation 11:3–6): Prophetic witness proceeds unhindered; fire consumes enemies and plagues strike the earth (correlating trumpet judgments to humanity's rejection of witness)
2. Phase 2 — Vulnerability and Death (Revelation 11:7–10):
 - a. The Beast from the Abyss arises, overcomes, and kills the witnesses after their testimony is finished
 - b. Background of the Beast: Demonic, oppressive imperial powers (historically the Roman Empire)
 - c. Bauckham's parable perspective: Simultaneous realities of spiritual protection/invincibility and physical vulnerability/persecution

V. Martyrdom, Vindication, and the Culmination of History

A. Disgrace in the 'Great City' (Revelation 11:8–10):

1. Bodies left unburied for 3.5 days as an extreme cultural insult and sign of shame
2. The 'Great City' as a composite world city symbolizing hostility to God:
 - a. Babylon/Rome (oppressive imperial power)
 - b. Sodom (immorality/evil) and Egypt (oppressive enslavement)
 - c. Jerusalem (where the Lord was crucified)
3. Earthly dwellers gloat, celebrate, and exchange gifts over the death of the tormenting prophets

B. Divine Vindication and Resurrection (Revelation 11:11–12):

1. Breath of life from God enters them after 3.5 days (recalling Ezekiel 37 dry bones vision and Jesus' resurrection)
2. Ascend to heaven in a cloud before a watching world, reversing humanity's hostile verdict
3. Signifies the ultimate vindication of the faithful witnessing church

C. Cosmic Response and Judgment (Revelation 11:13–14):

1. Great earthquake strikes; one-tenth of the city falls and 7,000 perish

2. Survivors are terrified and give glory to the God of heaven:

- a. Forced homage / acknowledgment of God's sovereignty
- b. True conversion/repentance brought about through the church's faithful, suffering witness

D. Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet (Revelation 11:15):

- 1. Consummation of God's kingdom and conclusion of the sixth trumpet interlude