

**The Revelation to John**  
**Chapter Eleven**  
**The Two Witnesses and the Seventh Trumpet**

Leon Combs, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.  
Originally written in 2008

This chapter is rather difficult to interpret. To the dispensationalist the time period here is the midpoint of the seven-year period of tribulation. In a historical interpretation this is a period of time in John's future when God will again give warnings to the world of His judgment. Throughout time God has warned the people of the results of their Godless ways and He will now do it again. He is going to also bring powerful witnesses to proclaim the Gospel and the coming judgments of God. Some interpreters say that these are two people and some say that they represent the "real" church since there were only two churches, Philadelphia and Smyrna, presented previously as pure. People present will have already witnessed horrible disasters and they have still continued in their sins as we saw at the end of chapter nine.

Some interpreters take a literal interpretation and considerable difficulties follow such a path. Some people say that the two people are Moses and Elijah. You are probably familiar with the "end times" authors who present these as two people with great powers who are then killed and later revive. Those authors have made a lot of money with books and movies and they make for exciting and amusing tales. Leon Morris and others take verses 1- 13 as symbolic and referring to the war between the church and the world with the church suffering terribly but ultimately victorious. I am going to follow the symbolic interpretation for I believe that it presents a very realistic scenario for the battle between the two groups. I also think that when we read the entire chapter in context we will clearly see that the two entities are not really two people. This interpretation will not sell books or be made into epic movies, but I think that application is also of the world. However this approach makes this "chapter" fit with what has been happening between the invisible church and the world for at least the past 50 years. A historic approach reveals horrible tribulations occurring on the world since the ascension of Jesus Christ and continuing today along with the continuing persecution of the church. The need for supernatural protection from the persecution of the world is great and similar to the powers of Moses and Elijah.

**Rev11:1 "And there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it."**

A long reed grew in the area of Palestine that was useful as a walking stick and as a measuring rod. Ezekiel referred to an angel using a similar rod to measure a temple in Ezek 40:3-43:17. There is a reference to a line in Ps 19:4 and such is the rule of doctrine so that all doctrine of the church is based upon the Word of God. It gives direction to all the forms, laws, and ordinances of the church; and this is the sense in which John makes of it. Such a line was used in separating the seven churches into only two that were acceptable to the line. Certainly the time of the Reformation made use of such a line. This would also have been done in our nation when churches were formed according to the

Gospel plan separate from a national church. The word translated “temple” is really sanctuary from the Greek word *naos* and the people of God are often referred to as God’s people. The Greek word translated “measure” above can also be translated as “count” and that translation is more appropriate if the temple is the body of all believers. Again it makes for more exciting reading to make the proposal that the temple has now been rebuilt in Jerusalem but such is not consistent with the rest of the chapter (Rev 11:8-19). Since John has previously in this event had a perspective from earth, it is probable that this building is on earth. John is probably also referring to the church since the church has been called God’s sanctuary or temple:

1Cor 6:19 *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?*

Acts 7:48 *"However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:*

1Cor 3:16 *"Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"*

2Cor 6:16 *"Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their god, and they shall be my people.*

Eph 2:19-21 *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, <sup>20</sup>having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, <sup>21</sup>in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;"*

The altar is an important component of the temple that points to the sacrificial nature of Christian service: *"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."* (Rom 12:1)

**Rev11:2 And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.'"**

Measuring in the Bible can be done for destruction or for preservation, and since the bondservants have been sealed we know that the church will be preserved although many individuals may die. It seems here that God is dividing man into Christians (those in the temple) and the Gentiles (those outside the temple) or those professing to be a component of the invisible church but according to the line of God are really apostate churches. These are not to be measured as belonging to the Gospel church. We should note that this outer area has been given to the nations by God during this time period. Forty-two months is the same as the time period in the next verse and is literally “a time, times, and a half-time”. God is then allowing the Gentiles to trample the holy city for only some specified time before ending such event.

We see today some of the hatred mankind has for the true church. Humanism is intolerant of the exclusive nature of Christianity and tries to change the teaching or to treat it as

being intolerant and therefore the teaching of bigoted, uneducated people. The world pushes for abortion of the unborn and marrying of same-sex couples as two of the most anti-Christian acts. Note the words “it has been given” meaning that God has permitted the nations to persecute the church for a period of time. Other trappings of the holy place are referenced in:

- Isa 63:18 *Your holy people possessed Your sanctuary for a little while, Our adversaries have trodden it down.*
- Dan 8:13 *Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, "How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?"*
- Zec 12:3 *"It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it.*
- Luke 21:24 *and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*

They are not permitted to destroy the church but to oppress it. The time of 42 months is the same period as 1260 days (11:3; 12:6) or “a time, times and half a time” (12:14; Dan 7:25; 12:7) with “time” being a year and “times” being two years for a total of 3.5 years. This is the length of time Antiochus Epiphanes tyrannized in Jerusalem and sacrificed pigs in the Temple at the middle of the second century BC. Forty-two is also the number of encampments of Israel in the wilderness (Num 33:5) and, since John often uses images from that deliverance period, he may be using a reference to that era. The total time should not be considered literal since the reign of this evil component is to be over all the kings and nations of the earth as the 13<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> chapters of this book show. According to the time used by the Chaldeans and Daniel, the days are counted as a year and this would be 1260 years. According to some writers this time period would approximately cover from the first pope (not counting Peter) until the time of the Reformation. The holy city refers to all the churches that are measured to be Christian that are called in allusion to Jerusalem that bears this name (Matt 4:5).

**Rev11:3 “And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”**

**Rev11:4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.”**

God is then giving His authority to witnesses to prophesy for the same period of time that the Gentiles are allowed to trample the city. Twelve hundred and sixty days is three and one half years, which represents the last half of a possible seven-year tribulation period as the “end times” authors propose. This is the same time as prophesied by Daniel:

- Dan 7:25 *“And he will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.”*

- *Dan 12:6-7 “And one said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “How long will it be until the end of these wonders?”<sup>7</sup> And I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed.”*

Please remember that I consider the great tribulation to be the entire time of the suffering of God’s people since the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. However these 42 months could be the last of that time period or some short period of time near the end. If this time period is to be considered to be 1260 years then it could be as stated above and the “two witnesses” would be a succession of ministers and churches over those years when the Roman Catholic church ruled with its worship of Mary, angels, and other deities.

Some people have said that these two witnesses were Moses and Elijah and other possibilities have been raised such as Elijah and Elisha, Enoch and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, the Law and the Gospel, the OT and the NT, and others. The context demands some association with the church. Being dressed in sackcloth indicates mourning. It makes for a great best-seller and movie to visualize these witnesses as two people but we will see later that this chapter itself speaks against such a possibility. The lampstands have previously stood for the churches and it seems unlikely that God would change His nomenclature at this point. Note also that lampstands give out light and that is our purpose individually and collectively. That each witness is also seen as two olive trees represents a plentiful supply of olive oil symbolizing a strong dependence upon the Holy Spirit in their acts. A vision recorded in the following also refers to two olive trees:

*Zech 4:12-14 “And I answered the second time and said to him, “What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden oil from themselves?” (13) So he answered me, saying, “Do you not know what these are?” And I said, “No, my lord.” (14) Then he said, “These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.”*

Since only two churches in chapters two and three were judged faithful, God may be revealing to John that these two witnesses will be the nucleus of faithful churches which depend totally upon the Holy Spirit. Since they are visualized as in sackcloth the churches would be mourning concerning their prophesy of doom and destruction for mankind. Recognizing the word for “witnesses” as the Greek word “martyres” and the death of them as we will see later, these witnesses probably represent the martyrs of the church.

**Rev11:5 “And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed.**

**Rev11:6 These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.”**

It would be exciting to think that real fire can proceed out of the mouths of two real people but this fire often represents the judgment of God and the Word of God is very reprehensible to the enemies of the Church. God has previously spoken of His word being a destroying fire:

- *Jer 5:14 "Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, "Because you have spoken this word, Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire And this people wood, and it will consume them."*
- *1Kings 18:24 "Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, He is God." And all the people said, "That is a good idea."*
- *1Kings 18:38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.*

This "fire" of God will devour those who introduce strange doctrines in the church. It will disturb their consciences and will destroy them spiritually and eternally. God will not allow His witnesses to be killed before their time and His word will be devastating to their enemies. The witnesses have authority from God to: 1.) prevent rain, 2.) turn water into blood, and 3.) bring plagues to the earth. They also have the authority to do these events as often as they please. John is telling the church that these witnesses will have the same authority as did Moses and Elijah in former times. However these acts are to be understood spiritually as rain is explained of prophecy in Isa 5:6. Thus the Gentiles will not receive the Word of God but will remain with their blindness, darkness, and hardness of heart. They will follow their own teachings of "spirituality" to their eventual destruction. By "waters" are usually meant people, nations, and especially those ruled by evil forces. Turning into blood designs the confusions and wars raised among them due to the prophesying of these witnesses for Jesus said that He did not come to bring peace but the sword (Matt 10:34). The plagues refers to the rest of the seven vials poured out.

**Rev11:7 "And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them."**

God does not allow His people to be killed before their task is finished but He has set a time for the end of their testimony. The beast is undoubtedly Satan and this interpretation is in line with the "end times" authors. However this beast could be the emissary of Satan. The Alexandrian copy and others read "the fourth best that ascendeth" that may be the same as Daniel's fourth beast (Dan 7:7). After the testimonies of the saints are finished God will allow Satan to temporarily destroy the churches. Since the beast is portrayed as making war with the witnesses (also see below), they surely are not just two people.

*Dan 7:21 "I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them."*

Continuing with the interpretation that the witnesses are the faithful church of this dispensation, the church is now silenced by Satan and the world. Satan or his beast do not literally kill them all for the “killed” are “them” referring to the group of witnesses.

**Rev11:8 “And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.”**

There is no verb in the Greek, so the verb “will lie” is added. The word translated “bodies” is also **singular in the Greek**, which also adds credence to the interpretation that these witnesses are the church. John tells us that the “city” is a mystery called Sodom and Egypt so such a designation is also figurative although other authors have referred to it as Jerusalem. Jesus was not killed in Sodom and Egypt and such again testifies to the symbolic interpretation. These cities are representative of the world powers and the church is now quiet in the cities of the world. The great city is every city of the world and not just one city, meaning that it represents civilized man in organized community. The crucifixion of the Lord in Sodom and Egypt means that Jesus was spiritually crucified by the horrible sins in those places. Jesus is similarly being crucified in cities throughout the world now by the horrible sins against Him.

**Rev11:9 “And those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb.**

**Rev11:10 And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.”**

John tells us that people all over the world will see that the witnesses are no longer prophesying and they will all be cognizant of this event. Saying that they will not allow the bodies to be buried is a sign of great disrespect as they wish for the church to continue to be seen as a failure and therefore never true in what it proclaimed. We cannot be sure that the “days” means literally 24-hour days or years as most prophetic interpreters maintain. The Greek word is *hemera* and can be translated days or times or years depending upon context, which is not clear here. The time period is intended to make the point that “they” are really dead as was Lazarus, from the observer’s perspective. It cannot be literally three and a half days because of all that is related from verse 10. Just the sending of gifts to one another would take some considerable time at the perspective of the first century. Some consider this event to have taken place literally about the year 1414 in the council of Constance that lasted 3.5 years exactly. The witnesses John Huss and Jerom of Prague were killed and triumphed over by this council. Some think it occurred in about 1550 at the council of Trent, which consisted of men of all nations and also lasted exactly 3.5 years. However it is not likely that some of the many such events of the past are what is considered here. The witnesses have not finished and the outward court is not yet given to the Gentiles. Mankind will rejoice over the defeat of the faithful church, they will drink and carouse in continuous parties over its loss, and they will even give presents to each other to celebrate the end of this religion that had pestered them so long. They may proclaim a “Happy No-Church Day” for global celebration! In their

minds the church had tormented them during their entire existence. It had told them that there was only one God and the only way to Him was through Jesus. It had told them that there was only one reality and that they were condemned unless they followed Jesus. What a constant pest the church had been!

This discussion should make us all ask some deep questions about the status of the church in our home area. If we are not hated and condemned by the world then we have a problem. If we are trying to be accepted by the world then our approach is wrong. Jesus said that the world would hate us so why would any church be developing itself to be loved by the world?

- *John 15:18 “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.”*
- *Luke 6:22 “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.”*

**Rev11:11 “And after the three and a half days the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were beholding them.”**

There is now a change to past tense that continues. The world thought that they had defeated the church but the situation was much the same as when Jesus was crucified. They thought that Jesus was defeated and gone from their presence but then He revealed His true victory that then was available for all of us. Now after some brief time period God breathed life back into the church and there it was again, standing before them. No power on earth or in heaven can destroy the church of Jesus Christ:

*Matt 16:18 “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”*

This fear would be like that of the church upon the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:11).

**Rev11:12 “And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them.  
Rev11:13 And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.”**

The first “they” are the witnesses but we do not know the owner of the voice although we know that the person is either God or someone with His authority. Mankind now sees the people that it hated so much being taken into Heaven (The “they” in the second sentence above). One would think that, if believing in God were just a matter of reason, all would now flock to follow Him. Of course human reason and actions are not the way to God so the people will not repent. We don’t know why the numbers were given other than it took only a small portion of the city and a relatively small number of people killed to reveal the power of God and to terrify the people. They then gave glory to God but when He is

specified in a category (God of heaven) it means that to them He was just one of the gods and not the supreme God. As we saw in our study of Acts, the people at Mars Hill worshipped all the gods of which they could conceive, even the unknown god. This ascension cannot be taken literally for such an event will not occur until after the final judgment. To ascend to heaven signifies a more exalted state and here indicates a time when the church will be glorified before the world and they will have great honor given them from God. Just as at the resurrection of Christ there will be a great earthquake as the earth anticipates the end of its “suffering”. The city is assumed to be Rome.

**Rev11:14 “The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.”**

### **The Third Woe, The Seventh Trumpet**

**Rev11:15 “And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.'”**

At this point the end has come! We would be expecting some other catastrophe but instead we hear heavenly voices praising God. In the remainder of the New Testament, the word “Lord” usually refers to Jesus but here it refers to the Father, otherwise also including His Christ would not make any sense. They are proclaiming the replacement of the kingdom of the world with the kingdom of God. God has always been sovereign and the kingdom has already been declared by Jesus:

*Matt 12:28 “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”*

However now the kingdom is here in its full form and it will reign forever and ever! The time of Constantine was a time of great approval of the church and many people joined it but this cannot refer to that time (~300 AD). It is hard to accommodate this vision from our perspective with all the horrors we have seen upon Christians and the merging of the modern church with the world. However the meaning is that the powers of Satan and his followers will never overtake the world again as it did during the time of WWII. Christ is ruling and will continue to rule until the final end judgment comes when a new heaven and earth will be established. This is a great vision of what has yet to happen but has already been ordained by God and this should have brought great peace to the persecuted church of the time of John.

### **Rev 11:16-18**

*And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, (17) saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. (18) "And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."*



The elders were last mentioned between the sixth and seventh seals (7:11) and now that the kingdom has been proclaimed as “really” present now and forever they prostrate themselves in worship. In the Greek, “thou hast taken” is perfect tense with the meaning that it will continue. God has now permanently dethroned evil and taken His rightful place as supreme ruler. John tells us of five occurrences: 1.) the nations were enraged, 2.) God’s wrath came, 3.) the time of judgment of the dead came, 4.) rewards for all true bondservants had come, and 5.) the destruction of those who destroy the earth had come.

We see from the above that the judgments of God are not arbitrary and they will all come at the proper time. The anger of the nations is of no comparison to the wrath of God but this statement tells us again that mankind had no respect and fear of God. Saying that those who destroy the earth will be destroyed is saying that anyone who derided the character of God and His Laws would be appropriately judged. God has revealed to John and thus to the church that the time of exact judgment will come. In the mind of God what He has ordained has already happened for nothing can cause His plans to be thwarted. Even with their defeat stated, the nations will still rage against God just as Satan has raged against God since he left heaven.

**Rev11:19 “And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.”**

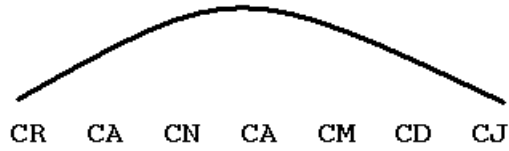
John is allowed a vision of heaven when the time of Earth 1 will be over. When the sanctuary of God in heaven was opened the ark of His covenant appeared. We do not know what happened to the earthly model of the ark after Josiah told the Levites to put it into the Temple:

*2Chron 35:3 “He also said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the Lord, “Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel built; it will be a burden on your shoulders no longer. Now serve the Lord your God and His people Israel.”*

What we see in heaven is the heavenly prototype of the ark, not the earthly ark. The revealing of the opening of the temple and the heavenly ark is the reality that the way to heaven is open for God’s people through the work of Jesus:

*Heb 10:19 “Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,”*

It is also very important that John mentioned the covenant for God’s covenant is eternal as some of our students saw in our study of Covenants. The Covenant of Redemption was formulated by God before the foundation of the world and then worked its way throughout history until the completion of time. We saw a picture of the overarching covenants in that study:



The initials successively stand for: Covenant of Redemption, Covenant of Adam, Covenant of Noah, Covenant of Abraham, Covenant of Moses, Covenant of David, and Covenant of Jesus.

The impressive “fireworks” is certainly appropriate for this monumental revelation!

But we will see beginning in chapter 15 that the pouring out of the wrath of God on earth is not over.