

THE TEMPLE AND THE TWO WITNESSES

Introduction

1. The sounding of the first six trumpets revealed the warnings of judgment to come if men would not repent.
2. Before the sounding of the last trumpet, John was presented with a vision to bring a challenge to the faithful.
3. First, there was the assurance that God would keep His promise of salvation to the faithful and judgment to the wicked.
4. Then, there was the challenge to the faithful to preach the Gospel – warning the sinner and teaching the lost.
5. Finally, there is the challenge to remain faithful during severe persecution, for God will protect and reward His servants.

I. The Measuring of the Temple

(11:1-2)

- A. This vision is a continuation of the interval between the 6th and 7th trumpets.
- B. John was given a strong and solid reed to serve as a measuring stick.
- C. He was told to measure the temple, the altar and those who worship therein.
 1. Remember, this is symbolic!
 - a. Some have concluded that the Temple in Jerusalem must have been standing for John to have measured it.
 - b. Thus, they conclude that the book must have been written before AD 70.
 - c. However, John was not in Jerusalem! He was on Patmos experiencing a vision!
 - d. This is not a literal measuring of the literal Temple in literal Jerusalem.
 2. Also, the word used here is the word for the “sanctuary” or the “sacred edifice” of the Temple, not the entire Temple complex.
 3. The background of this symbol is found in several OT passages.
 - a. Ezekiel 42:20 – *to demonstrate a separation between the holy and the profane (cf. 44:23)*
 - b. Zechariah 2:1-5 – *to demonstrate God’s knowledge and protection of His people*
 - c. “All that pertained to this archetypal temple of John’s vision and Ezekiel’s vision is measured by the divine will and standard, and is to be holy and kept separate from the common (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1).”
 4. Thus, God’s temple would be protected by Him when it was attacked.
 - a. God will allow the attack.
 - b. But He will not allow what He protects to be destroyed.
 5. Another lesson to be learned from this symbol is that to be in the place of God’s protection, one must “measure up” to His standard.
 6. The temple of God is the church of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:5; etc.).

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- D. John was told not to measure the court outside of the temple proper (the sanctuary), for it was given to the Gentiles.
 - 1. Notice that this temple has only one court, much like the tabernacle in the wilderness.
 - 2. The fact that this court was not measured symbolized that it was not holy nor under God's protection.
 - a. In fact, it was "cast out" from God's protection.
 - b. It was left for the nations (the Gentiles).
 - c. Remember that both Jews and Gentiles could become members of the Lord's church.
 - d. The Gentiles in this verse symbolize the world – those who refused or abandoned the Gospel.
 - 3. Those outside of the church would be under God's wrath.
- E. Finally, he was told that the "holy city" would be trodden under foot for 42 months, or 3 ½ years.
 - 1. Just as the temple was not literal, so the "holy city" does not refer to a literal Jerusalem.
 - 2. Instead, the "holy city" is the home of the saved (cf. 21:2, 10).
 - 3. The message is clear: even though God protects the church, it will still face persecution.
 - a. No one will be able to destroy the Lord's church.
 - b. No persecution will force a Christian to be lost.
 - c. The worship and service of God would continue.
 - d. But, in the world, there will be suffering (cf. John 16:33).
 - 4. However, this persecution is limited – it lasts only 3 ½ years.
 - a. This number is ½ of seven.
 - b. This symbolizes a broken period of time, an incomplete episode of suffering.
 - c. This persecution would be severe, but it would not completely destroy the church.

II. The Two Witnesses

(11:3-6)

- A. After measuring the temple, John is told of God's two witnesses.
 - 1. The first part of this vision assured the church that God would protect them even though they would suffer persecution.
 - 2. The second part of this vision indicates that even during persecution, God's Word would still be taught and preached.
- B. Who are the two witnesses?
 - 1. Many have devised numerous strange and fanciful theories.
 - 2. Whoever they are, their duty is to testify and prophecy.
 - 3. Consider the symbolism of this concept.
 - a. Two witnesses were needed for legal testimony (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Numbers 35:30; Hebrews 10:28).
 - b. Two witnesses were needed for church discipline (Matthew 18:16, 19-20).
 - c. Two witnesses were needed for confirmation of truth (John 8:17; Luke 10:1; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19).
 - 4. If this number is to be taken literally, it probably refers to the Holy Spirit and the apostles (cf. John 15:26). *{Yet, keep in mind the fact that by this time all the apostles had died, save John.}*

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5. Symbolically, the two witnesses represent all those who stand for and teach the truth in the midst of persecution.
- C. Note that they wear sackcloth – symbolizing their mourning during their suffering – and prophesy for the same amount of time as when the “holy city” is trodden under foot.
 1. This links them to the prophets who often wore the same.
 2. Their “witnessing” and “prophesying” is not literal but symbolizes that they do the work of a prophet – speaking God’s Word.
- D. Their role is further explained by comparing them to the olive trees and candlesticks of Zechariah 4.
 1. The message was one of confirmation to Zerubbabel that the temple in Jerusalem would be rebuilt.
 2. The candlesticks shone forth the light of God’s truth.
 3. They were supplied with oil directly from the olive trees – symbolizing that their strength and power came from God.
 4. In John’s day, the faithful serve as witnesses who hold forth the Word of Truth, empowered by God through the Holy Spirit (cf. Philippians 2:15).
 5. The message is the same – God’s purpose will not be defeated; His people will be victorious.
- E. Furthermore, they would be protected by God, just as He has always empowered and guarded His prophets.
 1. Elijah called down fire from Heaven to devour the enemies of God (2 Kings 1:10-14).
 2. In like manner, those who stand for the Truth will prevail with the fire of God’s Word (cf. Jeremiah 5:14; 20:9; Acts 6:10; 7).
 3. Elijah’s prayer stopped the rain from falling in Israel (1 Kings 17:1; 18; Luke 4:25; James 5:16-18).
 4. In like manner, those who stand for the Truth will have the ear of God and the assurance of answered prayer.
 5. Moses caused plagues to humble the wicked Egyptians (Exodus 7 – 12).
 6. In like manner, those who stand for the Truth will bring down the unrighteous with God’s Word.
 7. These judgments are not literal, but symbolic of the power of the righteous over the wicked.

III. The Death of the Two Witnesses (11:7-10)

- A. This is the first mention of “the beast” who will play a prominent role in subsequent chapters of this book.
 1. In chapters 13 and 17, it is revealed that this beast symbolizes a great world power (namely, Rome).
 2. This beast is a servant of Satan, for it rises from the abyss.
 3. Thus, Rome’s persecution of the church and killing of Christians was the work of the Devil.
- B. Though the beast will war against and kill many saints, it would not be until they had finished their testimony.
 1. Though the church suffered severe persecution, the Gospel went into all the world (cf. Colossians 1:23).
 2. Furthermore, God’s will was completely revealed, confirmed, and recorded for all men (cf. Mark 16:17-20; Jude 1:3; 1 Peter 5:12).

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- 3. Satan would not succeed in stopping God's plan of salvation.
 - C. The bodies of the slain saints are pictured as lying in the streets of Babylon, the great city.
 - 1. Babylon symbolizes the world – thus, it is related to Sodom, Egypt and the worldliness that led to the crucifixion of Jesus.
 - 2. Sodom = moral depravity; Egypt = bondage to sin; Jerusalem = rejection of truth and salvation
 - D. The wicked world treats the deaths of Christians with utter contempt and disregard.
 - 1. The 3 ½ days is related to the other numbers in this chapter.
 - 2. It represents an incomplete time, in this case, of a much shorter duration.
 - E. In fact, they rejoice because they have rid the world of such a nuisance.
- IV. The Resurrection of the Two Witnesses (11:11-14)
- A. However, their joy does not last long, for the cause of Christ will rise from the ashes of persecution.
 - B. Their joy is turned to fear as God grants complete and total victory to His people, the church.
 - 1. Neither the resurrection nor the ascension in this passage is literal.
 - 2. They symbolize the victory of the cause of Christ over evil.
 - C. When God's people are victorious, the wicked are judged and punished.
 - D. The result is that men fear and recognize the power of God.