

than one might expect to bring about repentance in advance of the fulfillment of *the mystery of God as announced to the prophets*. The six trumpets have **not** brought about repentance, so one can imagine the seven thunders would not either. And so, the sealing of the thunders is followed by two things: (1) The declaration that there will be no more delay, and (2) John must eat the scroll and prophesy. As will be seen, the church will hear, keep, and testify to what John has testified to. The witnessing church coupled with God's judgment **will** bring many to give glory to God (ch. 11). Thus, the sealing of the thunders emphasizes to the church both the hastening nature of God's final judgment and the vital nature of the churches' witness *before* this hastening judgment.

As with Ezekiel and Jeremiah, John enjoys the sweetness of consuming God's word, but that is followed by a bitter stomach. As with Ezekiel and Jeremiah, the bitterness is likely because the people will respond with aggression to their message (Ezek. 2:8-3:15; Jer. 15:15-18). As with all the prophets, the testimony of John and the churches is appreciated more after their deaths than during their lives (explored in ch. 11).

***How does this vision impact you — knowing God could simply sound out more trumpets and thunders, but in part relents so that the word might be consumed and proclaimed by his people?***

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**APPLYING THE TEXT:** *Bittersweet*. It is both an exciting and grave responsibility to know that God uses the churches to witness to the truth of God before the end. However, as with John and the prophets before him, it can be both sweet to consume and proclaim God's words, but bitterly painful to see the immediate response to it.

**Measure the temple, trample the holy city (11:1-2).** As the conquering lion was reinterpreted by the sacrificial lamb, as the Israelite army was reinterpreted by the multiethnic assembly of martyrs, and as the scroll was both sweet to the taste and bitter to the stomach, the paradoxes continue here as the temple is measured, but the outer courts and holy city are trampled.

The image of the measurements being taken is often used to mark out a place or people for protection and salvation or for destruction (Jer. 31:38-40; Zech. 1:16; Lam. 2:8, etc.). Here, John is told to measure the temple, the altar, and those who worship there, but to leave out the outer court because that appears to be given along with the holy city to be trampled for 42 months by the nations. Forty-two months is the equivalent of 1,260 days, and time, times, and half a time (three and one-half years) — which is may be intended to mark out half of seven years for the nations to cause God's holy people to suffer (and more — 13:5; Daniel 12:7, etc.).

The most compelling explanation of this image is the perspective that sees both the temple, altar, those who worship, the outer court, and the holy city as referring to God's people in whom he dwells. God's people are repeatedly referred to as the temple of God because God's Spirit in them (Rev. 3:12; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21). Elsewhere in Revelation, the holy city is closely associated with the perfected people of God (21:2, 10; 22:19).<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Hebrews 12:22 pictures us as approaching the heavenly Jerusalem even now.

The vision of the temple and holy city is like the scroll John ate and like the rest of chapter 11 — both sweet and bitter. On one hand, the people in whom God dwells are protected — imaged in the measuring of the temple, altar, and those who worship there. God will dwell among his people, enabling their worship and sacrifices to him. On the other hand, the people of God are also exposed — seen in the leaving out and trampling of the outer court and the holy city for forty-two months. This accords with what we saw in chapter 7: the Israelite army of God was sealed and protected on earth, but the kind of protection they received is immediately reinterpreted by the multiethnic crowd of martyrs coming out of tribulation. They are not preserved from tribulation but rather through it.

In words similar to Revelation 11:2, Jesus said that *“Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled,”* (Luke 21:24).<sup>106</sup> Why would John symbolize the tribulation of the church using language similar to Jerusalem’s tribulation and destruction? **First**, it is not out of the ordinary at all for John to use language from other Scriptures for Revelation’s purposes. It often necessary to understand the original context of the Scriptures John alludes to, but their meaning in Revelation is not restricted by the original context (i.e., John mixes together language from past oracles against Babylon, Edom, Egypt, and Judah in the sixth seal). **Second**, that God’s new holy city, the new holy people, and the new Israel would undergo suffering similar to ethnic Jews has already been seen in how John has used Daniel’s prophecies. The “saints” who would undergo tribulation and receive the kingdom would have been initially read as ethnic Israel, but, as we have already seen, Israel has been expanded to people from every nation, tribe, people, and language who follows the Lamb.<sup>107</sup> God’s people are refined by the trials of “exile” just as ethnic Israel was (cf. 1 Pet. 1:6-7).

***How does it impact you to see the church pictured both as a protected temple for sacrifice and worship and as a holy city that will be trampled by the nations? How do these images impact how we view and live out our communal life together as Christians?***

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<sup>106</sup> This has led many to understandably conclude that Revelation 11:1-2 predicts the destruction of Jerusalem — whether in AD 70 or in some future event. With respect to predicting an AD 70 destruction, this seems unlikely since the temple was indeed destroyed and not protected. Knowing this, some offer that the measuring of the temple represents the spiritual protection of God’s people, but that the trampling of the holy city represents the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. However, this interpretation would be problematic since one could only understand it in hindsight. One could only know in hindsight that the temple represented God’s multiethnic people and the city represented earthly Jerusalem. Since Revelation is intended to reveal, this seems unlikely. Furthermore, it feels rather arbitrary to mark out the temple as symbolic, but not the holy city. It seems more likely that this vision uses language from past destructions of Jerusalem — the three and one half year siege that ended in 586 BC and the similar siege that ended in AD 70 — and applies it in a new way to the church.

<sup>107</sup> It may be instructive to compare and contrast this with Daniel 8:9-14; 9:24-27; 11:29-35; 12.

## #17 THE TWO WITNESSES (REV 11:3-19)

The Lamb has opened the scroll and unleashed judgments upon the earth, but nobody has repented. The sealing of the seven thunders signals that a different path is needed to bring people to give glory to God. The open scroll must be consumed by John so he can prophesy. This will enable the church to both keep what is written and, as Revelation 11 will explore, witness to it. This will not be easy; the word of God is sweet, but the hard-faced response to God's prophet can make one bitter. The seventh trumpet will blow and God will complete his purpose, but not before John and the churches enter the same struggle with their cities as the Lord did with Jerusalem.

**The two witnesses, olive trees, lampstands (11:3-14).** Verses 3-14 depict two witnesses prophesying, being killed, and coming to life before a tenth of the city falls and the rest who are not killed give glory to God. All in all, God uses both partial judgment and the witness of the churches unto Christlike death to bring about what the trumpets alone did not: repentance.

John images the two who prophesy in three ways. **(1)** The two are described as *witnesses* who prophesy in sackcloth — lamenting the wickedness of the city in which they dwell.<sup>108</sup> **(2)** The two are also described as *olive trees* (cf. Zech. 4). There was a concern in Zechariah's day as to how the temple would be completed so God's presence could be clearly seen in Jerusalem.<sup>109</sup> This challenge is imaged by a lampstand that needs oil so it can keep burning. The answer? God's Spirit at work in God's people (and leaders) are *olive trees* that supply oil to the lampstand to keep it burning.<sup>110</sup> **(3)** Also drawing on Zechariah, the two are also described as *lampstands* who stand before the Lord of the whole earth. Lampstands have been used in Revelation to symbolically describe the churches which Jesus is tending to (1:12-13, 20, etc.). We may be intended to see the Seven Spirits as the actual flame (4:5), while the church is the lampstand carrying the light.

The two witnesses are *a personification of the churches' function as lampstands and olive trees shining God's light in the world and bringing the nations to give glory to God before the end.* Further deepening this imagery, the church has already been depicted as God's temple and holy city which will continue worshipping and sacrificing through persecution (11:1-2).

The two witnesses personifying the lampstands (churches) are Elijah (*"fire consumes their foes," "shut the sky, that no rain may fall"*) and Moses (*"power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague"*). Elijah confronted all Israel along with Ahab and Jezebel to turn from their idolatry and injustices against God's people to serve YHWH. Moses confronted Pharaoh, Egypt, and their gods for their injustices against Israel and for resisting the will of YHWH. Moses and Elijah did this both with the testimony of their mouth and the divine power of God's judgment to back them. The shocking result is that the churches are imaged as being in a similar position to these two men (cf. Jam. 5:17-18). The churches stand beside the Lord of the earth to rule with him by means of witnessing against the earth in sackcloth.

If anyone hurts the witnesses, their are doomed to be killed by a variety of plagues called down by the witnesses. This is similar to Jeremiah 5:14, *"Behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them."* Revelation has indeed depicted

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<sup>108</sup> Why two? The witnesses bring formal charges of sin and idolatry. Every charge must be established by at least two witnesses (Deut. 19:15). Jesus also sent out the seventy-two in groups of two (Lk. 10:1).

<sup>109</sup> The temple was God's dwelling in Jerusalem where people could come experience the presence of God through prayer and sacrifice. The burning lampstand symbolized God's presence there. If there is no temple, there is no lampstand. If there is no lampstand, the world is not coming to know and experience God in his presence.

<sup>110</sup> The Spirit is the oil, which flows from the two olive trees to keep the lamp lit. Beale, 222.

the saints as having a sort of judging power. The saints call to God to avenge their blood (6:9-11) and God responds to their prayers in judgment (8:3-5; 16:3-7; 19:1-2). This function must not be taken lightly, but one wonders if the secular, splintered, timid church of today has forgotten the power with which God backs the churches when they witness through affliction (2 Thess. 1:6).

But the chief function of the churches as imaged by these witnesses is their testimony (vs. 3, 6, 7). In our world that wants churches to be and do many things, the two witnesses give the churches a clear vision: God has called them to prophesy against the cities they live in for their sin, idolatry, and injustices — trusting all the while that God's divine power will back them.

But the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will battle, conquer, and kill them. The beast will represent the empire-based violent power of Satan (explored more in chapter 13). The dead bodies of the two witnesses are said to lie in the "*great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.*" See the big picture: the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations rejoice over the death of these witnesses. They hated how these witnesses *tormented* them — by their prophesying and by judgments that came from them.<sup>111</sup> The church should take note: we live in a world where tolerance is the greatest virtue and psychological harm is the greatest sin.

The city in which their bodies lie is symbolically or spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where the Lord was crucified. At this point, many uncover one specific referent for this city. Some understandably say it is Jerusalem — alluding to how Jerusalem is compared to Sodom (Jer. 23:14).<sup>112</sup> Others say it is Rome since "the great city" elsewhere refers to Babylon, to which the first century referent is Rome. But we must remember that deciphering Egypt, Sodom, Babylon, the beasts as code for one specific referent fails to take these images seriously as images.<sup>113</sup> If John's intention is simply to say Rome or Jerusalem, he can say that. But instead, he's drawing on a type and casting an image by describing the spiritual quality of a city that would kill God's witnesses. It's like Egypt which enslaved God's people. It's like Sodom which was full of sexual perversion and injustice. It's like the city that killed the Lord Jesus. The point is not offer a coded referent to one city but to trace out a glove that fits the hand of any city that rejects God's kingship, is sexually immoral, attacks God's people, ignores the weak, and works injustice.

Despite being killed, after three and a half days, a breath of life from God enters them, they stand on their feet, terrifying the onlookers before ascending into heaven in a cloud (mixing imagery from Ezekiel 37:10, Daniel 7:13, and Acts 1:9). Remember: Revelation discloses a transcendent perspective — not plain descriptions of literal events — through a symbolic narrative. A couple of perspectives can be gleaned here. **(1)** As with chapter 7, the witnesses are protected not from tribulation but through tribulation as signified in their Christlike resurrection and ascension. **(2)** This vindicates the witnesses. Beale explains that "The persecutors... have now realized that the prophets' announcement of judgment was not empty but will come to pass."<sup>114</sup> How God actually accomplishes this is a question that will be explored below.

A tenth of the city falls and 7,000 die in an earthquake after the ascension of the witnesses. Though this is the smallest fractional judgment, the result is astonishingly different than before: *the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.* Elsewhere in Revelation, the gospel demands giving glory to God (14:6-7), but it does not happen (16:8-9).

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<sup>111</sup> Elsewhere, this list refers to the ransomed (5:9; 7:9) and to those to whom the gospel is preached (14:6).

<sup>112</sup> Using Jerusalem as a single referent for this city is particularly problematic since the *beast* kills the witnesses and it is people from the *nations* that make merry over them before *a tenth of the city falls and the rest repent*. This is not predictive in any way of what happened with Jerusalem in AD 70. Also, note that Jerusalem is never described as being like Egypt but as lusting after in Egypt (Ezek. 23:18-20)

<sup>113</sup> Bauckham, 93.

<sup>114</sup> Beale, 231.

Bauckham has pointed out that when the 7,000 are killed and the rest give glory to God, this is likely intended to image a reversal of Elijah's situation in 1 Kings 19:14-18.<sup>115</sup> Elijah complains that Israel is completely compromised by idolatry, so God promises that none except the 7,000 who haven't bowed to Baal will escape the judgment brought by Hazeal, Jehu, and Elisha, whom Elijah must anoint. But Revelation reverses this: 7,000 are killed in the earthquake, but the rest give glory to God. The point is likely not to predict a specific event in which there will be a mass repentance, but rather to emphasize to the church the value of their confident witness unto death. Not only will they be protected and vindicated, but their witness will not be fruitless.

But why? What have "the rest" just seen that moves them to give glory to God?<sup>116</sup> Bauckham looks back on church history to make a compelling argument that *how* martyrs die and *how* the church responds to persecution enables the world to clearly see the truth of Christ embodied in the church.

"The symbolic narrative of 11:11-12 means not that the nations have to see the literal resurrection of the Christian martyrs before they are convinced of the truth of their witness, but that they have to perceive the martyrs' participation in Christ's triumph over death. In fact, the way that Christian martyrdom, in the earliest centuries of the church, impressed and won people to faith in the Christian God, was precisely thus. The martyrs were effective witnesses to the truth of the Gospel because their faith in Christ's victory over death was so convincingly evident in the way they faced death and died."<sup>117</sup>

The witnesses can die confidently and the church can keep boldly witnessing for the good of the cities they live in because they know they are protected by God and their witness is not fruitless. As Tertullian is credited with saying, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of church."

***How all is the symbolic narrative of the two witnesses intended to impact the churches and us today? What would our churches look like if we allowed this vision to transform our imaginations?***

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**Kingdom come (11:15-19).** The mighty angel had sworn that in the days of the seventh trumpet, what was announced to the prophets would be fulfilled (10:6-7). So many strands of Scripture — prayers, promises, and shadowy narratives — find their completion in the seventh trumpet. While this is promise and judgment consummated, these praises won't be filled out with much in the way of vision until chapters 20-22.

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<sup>115</sup> Bauckham, 88.

<sup>116</sup> We need to avoid two extremes. We don't want to interpret this vision so literally that we only see Moses and Elijah slain and resurrected, etc. We don't want to generalize so much that we simply see injustice vindicated. There is a reason why the death and resurrection of these witnesses is what John sees.

<sup>117</sup> Bauckham, 87-88.

God promised Abraham and his descendants the land that ran from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates. Centuries later, Joshua led Israel in a conquest of this promised land. But idolatry among the tribes left them exposed to enemies, so their dominion contracted during the days of the judges. God eventually raised up David to overcome Israel's enemies. God promised David that one day he would give them and their land rest from enemies. God gave David a measure of that and even more to Solomon. Mysteriously, Solomon's influence crept beyond the borders of Israel to the ends of the earth.

But the nations didn't simply bow the knee to God and his kings in Jerusalem. Many fought. Perplexed at why the peoples would defy the purpose of God, David rhetorically pondered, *"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?"* (Ps. 2:1). David warned kings to submit to God and his king, for God had promised his Son and King *"the nations"* and *"the ends of the earth"* as a possession (Ps. 2:8). Israel grabbed onto this promise. This was bigger than a small piece of land in the Middle East. Solomon prayed that God would expand the king's dominion to the ends of the earth and fill the earth with God's glory (Ps. 72).

Filling out this imagery, God showed the king of Babylon how God's kingdom would one day crush all others and fill the earth. *"But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth... the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,"* (Dan. 2:35, 44). Daniel hears more in a later dream of how God's kingdom will come through a son of man and the saints. *"And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him... his [or their] kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him [or them],"* (Dan. 7:14, 27). Jesus is the Son of God, Son of man, and Son of David to bring God's kingdom on earth. The saints have been given royal power to expand the borders of this kingdom (in tribulation).

But as the seventh trumpet is blow, John hears of this project's and promise's consummation: the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord. The God who is and who was is no longer "to come" because his great work has been accomplished. God has always ruled, but now that the raging of the nations has been ended, this is the definitive new beginning of God's eternal reign. The dead are judged, God's prophets and saints small and great are rewarded, and the destroyers of earth are finally destroyed. All enemies have been put under Christ's feet and God has become all in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

John only *hears* up to verse 18, but he gets a small glimpse of the final judgment in verse 19. God's temple is opened up with the ark of the covenant in full view — no curtain. When God overcame Jericho, the priests carried the ark of the covenant and blew horns. The final judgment sequence seen previously in 8:5 (later in 16:17-21) is repeated and filled out more: lightning, rumblings, thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

All in all, the declarations and praises at the 7th trumpet reflect a consummation of Jesus' prayer: *"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,"* (Matthew 6:10).

***We previously said that seeing how everything turns out shapes how we view our present reality. How all does the seventh trumpet set our vision of reality right today?***

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