

REVELATION 11:1-14

“Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, “Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. “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. “And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not 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 plague, as often as they desire.

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. 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. 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. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

But 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 watching them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. And in 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.

The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.”

– Revelation 11:1-14, NAU

Introduction

Revelation 10-14 consist of a parenthetical section between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets. This section includes a series of interludes dealing with various topics. In 11:1-14 the subject of chapter 10 is continued. Except for 11:15-19, in which the seventh trumpet is introduced, the narrative concerning the trumpets is not advanced.

Our attention here is focused on chapter 11. Ladd (p. 1) gives the following helpful summary of the chapter:

John is told to measure the temple of God and its worshipers, but to exclude from the measurement the outer court, which is to be trampled down by the nations for forty-two months. God sends two witnesses to Jerusalem to testify against the nations, but the beast kills them and all the people rejoice at this martyrdom. After three and a half days, they are revived and

caught up to heaven. Then a great earthquake destroys a tenth of the city, seven thousand people are killed, but the rest give glory to the God of heaven.

Viewpoints

Most scholars agree that this is one of the most controversial passages in the book of Revelation. At least four possible interpretations are often discussed and supported or criticized.

First is the literal historical view. According to Ladd (p. 1):

Many commentators understand it to be a piece of earlier Jewish apocalyptic, written before A.D. 70 while the temple was still standing and thus to be taken literally and historically in its intent. In this view, the temple is the actual historical temple in Jerusalem and the passage predicts that when the temple was besieged by Roman armies, the inner shrine would be preserved from the destruction that befell the temple as a whole. Such an alleged prophecy, of course, was not fulfilled.

Horton, as well as Ladd, rejects this view. He states (p. 156): "This can hardly be Herod's temple, for in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy (Matthew 24:2), it was destroyed by the armies of Titus in A.D. 70, twenty-five years before the Book of Revelation was written."

Second, the dispensational view is held by many. Walvoord (p. 176) states: "The temple here is apparently that which will be in existence during the great tribulation." Horton's view is similar. He writes (p. 156), "verse 1 indicates a temple built in Jerusalem in the time of the end, possibly after the Antichrist makes a covenant with the Jews (Daniel 9:27)." Against this view, Ladd (p. 150) states: "The difficulty with this is that there are elements in the chapter which demand symbolic interpretation, which even dispensationalist admit."

Third, other commentators hold that John is referring to the church. Mounce (p. 218), for example, writes:

the notes which follow understand the entire section to be symbolic of the fate of the witnessing church during its final period of opposition and persecution. It forms the contents of the "little book" of chapter 10 which was sweet to the taste but made the belly bitter (10:9-10). That the language of prophecy is highly figurative has nothing to do with the reality of the events predicted. Symbolism is not a denial of historicity but a matter of literary genre.

With regard to this view, Ladd (p. 150) states: "It is difficult to interpret these three chapters symbolically of the church—the spiritual Israel. They teach that literal Israel is yet to be included in spiritual Israel."

Fourth, some hold that this chapter refers to the Jewish people. Horton (p. 156) says: "Some, however, seeing symbolic elements in this chapter, take the measuring of the temple, the altar, and the counting of the worshipers to be symbolic of God's preservation of the Jews, whether an actual temple is built or not." Ladd (p. 152) supports the view that the chapter refers to the preservation of the Jews.

Measuring the Temple: Verses 1-2

As the chapter opens, John was given a measuring rod like a staff and was told to “Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.” According to Ladd (p 151):

The Greek word translated “temple” designates the temple building proper in distinction to the outer court. This is important in the interpretation of the passage. The temple area as a whole consisted of a complex, at the center of which stood a building or shrine within which were the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. This was surrounded or bordered by three courts: the court of the priests containing the altar of burnt offering, into which only priests were admitted, and two adjoining courts: the court of Israel and the court of the women. As the terms suggest, these were the courts where the Jewish people might assemble to worship. These inner courts were surrounded by a vast outer court—the court of the gentiles, to which all interested men were given access.

Horton (p. 156) adds: “Though they are headed for judgment, the Gentile nations are given not only the Court of the Gentiles, but the ‘holy city,’ Jerusalem, to trample it down for forty-two months, half of the seven-year period foretold in Daniel 9:27 (probably the latter half).”

Why was John told to measure the temple? According to Horton (p. 155): “Measuring in the Bible is often a symbol of preparation either for destruction or preservation (see Numbers 35:5; Psalm 60:6; Isaiah 65:8). Here preservation is indicated.”

The Two Witnesses: Verses 3-6

At this point the two witnesses enter the scene. God always has His witnesses. As Horton (p. 159) states: “It is very important to note that God has never left any period of history without a witness, even during this time of Great Tribulation.” Once again, the period of forty-two months is mentioned. Some expositors hold that the witnesses were active during the first half of the Tribulation, but it seems that most favor the last half.

There is a lot of speculation about the identity of the two witnesses. Mounce (p. 223) holds that they represent the witnessing church. As Walvoord points out (p. 178) some believe that the two witnesses represent Israel and the church or Israel and the Word of God. However, he holds that they are two individuals. Ladd (p. 154) believes that they are two individuals sent to witness to Israel to bring about their conversion.

Some commentators suggest that the two witnesses are Elijah and Moses or Elijah and John the Baptist. Although Mounce believes that they represent the church, he says (p. 222): “There is little doubt that the witnesses are modeled after Moses and Elijah.” Like Elijah and Moses, they have great powers. They will be authenticated through mighty words and deeds.

John, however, does not specifically identify the two witnesses. As Horton declares (p. 157):

Actually, the two witnesses are identified only as “two olive trees” and “two candlesticks” (that is, lampstands). In Zechariah 4 the two olive trees are Zerubbabel the prince of David’s line and Joshua the high priest. They are two anointed leaders who minister by the Spirit of the Lord

(Zechariah 4:6). Although the two witnesses John is told about are not the two witnesses of Zechariah 4, the angel's description identifies the two witnesses of verse 3 as Spirit-filled leaders.

Zechariah 4:2 also described a golden lampstand; it supports a large bowl that serves as a reservoir of oil for seven lamps of seven wicks each (totaling forty-nine lights), symbolizing a fullness of light by the Spirit. The two witnesses of Revelation 11:3 are both described as lampstands standing before the God of the earth, that is, before the true God who is Lord over all the earth. They are constantly in His presence. When they prophesy, they give light from God, a fullness of light so that one has a right or excuse to deny the truth and clarity of their message.

Mounce (p. 224) draws a key conclusion. He says: "By these two metaphors John is emphasizing a truth concerning the church which has always been true but is especially appropriate in times of persecution—that the power and authority for effective witness lie in the Spirit of God."

The Beast Kills the Witnesses: Verses 7-10

When the ministry of the two prophets is finished, they are faced with death. God permits their enemies to overcome them. As Ladd (p. 155) states: "Until their mission is completed, the person of the two witnesses is inviolate; but when they have accomplished their task, they fall prey to the wrath of the beast." When it seems that some are defeated, it may only mean their mission was complete.

Once again, there is much discussion about identity. Here, the identity of the beast is in question. Horton (pp. 159-160) writes:

Some say this beast is the angel of the abyss, called Abaddon-Apollyon in 9:11. Others say he is Satan himself, forming a satanic trinity with the two beasts of chapter 13. Still others say that though he comes up from the abyss (indicating his power is from Satan), he is a man, undoubtedly the same as the first beast in chapter 13.

Walvoord (p. 181) takes the following position concerning the beast who kills the two witnesses:

According to verse 7, the beast from the bottomless pit, which is none other than Satan himself, makes war against them and overcomes them and kills them. Of interest is the fact that this is the first of thirty-six references in Revelation to the beast (Gr. therion), not to be confused with the living creatures of chapter 4. The beast out of the pit is Satan. The beast out of the sea is the world dictator (13:1). The beast out of the land is the false religious leader of that day (13:11). This unholy trinity is the satanic counterfeit of the divine Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The beast kills the two witnesses who are left in the street unburied for three and a half days. Ladd (p. 157) writes: "To leave dead bodies lying exposed and unburied was the extreme indignity in the ancient world (I Kings 21:24; Jer. 8:1-2; 14:16). It is obvious that the city of Jerusalem is intended." Horton (p. 160) says: "It is significant that the bodies of these witnesses

lie in the street of this city where their Lord was crucified. They now in a very real sense share in His sufferings.”

The news about the two prophets no doubt will travel fast. Ungodly people throughout the world will rejoice over the death of these powerful witnesses. They spoke for God, and their message will confront the entire earth with the truth.

The Breath of Life from God: Verse 11

The celebration of the unbelieving masses ends soon. After three and a half days, God brings the two witnesses back to life. This causes great fear to come upon them. The two witnesses stood on their feet, demonstrating that they were alive.

God gave the two witnesses life. This was accomplished by “the breath of life” from God. Related passages in the Bible are: John 20:22; Genesis 2:7; 6:17; 7:15; 7:22; Ezekiel 37:5, 10; and II Kings 13:21. Ladd (p. 158) states: “The resurrection of the two prophets reminds us of the prophecy of the revival of Israel in Ezekiel 37:10.” The breath of life often has to do with physical life, but it can also refer to spiritual life. Horton says (p. 162):

The Spirit of Life from God enters the bodies of the two witnesses, and they stand up on their feet. The word translated “spirit” and “breath” are the same in both Greek and Hebrew, thus the “Spirit of life” is parallel to the “breath of life” that God breathed on the first man He created (Genesis 2:7).

During the three and a half days that their bodies lay in the broad Jerusalem street, they would probably become disfigured by animals, if not by people. Decay would probably set in. But the Spirit of life is a creative, life-giving Spirit that comes out from God, full of His power. Thus, the two witnesses are restored not only to life, but also to full health and vigor. They are infused with spiritual life as well. And they stand up full of the power of the Holy Spirit. What a witness to the fact that the victories of the beast will be short-lived! God is the Victor and always will be the Victor. He alone has the ultimate control over life and death.”

The world is filled with great fear. No doubt they will remember the great works of the two witnesses and will expect judgment. However, this aspect of the work of the two witnesses is over. Judgment will come, but it will come through others.

The Triumphant Witnesses: Verses 12-14

The two witnesses hear a loud voice calling them up into heaven. Their opponents are left behind to watch them ascend in the cloud. According to Mounce (pp. 228-229):

As the witnesses are taken up into heaven, a great earthquake levels a portion of the city, killing 7,000 and forcing the rest to acknowledge the transcendent majesty of God. Ezekiel 38:19-20 predicted a great earthquake which would precede the end. Zechariah says that the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west when God returns to crush his enemies (Zech 14:15). Although the earthquake may symbolize some great upheaval in the social order (cf. Hag 2:6-7,

here, as in Revelation 6:12, it is part of an apocalyptic vision which portrays in a literal manner the events yet to come.

Seven thousand people died, and the rest “gave glory to God.” According to Horton (p. 164):

“To give glory to God” means to praise Him, recognizing His majesty, power, and might. At this point, at least, the rest of the people of the city acknowledge that the power of God is greater than that of the beast who came out of the abyss. Perhaps some of those who give glory to God turn to Him in genuine repentance, then become martyrs, refusing to take the mark of the beast (see 13:15-6). In any case, it is clear that the world as a whole does not repent, for they blaspheme God in the plagues that follow.

Conclusion

Our purpose is to study what the Word of God says concerning the Holy Spirit. Here, the “breath of life” is the “Spirit of life” from God. In verse 11 we see the life-giving function of the Spirit of God. God gives life to the fallen witnesses. In this case it is life for their physical existence, but no doubt the life they were given includes spiritual life as well. The Spirit of God is, indeed, a life-giving Spirit.