**THE TWO WITNESSES**

**REVELATION CHAPTER 11**

We find ourselves somewhere in the middle of the Tribulation period. As we come to this chapter, we’re in a brief interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments. For the time being God is withholding His terrible wrath, but the end is near. By the way, as we read and study Revelation and look at all of the awful judgment, we shouldn’t be surprised. Read your Bible. Both the O.T. and N.T. warn us about it [READ Psalm 110:5-7, O.T. prophets and Jesus said all of this will happen]. So, none of this should shock us. After all, God is true to His word.

Well, the seventh trumpet of God’s judgment is about to be sounded. In Chap 10 John was commissioned to prophesy, to tell about God’s impending judgment. He symbolically consumed God’s Word by eating the little scroll, which contained God’s upcoming judgments. He’s acting in the role of a prophet of God. Let’s just delve right into Chap 11…

1 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,”

The same mighty angel we saw in Chap 10 now instructs John to measure the temple of God and those who worship in it. Measuring something in Scripture always represents judgment. This revelation was given to John on the island of Patmos around 95 AD. So, this is an interesting command. By this time in history the Roman general Titus has already destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. He did that in 70 AD, some 25 years before. So, which temple is the angel referring to here? I believe it must be referring to the temple in Jerusalem where the Jews during the Tribulation period are worshipping God [note: today the Temple is occupied by Muslims, no altar, no holy of holies, Jews worship in synagogues]

John is told to measure the altar and those who worship in it. This indicates that God’s judgment is being measured against those who worship in the temple of God during the Tribulation – specifically this is a reference to the Jews. They’re the ones worshipping in the temple. Why is God measuring them for judgment? Because despite all the light they have received, in the O.T. scriptures, the N.T. teachings of Christ and the apostles and the testimony of the 144,000 saved Jews during the Tribulation, these Jews stubbornly reject Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

2 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 42 mos.

John’s told to not measure the outer court. Why not? Because this is the court of the Gentiles. He’s only measuring the Jews for judgment. God’s judgment upon the non-believing Jews during the last half of the Tribulation fulfills Jesus’ prediction: [show slide, READ Luke 21:20-24]

This has both a near and far fulfillment – near in 70 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans, far with their destruction during the Tribulation which we see in Revelation.

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

During the last 3½ years of the Tribulation period (1,260 days) God will raise up two witnesses who will prophesy. The mission of these two witnesses will be to bring God’s message to the unbelieving Jews who will be severely persecuted by the antichrist and his followers. It’s my belief that the time of the Gentiles (the time allotted by God for their salvation) ends after the seventh trumpet is sounded later on in this chapter. However, God extends grace to His chosen people the Jews (an additional 42 months). Notice that the 2 witnesses are dressed in sackcloth – they are in mourning over the wretched condition of the Jews.

OK, so let’s take a closer look at these two witnesses…

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

5 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.

6 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.

There’s all kinds of speculation about who these two witnesses are. [show slide with various conjectures] The Bible is silent as to their identity. Some say they’re Elijah and Moses. After all, these 2 guys appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Others say they’re Elijah and Enoch because neither of them experienced physical death but were taken by God. And then there are all these other conjectures. We just don’t know. It’s quite possible they could be two witnesses that nobody has ever heard of. Whoever they are, certain things are made clear about them:

* They’re filled with the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the olive trees.
* They preach the Gospel of Christ, represented by the lampstands, which offer light, in this case Jesus the light of the world.
* They strongly resemble God’s mighty prophets, bold and possessing miraculous powers given by God. Notice that the power to stop rain and turn water into blood is similar to the power displayed by Elijah and Moses, respectively.
* For a period of 1,260 days (3½ yrs) they are protected by God.

7 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,

8 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.

9 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,

10 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.

The beast is the antichrist. However, he cannot kill the two witnesses until God allows him to do so. And at some point, God does just that. He allows His two witnesses to be martyred. There is great rejoicing by those who hate God and reject Christ when these two preachers of righteousness are finally dead. In fact, there’s great celebration all over the earth at their demise. Their bodies are put on public display in the city of Jerusalem for everyone to gawk at. The last phrase of verse 10 offers us an idea as to the affect the two witnesses had on the unsaved… “ these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.” We ought to be actively tormenting those bound for hell right into heaven! I’m convinced from my own observation that the unrighteous hate God and holiness more than the saints of God hate sin and Satan.

These verses describe a sadistic world controlled by Satan. But the world’s in for a huge surprise…

11 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.

12 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.

13 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.

Hmmm, a resurrection and an ascension. We’ve seen this before!

Just imagine as the whole earth watches this grisly scene played out on TV. The secular media speculates for three days what has happened and why. They see this terrible thing happen to the two prophets of God. They witness their deaths, then they witness their resurrection back to life. Then they witness their ascension to heaven. Finally, there’s an earthquake. God replays vividly for the whole world what happened at the end of all four gospels, what happened to Jesus, and He does this right before their very eyes! These two witnesses had preached about the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of our Lord only to be dismissed as a bunch of religious nuts. If the world had been skeptical before, certainly now there can be no doubt about the truth of the Gospel. Right? Well if you think mass evangelism breaks out, keep on reading. It doesn’t. Let me read v 13 again…

13 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.

There’s coming a day when all hell will break loose upon the earth. But there’s also going to be an interlude when heaven comes down and it’s going to touch people with such vivid reality that they can’t do anything but believe. But it will be too late! Too late. For 7,000 people “too late” comes in the form of an untimely death in an earthquake. For those Gentiles who survive the earthquake “too late” comes when the seventh trumpet sounds.

When Jesus came from glory, we witnessed the greatest demonstration of God’s grace on Calvary’s cross. He died on that cross for our sins, was buried, resurrected and ascended back to the Father. Since then we’ve had 2000 years plus of the Holy Spirit striving, working in the hearts of men and women, boys and girls to be saved. God’s telling us that now is the time to be saved… Don’t wait. Hurry! Death is knocking at your door. Hurry! The last trumpet is about to sound! The last woe that ushers in the end of the age is close at hand…

14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."

16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God,

17 saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.

OK, so now the third woe, the seventh trumpet is sounded. Immediately the scene shifts to heaven. There’s jubilation and thankful worship as the heavenly host gathers around the throne of God and exalt the Lord as their king. “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever” [George Frederich Handel used these verses from Revelation in “The Messiah.”] God indeed is in the process of reclaiming rightful ownership of the earth He created.

Now what I want you to do is to contrast the joyful praise in heaven with what’s going on down on earth as described by the 24 elders in v 18…

18 The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

The earth is filled with anger! The world controlled by Satan and the antichrist wants no part of God’s rule in their lives and they openly rebel! As a result, the wrath of God will fall again upon the earth. Eventually (in Revelation Chapter 19) the antichrist and his followers will be destroyed. And the saints saved during the Tribulation will receive their heavenly reward.

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Do we interpret these verses literally or metaphorically? I say both. This is literally occurring, but the symbolism is also very important. In the O.T. the Ark of the Covenant was a sacred treasure of Israel. It signified the presence of God. God is showing Israel that He intends to keep His covenant with His people and redeem Israel to Himself. God’s divine promises will be fulfilled. The lightning, thunder, earthquake and hail indicate God’s judgment on the world. Meanwhile, God extends grace to the Jews a little longer.

[Cindy’s lesson]

What a sobering chapter! This whole long section of Revelation that takes up more than half the book, from Ch 6 thru 18 ought to make people realize that this world isn’t going to last forever. God’s judgment is coming. While there may still be time to get saved, the overriding message of Revelation is “Get saved NOW! Don’t wait.” “behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2)

Sin and Satan and fallen mankind have ruined God’s perfect creation, but this is indeed our Father’s world – He created it – and some day He is going to reclaim it, restore it and make all things new. Let’s sing “This is my Father’s world” with that in mind.