

Revelation 11 | God's Purposes Prevail and His People Are Vindicated

Chapter 11 has been generally acknowledged to be one of the most perplexing sections of the entire book of Revelation

There is a bewildering interweaving of OT history and symbols

- The temple and the altar
- Moses and Elijah
- The wild olive trees and the lampstand seen by Zechariah
- The plagues sent upon Pharaoh
- The beast predicted by Daniel
- Sodom and Egypt and Jerusalem

What are we to make of these things?

- We know that Revelation speaks of real things: people, places, events (future)—and that it uses a lot of symbolism to do so—but not always
 - What is symbolism and what is literal? (Can be a challenge to determine—take a humble tack)
- In this part of the vision, John sees:
 - Two **witnesses** of the gospel and judgment of God; supernatural **powers** for protection (fire from mouth); no **rain**—water to **blood**—**plagues** on earth for **demonstration**; the **beast** arises from the **abyss** and kills them; **world** rejoices; **bodies** lay; **resurrected** and **caught up** to heaven; **earthquake** where many died—**others** gave God glory

Verses 1-2

- Does not refer to the Jewish temple standing in Jerusalem during NT times (Destroyed in 70AD)
- **Perhaps there is a new temple in Jerusalem during the Tribulation period and it is that which John is seeing here**
 - There very well may be a temple standing in Jerusalem during the Tribulation period
 - There are several reasons to believe this
 - **Daniel 9:27** says that the anti-Christ will put a stop to the religious activity happening there
 - In **Matthew 24:15ff.** Jesus warns the when the anti-Christ stands in “**the holy place**” there will be great tribulation before Christ's return
 - **2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, NLT**
 - = a temple in the tribulation period (you can experience this in Israel)
- **Perhaps, this is symbolic language that pictures the temple not as a building but as God's people**
 - Normal use of the idea of temple in the NT
 - “**Do you not know that you are God's temple?**” (1 Corinthians 3:16)
 - “**We are the temple of the living God**” (2 Corinthians 6:16)
 - Believers are living stones “**being built up as a spiritual house**” (1 Peter 2:5)
 - The whole church is growing “**into a holy temple in the Lord**” (Ephesians 2:21)
 - Measuring is done in order to build and repair (Cf. restore and revive the church)

These 2 options kind of represent 2 ways to view the content in this chapter (there are others, but...)

- 1. A more **literal perspective** of future events during the tribulation period
- 2. A more **symbolic perspective** of future events during the tribulation period

1. A more literal perspective

- a. There is an actual new temple standing in Jerusalem (vv. 1-2)
 - i. Those inside represent Israel
 - ii. Those outside represent the nations against her
- b. During the tribulation period there will arise 2 witnesses in the last half of a 7 year period (v. 3)
 - i. They are witnesses specifically to unrepentant Israel
 - ii. **Zechariah 1:16-17 and 2:10-12, NASB**

- c. They have supernatural enabling to fulfill their ministry (v. 5)
 - i. These may be Elijah and Moses (v. 6) (Cf. **2 Kings 1**; **Exodus 4:9**) (Cf. Law and Prophets)
 - ii. May be two people who come in the spirit of Moses and Elijah (Cf. John the Baptist)
- d. The anti-Christ will come on the scene and kill them (v. 7)
- e. Their bodies will be seen by and celebrated over by the whole world (vv. 8-10)
- f. They will be resurrected for all to see and taken up to heaven (vv. 9-11)
- g. There will be an act of judgment (and earthquake) for those who have rejected their witness and others will repent and give glory to God (v. 13)

2. A more symbolic perspective

- a. The temple language represents the church (vv. 1-2)
 - i. Those on the inside are the church
 - ii. Those on the outside are its persecutors
- b. The two witnesses represent the witnessing Church during the tribulation period
 - i. Jesus sent His disciples out to witness in twos (**Luke 10:1**)
 - ii. They are represented as olive trees and lampstands (v. 4)
 - 1. Cf. Zerubbabel and Joshua (**Zechariah 4:2-14**)
 - a. Prince and priest
 - b. Cf. The church in its royal priesthood (**1 Peter 2:5**)
 - c. **Zech. 6:4** = "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord
- c. The miracles mentioned in connection to the witnessing Church represent God's protection of her (v. 5) and authoritative power present in her (v. 6)
 - i. To witness and pronounce judgment (Cf. **Jeremiah 5:14, NASB**)
- d. The beast (v. 7) represents antichristian world powers which seek to silence the churches witness
- e. The church will appear to be eradicated (vv. 8-10)
- f. The church will be vindicated as God's indestructible witness (v. 11)
 - i. The church has always risen from the ashes of persecution and martyrdom

Which is it? (more literal or more symbolic?) (God has and could literally do all this)

"Perhaps the most that can be said with confidence is that the author views the people of God as bearing faithful testimony, but also suffering pain and persecution and indignity. They are delivered not from martyrdom and death, but *through* martyrdom and death to a glorious resurrection." –Bruce Metzger¹

No matter who and what we interpret these witnesses and the connected details to be, three overarching truths are clear

- 1. God is once again, through another means, endeavoring to call to repentance sinful people that He loves and wants to forgive and save rather than judge
- 2. Though evil appears to triumph, it does not
- 3. God's purposes prevail and His people are vindicated
 - This is **true** at the **end**—this is true at **all times in all places**—this is true **in your life**
 - Lazarus; The Cross; Witnesses; you? (where does it feel like evil has won?)

Verses 14-19

- The kingdom of Christ is coming (v. 15)
- God's great power will be made evident (v. 17)
- Justice, judgment, retribution and reward (v. 18)
- The way opened to the ark of God (v. 19)
 - Represents the presence of God
 - The ultimate promise of our communion with Him
 - Through the blood of Christ
- **The 24 elders are—once again—on their faces worshipping!** (v. 16)

¹ Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code—Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 68.