

## **Study 22: Revelation 11:1-11**

**1 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.**

- The prophet Ezekiel was also instructed to measure the Temple as described in Ezekiel 40-42. In that passage, the Lord was restoring the Temple after Israel had profaned it through idolatry.
- The Lord may judge and punish His people, yet it is always with a view toward restoration. He is always mindful of the Church, and is aware of all His people. The Church can never be too big for God not to be able to "measure it and count the worshipers."
- I had a seminary professor who said, "No matter how severe God's judgment throughout history, there are always signs of His mercy. And His judgment, though at times severe, is never as severe as it could be."
- The Lord told Ezekiel after the Temple had been measured and described:

**While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever. The house of Israel will never again defile my holy name-- neither they nor their kings-- by their prostitution and the lifeless idols of their kings at their high places. When they placed their threshold next to my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them, they defiled my holy name by their detestable practices. So I destroyed them in my anger. Now let them put away from me their prostitution and the lifeless idols of their kings, and I will live among them forever. "Son of man, describe the temple to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their sins. Let them consider the plan, and if they are ashamed of all they have done, make known to them the design of the temple-- its arrangement, its exits and entrances-- its whole design and all its regulations and laws. Write these down before them so that they may be faithful to its design and follow all its regulations (Ezekiel 43:6-11).**

- If the people of God repent and follow God's commands, He is always willing to restore. God wants to live in the midst of His people forever. That is His objective.

**2 But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.**

- The Church is sometimes subject to violation from the world and the Gentiles, but it is always for a season that God chooses and controls. But God is not concerned for those who are not His people in this context, thus they weren't measured. God uses the Gentiles to chastise His people, then chastises the Gentiles for being such willing instruments!

**3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."**

- Are there literally two witnesses that can be identified someplace and time in history? Probably not. Why would Revelation get literal at this point when everything up to this point has been symbolic?
- The Lord's cause seems to be outnumbered by His enemies. There were only two witnesses here, but the Lord gives His true witnesses power. That makes those witnesses able to withstand all the power of the kingdom of darkness.
- You may seem to be overwhelmed at times, but the Lord will empower you if you humble yourself (clothe yourself in sackcloth).

**He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble (Proverbs 3:34).**

**But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).**

**Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).**

- God is seldom without a witness whom He empowers to speak on His behalf or prophesy.
- Is there any significance to the 1260 days, which equal three and half years? It is not to be taken literally, but represents a beginning and an end to every ministry that is from God. Think of John the Baptist. He had a definite period of effective ministry and then it was over. It is interesting that Jesus had a public ministry of about three and a half years. Even Jesus' ministry had a beginning and end (as far as His physical presence on earth; obviously He is still ministering!). No ministry of man lasts for that long.

**4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.**

- In Zechariah, we read:

**Then I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?" Again I asked him, "What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?" He replied, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I said. So he said, "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth" (Zechariah 4:11-14).**

- An olive tree is long-lasting and provides an abundance of oil from the olive crop. That oil is rich and is consumed by humans. The symbolism here is obviously that the Lord anoints His witnesses with an unending supply of spiritual anointing and that "oil" helps sustain the people of God.
- The oil can also serve to keep the flame burning on the lampstand. The anointing on God's servants gives off light to the world, although darkness will not want to submit to this light.
- Do you notice how many Old Testament images and themes reappear in Revelation? God is connecting what He did in ancient times to what He is doing in the Church at the time Revelation was written and today.

**5 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.**

- It may seem like God's witnesses are outnumbered so that their opposition has the upper hand. But God is watching and will eventually destroy those who oppose them and Him. It may seem like God isn't watching or acting on our behalf, but He is and will.
- It is interesting that the words that come from the witnesses' mouths has the power to destroy their enemies. It is important that we continue to speak the word of God in times of opposition and trouble. It has the power to deliver us and destroy the opposition.

**"Therefore this is what the LORD God Almighty says: "Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes" (Jeremiah 5:14).**

- Once again, let us put ourselves in the place of the churches who were receiving this Revelation letter. They weren't examples of power and ministry. They had their problems and would have seemed to be insignificant, even in trouble with God. Yet they would read this and be encouraged to stand and speak even though their numbers were small and their power limited.
- That is the same message for the Church today. Your numbers may be small, but if God is with you, it doesn't matter. Stand in the power of your testimony and in the light that you have. God will do the rest!

**6      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.**

- Both these references are from actual prophetic actions in the Old Testament. Elijah declared that there would be no rain in Israel during Ahab's reign and Moses decreed the 10 plagues on Egypt. The Spirit was reminding the churches that the prophetic messengers of God have tremendous power, more power than the Roman armies that ruled the world at that time.
- Today's prophets continue a long tradition of men and women chosen by God to speak on His behalf. Today's prophets are connected in the prophetic family tree to Moses, Elijah, Daniel and Amos. What God is doing today He has been doing for millennia and that is to communicate to His people to instruct them and to the world to cause them to repent and turn to Him.

**7      Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.**

- Every testimony, ministry or human institution, no matter how noble or spiritual, has an end. Only God is never-ending. The above statement would seem to indicate that these two witnesses lost their lives to the superior power of the evil one. That is not the case.
- God is in control of all things. My life is hidden in Christ (see Colossians 3:3). For something to get to me it has to get through Him first. These witnesses died because they had finished the work God had for them to do. He brought them home to be with Him.
- At times, it seems like God's enemies have the upper hand. They do not. The Church is to walk in faith at all times. God is the victor! He will get the glory!

**8      Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.**

- At times, God allows His enemies seemingly to publicly triumph over His people and His cause. Their victories never last.
- What is the great city? No one knows. But to me it represents a place where there are a lot of people and from where the news spreads far and wide.

**9      For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial.**

- There are ambassadors, embassies and international traders in capital or great cities. God wants the news of the demise of His servants to receive broad publication so that His enemies will have a chance to believe a lie.

- Not only were God's witnesses killed but they were subjected to public humiliation. Come to think of it, this is reminiscent of what happened to Jesus. This may even be a reminder to the churches of what happened to Jesus! Jesus was subjected to the most cruel and shameful torture and death. The nations of the world at Jerusalem beheld it. Pilate and Herod became friends after Jesus' death. Should we, God's servants, expect any different treatment than our Lord received?
- When humiliating things happen to God's servants, it is not an indication that they have done something wrong or that God has withdrawn His favor. It is just another means by which God accomplishes His will.

**10 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.**

- My theory is that God allows the enemies of the Church (and of Him) to gloat and think they are prevailing. That is what happened to the Egyptians. They thought they had Israel trapped at the Red Sea and proceeded accordingly. But their confidence was mistaken and they all lost their lives.
- Israel and Rome thought they had finished off Jesus and His followers. They probably congratulated themselves for a job well done. Jesus had tormented them, just like John the Baptist tormented Herod because he had taken his brother's wife. Herod had John killed and the religious leaders had Jesus killed. But killing those witnesses did not bring relief. It only strengthened the power of their message.

**11 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.**

- Let us review one of our interpretative rules for Revelation. This book was being addressed to God's people who were under pressure and persecution. It is delivered using symbols and stories that will not be familiar to the unsaved, so we can say that it was written in a sort of secret code. Those in the Church reading this book will understand but be in no danger of someone outside the Church reading it and actually understanding what was meant.
- I think that this verse is a veiled reference to Jesus and the power of His resurrection. But only you and I would see that. Someone who is unsaved and would read this would think it is a reference to some future event.
- Yet the principle of God vindicating His servants is also seen in this verse. Paul wrote:

**Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if**

**our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you (2 Corinthians 4:1-12).**

- Why would God allow this or work in this manner? Because He wants all men to come to a knowledge of the truth. When the Sanhedrin heard that the tomb was empty, it was so they could turn and come to the truth. They chose not to do so. They maintained their hard hearts and stubborn minds and continued to resist the work of God. They will have no excuse when they stand before God.