

Revelation 11 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

Not only are we about half way through the Book of Revelation, Chapter 11 marks just about the mid-point of the Tribulation – That last 7 years after the Church has been raptured and the Earth is plunged into a time of trial as never before.

The first half of the Tribulation is generally a time of calmness and a measure of prosperity led by the deceptive reign of the antichrist. Even though it's a time of general peace, that peace is punctured now and again by catastrophic upheavals in nature.

But at the mid-point of the Tribulation, everything changes.

You see, during the first half of the Tribulation – God has slowly withdrawn His gracious restraint of evil.

It's this withdrawal that has allowed the *emergence and career* of the antichrist.

But it's also allowed the effect of the Curse of sin to bring decay and death to the systems of nature.

By the time we reach the mid-point of the Tribulation, the withdrawal of God's restraint of evil is complete; His sustaining of nature is released, and it seems everything is in a stage of meltdown.

While the first half of the Tribulation sees the natural result of man's rejection of God – a kind of sowing what mankind has reaped; the last half of the Tribulation sees the *overt judgment* of God falling on Earth.

John's visions in Revelation alternate between what's taking place on Earth and what's going on in Heaven.

Ch. 11 begins with *another vignette* – a *background or supporting vision* that shows John, even during the terrors of the Tribulation, God will not leave Himself without a faithful witness, but will still hold forth to the few, maybe even to the one or two who will respond, the hope of salvation.

Vs. 1-14 ought to be understood as a vision of something that will be taking place during the *first half* of the Tribulation.

CHAPTER 11

¹Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. ²But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

Along the sides of the Jordan River are immense brakes of densely packed reeds, like cattails - that's what John was given.

These reeds aren't particularly strong, but they are very straight and lightweight and make excellent measuring sticks; like our yard stick – so that is what they were often used for.

They were often used for measuring large distances because of their length, and that is what John is told to use it for here.

He's told to measure the temple of God, its altar – and to number the people who are worshiping there.

Now, how are we to understand this? Just what temple is being referred to here?

Is this the temple in Jerusalem, in heaven, or is this some kind of *spiritual* temple, like the Church?

Well, verse 2 makes it clear this can't be the heavenly temple, because its outer court is trampled by the Gentiles.

Does this refer to the Church, as some preterist interpreters insist?

To spiritualize Revelation 11:1-2 and make the temple refer to the

Church creates a number of serious problems. [1]

1) How could John measure an *invisible* body of people, even if the church were still on earth?

2) If the temple is the Church, then *who are the worshipers* and what is the altar?

3) Since the church *unites* Jews and Gentiles in one body (Eph. 2:11ff), why are the Gentiles segregated in this temple?

It's wisest to interpret this temple as an *actual building* in the city of Jerusalem.

The prophet Daniel, Jesus, and the apostle Paul all made it clear that there must be a *literal temple* standing in Jerusalem in the Last Days.

Daniel & Jesus said that it would be the scene of the *abomination of desolation*. Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 Matthew 24:15-16; 24:21

Paul said it's where the antichrist will declare himself god and demand worship, which likely *is* the abomination that results in desolation mentioned by Daniel & Jesus. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4

Bible students who interpret the Bible literally have long recognized certain things need to be in place *before* Jesus returns.

Classically, some of the things they've looked for:

- 1) The regathering of Israel into their land.
- 2) The coming together of the European nations into a united confederacy.
- 3) The practice of buying & selling with *numbers* instead of hard currency.

Just a little over 50 years ago, the thought that these things would ever come to pass were wild, and fueled the tendency to interpret the Book of Revelation spiritually rather than literally.

But the more courageous of prophecy students believed they would eventually come to pass.

A hundred years ago, William Blackstock wrote a book titled *Jesus Is Coming*.

He said the Jews would once again reclaim Israel and make it a nation.

He was laughed at.

Today, Israel is a nation – in fact, the eyes of the world are turned to the Middle East and the continuing tensions her existence creates.

The European Community is a fact with the push to unite under a common currency and military force all but accomplished.

Electronic Funds Transfer is an everyday event, and now we see the technology in place for doing away with cards and the implantation of the numerical data to access one's financial accounts right on one's body.

But there's another sign of the return of Christ that *remains to be seen*, and that is the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

The temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, and today, on the site of the former temple is Islam's third holiest shrine, the *Dome of the Rock*.

Anyone who knows anything about the Middle East knows that the prospect of a rebuilt temple is *absolutely incredible* - yet the Bible tells us it will happen.

While the obstacles are real and immense, plans are already underway to rebuild the Temple.

Until just recently, interest in the general Jewish population of Israel has had little if *any* interest in rebuilding the temple.

But the current strife with the Palestinians and Israel's growing sense that the world is turning against it has resulted in a marked movement of the moderate-middle toward greater Jewish loyalty and a return to its traditions.

A recent article – dated July 18th, in the Jerusalem Post says –

53% of Israelis want third temple

By HAIM SHAPIRO

Over half of all Israeli Jews would like to see the building of a third temple, according to a survey commissioned by the Reform movement's *Israel Religious Action Center*. According to the survey, conducted by the *Dahaf Institute*, a total of 53% . . . queried said that they would like a third temple erected on the Temple Mount.

There's a small but well-organized group of people in Israel who are *determined* to rebuild the temple.

They see it as something of a *blasphemy* that the Muslim *Dome of the Rock* is allowed to stand on the site of their temple.

Imagine how Catholics would feel if St. Peter's in Rome were demolished and a Hindu shrine was built on its ruins.

Some of the more action oriented have said they have no qualms about blowing it up so the temple can be rebuilt.

Several years ago, a plot to do just that was foiled by Jewish intelligence.

When the Muslim community found out how close the plot had come to destroying their shrine, they rioted in a well publicized attack on Jewish worshippers at the Western Wall.

Several groups are already making preparations so that when the time & opportunity come, they'll be ready to rebuild.

The Temple Mount Faithful has cut the cornerstone; and in fact

they've tried to lay it a several times now.

But they are always stopped by Israeli court; fearful of reaction of Arabs.

A temple will need priests, so a school has been set up which is training young men whose genealogies have been researched and proven to be or the priestly tribe.

They are learning the rituals of temple service; including offering sacrifices.

The temple will need implements, so *The Temple Institute* has researched the Jewish religious books & traditions for directions and has remade many of them.

Here is a quote from their website – www.templeinstitute.org – The major focus of the Institute is its efforts towards the beginning of the actual rebuilding of the Holy Temple. Towards this end, the Institute has begun to restore and construct the sacred vessels for the service of the Holy Temple. These vessels, which G-d commanded Israel to create, can be seen today at our [headquarters in Jerusalem](#). They are made according to the exact specifications of the Bible, and have been constructed from the original source materials, such as gold, copper, silver and wood. These are authentic, accurate vessels, not merely replicas or models. All of these items are fit and ready for use in the service of the Holy Temple. Among the many items featured in the exhibition are musical instruments played by the Levitical choir, the golden crown of the High Priest, and gold and silver vessels used in the incense and sacrificial services. After many years of effort and toil, the Institute has just recently completed the three most important and central vessels of the Divine service: the seven-branched candelabra, or Menorah, made of pure gold; the golden Incense Altar, and the golden Table of the Showbread.

If you go to their website, you will see how they are even now weaving the cloth for the priestly garments.

There are many other little details I could share tonight about the plans to rebuild the temple, but we move on.

Some Jews who want the temple rebuilt are taking a *scientific approach* and waiting for the *right time* to build the temple.

One of these is Dr. Asher Kaufman who has done a lot of study of the Temple Mount and is convinced the *Dome of the Rock* need not be destroyed.

It's long been thought that the Dome of the Rock sits over the site of the ancient temple (show overhead).

But Kaufman began to doubt this traditional view as he read some

ancient sources on the temple.

He came to the conclusion the temple was located *north* of the DOTR, in what is now a wide flat, open expanse (show overhead).

Here's a couple reasons why he came to that conclusion –

- 1) The location of the ancient East Gate.
- 2) The location of the Dome of the Spirits (tablets).

Kaufman's theory makes good sense in light of what we find here in Rev. 11.

John was told *not to measure* the outer court; it's given to the Gentiles.

If the temple is built where Kaufman says it originally stood, the DOTR would lie in the *outer court*.

And this is where some Bible students see a *correlation* between the rebuilding of the temple and the rise of the antichrist.

Right now, if the Jews moved to rebuild their temple on in the place of the DOTR, it would inflame the wrath of the entire Arab world and lead to a terrible holocaust.

So some suggest that *one of the things* that will catapult the antichrist into world attention is his suggestion that the Jews build their temple according to Kaufman's suggestion – just to the north of the DOTR; separating the two shrines by a wall.

As I mentioned, this would put the DOTR in the new temple's outer court, which would continue to be given over to the Gentiles, the Muslims.

Now, what makes this idea even more provocative is that while there is a growing movement of Jewish loyalists who want to rebuild the temple, Orthodox Jews have a completely different take!

They believe the Messiah will come *before* the temple is rebuilt. In fact, they see the rebuilding of the temple as a *proof* he's the Messiah!

How perfect for the emergence of the antichrist.

On one hand there's a group that's ready and agitating to build now – and preparing the materials.

On the other hand is the heart & soul of Jewish religious political life that believes it's the Messiah's job to rebuild the temple.

In John 5:43, Jesus said, "*I have come in My Father's name,*

and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.”

Back to our text –

¹Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. ²But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

In both Ezekiel 40-41 & Zechariah 2:1-3, measuring shows God's careful preparation for judgment.

By measuring something, it's a way of showing right of ownership and freedom to do with it as one pleases.

It's about to become the scene of the abomination of desolation, so God has John “size it up” in preparation for judgment.

Note that the Gentiles will tread the City of Jerusalem underfoot, meaning exert dominance over it, for 42 months.

That's 3½ years, the last half of the Tribulation.

In Luke 21:24 Jesus said, “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the *times of the Gentiles* are fulfilled.”

We'll be taking a closer look at some of these time references in a later study after we've had a chance to see more of them; then we'll piece them altogether into a more comprehensive scenario.

Now notice how, without any kind of scene-change, John seems to introduce a new aspect of the vision -

³And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”

Who is speaking here? This is the same angel we read about in v. 1, who's also the angel of ch. 10 – who we saw in our last study is none other than the Lord Jesus!

1260 days is *also* 3½ years.

In the Bible – a year is reckoned as *360 days*.

Therefore, 1260 days equals 42 months (of 30 days) and 3½ years. 3½ years is also referred to as a “*time, times, and a half time.*”

(Dan. 12:7)

The 42 months of v. 2 are the *last half* of the Tribulation – in contrast, this 1260 days in v. 3 refers to the *first half*.

The \$94 Million question is – who are these guys?

Well, first of all, note that they are mentioned as part of John's being told to measure the temple.

It seems these witnesses are related to Israel and the temple.

They are called prophets in vs. 3 & 6, which in the classic OT sense meant they would carry on the prophetic ministry of calling the nations to repent and return to the true God of Israel.

This is why they were sackcloth.

Sackcloth was the attire of repentance and mourning and was what the prophets wore when they were preaching a message of repentance.

It's interesting that according to Deut. 17 & 19, two witnesses was the minimum number acceptable under Old Testament law to bear witness to the truth and to call for a verdict of guilt when the punishment was death. (Deut 17:6; 19:15).

But this doesn't tell us *who* these two guys are. The next verse give us some clues . . .

4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.

This is a clear reference to Zechariah 4, where the prophet has a vision of King Zerubbabel and the priest Joshua as two lampstands being fed by two olive trees.

That vision was meant to show that the king and priest of that time were supernaturally empowered by God to fulfill their office of leading and teaching the people – and together working to rebuild the temple destroyed by the Babylonians.

Note how v. 3 begins –

And I will give power to my two witnesses . . .

The point is this – these two witnesses are given supernatural power to accomplish their mission; and that at a time of tremendous opposition and trial.

5 And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone

wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner.

⁶These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

These verses seem to give us some clues as to just who the two witnesses might be.

Not only do they declare God's words, they perform miracles of judgment reminiscent of both Moses and Elijah. (Ex. 7:14-18; 1 Kings 17:1ff; 2 Kings 1:1-12).

When some soldiers came to arrest Elijah one day, fire fell and consumed them.

Elijah is also the one who prayed for a drought.

Moses is the one who brought all the plagues on Egypt and turned the water to blood.

In Malachi 4:5-6 we read this –

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

Question: What better witnesses to bring to Jerusalem in the Tribulation, when God has turned His redemptive attention back to Israel, than the two men who stand at the very head of the Law & the Prophets, than Moses & Elijah?

It's also notable that Elijah never died; he was taken up bodily into heaven.

Moses' body was taken care of by God Himself – no *man* buried him.

Finally, in Matthew 17:1-6, both Moses & Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration.

These two seem to have some special role to play as the witnesses of God.

Whoever these two witnesses are in Revelation 11, they're unstoppable as they bear testimony to God.

When they're attacked, their attackers aren't merely answered – their singing to a crisp.

And they're given power to afflict the earth-dwellers with trouble so that they might realize the authority of their message.

This goes on for 1260 days - 3½ years.

7When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. **8**And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

The beast from the bottomless pit is a reference to 9:11 (the chapter & verse, not the date).

There we saw that the beast from the bottomless pit is the devil.

As we saw, the 1260 days of their testimony takes us to the mid-point of the Tribulation.

As we'll see when we get to ch. 13, it's at the mid-point of the Tribulation that the devil actually *possesses* the antichrist, in a kind of unholy incarnation and mockery of the Incarnation of Jesus.

The two witnesses will be *invincible* until the time of their ministry is over, but then they'll fall to the attack of the antichrist himself.

Refusing to bury the dead was the greatest *cruelty* one could offer throughout the ancient world and was a mark of serious *ungodliness* because it was considered *inhuman*. (Isaiah 5:25)

The two witnesses are refused burial while the world rejoices over their demise and subsequent humiliation.

9Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves.

10And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

The location of their death will be Jerusalem, as is made clear in v. 8.

There Jerusalem is referred to as *Sodom & Egypt*, meaning it's

become the center of moral filth and sin, as well as the nexus of bondage.

Because the witnesses have opposed the antichrist and called the earth-dwellers to repent of their rebellion, calling down terrifying plagues as a way to soften people up and prove the authority of their message, the earth-dwellers rejoice when they're finally put out of the way.

And the antichrist will come off looking like a hero because he's the one who killed them.

In fact, the world will *declare a holiday* and everyone will tune in to the latest news reports from Jerusalem where the TV cameras are trained on the bodies of the two men, just as the TV was filled for days after 9-11 with image after image of the Twin Towers.

That was a time of sorrow and mourning – this will be a time of rejoicing and a party-spirit.

WHY? Because the men of God are dead!

All they were was messengers – proclaiming a true word about the spiritual condition of the earth-dwellers, cautioning people about the lies and deceits of the antichrist.

But sinners do not want to hear the truth of their condition.

Those who love the darkness hate the light.

Isn't it interesting how some people get hostile when you share the gospel with them?

You can be so gentle and careful in the way you speak and what you say, yet they become angry.

Where does this anger come from?

It comes from sin's natural hatred of truth.

Let's say I go to the doctor with something I suspect is an illness.

He diagnoses that indeed, I have a terminal illness; but good news, there's a vaccine that will instantly cure me.

I think, "Oh know – can I afford it," and ask, "Okay Doc, tell me; what's it gonna' cost?"

He replies, "A generous benefactor has already paid the price – all you have to do is say the word and submit to the needle and you'll be cured."

So I get the shot.

Then the doctor tells me that while I'm cured of the disease

itself and won't die, some of the symptoms will take a while to recover from.

Then he tells me to take a package of the syringes with me and if I meet anyone else with the disease, to tell them and ask if they want to be cured.

On the way home, I stop at Starbucks for a White Chocolate Mocha, and notice the person in front of me has the disease.

I begin talking to them, telling them about what just happened to me and how much better I feel already.

I ask if they'd like a shot, but they tell me to leave them alone – and how dare I accuse them of being ill!

Why of all the insults to suggest they aren't in perfect health!

And why should they take an injection? They don't need a shot. I must be some kind of a nut case, a freak.

There are a number of parallels between that story and our sharing the gospel with the lost.

As with all things, the Tribulation will see what happens today raised to an even higher degree of intensity.

11 Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them.

The breath of life entering the two corpses of the witnesses alludes to Genesis 2:7 where the breath of God enters into the body of the first man, giving him life.

But the two witnesses aren't just raised from the dead; they're caught up into heaven!

The earth-dwellers refused them burial and so meant to heap shame on them – and God permitted it for a time – but now He does something to *vindicate* His own – as he ALWAYS does!

Instead of burying them, He rescues them from their enemies, raises them from the dead, and gives a solemn witness to the watching world by taking them up into heaven – reminiscent of Jesus's ascension after His resurrection while the apostles watched.

The world's rejoicing is suddenly turned into *great* fear.
There's that word "*mega*" again!

13In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Earthquakes were just about universally considered in the ancient world to be judgments from God.

The resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses, coming at the sound of a voice everyone hears calling them up to heaven, and then followed by a *mega*-earthquake, combine to make people realize God is real and they have trifled with Him to their own hurt.

The immediate reaction is to glorify, instead of defame God. This is a momentary and short-lived window opened to sanity in the midst their depravity.

They may mouth words of praise to God that are *true*, but their hearts are still in rebellion against Him.

14The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

The second woe refers to the sounding the 6th trumpet, which we read about all the way back in ch. 9, v. 13.

The 6th trumpet and 2nd woe set lose a vast military force that wiped out a third of the world's population.

It seems that this verse *ought* to have been placed right after the last v. of ch. 9.

Why's it left till here?

As we'll see in the next verses, this all brings us right up to the middle of the Tribulation.

The 7th trumpet and third woe which sounds in the next verse, marks the beginning of the last 3½ years.

So the visions of chapters 10 & 11 are background visions to the first half of the Tribulation that help set the scene for the last half.

15Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud

voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”

The word “loud” to describe the voices in heaven is once more the word *mega*.

This is the *mega-chapter* of Revelation.

The voices are probably all the groups we’ve already read about in Revelation;

The living creatures, the elders, the angels, the martyred Tribulation saints and the company of the redeemed so vast no one could number it!

They celebrate that the kingdoms of this world have finally become the Kingdom of God, and there shall be no end to His rule!

Actually - John uses the singular for “kingdom” here;

The kingdom of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord . . .

He uses the singular because at this point in history the antichrist will have the entire world under his control.

That control will now pass to Christ.

16 And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷saying: “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.

18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth.”

The elders now lift up a formal song of inauguration.

The reign of God over creation, which has always existed in a mysterious and hidden sense, will now become manifestly evident for all of creation to see.

In fact, the emergence of God’s reign is what makes the nations so

angry; they do not want Him to rule over them.

They are in rebellion against God and are upset they will no longer have their way.

But man's anger is an impotent and ineffectual thing compared to God's wrath and indignation at the evil man has perpetrated on His creation.

The elders announce and celebrate the fact that the time has finally come when all evil will be redressed and all unrewarded good will be taken care of.

19 Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. [Stop]

Don't miss the image here – the 7th trumpet blows, there's the sound of loud voices heralding the Kingdom.

Then the elders make a formal announcement of God's coming judgment.

Then the doors of heaven are opened and John sees the heavenly ark of the covenant.

Now, think about it – what was the ark in the tabernacle and temple *like*?

Israel originally had no human king; why? Because God was her King!

And what does a King sit on? A throne.

And where did God manifest His presence in the midst of Israel?

On top of the ark.

The ark was a picture of God's throne.

What led Israel into battle as they were making their way from Egypt to the Promised Land? The ark, the throne of God.

It's this imagery that George Lucas & Steven Spielberg used in their first Indiana Jones movie – of the ark of the covenant as some kind of War Wagon.

But it was simply the symbol of God's presence and power and rule over the affairs of Earth.

What John is seeing here is the doors of heaven opening to reveal the emergence of the ark of the covenant as God comes to make war with the earth-dwellers and claim what belongs to Him.

Years ago in Park Forest, a friend and I used to regularly take advantage of another little kid who wanted to hang out with us.

I remember one time playing in his front yard in the snow.
We were having a snowball fight and we had ganged up on him.
He started crying and yelling at us that we were being unfair.
We thought nothing of his protests until his mother opened the
front door.

We all heard the door open, and turned to see her take her stand on
the porch, hands on hips and a look of anger on her face.
My friend and I just took off running.

**And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an
earthquake, and great [mega] hail.**

Along with earthquakes, thunder and lightning storms were
considered judgments of God.

God is marshalling all of nature against rebel man.

There are reported cases of hail the size of softballs – and in some
cases, entire sheets of ice weighing hundreds of pounds have
fallen from the sky.

 Wiersbe, Warren