

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 16, Revelation 11: Temple and Two Witnesses Woman/dragon/son

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Welcome to your deep dive. Today, we're diving into Revelation chapter 11. Oh, Revelation 11.

Yeah, it's a chapter that's packed with symbolism, right? Mm-hmm. A temple, these mysterious witnesses, a beast from the abyss, all this kind of crazy stuff. Right.

We're going to explore what scholars think these symbols mean and what they tell us about the early Christian experience. Absolutely. So, are you ready to unpack some serious apocalyptic imagery? I am.

Revelation has fascinated and puzzled people for centuries, and chapter 11 is a great place to start unraveling it. Okay. So, first, let's set the stage a little bit.

This vision that John has, it wasn't just a random dream, right? It's coming out of a very specific historical situation. You're right. Context is key.

Revelation was most likely written by John to early Christians facing persecution under the Roman Empire. Right. So, imagine their reality.

Emperor worship was enforced, and those who refused to comply faced harsh consequences. Wow. Talk about a pressure cooker.

So, in this situation, John drops this image of a temple that needs to be measured. Right. But the text is clear that it's not about a literal building.

Right. So, what's the significance of that? It's a metaphor for the church. The idea of God dwelling among his people was central to the Old Testament temple.

Okay. But after Jesus, that dwelling place isn't a physical building, but the community of believers. So, the people themselves are the new temple.

That reminds me of how Paul called Christians temples of the Holy Spirit. Exactly. But here's where things get really fascinating.

John is told to measure the temple, symbolizing God's protection. Right. But the outer court isn't measured.

It's given over to the Gentiles to be trampled for 42 months. Okay, hold on. That's a pretty unsettling detail.

Is this saying that some parts of the church are vulnerable? Well, the 42 months, which equal three and a half years, are probably symbolic, not a literal timeline. One interpretation is that it represents the parts of the church that have compromised with the world. Okay.

And are therefore subject to its pressures. So, like the churches that John critiques earlier in Revelation for losing their way? Yes. They've become part of the outer court, so to speak? Precisely.

Yeah. But another, perhaps more likely, interpretation is that it represents the duality of the Christian experience. Okay.

You're spiritually protected by God, but you're still living in a world that may be hostile to your faith. Yeah. You're safe in God's hands, but that doesn't exempt you from the realities of persecution.

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense, especially in that historical context. Right. You're part of God's dwelling place, but you're also very much in the world with all of its challenges.

Yes, and that tension is key to understanding this passage. Okay. Now, let's talk about these mysterious two witnesses who arrive on the scene.

Okay. They preach for 12,260 days, again, probably symbolic and mirroring those 42 months, and they have some wild powers. Right.

They can shut up the sky like Elijah, call down plagues like Moses. Right. It's as if they embody the combined prophetic power of the entire Old Testament.

Yeah. It's really interesting. So, who are they? I mean, some scholars say it's literally Moses and Elijah returning.

Others point to first-century figures like Peter and Paul. What are your thoughts? Well, those are common interpretations, but to me, the stronger argument is that the two witnesses represent the whole church. Okay.

In its prophetic role. They're the ones called to speak God's truth, even when the world doesn't want to hear it. Okay, so it's not about two specific individuals.

Right. But it's about this collective witness of the faithful. Yeah.

And there are two witnesses because in the Old Testament, you needed two witnesses for a valid testimony. Exactly. It could also tie back to only two churches in Revelation, Smyrna and Philadelphia.

Right. Being commended for their unwavering faith. They become these models of what it means to be a faithful witness.

Okay, so much layered meaning packed into just a few verses. It's really incredible. And just when it seems like these witnesses are unstoppable, things take a dramatic turn, right? Right.

They're killed by this beast that rises from the abyss. I mean, it's hard to imagine a scene that's more packed with symbolism. You're right.

There's a lot to unpack here. Yeah. Beasts in the Bible often represent oppressive anti-God empires.

Right. For John's audience, this likely meant Rome with its emperor worship and persecution of Christians. Okay, and the abyss.

That's not just any pit, is it? It's got some seriously dark connotations. Absolutely. In biblical imagery, the abyss is like a prison for evil spirits.

So this isn't just a political enemy. There's a spiritual dimension to the persecution. Wow.

It's a reminder that the forces arrayed against these early Christians weren't just earthly, but spiritual as well. And it gets, I mean, it's getting pretty intense here. The witnesses' bodies are left unburied, which is a huge insult in that culture.

Yeah. And the world is celebrating their death. And there's this chilling detail.

You know, they're killed in the great city. It's described in a way that makes it seem like Babylon, which was, you know, code for Rome at the time. But it's also described like Jerusalem.

Right. Where Jesus was crucified. So what's up with that? What's going on there? That merging of Babylon and Jerusalem into this one great city is one of the most fascinating aspects of this passage.

Yeah. To me, it suggests that this isn't just about one specific city or empire. Okay.

It's about any power that sets itself up against God. Right. It's the ultimate symbol of worldliness and opposition to God's people.

So it's not just about Rome, as bad as Rome might have been in that moment. Exactly. It's about recognizing that tendency towards opposition to God that can exist in any human system.

Exactly. That universality is crucial to understanding the deeper message of Revelation. Okay.

So we've got this world system embodied in the great city, and they're celebrating the death of God's witnesses. Is it all doom and gloom at this point for those who remain faithful? Not at all. Remember, this is apocalyptic literature.

Yeah. There's always a twist. Yeah.

And in this case, it's a big one. The witnesses lie dead for three and a half days, mirroring Jesus' time in the tomb, and then they are resurrected. Ah.

So we see that classic reversal, right? Yes. A sign of vindication for their suffering and faithful witness. That's got to have been quite a shock to those who were celebrating their demise.

Absolutely. And there's more. An earthquake strikes, destroying part of the city, and some people respond by giving glory to God.

Now, is that forced acknowledgment, like they're terrified, or is it genuine repentance? Perhaps both. Some might be simply terrified by God's power. Right.

But others might genuinely recognize his hand in the events and turn to him. It makes you wonder what impact those who actually saw that, who witnessed the resurrection, had on spreading the message, you know? Mm-hmm. You'd think that kind of event would make people pay attention.

That's a great question, and it's one that Revelation leaves open to us to consider. Mm. But it speaks to the ripple effects of faithful witness, even in the face of death.

So we've got a lot to ponder here. Yeah. But before we get too lost in speculation, let's take a step back for a second.

Okay. This isn't just a chronological account of events, right? Yeah. It's a powerful parable about what it means to be the church in the world.

You're absolutely right. Yeah. It's a story about the challenges and ultimately the victory of God's people.

Right. It reminds us that the church, as God's temple, will be preserved, even amidst suffering. Right.

We are called to be faithful witnesses, even when we face opposition. Mm. And ultimately, vindication comes from God.

Powerful stuff. This deep dive into Revelation 11 is giving me a whole new perspective on this book, you know? Mm-hmm. And listener, what's standing out to you so far? What's resonating? Hold onto those thoughts as we continue our exploration.

Absolutely. Okay. So we've seen this drama of the two witnesses play out, you know? Yeah.

Their powerful ministry, their shocking deaths. Uh-huh. The world's reaction to that, and then bam, resurrection.

Right. But then the chapter kind of shifts gears pretty dramatically. Mm-hmm.

All of a sudden, we're hearing trumpets blaring and these voices booming from heaven. Mm-hmm. It almost feels like a different scene altogether.

It's a definite shift in tone and focus. John takes us from these earthly struggles of the witnesses to this grand cosmic scene to signal a major transition. Mm-hmm.

And it's all building towards the blowing of the seventh trumpet. Okay. Which was first mentioned way back in Chapter 8. Okay.

And this isn't just any trumpet. This is a game changer. Okay.

I'm intrigued. Break it down for us. What happens when that seventh trumpet sounds? There are these loud voices from heaven proclaiming, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.

Whoa. That's not subtle. That's a pretty clear declaration of victory, isn't it? Exactly.

Yeah. It's a powerful affirmation of God's sovereignty over all creation. No matter how intense the persecution, no matter how strong the beast may seem, God is in control.

His plan will prevail. And everyone in heaven is totally on board with this, right? It sounds like one giant victory party is breaking out. You could say that.

Yeah. We see the 24 elders who symbolize the redeemed people of God, right? falling down in worship, giving thanks for his righteous judgments and the establishment of his kingdom.

Okay. So I have to ask, does this mean the story ends on this purely happy note? Right. Like all conflict resolved, good wins, roll credits, because this is Revelation, after all.

And it tends to be, well, a bit more complicated than that. You're right. It's not that simple.

Yeah. Revelation is layered with meaning and foreshadowing. Yes, the seventh trumpet marks a significant victory, and it gives us a glimpse of the ultimate triumphs to come.

Right. But the story doesn't end there. There's still a lot more to unfold.

Okay. You're keeping us in suspense. But what's striking to me is how much Chapter 11, even with this abrupt shift in scene, manages to pack in all these core themes of the entire book of Revelation, right? The temple, the witnesses, the beasts- you know, it's like a miniature version of the whole drama.

I totally agree. Yeah. It's a microcosm of this larger struggle between good and evil, between God's faithfulness and the world's opposition.

Right. And it shows us that even in the midst of suffering and persecution, God's people can hold onto hope and find assurance in the knowledge that he is ultimately in control. That's a message I think we all need to hear sometimes, especially when the world feels really chaotic and overwhelming.

Right. But I have to ask, and I know this is the question people have been debating for centuries, does Revelation give us any clues about the timing of all this? Like, is it a literal timeline of future events? That's the million-dollar question, isn't it? And as you said, people have been arguing about it for centuries. There are some who interpret Revelation very literally, seeing it as a precise roadmap of events leading up to the end times.

But others, and I tend to fall into this camp, see it more symbolically. Okay. The focus for me is on the timeless truths it conveys about God, about evil, right?

And about the ultimate triumph of good. So it's not about trying to decode a secret code or predict the future. Exactly.

It's about understanding the deeper spiritual realities that shape human experience. It's about finding hope and courage in the face of adversity. Yeah.

It's about living faithfully in a world that often feels hostile to God's purposes. That makes a lot of sense to me. Mm-hmm.

It's not a crystal ball, but it is a source of strength and guidance for living in the present, even when things get tough. Right. But to bring this back to Chapter 11, Sure.

if we connect this section about the seventh trumpet to this bigger picture of Revelation. What are the key takeaways we should keep in mind as we move forward? Well, for me, the first takeaway is the crucial importance of faithful witness. The two witnesses who represent the church are empowered by God and protected, even in the face of persecution.

Right. And their story reminds us that our primary calling as believers is to speak the truth. Right.

To stand up for what's right, to point others to God. Yeah. And to do all of this, even when it's difficult or costly.

So it's not about retreating from the world or passively waiting for things to get better. It's about actively engaging with the world. Right.

Being a light in the darkness, even when the darkness feels overwhelming. Yes, exactly. And the second takeaway is we need to be aware of the reality of spiritual warfare.

Mm-hmm. The beast emerging from the abyss represents these very real forces of evil that are at work in the world. Right.

Forces that are opposed to God and his people. So we're not just fighting against injustice or societal evils. Right.

We're wrestling with something much deeper. Mm-hmm. This spiritual dimension that we can't ignore.

Precisely. And that leads to the third takeaway. Okay.

Which is the ultimate sovereignty of God. Despite the seeming victory of the beast, God is still on the throne. Right.

The witnesses are resurrected, the seventh trumpet sounds, and God's kingdom is declared. Right. It's a powerful reminder that even in the darkest moments, we can have confidence in God's ultimate victory.

Okay. I'm feeling a bit more hopeful now. Good.

Even after that intense journey through the trials of the witnesses. But I have to ask, what about the people who celebrated their death? Mm-hmm. What happens to them? Right.

Is there any chance of redemption for those who seem so fiercely opposed to God? That's a great question. And it's one that Revelation will explore in greater depth as the story continues. Well, I guess we'll have to wait and see how that plays out.

But for now, I'm definitely feeling like I've gotten a much deeper understanding of Revelation chapter 11. Good. And listener, I hope you are too.

We've got a lot more to unpack in this book. Mm-hmm. So keep those questions coming as we keep diving deeper.

Okay. We've covered a lot of ground in Revelation 11. We have.

From the temple as a symbol of the church to those mysterious witnesses to the beast from the abyss. Yeah. And that dramatic declaration of God's kingdom, it's been quite a ride.

It has. But before we wrap up. Okay.

I want to go back to that image of the great city for a minute. Right. It really struck me how it kind of blends together Babylon, you know, representing the Roman Empire.

Yeah. And Jerusalem, the holy city, the place where Jesus was crucified. Mm-hmm.

What do you make of that blending of those two images? Well, it's one of the most powerful and thought-provoking aspects of this chapter. Yeah. On the one hand, it points to this reality that opposition to God can arise from anywhere.

Mm-hmm. Not just from a specific empire or political system. Okay.

It's a universal human tendency to set ourselves up in opposition to God's will. Whoa. Okay.

So you're saying it's not just about pointing fingers at the bad guys out there. It's about examining our own hearts and our own actions. Exactly.

And that's where the real challenge of Revelation lies, I think. It's easy to get caught up in the dramatic imagery. Right.

And the cosmic battles. Yeah. But the real transformation happens when we allow those images to shine a light on our own lives, our own compromise, our own tendencies to build our own kingdoms apart from God.

That's a powerful insight. Mm-hmm. It's not just about decoding these symbols.

Right. It's about allowing those symbols to decode you. Yes.

To reveal the ways in which we might be aligning ourselves with these forces that oppose God. Right. Even if we don't realize it.

And that's why I find Revelation 11 so relevant. Mm-hmm. Even for us today.

Yeah. It's not just an ancient text about some far-off future. Right.

It's a mirror reflecting these spiritual realities that are at play in our own lives. Right. In our own communities, in our own world.

So it's a call to action then, not just a story to read, but a challenge to live differently. Absolutely. Yeah.

It's a call to be those faithful witnesses, even when it's hard. Yeah. It's a call to stand against injustice and oppression, even when it feels like a losing battle.

Right. And it's a call to find our hope and security in God's ultimate victory. Mm-hmm.

Even when the world around us feels chaotic and uncertain. That's a message I think we all need to hear. Yeah.

Revelation 11 might seem like, I don't know, kind of a strange and confusing chapter at first glance. Right. But once you start peeling back the layers, there's so much wisdom and challenge packed in there.

Absolutely. And listener, I hope this deep dive has given you a new appreciation for this powerful and often misunderstood book. Mm-hmm.

What stood out to you? What questions are still swirling around in your mind? Let this be the beginning of your own exploration of Revelation. Right. It's a journey that might surprise you.

I couldn't agree more. There's always more to uncover, more to learn. Right.

More to be challenged by. Yeah. And I think that's what makes Revelation so fascinating.

It's a book that keeps on giving. Well said. And thank you for being our guide through this dense and fascinating chapter.

It's been a pleasure. I know I've learned a lot, and I hope our listeners have too. Me too.

So until next time, keep diving deep, keep exploring, keep asking questions, and keep seeking truth. It's been a pleasure. And to our listeners, happy exploring.