

Revelation Eleven (vv.1-13)

Interlude: The Measuring of the Temple and the Two Witnesses [11.1-13]

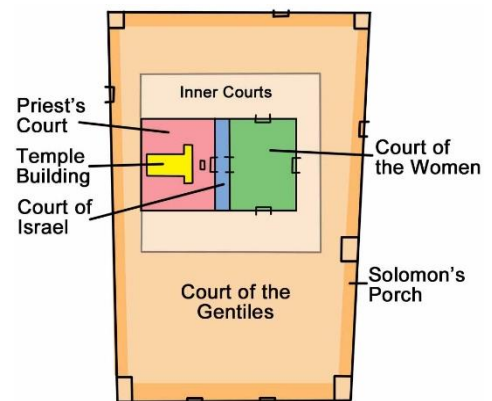
Though 11.1-13 is part of the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets, the section appears to focus on the *spiritual* condition of Israel during the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation. Revelation 12 describes her *physical* condition during the last 3.5 years, being subject to the persecution of the dragon (12.13-14).

The Temple in Jerusalem [vv.1-2]

v.1. John's first responsibility under his renewed prophetic call was to measure the temple of God. He was **given** (probably by the mighty angel) a **reed** [*kalamos*]. The reed was from a plant that grew in the Jordan valley, sometimes to the height of 15-20 feet. The hollow stalks were used for measuring because they were long, straight, and lightweight. Ezekiel used a reed to measure the future millennial temple (Ezekiel 42.16-19). The reed was like a **rod** (staff) because they were sturdy enough to be used for walking (Mark 6.8) or even as a ruler's sceptre (Revelation 19.15). John was instructed to **rise** (get up) and **measure the temple of God**, the **altar** and those that **worshipped** there.

In this case, John does not determine any physical dimensions – this is therefore measurement according to a standard – hence the worshippers are measured too. The standard is likely response to the ministry and message of the two witnesses. In Scripture, things are measured for various purposes. **1. Punishment.** Measurement can be a metaphor for judgment, for God's vengeance is carefully and righteously executed. He is not capricious (Genesis 15.16; Isaiah 28.17). **2. Possession.** Measuring often signifies ownership – it defines the parameters and extent of what belongs to God, or a person/tribe (Ezekiel 48; Zechariah 2.1-5, 12). **3. Purpose.** Measurement can be used symbolically to declare divine purpose. For example, Ezekiel's temple is carefully measured as a declaration of the certainty of its literal rebuilding in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40-43). Here in Revelation 11, *possession* and *purpose* are the prominent thoughts. First, God is measuring off what belongs to Him. Jim Allen says, *"The implication is that even in the darkest days of the tribulation there will still be a portion for God... within the nation of Israel there will be true testimony for God as symbolised in the temple."* Furthermore, that portion will enjoy His special protection, preservation, and favour (as illustrated in the two witnesses). Second, God also has a purpose for His people. Whatever may befall the temple (rebuilt by the Jews in unbelief at the commencement of the tribulation), God is making a pledge of future restoration and blessing.

At the time John was writing Revelation, the **temple** [*naos*] in Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans (AD70). It must be rebuilt by the beginning of the Tribulation (cf. Matthew 24.15; 2 Thessalonians 2.4). *Naos* refers to the inner temple, made up of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The **altar** most likely refers to the brazen altar of sacrifice as indicated by the definite article, "the altar". This was located outside the sanctuary, and the place where worshippers had access and would gather. **Them that worship** represent Jewish believers who will worship God in the Tribulation.



v.2. But John was to **leave out** (disregard) and **not measure** the outer court [*aulē*]. This court was still within the temple precincts [*hieron*], but outside the sanctuary and beyond the inner court. It was an area serving more civic purposes (Mark 11.15). In NT times this outer area was as close as non-Jews could come to the temple itself, and a low wall blocked the way between the outer and inner courts. The distinction, therefore, is between Jews (v.1) and Gentiles (v.2). The command not to measure is explained – **for it is given unto the Gentiles**. Gentiles are excluded from God's favour in anticipation of their rising in rebellion against God and worshipping the dragon and the beast (cf. 13.3-4). The Gentiles **shall** (note the *future* tense) **tread underfoot** (trample) the **holy city** (Jerusalem) for **forty and two months**, the equivalent of the last 3.5 years of the Tribulation. Forty-two months is the equivalent of 3.5 years. The period is variously described as "time, times, and half a time" (12.14; Daniel 7.25; 12.7) and 1,260 days (11.3; 12.6). The context will determine whether the reference is to the *first* or *second* half of the tribulation. Here, the reference is to the *second* half of the Tribulation because the oppression of the Gentiles will rise after the breaking of the covenant (cf. 12.6, 13; 13.5; Daniel 9.27).

The **treading underfoot** of the city does not necessarily demand destruction, but probably describes the city as controlled and dominated by the military might of the beast. Describing Jerusalem as the **holy city** is remarkable given its present and future spiritual condition, but the ultimate purpose of God is in view – this is, and will be again, a city set apart for God and His glory (cf. Nehemiah 11.1; Daniel 9.24; Matthew 4.5; 27.53).

The Testimony of the Two Witnesses [vv.3-13]

God will not leave Himself without a witness. *Globally*, 144,000 witnesses will be preaching the gospel (cf. Matthew 24.14). *Locally*, the two witnesses will testify to God in Jerusalem during the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation. This is the fulfilment of Malachi 4.5-6, “*Look, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD arrives. He will encourage fathers and their children to return to me, so that I will not come and strike the earth with judgment.*” [NET].

Their Responsibility [vv.3-4]

v.3. The word **and** suggests continuity with the preceding verses – the two witnesses and their ministry are the measure of divine favour and blessing. **I will give** is likely the voice of God communicated through the mouthpiece of the mighty angel (cf. 10.11; 11.1). The witnesses are *commissioned*, or *given permission* to **prophecy**, the primary meaning of which is to ‘speak forth’ or ‘preach’. They will preach for **a thousand two hundred and threescore days** – likely referring to the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation (see notes below). That these days are so carefully numbered suggests God is carefully measuring and valuing every day of their testimony. The **two witnesses** [*martyrs*] are set in contrast to the two great Satanic beasts introduced in Revelation 13. Mark Hitchcock notes, “*Just as Satan will have his two henchmen on earth during the Tribulation, so the Lord will have His two representatives on earth to counteract the evil of the beast and the false prophet.*” Under the Law, two witnesses were required for adequate and sufficient legal testimony (Deuteronomy 19.15). Thus, these two men will undoubtedly condemn the beast and his empire as well as carry an uncompromising call to repentance in Jerusalem. They are **clothed in sackcloth**, a rough, heavy, coarse cloth worn in ancient times as a symbol of mourning and distress. Their dress will be reflective of their lamentation over the covenant that has been made with death and hell (Isaiah 28.15; Daniel 9.27), as well as a call to repentance in view of coming judgment. **v.4.** The two witnesses **are the two olive trees**, [even] **the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth**. This is a plain reference to the vision of Zechariah 4. In Zechariah’s day, the two olive trees symbolised the *priestly* and *princely* offices in Israel, represented by Joshua and Zerubbabel. It was these two men that would help maintain the testimony of Israel to God in the power of the Spirit. Now, in the Tribulation, two Spirit-filled men (olive trees) stand as witnesses (lampstands) for God in a dark day. They will be lamps of enlightenment for Israel and present the way to regain God’s blessing through repentance. The witnesses **stand before the God** [or **Lord**, JND] **of the earth**. This indicates fellowship and authority, as well as readiness to serve (cf. 1 Kings 17.1; 22.19). In a day when the Devil seeks to claim earth for himself, these witnesses maintain Christ’s title to the same.

Their Retribution [vv.5-6]

v.5. These two verses present *four* scenes that are reminiscent of the ministries of Elijah and Moses.

- **Scene One.** If **any man will** (has a desire) to **hurt** (harm) **them**, their enemies are consumed by **fire**. One commentator writes, “*Literal fire proceeding from their mouths as if they were human flamethrowers is unlikely. The sense here is that their speech initiates judgment.*” Thus, those who seek to kill them are instead killed by them in an echo of the divine protection afforded to Elijah when Ahaziah sought his life (2 Kings 1.10-12). The statement **must in this manner be killed** “indicates that God has established an automatic response triggered by the hatred of the enemies. The Lord’s witnesses are protected by a divine law from which there is no escape” (Jim Allen).
- **Scene Two (v.6).** The witnesses **have power** (authority) **to shut heaven** that it **rain not in** [*en*] **the days of their prophecy**. This may mean the drought will extend for the whole period of 3.5 years, just as in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 17.1; James 5.17).
- **Scene Three.** The witnesses will have **power over waters to turn them to blood** just like Moses and the first Egyptian plague (Exodus 7.20-21; cf. Revelation 8.8; 16.3-4).
- **Scene Four.** The witnesses will also **smite** (strike) **the earth with all** (every kind of) **plagues whenever** they so desire. The action of God against the gods of Egypt is being reenacted against the beast and his empire.

Their Resurrection [vv.7-10]

v.7. The two witnesses are immortal until their work is done. It is only when **they shall have finished their testimony** they will be killed. The word **finished** [*teleō*] indicates a goal attained. They will have completed their divinely appointed task, probably the fulfilment of the 1,260 days. Paul uses the same word, “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*” Only then will God remove His protection and they will be **killed** – their greatest and final act of testimony for God. (2 Timothy 4.7). The ultimate cause of their death is **the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit**. The beast [*thērion*] is yet to be formally introduced in the book of Revelation (cf. 13.1-8). The word describes the wild, ferocious, animal-like character of the man of sin, the same man who will prove to be the archenemy of God’s people and seek to be worshipped as God. He is the antichrist. He is the *one who ascends* from the abyss, not speaking of the timing of his ascent, but rather the permanent character of the man as one who is satanically and demonically inspired. In fact, he has two comings. He arises out of the *sea* (nations) as to his arrival on the world stage (13.1) and out of the *abyss* at the midpoint of the Tribulation (by a pseudo death and resurrection) when his satanic possession becomes evident to all (cf. 13.3; 17.8). This man will **make war against** the witnesses, and **shall overcome them** – but, in all his evil actions, he

can only do what God permits. It is likely this all takes place at the mid-point of the Tribulation, just as the beast has recovered from his mortal wound through Satan's power (13.3; 17.10-11). He will then break his treaty, enter the Temple, and declare he is God before seeking to kill the two witnesses. Jim Allen says, *"His terrible success in killing them must echo round the world. Men will feel that this man has now no rival and his power is greater than that of God, who can no longer protect His own. Men will say, 'Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?'"*

v.8. Their **dead bodies** will **lie in the street** [*plateia*] of Jerusalem for 3.5 days (v.9). The word *plateia* tends to refer to a broad space or road, like a marketplace or city square. In the ancient world, the public exposure of a dead body for any length of time was considered a great indignity – the final act of insult (cf. Psalm 79.2-3). In exposing their bodies to such shame into the *fourth* day, Satan may be announcing to the world that what God did with Christ (raised the third day), He cannot do with these two men. But, once again, God will confound his evil! Little does he know that the scene is being set for a mighty miracle of God (cf. v.11). In case there is any doubt over the identification of the **great city** (which normally refers to Babylon, cf. 14.8; 18.10, 21), it is identified as the place where "their" [NET] **Lord was crucified** – this must be Jerusalem! Sadly, Jerusalem, that once 'holy city' is now as *immoral* as Sodom and *idolatrous* as Egypt.

v.9. For 3.5 days, those from **every people, kindred** (tribe or race), **tongue** (language) and **nation** will gaze at their corpses. It could be that these diverse groups will all be in Jerusalem at this time – the bodies of these famous, once immortal men will become huge tourist attractions. Or, this could be a veiled reference to the power of television. Perhaps a live stream of the bodies lying in Jerusalem will be beamed around the world and shared on every social media account. **v.10.** People in general will celebrate the death of God's witnesses. **They that dwell upon the earth** describes not just physical location, but moral identification. Earth is their home, and they identify with its principles and prince (the beast). These unbelievers will **rejoice** (gloat) and **make merry** (celebrate) even **sending gifts** to one another to express their mutual delight because the two witnesses that had **tormented** them were now dead. Torment is a word used of the awful suffering of the lake of fire (20.10), and in this context could refer to the physical suffering the witnesses had caused by their plagues.

Their Rapture [vv.11-12]

v.11. The language of resurrection used here is drawn almost word for word from the LXX of Ezekiel 37.5, 10. Perhaps the resurrection of the two witnesses is a foreshadowing of the restoration of the whole nation. **After three and a half days** (reflecting the period of their ministry) the (Holy) **Spirit of life** sent from God raises them to their feet. Imagine the consternation across the globe as the 'tormentors' of men are raised to live again! Their resurrection brought **great fear** – people were panic-stricken, even terrified. The devil's greatest weapon of death had failed. **v.12.** At the same time the earth dwellers heard a **great voice from heaven** saying, **"Come up hither!"** The last voice to express this command was the voice of Christ to John (4.1). Now, again, it is likely Christ who calls the two witnesses to Himself. **They ascended up to heaven**, enveloped in a cloud, their enemies gazing with sustained attention! There are obvious parallels with the ascension of Christ, though He was watched with *adoring* eyes by the circle of His closest friends (Acts 1.9).

Their Remembrance [v.13]

v.13. The **same hour**, or "just then" [NET] a **great earthquake** destroyed a **tenth part of the city** of Jerusalem and killed **of men seven thousand**, literally "seven thousand names of men" [JND]. The unusual expression indicates that the number was carefully and precisely counted. Perhaps these individuals were men of note in the kingdom of the beast, or among those who were sent to kill the two witnesses. The **remnant** or "the rest" [NET] of the inhabitants of Jerusalem not slain by the earthquake were **affrighted** (terrified) and **gave glory to the God of heaven**. This appears to be the language of true repentance, for example, the angel with the "everlasting gospel" calls on earth dwellers to "fear God and give glory to Him" (14.7). The servants of God are characterised as those who fear God and "give honour (glory) to Him" (19.5, 7). See also 15.4; 16.9. Alternatively, it could just describe an acknowledgement that the true God of heaven has vindicated His servants and brought the earthquake. Since the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be mostly Jewish, this could well be part of a large-scale repentance on the part of many. Isaiah 66.8, *"Can a country be brought forth in one day? Can a nation be born in a single moment? Yet as soon as Zion goes into labour, she gives birth to sons!"* [NET].

Addendum. Two major questions deserve some attention, *"Who are the witnesses?"* and *"When do they prophesy?"* Many excellent expositors differ on the answers to these questions, so we are wise not to be dogmatic.

Who?

- Hitchcock says, *"The early church held the view that the two witnesses are literal individuals. Hippolytus, who was the bishop of Rome from about AD 200–235, identified the witnesses as Enoch and Elijah."* The principal reason for selecting Enoch and Elijah is that both were translated to heaven without seeing death.
- Many commentators believe the two witnesses are Elijah and Moses. 1. The miracles they performed were the same miracles that Elijah and Moses performed (11.5-6). 2. Malachi predicted the return of Elijah "before the coming of the

great and terrible day of the Lord" (Malachi 4.5). 3. Both Moses and Elijah were seen on the mount of transfiguration, a preview of the coming kingdom of Christ.

- A third view, and likely the right view, is that these are two **unknown Jewish prophets** God will raise up. They are purely future persons, not two men from the past. Fruchtenbaum says, *"The Two Witnesses will simply be two Jewish men living in that time whom God will elevate to the office of prophet and will endow with miraculous powers."*
- The prophecy of Malachi does not demand that Elijah will *personally* return before the Great Tribulation. If John the Baptist *could* have been Elijah, had Israel been willing to receive him (Matthew 11.13-14), then two Jewish prophets could also come in the spirit and power of Elijah and fulfil the prophecy of Malachi.
- Jim Allen concludes, *"It is better to see these two witnesses as men whom God has called and equipped for a special task. They carry out this task on the pattern of Moses or Elijah, who have borne testimony in somewhat similar circumstances in the past history of the nation of Israel."*

When?

- There are many good arguments on both sides, but I slightly prefer the *first half* of the Tribulation. some of the following evidence is taken from a helpful article by *John C Whitcomb* entitled, *"The Two Witnesses"*.
- Malachi describes Elijah as arriving *"before* the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord" – hence their ministry will be *before* the last 3.5 years of Great Tribulation.
- The 42 months of the second half of the Tribulation are described as *future* in 11.2, *"they will* trample on the holy city for forty-two months." This suggests the ministry of the two witnesses is prior to this in the *first* half of the Tribulation.
- Would the two Jewish witnesses remain in Jerusalem during the 42 months of Antichrist's dominion if the Lord Jesus, their Messiah, told them to flee to the mountains? See Matthew 24.15-21.
- If the 1,260 days occur during the last half of the Tribulation, then the entire world would be celebrating the death of the two witnesses for 3.5 days *after* Armageddon and the destruction of the Antichrist! This is very difficult to imagine.
- It would be strange for Antichrist to bring fire from heaven upon *his* enemies (13.13) if the two witnesses are simultaneously bringing fire from heaven upon *their* enemies (11.5).