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## ***Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation***

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### **Revelation 11:1-6: “The Two Witnesses”**

**General idea:** This passage is our introduction of the two witnesses and another interlude to show us in greater detail what God is doing and how it applies to us. John is given the task of measuring the Temple to see its dimensions as well as to see who is really worshiping God and who is not—those who are His in word and deed versus those who are the pretenders and manipulators. He is given parameters of what to measure and what not to count. And then, John is given the reason; this great Temple would be trampled upon, defiled, and destroyed. God's great Temple, His witness to the earth, a place of worship, and the cultural identity to His people will be gone, wiped away, leaving the Jews without their sacred rituals or their cultural identity, except the most important identity—the one that is in Him, the one we typically ignore. John is even given some specifics on time and place; this will be no surprise; the warning is given and the judgment looms.

**Vs. 1-6:** This passage is a description of faithfulness shown by the two great witnesses of faith, of great perseverance and courage, who have amazing powers, and who walk like Moses and Elijah. We are not told specifics of who they are, but they are models of greatness who exemplify, in stature and character, whom we should seek to be like. That *ought* is faithfulness of faith and character so we can stand in Christ with an authentic consistent testimony from our relationship with Him that is reflected in our behaviors and words (2 Kings 2:1-12; Ezek. 37; Zachariah 4:1-14; Daniel 8; Matt. 17:3-4; Luke 10:1).

- *Measuring rod/Reed* was a surveyors tool, made from cane plant, a type of bamboo that grew beside the Jordan river, and grew to a consistent 20 feet (Ezek. 40:3; Zech. 2:1-2).
- *Measure.* The Jewish mindset then believed that saying how vast and magnificent was the Temple was a way of praising God (Psalm 48:12-13; Ezek. 40:3-42:20; Zech 2:1-5). This term also refers to God's omniscience, (that He is all knowing) that He cares and is active and involved in our lives personally and collectively as a Church. This also refers to God's power and ability, and that all things are under His control and plan (Ezek. 40:1-43:17; Rev. 21:15).
- *Go and measure.* In ancient times to measure something meant you owned it or were claiming ownership of the item being measured, usually property. This meant that what was measured was claimed; *it is mine and I have responsibility and direction over it.* Here, it appears that John is claiming the

Temple in the Lord's Name, measuring and pointing to the rights to it for the Lord.

- *Temple of God.* This represents God's presence on Earth. This is not where He lives, as He is omnipresent and thus cannot be confined; rather, it is His representative and a place where people can worship Him. For those who feel Revelation was written after the Temple's destruction around 90 A.D., this may refer to those who are left, His "remnant," God's chosen people. (Rev. 4:1-5:14).
- *Altar.* The context is worship; this may imply that this is the "great altar."
- *Count the worshipers* indicates those who are faithful and who have not bowed to idolatry, committed adultery with God, or given up their faith in tough times, but who have persevered. These are the people He seals and protects (Rev. 7:1-17).
- *Exclude.* God is not the One who excludes; it is we who reject and fight against Him (Is. 56:3-7; 66:5).
- *Outer court* refers to *The Court of the Gentiles* which is the large outer section of the Temple (26 acres in Jesus' Time) where the Gentiles were allowed to gather, this also denotes a form of evangelism (Gen. 12).
- *Given to the Gentiles* refers to the attacks on God's people by those who hate God, who are "outsiders" who refuse His grace and call. God freely gives to the Temple's oppressors what is theirs—the courtyard, the gathering point for those who are not His Chosen People. But they, the Romans, take it all and destroy it in 70 A.D.
- *Trample.* The goal of pagans was to get rid of anything that convicted them or pointed to truth; the Temple represented both. Thus, it was an object of wrath and a prime objective of destruction to many. The Temple has been vandalized, broken down many times, and destroyed completely at least three times by its enemies (Psalm 79:1; Is. 63:1-18; 1 Macc. 3:45; 6:40; Luke 21:24).
- *Holy city.* Most likely it is Jerusalem that is in view. Some say it is Rome, but that would be like telling people who live in New York, NY that Los Angeles or Paris was the great holy city, and that would be absurd. Nothing of Rome was considered great or holy to a first century Jew.
- *(Forty-two) 42 months* was a metaphor for a limited time of unrestrained impiety, evil, and/or oppressions, possibly meaning the symbolic timeframe of the Temple's destruction or the Syrian dictator, Antiochus Epiphanes (168-165 B.C.) who instigated great suffering to the Jews and defiled the Temple and

shut it down for over three years. Not necessarily a literal number, “42 months” is symbolic, referring to grace, “a time, times and a half time” or 3 ½ years, which means half of seven years. This is pointing to grace as God cuts the suffering in half. The context denotes an intense time of conflict and stress as evil people fight against God’s people; yet, He is still there and sets His limits of what persecution will take place by His grace (Dan. 7:25; 9:27; 12:7-12; Rev. 11-13).

- *Give power* refers to God’s control as He uses His servants as His instruments; their impact is like a ripple in a pond caused by throwing in a small stone. In addition, we have no reason or need to fear our Lord for the future; rather, we can reverence and trust in His protection and provision.
- *Two witnesses* are two people (either angelic or human) who are God’s representatives. They possibly represent some sort of Moses and Elijah. Their call is to stand against the *beast* and testify to the believers to stand for the faith, possibly in the final days before Christ returns.
- *Prophecy for 1,260 days*. Not necessary literal, some view this as denoting the Great Tribulation (from Daniel,) which really means *enduring great troubles*. Three and a half years is the same meaning as *42 months*—42 months of 30 days each x 30 days = 1,260 days. (Dan. 9:2-24; Rev. 12:6).
- *Clothed in sackcloth* meant being remorseful and repentant. It referred to a coarse burlap type of material woven from goat hair to signify one’s mourning or repentance. This also denotes, as Zechariah states, a promise for a full restoration and blessing for God’s people (Joel 1:13; Jonah 3:5-6; Matt. 11:21).
- *Two olive trees*. *Olive Trees* in combination with *Lamp stands* usually refers to the two anointed ones, such as Moses and Elijah, or the ruling class of priests and kings. In Zechariah, this meant presenting two ruling houses—“the king” and “the priest,” possibly referring to Zerubbabel and Joshua (Zech. 4:2-14). Many Jewish thinkers see this as futuristic, pointing to a messianic figure, either a priest or a king. Both were fulfilled in Christ.
- *Two lampstands* refers to reverence to God. Also, in Revelation, it refers to the Church as the body of believers whose duty it was to be a light as a witness for Christ. The objects possibly point to the two good of the seven churches. The description in this passage calls attention to the scope and power that God gives for us to remain faithful and give an effectual testimony (Rev. 1:12-20).
- *Stand before the Lord* refers to those who are His representatives and/or His Church (Matt. 18:10; Rev. 4:4). It could also have referred to O.T figures that

did not die, such as Enoch and Elijah, the power and impact of Moses, or to the Zechariah passage. Most probably, it was all of the above.

- *Fire comes from their mouths* possibly refers to some supernatural spiritual gifting that God gives these beings (Lev. 9:24-10:02; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:41). In the Jewish culture then, it meant to stare back at someone spitefully who was being disrespectful. But, because of the *mouth* usage, this is also a metaphor for prophesying Judgments; these events could happen literally, be metaphorical, or both (1 Kings 1:10-12; Jer. 5:10-14).
- *Power to shut up the sky* refers to drought that was used as punishment for disobedience (1 Kings 17:1; 18; Luke 4:25; James 5:17). Elijah was a miracle worker. He is not an esoteric figure but an inspiration and incentive for the power and prominence we have available to us. Elijah also represents the “everyman,” who, by his prayer life, was powerfully used by God (1 Kings 17:1; 18: 1, 41-46; 1 Sam. 12:17-18)!
- *Turn the waters into blood.* This is reminiscent of Moses and the miracles God used through him to convince Pharaoh and the Israelites of God’s purpose and power (Ex. 7:14-25). John may be using this part of the passage also as a slap in the face to the arrogant Jew who refused to see Christ—who still wanted for a messiah when one had already come (Deut. 18:15-18; Mal 4:5).

The “two witnesses” are somewhat of a mystery. There are many theories, but the point that is often missed by the speculators is the call and example to be faithful in dire times. Some commentators say that a literal, new Moses and Elijah will come, but the word meanings and context clearly point to the Church. Again, this misses the greater point of faithfulness (Rev. 1:6; 5:10).

The controversies that arise in Revelation are exemplified in this text. As many commentators and speculators focus on who these two witnesses can be, the conjectures abound. The good, prevailing theories are that these are two humans who are faithful and God empowers them as courageous examples to the Church. They can be ordinary Christians, perhaps prophets in the Old Testament sense. The next controversy is about when they do appear; will it have been had been at the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. or will it be just before Jesus comes back. It is more probable, because of the Lamp stands, that they are symbolic representatives of the two good, faithful churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia seen or given as a model for us to follow and not necessarily literal. But the defining is not as important as the actuality of their mission, which is faithfulness, and which means more and applies further and deeper than any theories that could all possibly be wrong (Deut. 17:6; 19:15).

**The Preterist view:** They see this passage as a reference to Ezekiel. To *measure* is seen from Ezekiel, chaps 40-47, to divide from what is holy from what

is profane and corrupt as what defines a true *Temple of God*; the results from the examination mean judgment and destruction. The call to remain pure and reform was rejected by the Jews and thus the Temple was destroyed (Is. 1:12; Jer. 10:16; 51:19; Ezek. 22:26; 40-43; Zech. 2:1-5; Dan. 7:25; Luke 21:24; Rev. 21:15-16). (Forty-two) *42 months* is seen as the length of Nero's war with the Christians and/or the siege of Jerusalem. The *two witnesses* seem to have baffled many in this camp, as it seems to point to a hole in their theory. (All these views have holes because our reasoning is limited and we tend to look to our own education and agendas, not at the big picture, and do not do all of the inductive research to see what the text is really saying.) Many see them as symbolic of a testimony to corrupt Judaism, as two literal people or prophets who are lost to history, as the "lamp stands" and "olive trees" from Zechariah 4:11-14, or as representative of the witnesses of Christ. Some have said they were Peter and James.

**The Futurist view:** They see to "measure" as representing God's ownership of his faithful during the tribulation and/or His preservation and protection of them. The "Temple of God" is seen as a new one, yet to be rebuilt, which, citing examples from Ezekiel, people in this camp see as an even essential prior to Christ's return. However, a major exegetical, textual problem occurs with this view as the Temple had already been destroyed, then rebuilt twice, once right after Ezekiel's prophecy and again under Herod. It was destroyed in 70 AD. The Temple represents faithfulness and/or the Church: the people of God and the "outer court" are seen as representing apostasy and/or the distinction of people remaining faithful or not during the tribulation. The "two witnesses" are viewed as literal forerunners to Christ's return, those faithful ones who preach and prophecy during the tribulation, or that Moses or Enoch and Elijah actually come back to do that. The "42 months" and "1260" days are seen as the first half of the great Tribulation, the last half, or a time after the tribulation.

**The Idealist view:** They see to "measure" as God's awareness of His worshipers—those who are true and those who are not as referenced by the "outer court." Also, this refers to apostasy invading the Church such as liberality and worldliness. (It is ironic that most who hold this view are mainline liberals.) The "Temple of God" is seen as the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies where the high priest entered once a year to atone, which to this view refers to those who are true worshipers of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5). (Forty-two) "42 months" is seen as grace, limiting the time of persecution (Dan. 7:25). The "two witnesses" refer to the church as a witness to the world from mission movements. "Sackcloth" refers to bringing the message of repentance. The "olive trees" refer to Zerubbabel and Joshua who were agents of restoration. "Fire from mouths" means those who bring harm to the Church will be judged.

**The Historicist view:** They see to "measure" as to look over and examine the church and see what is real, true, and devout, and what is distorted from God's

call and God's authority given to those who are to reform the Church. The "Temple of God" is seen as the church of true, devout believers drawing from other N.T. passages (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Thess. 2:4). The "outer court" or Court of the Gentiles is seen as the visible Church that becomes a corrupt institution, devoid of real, heartfelt worshipers, such as the Roman Catholic Church or liberalism. These were the indicators that gave the Reformers the vision and reassessment to reform the Church back to God and away from corruption which led to the Reformation. (Forty-two) "42 months" is seen as 1260 years, the duration of the Catholic Church and its persecution of true believers up to the Reformation. The "two witnesses" are representative of the faithful Christians who tried to reform and stand against the Catholic Church such as Huss and Wycliffe. The miraculous power given is seen as an instrument and reason for God's judgments and/or clothed in God's power (Deut. 32:2; Is. 55:10). "Fire from mouths" means the power of preaching and the power of the Spirit and/or from Jeremiah 5:14. The plagues are seen as the evils resulting from the corruption of the Church, such as wars and the inquisitions.

***The Essential Inductive Questions*** (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

***Additional Questions:***

1. Has someone ever looked at you spitefully before? How did you feel? What about when you did something wrong or were being disrespectful and someone gave you a look, how did you feel? How is this like conviction?
2. What does it mean to you to be a witness? What needs to happen for you and people in your church to be better witnesses?
3. What do you see as your spiritual identity, such as a Bible version, a church building, or a denomination, etc.?
4. How would you feel and what would you do if you were left without your sacred rituals or your spiritual identity? How would knowing and trusting your

real identity—the one you have in Christ—help you?

5. Consider that God has the task of measuring your faithfulness. What would He find? If God calculated who was worshiping Him and who is not at your worship services, what would He find?
6. How would you feel if you knew your church would be trampled upon, defiled, and destroyed?
7. When something is measured, it is usually by the owner, meaning there is an aspect of responsibility and direction over it. So, what is your responsibility and direction over your spiritual growth or your church?
8. What would you do if you were given parameters (a set of things to look for) of what to measure? What would you look for? What would you find in yourself?
9. What are the spiritual calls and precepts we typically ignore today as Christians?
10. What do you think would happen if everyone in your church knew who belonged to Him by word and deed, and who were the pretenders and manipulators?
11. How can you know and what can be done positively and effectually with that information? (The key is Gal 5.)
12. God is omniscient, which means He is all knowing; this also refers to His power and ability, in which all things are under His control and plan. In addition, He cares for and is active and involved in our lives personally and collectively as a Church. So, how does this fact affect your faith and plans in your life and church? (Because God is omniscient, I will....)
13. God is not the One who excludes; it is we who reject and fight against Him. How does this help you in your perseverance and your witness?
14. The goal of pagans and people who hate God is to get rid of anything that convicts them and points to truth. How do you feel about this? How does knowing this give you confidence in faith?
15. Have you ever considered your actions as ripples in a pond caused by throwing in a small stone? How so?
16. What can you do to be sure you have no reason or need to fear our Lord for the future? How can this help your reverence and trust in His protection and provision?

17. God is in control and He uses you as His servant and as His instrument. How can this fact help you make an impact to your friends and church?
18. What does greatness in faith mean to you and your church? What would happen if your church took more seriously its call to model “greatness” or become people who exemplify true stature and character? In so doing, what would your church look like? How would it be impacting to its members and neighborhood?
19. What can you and your church do to be great? What is the plan? When will you do it?
20. If God showed you two great witnesses of faith, perseverance, and courage, what would they look like? What could you do to be like them?

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