

## THE SPIRITUAL FORECAST FOR THIS NEW TESTAMENT ERA

*11 I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there. 2But exclude the outer court and do not measure it; because it has been handed over to the Gentiles, and they shall trample the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. 3I will send my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." 4These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies; if anyone seeks to harm them, he must be killed in this way. 6These [two] have the authority to shut the heavens so that it will not rain during the days of their prophecy. They also have the authority to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every [kind] of plague as often as they desire. 7When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss shall wage war against them, and overcome them, and kill them. 8Their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which [symbolically] is called Sodom and Egypt, [the place] where their Lord was crucified. 9For three and a half days men from all the peoples and tribes and languages and nations gaze upon their dead bodies and do not permit their dead bodies to be buried in a tomb. 10Those who dwell on the earth rejoice over them and celebrate by sending gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. 11But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood on their feet, and those who saw them were terror struck. 12Then they heard a loud voice from heaven say to them, "Come up here," and they ascended into heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13In that [very] hour there was a severe earthquake, and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand persons were killed by the earthquake; those who survived were terrified and glorified the God of heaven. (Rev. 11:1-13)*

### **Introduction**

Do you ever check the weather forecast in the evening newspaper to see what kind of weather conditions you might expect in the coming day and week? Before going to bed, do you tune in the T.V. meteorologist to find out what kind of weather conditions you are liable to encounter on your way to work the next morning?

Weather satellites orbit the earth and transmit information back to meteorologists who in turn communicate that weather information to us so that we may have a forecast of what to expect; especially to prevent us from being caught off guard by any approaching storm.

In order that we may know what will take place in this present period of history that climaxes with the return of Christ, the Lord has graciously provided us with "a spiritual forecast." Because He has given us a forecast of what this period of history will hold for His people, let us carefully consider these things God wants us to know.

## I. Know that the Church will be Preserved in the Midst of Tribulation

The Apostle John is now given *“a reed like a measuring rod”* and is instructed to measure the temple of God (vs. 1.) In Scripture, the act of measuring means setting something or someone aside for preservation; the LORD measures, or marks off, what belongs to Him:

*Then I looked up—and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand. <sup>2</sup>I asked, “Where are you going?” He answered me, “To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and long it is.” <sup>3</sup>Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him <sup>4</sup>and said to him, “Run, tell that young man, ‘Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. <sup>5</sup>And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,’ declares Jehovah, ‘and within it I will be its glory.’” (Zech. 2:1-5)*

The act of measuring is very similar to the act of sealing, which occurred in Revelation 7:1-8 where the people of God were sealed with a mark on their forehead, signifying that they belonged to the Lord and, therefore, will be spared from His righteous judgment.

John is commanded to measure *“the temple [literally, the sanctuary] of God;”* in other words, John is to measure the temple proper, excluding the outer court. He is also instructed to measure *“the altar.”* The altar would be the altar of incense, which was the only altar located within the sanctuary. In the furnishing of the Old Testament temple, the altar of incense was associated with the prayers of God’s people—the aromatic incense testifying to the LORD’s delight in the prayers of His people. The identification of the altar with prayer is brought out in Revelation 8:3-4,

*Then another angel, one who had a golden censer, came and stood by the altar. He was given much incense that he was to mix with the prayers of all the saints, and offer it on the golden altar that was before the throne. <sup>4</sup>The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, ascended to the presence of God from the angel’s hand. (Rev. 8:3-4)*

The measuring of the altar indicates that the prayers of God’s people are preserved; that is to say, they are precious to God and they shall be answered.

Next John is instructed to measure *“those who worship there.”* To measure the worshipers would mean the same as numbering them, as in Revelation 7:1-8. The point being made is that all the redeemed of the Lord are accounted for and preserved, not one is lost.

John’s attention is now directed towards *“the outer court”* (vs. 2.) John is told to exclude this court; literally, he is to *“cast it out,”* and he is forbidden to measure it. This outer court will not be preserved; it is not afforded divine protection from

the onslaught of the Gentiles. John is forbidden to measure this outer court precisely because *"it has been handed over to the Gentiles."* In this context, the term *"Gentiles"* should be taken to mean the men of this world, those who are hostile to Christ and to the kingdom of God. Note 1 Thessalonians 4:5, a passage that speaks of *"the Gentiles who do not know God;"* that is to say, they have no love and affinity with the living God.

The heavenly voice now informs John that the Gentiles *"will trample the holy city underfoot* [including the outer court] *for forty-two months."* The various time designations (*"forty-two months," "1260 days," "a time, times, and half a time"*) are all equivalent to each other. Each time designation amounts to a sum of 3 ½: forty-two months amounts to 3 ½ years, as does 1260 days; likewise, the designation *"a time, times, and half a time"* amounts to a period of 3 ½ times; and all represent the period of opposition and tribulation that the people of God encounter from the world. For the people of God, constituted in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, this period of opposition and tribulation extends from Pentecost until the return of Christ, with ever increasing severity:

*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. <sup>19</sup>If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (Jn. 15:18-19)*

*Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. (Matt. 24:9)*

A striking example of this hatred of the world against the church can be seen in the attitude of the communist leader, Valdimir Lenin, towards devout Christian leaders: "Lenin had no real feelings about corrupt priests, because they were easily beaten. The men he really feared and hated, and later persecuted, were the saints. The purer the religion, the more dangerous" (Paul Johnson, *Modern Times*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1983, pp. 50-51.)

What is the message of Revelation 11:1-2? We must preface our interpretation of this passage with the understanding that here, as elsewhere in the book, New Testament events are being described by the use of Old Testament terminology. This principle of interpretation is in keeping with our Lord's own example of interpreting and explaining the person and ministry of John the Baptist. Note Matthew 17:10-13,

*The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the Law say that Elijah must come first?" <sup>11</sup>Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. <sup>12</sup>But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him whatever they desired. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." <sup>13</sup>Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist. (Matt. 17:10-13)*

In this passage of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus explains how the Old Testament figure, Elijah, was prophetically foretelling and revealing the New Testament figure, John the Baptist. Notice that in referring to John the Baptist, the prophetic person whom the Old Testament prophet Elijah typified, Jesus continues to use Old Testament terminology, identifying John the Baptist as "Elijah." It is important to appreciate these two principles of biblical prophecy if we are to have a true understanding of the passage of Revelation presently before us.

With this principle of interpretation in mind, we can now seek to understand the message of Revelation 11. The picture presented here is that of an attack upon the people of God—constituted as the church of Jesus Christ and depicted under the image of "the city of God" and the "temple of God"—by the world that is hostile to Christ. An attack that shall even go so far as to trample under foot "the outer court of the temple"—the imagery depicts the severity of the attack made by the world against the Lord and all that belongs to Him. But all those who have truly put their faith in Christ and belong to Him shall be preserved, as is depicted by the "measuring of the temple proper." This is in keeping with our Lord's word of assurance spoken in John 6:39-40,

*And this is the will of him who sent me, [namely,] that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but should raise it up at the last day. <sup>40</sup>My Father's will is that every one who looks to the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (Jn. 6:39-40)*

This is the first thing God wants us to know: The church of Christ will be preserved in the midst of tribulation. If you have given your heart to Christ, He will hold on to you, He will preserve your soul and bring you safely into the everlasting kingdom of God. No matter how great the tribulation, the Lord is faithful and strong to preserve His people and not one of them shall be lost.

## **II. Know that the Church will Share in Christ's Humiliation**

In verse 3 the Lord abruptly introduces John and us to His "*two witnesses.*" In verse 4 these two witnesses are identified as "*the two olive trees and the two lamp stands* [or, candelabra] *that stand before the Lord of the earth.*" The imagery comes from Zechariah 4. The vision in Zechariah 4 is of a golden candelabra set between two olive trees: the oil of the olive trees is continuously poured into the candelabra by means of pipes connecting the candelabra to the trees (Zech. 4:3,11-12.) This constant supply of oil allows the candelabra to continually give its light. The interpretation of the vision is summed up in Zechariah 4:6: the two olive trees represent the Holy Spirit anointing and infusing God's people with His divine presence and power.

Based upon the interpretation given of the vision in Zechariah 4:6, as well as the principle of interpretation mentioned above (and exemplified in Matthew 17:1-13), the two witnesses of Revelation 11 (consisting of the two olive trees as one

witness and the two candelabras as the other) are the Holy Spirit and the church, as the Spirit through the church bears witness to Christ. This interpretation is supported by such New Testament passages as follow:

*But when the Comforter has come, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth, the one who comes from the Father—he shall testify [or, bear witness] about me. <sup>27</sup>And you also shall testify [or, bear witness], because you have been with me from the beginning. (Jn. 15:26-27)*

*We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. (Acts 5:32)*

*... they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. <sup>18</sup>On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup>But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, <sup>20</sup>for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matt. 10:17-20)*

In verses 5-6 the two witnesses are identified with the Old Testament personages, Elijah and Moses. Verses 5-6a are reminiscent of Elijah's ministry:

*Then [the king] sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "Man of God, the king says, 'Come down!'" <sup>10</sup>Elijah answered the captain, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men. <sup>11</sup>At this the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, "Man of God, this is what the king says, 'Come down at once!'" <sup>12</sup>"If I am a man of God," Elijah replied, "may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men. (2 Kgs. 1:9-12)*

*Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As Jehovah, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." (1 Kgs. 17:1)*

The latter part of verse 6 is reminiscent of Moses' ministry:

*Moses reported to Pharaoh: This is what Jehovah says: By this you will know that I am Jehovah: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood ... <sup>19</sup>Jehovah said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs'—and they will turn to blood. Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars." <sup>20</sup>Moses and Aaron did just as Jehovah had commanded. He raised*

*his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. (Ex. 7:17,19-20)*

*Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, "This is what Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, <sup>14</sup>or this time I will send all my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth." (Ex. 9:13-14)*

Elijah and Moses together sum up the whole Old Testament. Moses is the first great prophet:

*Jehovah your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him, <sup>16</sup>for this is what you asked of Jehovah your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of Jehovah our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."<sup>17</sup>Jehovah said to me: "What they say is good. <sup>18</sup>I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. <sup>19</sup>If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account." (Deut. 18:15-19)*

Elijah is the last great prophet: *"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of Jehovah comes" (Mal. 4:5.)* Note: Our Lord teaches that the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy is to be seen in the person of John the Baptist, the one who came *"in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk. 1:17.)*

By identifying His two witnesses with Elijah and Moses, our Lord is telling us that we as His church, being empowered by the Holy Spirit, carry on and complete the ministry begun by the Old Testament prophets. This is what John, as the representative of the apostles and the church, was commanded to do in Revelation 10:11. This is also the commission the Lord Jesus gave to His church following His resurrection:

*[Jesus] said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup>Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup>And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself ... <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup>He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things." (Lk. 24:25-27,45-48)*

Verses 7-8 reveal the fate of the Lord's two witnesses. *"The beast that comes up out of the abyss" shall make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.*



*"The beast,"* who is the subject of Revelation 13:1-10, represents the Satanically-inspired anti-Christ kingdom, which in its ultimate appearance at the end of history will be headed by the anti-Christ himself. The fact that the beast not only wages war against Christ's witnesses, but conquers them, again emphasizes that as the New Testament age draws to a conclusion, the hostility against and the persecution of Christ's church by the world will intensify to a devastating level.

*"Their dead bodies"*—literally, the *"dead corpse"* of the two witnesses—shall lie in the street of the great city (vs. 8.) Even as our Lord's own dead body hung upon the cross, so shall *"the corpse"* of His church "lie in the street." This represents the uttermost humiliation and scorn experienced by Christ's church at the hands of the world. The singular, *"dead corpse,"* indicates the union, or oneness, that exists between Christ and His church; the persecution they suffer is actually the world's expression of hatred for Christ Himself.

*"The great city"* is symbolically and spiritually identified with Sodom, Egypt and Jerusalem (designated as *"[the place] where their Lord was crucified."*) What all three of these cities (Jerusalem as it was on the day of Christ's crucifixion) have in common is their defiance of the will of God and their opposition to the people of God and to God's own Son. The writer to the Hebrews calls upon us to *"Consider him who endured such hostility from sinful men"* (Heb. 12:3.) In their prayer, the early church reminds the Lord of the way in which His Son was treated: *"Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed"* (Acts 4:27.) Notice that *"the Gentiles and the [unbelieving] people of Israel"* are united in their opposition to Jesus the Messiah.

Verses 9-10 reveal the attitude of the world towards Christ and His church. The enemies of Christ and His church do not allow the witnesses' dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. Again, here is utter contempt for God's people because of the enmity that the world itself has against God, as the Apostle Paul describes it in Romans 8:7, *"the sinful mind is hostile to God."* Writing about the Christian church in the United States at the end of the twentieth century, a pastor remarked: "Christian bashing is in vogue. It is the only acceptable form of hate left in America" (David T. Moore, *Five Lies of the Century*, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton IL, 1995, p. 251.)

Note that the time designation given in verse 9, *"three and a half days,"* corresponds to the previous symbolic time designations of *"forty-two months"* (3 ½ years) and *"one thousand two hundred and sixty days"* (3 ½ years)—it is another instance of the re-occurring figure of 3 ½, a time designation that appears to represent the entire New Testament age in which we live. Just as our Lord Himself suffered reproach throughout the days of His earthly ministry, which was a period of approximately 3 ½ years, and just as that reproach intensified to its culmination in His crucifixion, so, too, shall the reproach against

His church intensify to its culmination, resulting in “the great tribulation” at the close of this present New Testament age.

The world rejoices and celebrates their “conquest” of Christ’s church, *“because these two prophets—note that the two witnesses are now identified as two prophets—tormented those who dwell on the earth”* (vs. 10.) The Christian’s life and witness brings conviction to sinful man’s conscience, a conviction that can be torturous—note, for instance, Felix’s reaction to Paul’s witness recorded in Acts 24:24-25,

*Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup>As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified and said, “That is enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.”* (Acts 24:24-25)

Here is the second thing God wants us to know: As a disciple of Christ and a member of His church, you as a Christian shall share in Christ’s humiliation and suffering in this present world:

*Beloved, do not be surprised by the fiery trials among you (that have come for the purpose of testing you), as though a strange thing has happened to you. <sup>13</sup>On the contrary, since you are participating in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice; so that at the revelation of his glory you may indeed rejoice with exultation.* (1 Pet. 4:12-13)

### **III. Know that the Church will Finally Share in Christ’s Glory**

Verse 11 informs us that at the conclusion of the “three and a half day” period, *“the breath of life from God entered into [the two witnesses], and they stood on their feet.”* The time designations (forty-two months, 1260 days, 3 ½ times, and now 3 ½ days) are all synonymous and represent the present New Testament age. Therefore, the events described in verses 11-13, taking place at the end of “the 3 ½ day” period, are events that will take place at the very end of this present age.

By the power of the Holy Spirit the church of Christ is “resurrected” and raised to honor. Just as we share in our Lord’s sufferings, so shall we also share in His resurrection glory: *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory”* (Rom. 8:17.)

As a result of the church’s “resurrection,” *“those who saw them were terror struck”* (vs. 11.) The world is gripped with terror as it beholds the life-giving power of the Lord—the awesome power of Him whose church they have



persecuted—and as they witness the church’s redemption and await their own judgment. The Apostle Paul testifies of these things in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10,

*God is just: He will pay back affliction to those who afflict you <sup>7</sup>and give relief to you who are afflicted, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. <sup>8</sup>He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup>They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power <sup>10</sup>on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (2 Thess. 1:6-10) Note: To “not know God” means to have no loving relationship or devotion to Him.*

In verse 12 we learn that the two witnesses “*heard a loud voice from heaven say to them, ‘Come up here.’*” Just as God the Father honored His Son for His faithfulness, so He will honor those who are united to His Son and are faithful to Him: “*Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup>if we endure, we will also reign with him*” (2 Tim. 2:11-12a.) In response to the heavenly voice, the witnesses “ascend into heaven” in a cloud, as their enemies watch them (vs. 12b.) Just as our Lord Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of God, so His church shall share with Him in His glory: “*If any man would serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant also be. If any man serves me, the Father will honor him*” (Jn. 12:26.)

Verse 13 informs us, “*in that [very] hour there was a severe earthquake.*” Throughout the Revelation, the occurrence of a great earthquake is related to the final judgment; note, for instance, Revelation 6:12-17,

*I watched as [the Lamb] opened the sixth seal. [When he did so,] there was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat’s hair, the whole moon turned blood red, <sup>13</sup>and the stars of the heavens fell to the earth, like unripe figs fall from a fig tree when it is shaken by a strong wind. <sup>14</sup>The heavens receded like a scroll rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. <sup>15</sup>Then the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the generals, and the wealthy, and the mighty, and every slave and free man, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. <sup>16</sup>They say to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, <sup>17</sup>for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev. 6:12-17)*

As a result of this great earthquake, “*a tenth part of the city collapsed.*” “*The city*” represents mankind united in their sin and rebellion against God, united in their efforts to establish the kingdom of man to the exclusion of God and in opposition to Him. “*A tenth*” is the tithe, the first part that is devoted to the LORD, representing the whole and symbolizing the fact that all belongs to Him

and shall finally be claimed by Him—all men shall finally be compelled to acknowledge Him as the rightful and sovereign Lord over all. The fact that the city *“collapsed”* indicates that it has been conquered by God—the LORD asserts His divine authority and conquers His enemies as a great king besieging and conquering an enemy city.

Furthermore, as a result of this great earthquake, *“seven thousand persons were killed.”* “Seven” is the biblical number for completeness. By the use of the number “seven,” the Revelation is describing the complete and final judgment of God upon all of sinful, unrepentant mankind.

*“Those who survived ... glorified the God of heaven.”* Bearing in mind the symbolic nature of the Revelation, and the fact that it sometimes employs composite pictures as a means of depicting various facets of a single event (as done in Rev. 11:14-19,) this final statement is not intended to mean some persons will actually “survive” the Final Judgment, even though they are outside of Christ. On the contrary, this statement is declaring that finally, and for all eternity, even the damned in hell will be compelled to acknowledge that the LORD is God and He alone is God.

Thus Revelation 11:13 is pictorially proclaiming the whole cluster of events that shall take place on the day the Lord Jesus returns in glory to judge the world and redeem His people—this is a composite picture with each image depicting a part of what will take place on that last great day.

Here is the third thing God wants us to know: Finally, and for all eternity, as members of Christ’s church—as those who believe in Him as Savior and own Him as Lord—we shall share with Him in His glory.

## **Conclusion**

In order that we may know what will transpire in this present period of history that climaxes with our Lord Jesus returning in glory, the Lord has graciously provided us with “a spiritual forecast.” Because He has given us “a forecast” of what this period of history holds for His people, let us take to heart these things that God has revealed to us and that He desires for us to know.