

Study 12: Revelation Chapter 11

Introduction

“... Great activity follows the sounding of this trumpet; God’s heavenly artillery is already active. All this anticipates the things to come in the next section (chapters 12-22) as the prophecies of the little book which had been given to John are unfolded and carried out...”

Body of the Study

Introduction

The Measure of the Temple

The Two Witnesses

The Witnesses Respond

The Seventh Trumpet

Homework and preparation for next week:

Re-read chapter 11

Read the notes as a review of the study

Reflect on what we have covered in the previous chapters of the book in preparation for the next study (mid-study review).

How would the readers in first century Asia Minor have understood John’s description of “the beast” (11:7). What would that description have portrayed to them? How would the things that John wrote give them assurance and hope?

How does the “kingdom of the world” become the “kingdom of Christ”? (11:15)

Notes for study 12: Revelation Chapter 11

“...Great activity follows the sounding of this trumpet; God’s heavenly artillery is already active. All this anticipates the things to come in the next section (chapters 12-22) as the prophecies of the little book which had been given to John are unfolded and carried out¹...”

Introduction

Chapter 11 continues the second interlude of chapter 10, where John was instructed to eat the little book, which represents the gospel and God’s judgmental prophecies against the ungodly.

The Measure of the Temple

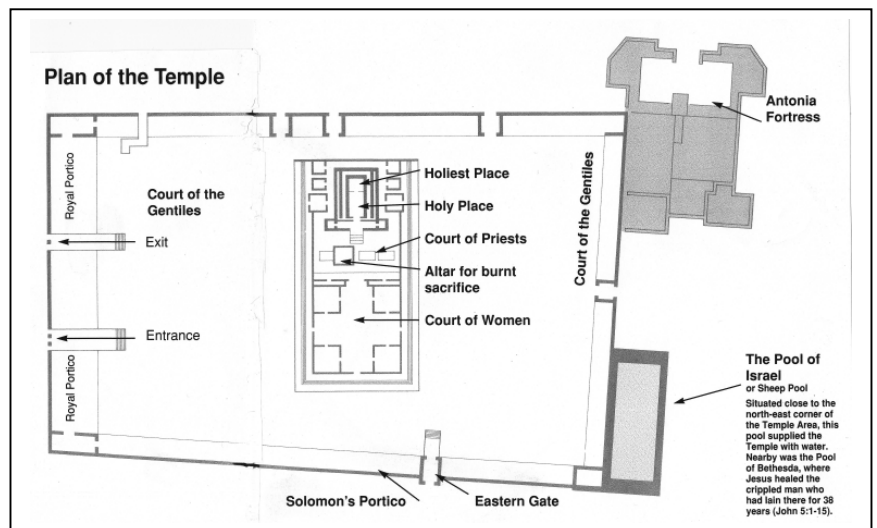
John was given a reed – presumably by the angel, and told to go and measure the temple “...I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “...Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there...” (11:1 NIV). This was not the physical temple in Jerusalem (the supporters of an early date for the letter use this passage to show that the temple must have still been standing, and therefore the letter must have been written before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70). It is worth noting that the Greek word used is *naos* (sanctuary) rather than *hieron* (temple). When the Tabernacle (the meeting tent that preceded the Temple) was built, it was to be made to the exact specifications that God had given (Heb 8:5). The Tabernacle had only three areas (courts) – the most holy place where the Ark of the Covenant and the Shekinah presence of God dwelled; the holy place which contained the altar of incense, the table of the shewbread, and the lampstand; and outer court which contained the laver and the altar of sacrifice.

When Herod’s temple² was built, several courts were added, which included the court of the women, and the court of the Gentiles. The latter was open to anyone, and was the place where gatherings and trading took place (Solomon’s Porch was one area in the court of the Gentiles – Acts 3:11). Gentiles could not proceed past this area, with the consequence of death! John was told to measure the sanctuary, but to ignore the outer courts “...But exclude

the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles...” (11:2 NIV). Whilst there is a physical relationship (a physical temple) to John’s instructions, the message is spiritual – it is about measuring up God’s people to see that they conform with the standard. Hailey notes³:

Alternate Views of the Text

Wallace (p.211) notes: “...the whole faithful church, and the true spiritual temple in contrast with the old temple which though still standing, was measured for destruction. The old Jerusalem, the apostate city, was marked for its downfall.”



¹ Hailey, p. 264

² Plan of Temple from Backhouse, Robert "The Jerusalem Temple" Candle Books; ISBN 1-85985-087-1

³ Hailey, p. 250

...the tabernacle was a type of the church. The church is referred to in the Epistles as “the temple [sanctuary] of God,” God’s place of habitation among men (1 Cor.3:16-17; 11 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21), made of living stones (1 Peter 2:5), redeemed with the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18f.), a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices to God. In John’s vision the temple is this sanctuary of God, the church, in which are all the true worshipers, “who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:3), worshiping in spirit and in truth (John 4:23f.). The altar is the golden altar upon which the incense of prayer and devotion are offered (8:3). The worshipers are the true circumcision, the Israel of God (Phil. 3:3; Gal. 6:15f.), who had been numbered (7:4), and are now measured.

The same spiritual parallel also extends to the *outer court*. Hailey notes again⁴:

A second view is that the measured temple and its worshipers represent those faithful to God, those untouched by the world, and the court without symbolizes the worldly or unfaithful in the church. This latter group would include those in the church who succumb to the doctrine of Balaam, Jezebel, and the Nicolaitians in courting the favour of the world. It would also include those who had left their first love, those who were lukewarm and indifferent, and the apostates who had left the Lord for paganism (chaps. 2, 3).

The church (the holy city) would suffer persecution for some time “...*They will trample on the holy city for 42 months...*” (11:2 NIV). The context indicates that those in the outer court were the ones who would do the trampling, and this is consistent with the persecution of the saints in the time in the Roman Empire.

...it may be better to understand the desecration of the outer court as a symbolic reference to the victory of the beast over the saints (described in v. 7). Thus by using two slightly different images, the "temple-altar-worshipers" and the "outer court-holy city," John is viewing the church under different aspects. Though the Gentiles (pagans) are permitted to touch the "outer court" and to trample on the "holy city" for a limited time ("42 months"), they are not able to destroy the church because the "inner sanctuary" is measured or protected in keeping with Christ's earlier word in Mt 16:18. (NIVBC).

There has been much speculation as to what the time *42 months* means. Taken literally, it is a period of 3 years and six months, and is (approximately) the same time as the 1,260 days of the next verse. This period is repetitive in Revelation, and also includes the term “time, times, and half a time” meaning “a year, two years, and half a year” or the same 3 years and six months. Whilst Jesus ministry is generally thought of as “three years”, we will see in a later study that the period is described as the three and a half years. John’s readers (many of whom would have seen the Lord) would have had a much better understanding of this than we do. At this point it is sufficient to note that the periods “42 months”, “1,260 days”, “3 years and six months”, and “time, times, and half a time” can be taken as equivalent.

Alternate Views of the Text

Wallace (p.213) notes: “...From the imperial order (for the destruction of Jerusalem: GO) and the beginning of the siege to its end and completion it was forty-two months, or *a thousand two hundred and three-score days*, – that was the exact period of time, as a matter of historical record, which covered the events of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.”

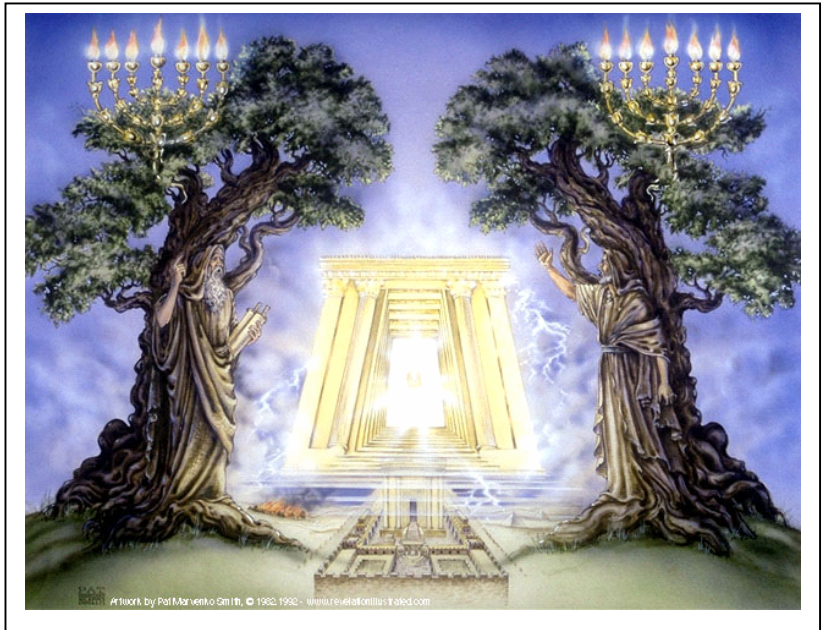
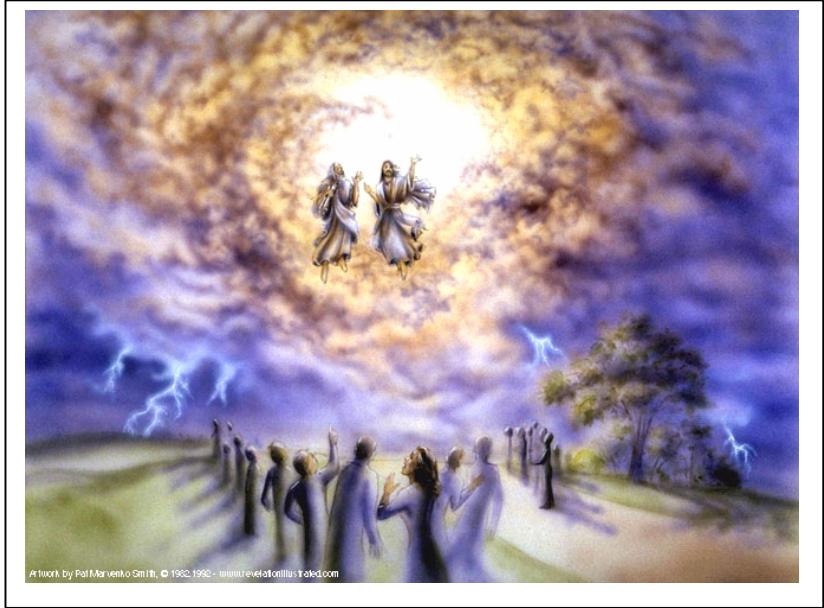
Wallace goes on to establish the dates of February AD 67 when Vespasian received his commission from Nero, and the end of the siege with the fall of Jerusalem and the burning of the city in August AD 70. He also establishes references for the dates (p.215).

⁴ Hailey, p. 251

The Two Witnesses

Two witnesses are called, and they prophesy for the same time that the church is persecuted "...And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."... (11:3 NIV). The question is: *Who are these two witnesses?* The question is answered in 11:6 – they have power to shut up the sky and stop the rain, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague! The identity of these people would not be lost on the first century christians. "...Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops..." (Jas 5:17-18 NIV). Moses was the one who brought the plagues on Egypt. It is significant that the period of drought brought by Elijah was the same as the period of persecution – 3 ½ years. Moses and Elijah are the two witnesses – representing the Law and the Prophets! Bewes notes⁵:

It all comes together. Elijah's period out in the wilderness was one of great opposition to the people of God, but it was also a time of immense influence – during which the prophet even had power to shut up the sky. It lasted for exactly three and a half years. This is taken in the Revelation as a symbol of our present christian era. When we pray, we may expect results. When we proclaim the Good News in the power and energy of the Holy Spirit, we may look for things to happen. We are the testing, but powerful period of the Two Witnesses! Ever since Christ's first coming, we have seen the spreading of the Church. Adversity and Christian growth walk together.



⁵ Bewes, p. 74

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Further characteristics of the two witnesses are revealed to John "...*These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth...*" (11:4 NIV). These also have a reference back to the Old Testament prophecy:

The reference to the "two olive trees and the two lampstands" is an allusion to Joshua and Zerubbabel in Zechariah's vision, who were also said "to serve the Lord of all the earth" (Zec 4:1-6a, 10b-14). The import of Zechariah's vision was to strengthen these two leaders by reminding them of God's resources and to vindicate them in the eyes of the community as they pursued their God-given tasks. Thus John's message is that the witnesses to Christ who cause the church to fulfill her mission to burn as bright lights to the world will not be quenched (cf. Rev 1:20; 2:5). (NIVBC)

The things of God would be preserved, no matter how hard His enemies might try to fight against them "...*If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die...*" (11:5 NIV). Fire suggests judgment from God. The witnesses will stand with God's support, and He will bring judgment on those who oppose the witnesses that God has put in place. The message to the first century Christians is that in spite of the oppression that they are facing, God's will will be done.

As already discussed, the two witnesses are revealed "...*These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want...*" (11:6 NIV). The Law and the Prophets testify of Jesus, and give credibility to His claims as being the Messiah. One witness is not sufficient to establish credibility but *by the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established* (Dt 17:6; Mt 16:18; 2 Cor 13:1). If we ignore the testimony of God's witnesses, then we are ignoring Him!

The prophets of old were ignored, and were persecuted. Revelation gives us insight as to why that was "...*Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them...*" (11:7 NIV). Satan attacked, overpowered, and killed the prophets of old, and Satan is still behind the persecution being faced by the Christians.

The two witnesses would be killed after they had finished their work "...*Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified...*" (11:8 NIV). The *great city* can have several meanings, but elsewhere in the book it refers to Babylon.

The city is called the "great city," a designation that refers to Babylon throughout the rest of the book (16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18-19, 21). Moreover, John's use of the word "city" (cf. 3:12) is symbolic. In fact, there are really only two cities in this book, the city of God and the city of Satan, which is later referred to as Babylon. A city may be a metaphor for the total life of a community of people (cf. Heb 11:10; 12:22; 13:14).

Here the "great city" is clearly more than merely Jerusalem, for John says it is "figuratively called Sodom and Egypt." "Figuratively" (GK G4462) means "spiritually, in a spiritual manner, full of the divine Spirit." Elsewhere in the NT, this word characterizes that which pertains to the Spirit in contrast to the flesh (1Co 2:14-15; Eph 1:3; 5:19; Col 3:16; 1Pe 2:5; et al.). Thus the spiritually discerning will catch the significance of the threefold designation of this city. It is called "Sodom," which connotes rebellion against God, the rejection of God's servants, moral degradation, and the awfulness of divine judgment (cf. Eze 16:49). In Isaiah's day the rebellious rulers of Jerusalem were called the rulers of Sodom (Isa 1:10; cf. Eze 16:46). The second designation is "Egypt." Egypt is a country, not a city. It is virtually certain that by John's day, Egypt had become a symbolic name for anti-theocratic world kingdoms that enslaved Israel. The third designation is "the great city . . . where also their Lord was crucified" (cf. Mt 23:28-31, 37-38; Lk 13:33ff.; 21:20-24).

If, as most commentators believe, John also has Rome in mind in mentioning the "great city," then there are at least five places all seen by John as one--Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, Jerusalem, and Rome. This one city has become, in the eyes of the spiritually discerning, all places opposed to God and the witness of his servants. Wherever God is opposed and his servants harassed and killed, there is the "great city," the transhistorical city of Satan, the great mother of prostitutes (cf. 17:1ff.). What can happen to God's witnesses in any place is what has already happened to their Lord in Jerusalem. (NIVBC).

To this, Hailey adds⁶:

John sees the world as a city of evil, as Hosea had seen Gilead, "a city of them that work iniquity; it is stained with blood" (Hos. 6:8). John sees this great city as a spiritual Sodom in its moral depravity, as an Egypt holding all people in bondage to lust and sin, and as a Jerusalem that rejected truth and put to death the author of truth; it was in such an ungodly world that Jesus was crucified. Literal Jerusalem does not fit this picture, nor does literal Rome, except as each might represent the world of its day. It was in the street (*plateia*), a broad way or main avenue of the city of this world, that their bodies were left.

Those in the city who saw the humiliation and death of the two witnesses will refuse to bury them "...*For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial...*" (11:9 NIV). The action is one of scorn and humiliation, but we need to remember that this is not a literal interpretation. It is a sign of how those who heard and saw the two witnesses gloated over their demise. God's enemies, led by Satan, had thought that they had overcome the Christians by persecuting them over and over. They were helped by the Jews, but had ignored the witness of the Law and the Prophets. Finally, when they thought that they had overcome, they even openly despised the Law and the Prophets!

This was only for a short period of time – 3 ½ days, compared to the 3 ½ years of the tribulation, but this is also half of seven – which indicates that it was a broken and troublesome time.

It was not just the leaders who rejoiced that God's two witnesses had been removed "...*The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth...*" (11:10 NIV). The people as well as the leaders rejoiced in the belief that they had conquered God.

Furthermore, the pagan world will celebrate the destruction of the witnesses and the victory over them by exchanging gifts, a common custom in the Near East (Ne 8:10, 12; Est 9:19, 22). Thus the beast will silence the witness of the church to the glee of the beast-worshiping world. The time of their silence corresponds in days to the time of their witness in years. It denotes only a brief time of triumph for the beast. (NIVBC).

The Witnesses Respond

Up to this point, all seems like doom and gloom. It seems that the world has won the war, and God's people have been defeated. However, God has other plans. "...*But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them...*" (11:11 NIV). There is a short-lived victory by the ungodly people who were making merry in their mistaken belief that they had overcome God, and silenced His people. Like the vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel (Ezek 37:10), God is able to restore life even to the dead. In this case, only God's enemies believe that the Law and the prophets are dead and that the Christians have been defeated. God has other plans. The church is triumphant, and overcomes those who thought they had defeated it.

There is perhaps a hint of the end of the Roman persecution in this vision. Eventually, under Constantine, instead of persecution of the Christians, religious tolerance is ordered. The Christian

⁶ Hailey, p. 257

religion that was so opposed to the Romans and the immorality and Emperor worship that went with it, became the religion of the State.

God's support for His people, and His response to their prayers is given in the total and complete reward and victory. "...Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on..." (11:12 NIV). The vision flips back to heaven. Some see this passage as a "rapture", where those left behind on the earth see God's people ascend to heaven in a cloud in the same manner as the Lord's ascent. However the symbolism is that God's people (the church) will overcome, and even the enemies of God (those who persecuted them) will see the victory. The victory belongs to God's people, not to the world. God has not only vindicated the oppressed Christians, but He shows His wrath against the oppressors "...At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven..." (11:13 NIV). The city is the same one that was previously referred to (11:8) – the city of the world. Seven thousand is a thousand times completeness! A tenth of the city suggests that the judgement was restrained, but the solution was complete. The people now submitted to God, and repentance was shown as they gave glory to the God of heaven.

Although this might sound like the end of the world as the Christians overcome Satan and enter heaven, it is revealed as the intense period of persecution, and the third woe is yet to happen "...The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon..." (11:14 NIV).

The Seventh Trumpet

The end of the second woe ushers in the seventh trumpet, and the beginning of the third woe. Hailey notes⁷:

It should be remembered that when the woes were introduced by the cry of an eagle that it was said, "woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth" (8:13). In response to the prayers of the saints, fire was poured out upon the earth (8:3-5), and the trumpets sounded, bringing judgements upon the earth. The judgements against the earth give assurance to the saints that evil will be defeated and truth will be victorious. If the interpretation of 10:7 and 11:1-13 is correct, the third woe does not usher in the final judgement, but signals the completion of God's mystery which was looked for and sought by the prophets. This conclusion is further supported by the word "quickly" (*tachu*), which means "without delay, quickly, speedily".

Whilst a silence followed the opening of the seventh seal, the sounding of the seventh trumpet is met with loud voices "...The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said..." (11:15 NIV). The scene turns to heaven, where a song of victory and praise is being sung. The battle had been long and terrible, but the victory had been won.

"...*"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."*¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,¹⁷ saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign"¹⁸ The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great-- and for destroying those who destroy the earth."..." (11:16-18 NIV)

This is a song of praise to God – worship to Him. The victory belongs to God, and He is to be praised and worshipped because He has delivered His people.

⁷ Hailey, p. 261

John sees a vision of the inner sanctuary of the Temple “...Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm...” (11:19 NIV). This is an image of what's happening in heaven.

In the heavenly temple John sees the ark of God's covenant. In the OT the ark was the chest that God directed Moses to make and place within the holiest room of the tabernacle sanctuary (Ex 25:10-22). He was directed to put in the ark the two tablets of the Decalogue--the documentary basis of God's redemptive covenant with Israel (Ex 34:28-29). Presumably the ark was destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar burned the temple in 586 B.C., for there was no ark in the second temple. Although the way into the Most Holy Place was barred under the old covenant to all except the high priest, now full and immediate access for all, along with a perfect redemption, has been secured by Christ's death (Heb 9:11-12; 10:19-22)... As the ark was the sign to Israel of God's loyal love throughout their desert journeys and battles, so this sign of the new covenant will assure the followers of Christ of his loyal love through their severe trial and attacks by the beast. "Flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder" represent God's presence and vindication of his people. (NIVBC)

Hailey adds⁸:

But the veil had been rent, and the way into the holy of holies laid open for us by the Lord Jesus (Heb. 10:20). The door into His holy temple was now open that the ark of God's covenant might be seen. God was giving assurance to His people that whatever might come, He would keep His covenant with them, for it is ever before Him.

⁸ Hailey, p. 264