

# THE TEMPLE AND THE TWO WITNESSES

Revelation 11:1-14

A Muslim mosque, The Dome of the Rock, presently dominates the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Two Jewish Temples have stood on this site. The first, built by King Solomon, was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The second, built by Zerubbabel, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

In 637 A.D. Muslim forces conquered Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock was completed in 691 A.D. Just a few meters south of The Dome of the Rock is a second mosque even more sacred to the Muslims which is called the Al Aqsa Mosque.

The Scriptures make clear that a third Jewish Temple will be built on the Temple Mount. It will be operative during the Tribulation. The Antichrist will desecrate this temple by erecting in it a statue of himself (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:3-4; Rev. 13:11-14). This is called *the abomination of desolation* by our Lord (Matt. 24:15). It will take place mid way through the seven year Tribulation.

At present, building a third Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount seems impossible. How it will come about is not revealed in Scripture. That there will be a Third Jewish Temple is certain. That is the clear message of the first two verses of Revelation 11.

Let's review what we've discovered thus far.

Presently, we live in *The Dispensation of Grace*, specifically, *The Church Age*. Our Lord Jesus could come at any time in *The Rapture* to gather up the Church and take Her to be with Him in heaven. Some time following *The Rapture* the Antichrist will negotiate a seven year treaty with the nation of Israel thus commencing *The Tribulation*. *The Tribulation* will end with the second coming of Jesus. Jesus will establish His *Messianic Kingdom* on earth. Following the Messianic Kingdom, *The Great White Throne Judgment* will be conducted during *The Aftermath* followed by *The Eternal Order* which includes the new heaven, the new earth and the new Jerusalem.

In our study of Revelation we have discovered that chapters 6-19 reveal the chronological sequence of events during the Tribulation. These events are organized around three series of judgments: the *Seal Judgments*, the *Trumpet Judgments* and the *Bowl Judgments*.

As we pick up our study in Revelation 11 we are reminded that the *Seal Judgments* are completed. Six of the seven *Trumpet Judgments* have occurred. On the Tribulation timeline we are nearing the midpoint. Beginning with Revelation 10 there is a parenthesis in the flow of events. Revelation 11 continues this parenthesis. The purpose of the parenthesis is to give us additional information about things that will occur during the first half of the Tribulation. Specifically, Revelation 11 gives us further information about three entities that will be functioning at the beginning of the Tribulation. These three entities are the Tribulation Temple and the Two Witnesses.

## THE TRIBULATION TEMPLE (11:1-2)

Revelation 11:1-2 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there," <sup>2</sup> but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

### The Tribulation Temple Will Be Built

Near the Jordan River grew canes that were long and straight. These were used as measuring rods in first century construction. In his vision, John was given one of these and told to measure the Temple, the altar and the people in the Temple. Measuring is a symbolic act with several possible meanings. It can indicate claiming the thing measured as one's own. Thus some understand that God is claiming the Tribulation Temple as His own. But there are problems with this view. This Temple will not be sanctioned by God. The worship in this Temple will not be acceptable to God. It will not be acceptable because it will be the restoration of the Levitical worship of the Old Covenant and Law of Moses both of which came to an end at the cross of Christ. This worship will not be acceptable to God because at its heart it

manifests a rejection of Jesus the Messiah. In addition, I speculate that the Two Witnesses will, among other things, speak against this Temple and its unacceptable worship. For these reasons I do not believe God is symbolically claiming the Tribulation Temple for Himself.

Measuring something can also symbolically reveal the restoration of the thing measured. In this case, measuring the Temple symbolically affirms that a Tribulation Temple will be built. Since 70 A.D. no Jewish Temple has occupied the Temple Mount. From 70 A.D. to 1948 A.D. no Jewish nation existed to build it. Since 70 A.D., the idea that a third Jewish Temple would be built has seemed impossible. Even now there are seemingly insurmountable obstacles in light of the Al Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques occupying the Temple Mount.

*As impossible as it may seem, God is affirming through John that the Tribulation Temple will be built.*

Beginning in 538 B.C. Jewish refugees began returning to Israel after 70 years of exile. Jerusalem and the Temple Mount lay in ruins. God gave the prophet Zechariah a vision of a man measuring the width and length of Jerusalem (Zech. 2:1-13). The point of the vision was to assure the people that no matter how daunting the task, Jerusalem and the Temple would be rebuilt.

By having John measure the Temple, God is strongly affirming that the Tribulation Temple will be built. When it will be built and whether or not it will be completed before the beginning of the Tribulation is a matter of speculation. Scripture does not make it clear. What we do know is that it will be completed before the mid point of the Tribulation because 3 ½ years into the Tribulation, Antichrist will desecrate the Temple with a statue of himself (Dan. 9:27, 2 Thess. 2:3-4).

This violation of the Tribulation Temple is implied in verse two.

### **Jerusalem Will Be Trampled**

Verse two reveals that 3 ½ years into the Tribulation Jerusalem will be overrun by the Gentiles.

#### **Revelation 11:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there," <sup>2</sup> but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

This corresponds exactly with Daniel 9:27.

#### **Daniel 9:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."

The first three and a half years or forty-two months of the Tribulation the Jews will worship unmolested in the Temple. Mid way through the Tribulation, Antichrist will violate the covenant, invade Israel and desecrate the Temple with his image (2 Thess. 2:3-4, Rev. 13:13-15). Jerusalem will be trampled by the forces of Antichrist for the final forty-two months, that is, the second half of the Tribulation.

Revelation 11:1-2 reveals 1) the Tribulation Temple will be built and 2) Antichrist will trample Jerusalem for the final 42 months (3 ½ years) of the Tribulation.

Concurrent with the building/functioning of the Tribulation Temple in the first half of the Tribulation will be the ministry of two men called the Two Witnesses. Their ministry is revealed in verses 3-13.

### **THE TWO WITNESSES (11:3-13)**

#### **Revelation 11:3-13 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And I will grant authority to my Two Witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."<sup>4</sup> These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. <sup>5</sup> And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. <sup>6</sup> They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. <sup>7</sup> And when they have finished their

testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them,<sup>8</sup> and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.<sup>9</sup> For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb,<sup>10</sup> and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.<sup>11</sup> But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.<sup>12</sup> Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.<sup>13</sup> And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

### When Will The Two Witnesses Minister?

The duration of the Two Witnesses' ministry is 1,260 days.

#### Revelation 11:3 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> And I will grant authority to my Two Witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

Based on 30-day months, 1,260 days is 42 months or 3 ½ years. The Two Witnesses will prophesy against Israel during the first 3 ½ years of the Tribulation.

### Who Are The Two Witnesses?

The Two Witnesses will be given supernatural power to perform miracles like those accomplished by Moses and Elijah. For this reason some believe the Two Witnesses are Moses and Elijah.

The passage, however, does not relate the ministry of the Two Witnesses to Moses and Elijah but to two men who lead the building of the second temple in 519 B.C. This is what is meant by the reference in verse four.

#### Revelation 11:4 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

The Two Witnesses are described as the two olive trees and the two lampstands who stand before the God of the earth. This is a reference to Zechariah 4, where a lampstand and two olive trees are mentioned.

The historical context of Zechariah 4 is the same as Zechariah 2. Those Jews who returned to Israel in 538 B.C. faced the overwhelming task of rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple. The task of leading the rebuilding program fell to two men – Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. Through the vision recorded in Zechariah 4 God sought to encourage Zerubbabel and Joshua with the promise that He would provide them the power needed to complete the work.

#### Zechariah 4:1–14 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. <sup>2</sup> And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it." <sup>3</sup> And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." <sup>4</sup> And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" <sup>5</sup> Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." <sup>6</sup> Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>7</sup> Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!' "

What was God saying to Zerubbabel? He was saying that Zerubbabel could count on the power of the Holy Spirit to enable him to overcome all obstacles and complete the building of the Temple.

<sup>8</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>9</sup> "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to

you. <sup>10</sup> For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

*"These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth." <sup>11</sup> Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?" <sup>12</sup> And a second time I answered and said to him, "What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?" <sup>13</sup> He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." <sup>14</sup> Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."*

The olive oil from the olive trees in Zechariah's image provided fuel for the two lampstands. The Two Witnesses of this period of Israel's history - Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel - were the leaders of Israel in Zechariah's time. Just as these Two Witnesses were raised up to be lampstands or witnesses for God and were empowered by olive oil representing the power of the Holy Spirit, so the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11 will likewise be raised up to be lampstands or witnesses for God empowered by the Holy Spirit during the first half of the Tribulation. In other words, their ministry will be empowered by an inexhaustible supply of the Holy Spirit's power.

### **What Will The Two Witnesses Do?**

Let's observe verse three very closely.

#### **Revelation 11:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> *And I will grant authority to my Two Witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."*

Notice these men are called *witnesses* and that there are two, not just one. Is this significant? I believe it is in light of the nature of their ministry. The Law of Moses stipulates that only on the testimony of two or three witnesses can a charge against a person be established.

#### **Deuteronomy 19:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> *"A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of Two Witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established."*

Through these Two Witnesses God will charge the nation of Israel with her many sins; first and foremost being her rejection of Jesus the Messiah. I believe they will also confront the Jews who entered into the covenant with Antichrist looking to him for security rather than to the true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As prophets they will warn the nation of Israel and the world about the true character of the Antichrist, about the counterfeit trinity and about Antichrist's designs to subjugate the world and declare himself god.

Undoubtedly a remnant will respond to the message of the Two Witnesses, but for the most part the Two Witnesses will be hated not only in Jerusalem but throughout the world. Attempts will be made to kill the Two Witnesses, but they will survive for 1260 days.

### **How Will The Two Witnesses Survive?**

#### **Revelation 11:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> *And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. <sup>6</sup> They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire."*

These Two Witnesses will have a combination of the greatest powers ever given prophets on earth. By these means they will survive many assassination attempts over the course of the 1260 days of their ministry.

## What Happens At The End Of The 1,260 Days?

### Revelation 11:7-14 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, <sup>8</sup> and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. <sup>9</sup> For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, <sup>10</sup> and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. <sup>12</sup> Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. <sup>13</sup> And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. <sup>14</sup> The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

The Antichrist will war against the Two Witnesses and will succeed in killing them. This event will happen after his resurrection from the dead. This is what is meant by the statement, *the beast that rises from the bottomless pit*. As a counterfeit Christ, Antichrist will mimic the death and resurrection of the true Christ. He will come back from the bottomless pit (Abyss) by means of his resurrection by Satan (Rev. 13:3, 12, 14). Along with his resurrection, the act of killing the Two Witnesses will provide another reason for mankind to worship him. All previous attempts to kill the Two Witnesses will fail because of the miraculous powers of the Two Witnesses by which they will be able to kill those who attempt to murder them. But when the 1,260 days of their ministry is fulfilled, God will allow Antichrist to have power over them and to kill them. This power of the Antichrist over the Two Witnesses, when all others failed, will be another reason why mankind will give its allegiance to the Antichrist.

The murder of the Two Witnesses will result in worldwide celebration. In a show of raw inhumanity, their bodies will be left in the streets of Jerusalem for 3 ½ days violating the Jewish custom of burial within 24 hours of death even for criminals. This is the only time during the seven year Tribulation that the citizens of the world rejoice and make merry.

But their merry making will end abruptly when the Two Witnesses are resurrected and ascend to heaven. An earthquake will strike Jerusalem damaging a tenth of the city and killing seven thousand. Citizens of Jerusalem will acknowledge these events as coming from the hand of God. Perhaps in the end, some will finally respond to the message of the Two Witnesses and put their faith in Jesus.

The second woe is the sixth Trumpet Judgment (Rev. 9:1, 12-13). The third woe is the seventh Trumpet Judgment (11:15).

## REFLECTION

I believe the ministry of the Two Witnesses is primarily to the nation Israel confronting her sin of unbelief and calling her to repentance and faith in Jesus the Messiah. Undoubtedly their message will reach around the world and many will come to faith through their witness along with the witness of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (Rev. 7).

The timeless principle in this passage has to do with responding to God's Word. The Two Witnesses will be declaring God's Word and validating their message with supernatural signs and wonders. Everyone will hear, see and know that the Two Witnesses speak for God. Even with all that proof the vast majority of the earth's population will reject their message, hate them and rejoice at their murders.

It will not be for lack of evidence that they refuse to submit to the Lord, but because of hardness of heart.

The same is true today. Human nature is the same. As you share Christ keep in mind that some people have an honest heart and after their questions are answered will trust in Christ. Others, however, will have objections and questions not for the sake of finding the truth, but for resisting it. Be faithful. Be clear in sharing Jesus Christ crucified, buried and risen again. Don't beat yourself up if someone does not come to faith after you've done all you know to do. Remember the Two Witnesses!

This also begs the question concerning the condition of our own hearts. Are we responding to God's Word with faith and obedience or are we rejecting God's Word? When God's Word teaches us to forgive are we forgiving? When God's Word teaches us to serve are we serving? When God's Word teaches us to pray are we praying? When God's Word teaches us to be sexually pure are we being pure? When God's Word teaches us to seek first His Kingdom are we seeking first His Kingdom?

If not, why not?

Each of us need to examine ourselves and ask, "How am I responding to God when He speaks to me from His Word?" "Do I have a stubborn heart towards God?" If so, let us repent and renew our commitment to humble ourselves before God and do His will.

Let us be hearers *and* doers of God's Word as James exhorts us:

**James 1:22-25 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* <sup>23</sup> *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.* <sup>24</sup> *For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.* <sup>25</sup> *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*