

Temple of Doom; City Handed Over

Revelation 11:1-2

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2016-12-08

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Well, I am pretty excited to get back into Revelation again. And we are up to chapter 11 where we have two puzzles to solve before we can adequately understand the passage. The second puzzle we will look at next time - the identity of these two witnesses. But today's puzzle is figuring out the details of verses 1-2. I'll just read the first three verses, and I will preach on the first two.

Text

11:1 I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who are worshiping there. 2 And leave out the outer court of the temple and do not measure it, because it has been given to the nations; and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

3 And I will give authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

Introduction - twenty controversies over which commentators disagree in verses 1-2

Moses Stuart begins his comments on chapter 11 with words that are not too encouraging if you are new to Revelation. He says, "The first two verses of this chapter have occasioned much trouble to commentators; and the variety of opinion respecting them is so great, that even to give a tolerably full account of it would occupy many pages."¹ He was not kidding. I did a quick scan of the 92 commentaries I own on this book and I was astonished at the wide variety of opinions on these two verses. Just for fun, I will read one of the many symbolic interpretations. Zegurus says,

'The temple means the church; the altar, Christ; or the temple and altar mean Christ, who with his two-fold nature is the temple of God and the altar of the church. The porch without means heretics and pseudo-Christians. To cast them out is to excommunicate them.'²

I'm sure that was the first thing that came into your minds, right? Uhh, probably not. But I could give you a couple dozen creative (and quite different) symbolic interpretations of what the temple, outer court, and altar mean. Good people are all over the map on several issues. Let me list twenty exegetical problems that evangelical commentators struggle over. Don't worry - I won't bore you with interacting with each one of these viewpoints.

1 Moses Stuart, A Commentary on the Apocalypse, vol. 2 (Andover; New York: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell; M. H. Newman, 1845), 213.

2 As quoted by Moses Stuart, A Commentary on the Apocalypse, vol. 2 (Andover; New York: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell; M. H. Newman, 1845), 214.

I think if we can settle just three exegetical issues (which I have given in your outline), then every one of these twenty issues will automatically be settled. And I've crafted the sermon this way to be as efficient as possible in settling what the text means. But here are twenty issues that people fight over on these verses.

- What is the reed, and what does it symbolize?
- Why is it likened to a measuring rod? Why not just say, "a measuring reed was given to him"? And connected to this, which Old Testament passages that deal with a measuring of the temple, a city, or a people form the Old Testament background? If you can nail that down it helps you to interpret the passage.
- Is the measuring for construction, for preservation, or for destruction? You can find Scriptures to back up each of those three interpretations.
- Which angel is this, and where is he standing when he gives the measuring rod to Ezekiel? Depending on how you answer that question, it impacts your understanding of the rest of the verses.
- Why does he measure the temple, altar, and people, but not the outer court? You have a wide variety of opinion on that, each of which impacts your interpretation of the rest of the verses.
- Since the altar is located in the outer court, why is it the only part of the outer court that is measured (other than the people)? Most commentators don't even address that question, but it is very significant.
- Should we translate the Greek verb of the first phrase of verse 2 as "leave out," "cast out," or "excommunicate"? All three are legitimate translations.
- Is the temple destroyed or protected?
- Is the outer court destroyed or protected?
- Why is the outer court not measured?
- When verse 2 says that the outer court is given to the nations, does that imply that the inner part is not given to the nations? That's what some liberals and even conservatives think is implied. Or (as others think) is the outer court not measured simply because it was already accessible to the Gentiles? Or (as I think) is the outer court not measured because only the temple proper is completely destroyed with not one stone left upon another, whereas the Gentiles will use parts of the outer court, and it will still have structures that are standing (including the wailing wall)?
- Does this prophecy relate to the first century, the second century, the Reformation, the Second Coming, or to something else?
- Is this a literal temple or a spiritual temple?
- If it is a literal temple, is it the one in John's day or one still future to us?
- Who are the people that are being measured? Are they good people or are they evil people under judgment? Commentators differ.
- Who are the nations? Some people think they are the Roman armies. (I would agree with that.) Some think they are the Jewish priests, believe it or not - and that they are called Gentiles because they are unbelievers. Some think they are the Idumeans. Some think Gentile Christians on earth. Some think Gentile Christians in heaven.

- Is the forty-two months the same time period as the one thousand two hundred and sixty days (as many assume), or are they two different three and a half year periods (as I believe) and therefore distinguished by different counting? I think they are the two halves of the seven-year war, whereas most partial preterists believe both refer to the same three and a half year period from AD 66-70.
- Is trampling the holy city a good thing or a bad thing? Is it blessing or judgment? And again, commentators are sharply divided on that.
- What is the holy city? Is it Jerusalem below or Jerusalem above? Is it the church? Or is it something else? Commentators differ.
- Does the trampling occur before AD 70 or after AD 70? I say it is after - from 70-74. Some people think it is hundreds or even thousands of years after.

And if you dig into each of those twenty questions, you will get a number of nuanced differences or even widely differing answers. Stuart was not kidding when he said that even a simple listing of the differences of opinion would occupy several pages. I won't take the time this morning to go through every interpretation and to refute it. But I strongly believe that my interpretation is the only one that takes every word and every phrase of these two verses into account.

Before I dig into the passage, let me give you a summary of what I think it teaches. I believe that these first two verses are describing the literal temple in Jerusalem that was still standing in John's day, and it was not pointing to a future church, or to the heavenly temple, or to the papacy, or anything else that happened after the first century. And I believe the context makes it crystal clear that it is describing a temple doomed to destruction, not to a spiritual temple being protected, or built, or honored (as many preterists assume). I believe it is quite clear that it is first century Romans who trampled the temple and city, not Muslims several centuries later. And I believe they trampled it for a full forty-two months. Most partial preterists who never consider a seven-year war have to really fudge on the figure of forty two months. I have only read a handful that can really explain that satisfactorily.

I believe the forty-two months and the one thousand two hundred and sixty days, while they mathematically both add up to three and a half years, are pointing to two different periods. This is where many partial preterists get it wrong. Daniel divides the war against Jerusalem up into two three and a half year periods, and uses this kind of language to distinguish the two periods. The first of those two periods goes from AD 66-70, and ends with the burning of the temple. The second period goes from AD 70 to January of AD 74, during which time the Romans very literally did occupy Jerusalem and the outer court areas of the temple before they handed it back to Jewish authorities.

I think that narrative sticks to the text, is a natural interpretation, fits the context of chapters 5-11, is covenantal, and fits every piece of the puzzle together without forcing them to fit. And, if you have a handle on the three exegetical points in your outline, you can refute every alternative theory that is out there even if you have not read them. And I will give practical applications throughout, and then I will end by giving four more.

I. Key exegetical issues that help to settle the debate

A. Interpretive issue #1 - What is the timing of this temple?

But let's dive into solving the controversies. The first of the three exegetical issues that help us settle the debate actually rules out 90% of the interpretations. If you get this first puzzle right you have almost solved everything. Most commentators take this as something future to the first century. But let's look at some internal clues that this cannot be the case.

The key timing clue is given in the phrase "those who are worshiping there" (present tense)

The most important clue is found in verse 1.

I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who are worshiping there."

The Greek is in the present ongoing tense and indicates that there were people worshiping in this temple at the very moment that this angel was talking to John, which we have already established was in AD 66. All by itself that proves that he is talking about a current temple, not a future temple.

The other distinctions between a currently existing temple and people (v. 1) and a future trampling (v. 2) reinforces a first century interpretation.

But there are other hints that support this conclusion. For example, verse 1's grammar speaks of a current temple, altar, and people and this stands in contrast with verse 2, which uses the future tense to indicate that this current temple and city is about to be occupied by Gentile nations and trampled by Gentile nations. The difference between what is (verse 1) and what will be (verse 2) is best explained by the first century war against Jerusalem that was about to start when John wrote.

Note age of prophecy and that it occurs during time of beast (v. 7)

Another hint can be seen by comparing verses 3 and 7. Verse 7 indicates that the two witnesses clearly prophesied during the time of the beast (who we have proven is the demon who moves Nero) and these two prophets are killed by the Beast. Well, since Nero was first century, that would put the prophesying of verse 3 into the first century. And since we have demonstrated that prophecy ceased in AD 70, that also puts it into the first century. But at least the Nero clue is clear.

Only AD 70-74 fits Gentile trampling for 42 months

Yet another hint is that the Gentile nations occupy the temple and trample Jerusalem for exactly 42 months - not longer; not not shorter. I know of only one period of history when this could be true.

Liberals try to say that this is describing Hadrian's siege of Jerusalem, which ended in AD 135. And that is a significant siege. It ended any Jewish occupation of Jerusalem for quite some time. But there is no 42 months either during or after that siege. In fact, the early church historian, Eusebius, points out that once the siege was done in AD 135, Hadrian decreed "that the whole [Jewish] nation should be absolutely prevented from that time on from entering even the district around Jerusalem, so that not even from a distance could it see its ancestral home" (Eusebius, HE 4.6, 3). Well, that means that after the Bar Kochba rebellion Jews were barred from Jerusalem for a lot longer than three and a half years, and the Romans built a pagan temple on the grounds. So it for sure cannot apply to the second century rebellion (as liberals often assume).

Nor can it refer to AD 66-70 (the first half of the war) because the Romans for certain did not trample the temple courts for that entire three and a half year period. Most preterists miss this.

There is one period and only one period that fits the evidence that the Romans had a hostile occupation of the temple grounds and the city of Jerusalem, and that is AD 70-74 - the second half of the seven year war.

Since witnesses prophecy before Jerusalem and temple are trampled (see verses 4-11), the 1260 days of verse 3 must occur before the 42 months of verse 2. See Dan 9:27; 12:7,11-12.

And that relates to the last hint on timing: Verses 4-11 make clear that the two witnesses prophesied before Jerusalem or temple were trampled. If that

is the case, then it is clear that the one thousand two hundred and sixty days of verse 3 must occur before the forty two months of verse 2. Let me repeat that. If the prophesying of verses 4-11 occurs before Rome takes over the city and the temple (which it does), and if verse 3 is a summarizing of the prophesying in verses 4-11, then it is clear that the 1260 days of verse 3 occurs before the 42 months of verse 2.

And you might wonder, "Well why? Why does John confuse us by making verse 3 occur before verse 2?" And the answer is quite simple. If you look in your bulletins where the text is written out, you will see that verses 1-2 are the overall heading of God's judgments on Jerusalem from AD 66 (when John does the measuring) all the way up to AD 74 (when the war ends and Rome is no longer trampling Jerusalem). So verses 1-2 is the heading of the entire seven year period, and verses 3-11 go back and give us the details of the first half of that seven year period. It fits perfectly. And it ties in with the way Daniel divided the seven year war into two parts as well.

So all of these hints together indicate that verses 1-2 covers the period from AD 66 to AD 74. Well, that really narrows down our interpretive options. You don't have to argue with every detail of theories that put this off to the future. I have the luxury of digging into every theory, but this is a shortcut way of sparing you a lot of trouble and getting through this material quickly.

B. Interpretive issue #2 - Is this a heavenly temple, a spiritual temple, or the literal Judaic temple of John's day?

The second major exegetical clue that helps us to interpret this is answering the question, "Is this a heavenly temple, a spiritual temple on earth (such as the church), or the literal Judaic temple of John's day?" There are people who agree that this is first century, but they either believe both verses 1-2 apply spiritually or (like Chilton) they believe verse 1 is the church (and usually they say the church in heaven) and verse 2 is the literal temple on earth. I don't buy that. Let me give you several reasons why I believe both verses address the literal temple in Jerusalem in the first century.

The angel calling for measurements had left heaven to earth (10:2) and is now standing on the land of Israel (11:1ff)

My first proof is the angel. Now it is true that some take this angel as speaking from heaven about a heavenly temple and that he is speaking to John while John is in heaven. But if you investigate which angel is talking, you will see that this can't be the case. Verse 1 says, "And the angel stood saying..." Which angel? The Majority Ecclesiastical Text (f35) says, "the

angel." In other words, the angel that has been talking all along in the last few verses. Some commentators point out that the only angel it could be is the angel who had been talking with John in chapter 10. Look at where this angel is when he is talking with John. Chapter 10, beginning to read at verse 1:

I saw a mighty angel descending out of heaven, [so he is no longer in heaven - "descending out of heaven"] clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow on his head; his face was like the sun and his feet like pillars of fire; 2 and he had a little book open in his hand. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land, So he is here on earth. That's the first clue. He is not dealing with something in heaven at this point, but something on earth.

But there is another little curiosity in chapter 11:1. It says, "And the angel stood saying..." Wasn't he already standing? Commentators point out that the mention of him standing is an indicator of a movement of the angel from straddling sea and land to standing now only on the land. So the focus is now going to be on the land of Israel alone. So you can rule out any interpretation that takes these two verses as referring to a temple in heaven or that isolates this temple from the land of Israel. Do you see how the puzzle is starting to fall into place?

We've already seen that this was a first century temple and had first century people already worshipping there (previous major point)

What about a future literal temple? Well, our first point already ruled that out, didn't it? The temple John is measuring is a temple that already had worshipers in it during the first century. What temple on the land fits that evidence? The literal temple in Jerusalem. It's pretty straightforward.

This temple is in the city of Jerusalem - a city intended to be a "holy city" (v. 2) but which had become like Sodom and Egypt (v. 8)

And that fits the flow of the argument within the whole chapter - that this temple is in the city of Jerusalem, a city intended to be a holy city (v. 2) but which has become like Sodom and Egypt (v. 8). And I won't get into all the Old Testament passages that this parallels till I get to first 8 - passages that describe how the holy city has become a harlot; or the holy city has become like Sodom.

Clues that this is the same temple as Ezekiel's (Ezek. 40:3,5,6,8; 42:16).

But some people object that the way this is worded brings to our mind the temple of Ezekiel 40. And that is true; it does. Ezekiel measures a temple in that chapter with a measuring line and with a measuring reed. Their claim is that since the temple of Ezekiel 40 is not literal, this one can't be either. Well, even if Ezekiel's temple was not literal, it would be a stretch to say that this one can't be.

But let's turn to Ezekiel and I want to show how Ezekiel's temple was indeed literal. Ezekiel is given the instructions for the rebuilding of a literal post-exilic temple. Ezekiel 40, beginning at verse 1.

1 In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was captured, on the very same day the hand of the LORD was upon me; and He took me there.

So the context is the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and temple in the literal city of Jerusalem. Then God is going to give Ezekiel assurance that there will be one more temple built in 70 years and that near the end of that temple's history, the Messiah will come and the Holy Spirit will be poured in that temple as living waters. So that's the context. It is my contention that Ezekiel is now going to start giving the precise measurements of Zerubbabel's temple - the very temple that Herod fixed up and the very temple that is being described in Revelation 11. Look at Ezekiel 40:2.

In the visions of God He took me into the land of Israel...

Where is he taken in this vision? Not to heaven. So many commentators take Ezekiel's temple as a heavenly temple, but Ezekiel is not taken to heaven in this vision. He is taken to the land of Israel - to something on terra firma earth - just like in Revelation. Continuing in verse 2:

2 In the visions of God He took me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain; on it toward the south was something like the structure of a city. 3 He took me there, and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway. 4 And the man said to me, "Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you; for you were brought here so that I might show them to you. Declare to the house of Israel everything you see." 5 Now there was a wall all around the outside of the temple. In the man's hand was a measuring rod six cubits long, each being a cubit and a handbreadth; and he measured the width of the wall structure, one rod; and the height, one rod. 6 Then he went to the gateway which faced east; and he went up its stairs and measured the threshold of the gateway, which was one rod wide, and the other threshold was one rod wide. 7 Each gate chamber was one rod long and one rod wide; between the gate chambers was a space of five cubits; and the threshold of the gateway by the vestibule of the inside gate was one rod.

And I won't keep reading on the measurements, but if you were to keep

reading you would find that he is giving a long list of boring detailed measurements all the way up to chapter 45. These include measurements of windows, window sills, storage closets, staircases, ceilings, doorways, different stories of the buildings, insets, protrusions, how to construct the wood, what decorations to put on each panel, the curtains, canopies, vestibules, where the priests will store their food, etc. It is inconceivable to me that it is talking about a non-literal temple. If it was just a symbol, why would he give such detailed measurements? It is my belief that he is simply giving instructions (now that the old temple was about to be destroyed) on how to build a replacement temple in seventy years when they come back to Israel under Nehemiah. It's the temple of Ezra and Nehemiah. And some people think that the temple would be too big and wouldn't fit between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, but that's because they have assumed reeds instead of cubits in certain places where the Hebrew doesn't say. Anyway, it's the temple that Herod later remodeled and gave a major uplift to.

And that he is talking about a literal temple can be seen not only from the incredibly detailed measurements, but from all the other parallels between Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6-7 and Ezekiel's temple. I've listed them here in my notes, but won't get into them this morning. But I agree with those commentators who say that this is a replacement temple like Solomon's temple.

Solomon's Temple 1 Kings 6-7

6:16,17
 6:19,20
 6:31-35; 6:32 AVmg; 6:34
 6:32
 6:20,22
 6:3
 7:21
 6:5
 6:5
 tselaot, ribs
 6:6
 6:8
 6:6,10
 6:6
 7 day dedication 2 Chron 7:9

Ezekiel's Temple Ezek. 40-45

41:2
 41:4
 41:23,24
 41:25
 41:22
 40:48,49
 40:49
 41:5,6
 41:6
 41:5
 41:6,7
 41:7
 41:6
 41:7
 7 day dedication Ez. 43:26

But there are so many other indicators in Ezekiel that he was referring to a literal temple, literal pots and pans, literal priests, and literal sacrifices. For example, the priests of that temple sweat in Ezekiel 44:18. I may be wrong, but I doubt that sweating occurs in heaven. In Ezekiel 44:22 it gives this

command to the priests of the new temple: "They shall not take as wife a widow or a divorced woman, but take virgins of the descendants of the house of Israel, or widows of priests." That simply does not fit a heavenly temple. Christ explicitly said that believers do not marry in heaven. And they for sure are not going to be getting unbiblical divorces in heaven, or having widows. And you keep reading and see that the priests in this temple are commanded not to drink wine while they minister in the holy place (44:21), but they can do so outside the holy place in the outer courts and give communion. They have no inheritance in the land (44:28), they can go astray (44:10-11), can sin (Ezek. 44:10-14), are supposed to take off their priestly garments when they come out of the temple and represent God before the people (44:19), are not supposed to shave their heads or let their hair grow long (44:20). You have all kinds of details like that which don't make sense in a heavenly temple.

These and many other details are simply ignored by those who take this as a symbol of heaven or a symbol of the invisible church. And that the prince cannot refer to Jesus can be seen from all that he is forbidden to do - he can only enter through certain gates, can't go into the holy place. Why mention that if he is Jesus? This prince has to have a sacrifice made for his own sins, etc. It is crystal clear that it is an earthly temple. Now, is the literal temple also symbolic? Yes it is, just like Solomon's temple was. But almost all symbols are also literal historical things - just like my wedding ring is symbolic, but it is still a literal wedding ring.

And people say, "But what about the miraculous river that starts as a trickle out of the temple, grows into a wide river and finally fills the whole world? Surely that is symbolic?" And the answer is yes. It describes the literal temple into which the living waters of the literal Holy Spirit would later be poured at Pentecost, and as the believers left that literal temple at Pentecost there was a trickle that grew until it reached every nation and is destined to become such a flood of water that it will cover the earth. But it flows out of a literal temple. The bottom line is that the temple commanded to be built in Ezekiel is exactly the same temple that is measured for destruction in Revelation 11.

Chilton's distinction between church as temple (v. 1) and Israel as temple (v. 2), with the former being protected and the latter being destroyed, does not hold up for several reasons:

Now, Chilton has written a lot of good stuff, but he insists that the temple of verse 1 is the true church being protected and that the temple in verse 2 is

the false Israel being destroyed. I just don't think that is possible for several reasons:

The text distinguishes between the temple (ναός), the altar (located outside the ναός in the outer courts), and the people worshiping at the altar (vv. 1-2). If the "temple" is a symbol of the people of God, why are the people measured separately?

First, the text clearly distinguishes between the ναός (the word that is twice translated as "temple"), the altar (which is located outside the ναός in the outer courts), and the people worshiping at the altar. If the temple represents the church, then that is like saying that the temple of verse 1 represents the people worshiping outside the temple of the same verse. That doesn't make sense. John clearly distinguishes three things in verse 1 - temple, altar, and people, whereas Chilton kind of merges them.

Such a distinction does not account for the fact that the same word for "temple" (ναός) occurs in both verse 1 and verse 2.

But more importantly, the word for "temple" in verse 1 is exactly the same Greek word for "temple" in verse 2. If Chilton's theory were correct, then it would make more sense for verse 1 to use ναός and verse 2 to use ἱερὸν. But he doesn't.

The "outer court of the temple" implies that temple (ναός) and court (αὐλήν) are two parts of the same structure.

Third, the mention of "outer court" strongly implies that the ναός is the inner portion of the same structure - which it is on the literal temple. But I don't see how it could possibly be so on a non-literal temple. Chilton can't have it both ways. If the word ναός refers to the church, then the outer court of the ναός must refer to the outer something of the church, not the Judaic temple. Outer implies inner. If verse 2 is the outer part, then verse 1 is the inner part of the same structure. So you would be more consistent to say that both verses apply to the church or both verses apply to the literal temple.

The best explanation is that the temple buildings and altar are 100% destroyed (not one stone left upon another) along with the people worshiping there, whereas the courtyard and outlying buildings surrounding the temple are preserved for the Romans to use for three and a half years. (See next major point)

Fourth, if we clearly distinguish between the ναός and the courts outside the ναός, everything perfectly falls into place. Marvin Vincent's Word studies accurately distinguishes between these two parts in this way:

The court which is without the temple. Not merely the outer court, or Court of the

Gentiles, but including all that is not within the ναός, the Holy and Most Holy places.³ If that is true, then the next subpoint follows - everything measured is destroyed, and what is not measured is preserved for a season.

This preserves the symbolism of the ending of the Old Covenant - everything related to sacrifices and Levitical system (ναός and altar) is taken away, while Herodian buildings not specified in the ceremonial law are excluded from destruction because they are not essential to the ceremonial system.

The fifth subpoint says that this preserves the symbolism of the ending of the Old Covenant - everything related to sacrifices and Levitical system (ναός and altar) is taken away, while the Herodian buildings that are not specified in the ceremonial law are excluded from destruction because they are not essential to the ceremonial system being done away with. On Chilton's interpretation it is confused. He has the ceremonial parts of the buildings preserved while the non-ceremonial parts are destroyed. It's the exact opposite.

This makes sense of the unusual Greek:

Καὶ τὴν ἀύλην τὴν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ναοῦ ἔκβαλε ἔξωθεν And the court the outside of the temple leave out outside

Sixth, this makes sense of the unusual Greek, which has the word "outside" twice. The literal Greek is , "And the court outside of the temple, leave out outside." John was instructed to not bother measuring anything that wasn't exclusively related to the Old Covenant worship system. It is the Old Covenant alone that is going to be destroyed. That is the central message - with the coming of Jesus it is blasphemy to cling to the ceremonial law.

This fits the historical situation - not one tiny stone of the ceremonial system (ναός and altar) was left - all was either taken to Rome or destroyed, while the Herodian buildings were preserved for Roman use for the next forty two months and then returned to Jewish control in AD 73.

And seventh, this makes sense of the historical situation. What was destroyed in AD 70? It wasn't 100% of the outer courts. Some of the outer courts were destroyed, but not all of them. The Romans preserved those for their occupation of the city for the next three and a half years. The only things that were either taken to Rome or which were destroyed completely were the things directly related to the ceremonial system - everything in the ναός, the altar, and the people who worshiped there - the priests and the

³ Marvin Richardson Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 517.

unbelieving Jews. Not one stone was left upon another in the portions measured. But there were stones left upon another in the very outer courts that were not measured - things like the Roman garrison tower, and what is now the wailing wall. Those weren't part of the temple. This passage explicitly excludes them from destruction. And if you don't hold to this, then you have a hard time answering Dispensationalists who say that the wailing wall proves that Christ's prophecy of the destruction of the temple has not yet been fulfilled. But it has. If you examine the two pictures on the back you will see that the temple buildings were destroyed, but the outlying buildings that were Gentile in origin (in other words, were not required in the law) were not destroyed.

C. Interpretive issue #3 - Is this a measuring for construction, protection, or for destruction? Hints that it is a measuring for destruction:

Of course, that is already anticipating the answer to the third interpretive issue on which there is controversy. The first two interpretive issues ought to settle almost all questions. But one lingering doubt that some might still have is that the measuring done in Ezekiel 40 was a measuring for building a new temple, not destroying it. Some people conclude that since Ezekiel's prophecy was positive about the establishment of an ideal temple, this passage must be describing something positive too - perhaps like the Protestant Reformation. But I think you will remember from Ezekiel 40 that the context was a destruction of a literal temple to be replaced by a literal temple, whose end was also prophesied to be in the first century. Even the context in the Old Testament was a context of temporariness for those buildings. They were not eternal as the Jews seemed to assume they were.

Internal hints

The ominous terms used build a picture take away any positive feelings - "rod...cast out...tread...underfoot...fire...devours...killed...plagues...war...overcome...kill...Sodom and Egypt...tormented")

But there are all kinds of hints even in this passage that this is a measuring for destruction, not a measuring to protect or build up. I've listed several ominous words for you. The word used for "rod" is a word that is used three times in this book for the rod that Christ uses to smash the nations (2:27; 12:5; 19:15). It is an ominous term. It is used elsewhere in Scripture in an ominous way. For example, Paul warned the Corinthian church, "What do

you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" There is a term in the New Testament for police officers that means literally "rod users" because they would beat people with rods to keep them in line. They were lictors who carried a big stick - the same word used here. That by itself immediately gives an ominous feel for this measurement. It's like a police officer whacking his baton in his hand just waiting to use it on you. The word "reed" connects the vision to Ezekiel (who does not speak of a measuring rod, but a measuring reed - both the Hebrew and the Greek translation of Ezekiel are quite clear), but by adding this word "rod" he makes clear that this measurement will be for destruction, not building.

But look at all the other words that I put in your outline. Commentators point out that the word for "leave out" in verse 2 can be translated as "cast out," "reject," or "excommunicate." And this temple is obviously going to be trodden underfoot. And the other words, fire, devours, killed, plagues, war, overcome, kill, Sodom and Egypt, and tormented, are anything but positive terms. The whole chapter from beginning to end is devoted to judgment, and the purpose of the two prophets was to preach judgment against Israel. To read something so positive into these verses as protection is to ignore the context.

It's not just the temple being measured; the people are measured with the rod too (v. 1c; see 2 Samuel 8:2).

And notice that it's not just the temple that is measured. The people are measured too. Verse 1 says, "And the angel stood saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship there." The only other place in the Bible where people are measured is in 2 Samuel 8:2 where David conquered Moab after Moab had tried to annihilate Israel. All those male soldiers deserved the death penalty, but David had them lie down and measured the people, sparing one for every two killed. Which, interestingly is the same ratio of Jews who would be killed in this war - two thirds. Some commentators say that this is a hint at how many would be killed.

External hints (compare the measuring here with Lam. 2:7,8; Is. 28:17; 34:11; Amos 7:6-9; 2 Kings 21:12,13; Ps. 60:6)

But the external hints that I give in my outline are the Old Testament references that many commentators say play a background here. Each one of those verses shows a region being measured for destruction. Psalm 60:6 says, "I will divide Shechem and measure out the Valley of Succoth." God is measuring out exactly what will be cut off and what will be preserved. Lamentations 2:7,8 speaks of the temple and Jerusalem being measured and

given into the hands of Babylon for destruction. Again, in that passage what is measured is what is destroyed. Everything measured will be destroyed and that which is not measured will be spared. Isaiah 28:17 also uses a measuring tool to speak of destruction. Amos 7:6-9 uses the image of a measuring line to guarantee judgment against Israel. 2 Kings 21:12-13 promises judgment using the image of a measuring line. It says, ...therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel: "Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle. 13 And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. 14 So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies, 15 because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.' "

I won't belabor the point, but measurement here is not for sparing people, but for judging people. And by measuring with a reed that is actually like a rod, he is doubly emphasizing the judgment.

II. A quick explanation of the meaning of the text phrase by phrase

So if you are convinced by what I have said on those three interpretive issues, then there is only one interpretation that fits. And let me go phrase by phrase through the passage very quickly so that you can see what it is.

Verse 1 says, "I was given a reed..." Though John speaks the judgment, it is God who gives it. Though God would use Romans for judgment, it is God who gives it. We have this tendency to look at politics, apostasy, unbelief, and problems in America from a human perspective and wonder how people could be so foolish. But Romans 1 says that when God gives up a nation unto a depraved mind, the downward slide is quick. We must examine the problems in our nation as judgments from God, just as the problems in first century Judaism were ultimately judgments from God. It's not mystifying; these are the tell-tale signs from God that America is already accelerating into judgment.

Verse 1 goes on, "I was given a reed like a measuring rod." We've already seen that this is an ominous word. The rod is destructive, so he is refining this as a measurement for judgment. And where will this rod come down? The angel tells John:

And the angel stood saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who are worshiping there.

The people worshiping at the altar are judged because they have rejected

Christ, the final sacrifice. And it is blasphemy to continue temple worship when the true temple, Jesus is rejected. The temple, altar, and people are measured and found wanting. Without a Christocentric view on life, we too are found wanting. We can have the trappings of the Christians religion and miss out on the Jesus that our religion is about. And when that happens, Paul says that we have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof.

And by the way, the Dispensational idea that God will reinstitute a temple and sacrifices in the future is nigh on blasphemy. It is just as much an implicit denial of the finality of Christ's sacrifice as these first century Jews were engaged in when they kept clinging to the shadows.

But look at that phrase, "And the angel stood..." By standing, the angel is showing the seriousness of what he is about to say.

But John is involved in the process of judgment as well. God had already called all true believers to leave the temple and the synagogue system or they would come under its judgments. And what judgments they were! Not one stone of the temple would be left upon another. Parts of the outer courts would survive, but not the temple itself. So here is the point, when John pronounces this word of judgment against the nation, there is a power behind those words. When the prophets of verses 3-11 pronounce God's word upon their lips, there is a power behind those words. And when the church of today pronounces the Word of judgment (such as the imprecatory Psalms) against God's enemies, there is a power behind those words. Christ Himself backs up those words. We will look at that a lot more when we get to the ministry of the two witnesses. But take a look at verse 2.

Verse 2: "And leave out the outer court of the temple and do not measure it, because it has been given to the nations; and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months."

As already mentioned, the reason the outer courts of the temple would not be destroyed in AD 70 was because God would give those courts to Titus' armies as a base of operations to destroy, pillage, and trample Jerusalem over the next forty-two months - from Ab 9 of AD 70 (I convert that to August 3) to Tebeth 29 of AD 74 (or January 15). That was 1260 days later - exactly forty-two months to the day. At the end of that time, the Roman governor Silva turned Jerusalem back over to the Jews and a period of rabbinic domination started until the second century after the Bar Kochba rebellion. So very literally Jerusalem was given over to the nations or the Gentiles for forty-two months; not longer or shorter.

III. Conclusion - some additional applications

We've already made some applications as we've gone through these controversies, but let me end with four more:

A. We can trust every detail of the book of Revelation

The first application is that we can trust every detail of the book of Revelation. Too many commentaries skip over key words and phrases and give a general gist of an idea that they have. But if your interpretation is correct, then every word will have meaning, and every word is critical for understanding the overall meaning.

B. We can trust God's total control when a nation falls apart

The second application is that God was in control of every detail of the disasters that faced Israel. We can trust His sovereignty. He is in control. Just picture God as a carpenter with a measuring tape. Some things he is tearing down, and other things He is preserving. But not a square inch of His work is arbitrary. And God starts with this imagery of a measure to make clear that He is controlling each detail of what appears to be a mess to the Jews of that day.

Let's apply that concept. I am all for prepping for disaster. But let's not be driven by fear. Prepping is good when it is done in faith. Proverbs twice says, "A prudent man foresees disaster and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished." We must learn to foresee disaster, and the way we do so is by looking at prophetic books like Revelation or Jeremiah and discerning the telltale signs that we are nearing the point of God's buzz saw cutting off large portions of a nation. I see the buzz saw coming in America. I have no illusions that Trump will fix everything. He may slow things down - possibly. But without repentance of the church, the plank is heading into the buzz saw. But the point of verses 1-2 is that God is in total control. We need to have an absolute confidence in His sovereignty. David Chilton made two excellent comments in other portions of his commentary. He said,

In every age, Christians must face the world with confidence, with the unshakable conviction that all events in history are predestined, originating from the Throne of God. When we see the world convulsed with wars, famines, plagues and natural disasters, we must say, with the Psalmist, "Come, behold the works of the LORD, who has wrought desolations in the earth" (Ps. 46:8).⁴

Confidence in God's government is of the essence of the patient faith to which God's people are called. We are to place our trust not in man, not in the evil machinations of diabolical conspirators, but in God, who is ruling the world for His glory. His judgment

⁴ David Chilton, [*Days of Vengeance*](#) (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 192.

will surely come. The patient expectation of this is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.⁵

And I would add that we must not put our trust in prepping. Too many preppers are fear driven not faith driven. Prep yes, but prep in faith that you are a steward who is responsible to do what you can, but don't worry if you can't do a lot. The key think is being in the center of God's will. And as one pastor in the inner city told me, the safest place to be is in the center of God's will.

C. Be prepared for the unthinkable to happen (most Jews thought the holy city and holy temple were impregnable and would never be conquered; the remnant was prepared by this book)

A third application is that we need to be prepared for the unthinkable to happen. This balances out the previous point. Trust is not presumption. When you read Josephus and other early histories of this period you realize that the Jews thought the temple and city were impregnable. And if you look at the way it was constructed, you can understand it. But added to their false sense of security was a false presumption that God would bless Israel and that since things had been good for as long as they could remember that they would continue that way. They had a false sense of security. This book warned Christians not to fall into that false sense of security.

I used the metaphor of our nation being pushed by the Master Carpenter into the buzz saw. But many Christians are very skeptical that America could possibly go through a buzz saw. It is unthinkable to them. They invest as if their method of investment will carry them through any crisis. Or they depend on grocery stores week-to-week as if it would be impossible for grocery shelves to be empty. Or they treat the American dollar as if it will always have the confidence of the world. A little history would show that even America has gone through a number of disasters created by government irresponsibility. Have you heard the expression, "Ain't worth a Continental Dollar?" That was in good old America. People's savings were wiped out when the dollar was abandoned. People forget their history. And there are any number of indications that our current irresponsible debt is unsustainable.

But forget about economic problems, because that is only one way that God can judge a nation. When you look at the rebellion of our nation against God on every front - from sexual ethics, to increased centralization, to the

⁵ David Chilton, [Days of Vengeance](#) (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 335.

deterioration of the judicial system, etc., you can at least know that our nation is worthy of the buzz saw. I think that much is undeniable. And if it is true, we should be prepared - just in case God does not show mercy. And the buzz saw may not be economic. It may be a solar flare or terrorists taking down the power grid. It may be nuclear war. It could be cyber-terrorism. It could be nations going off the American dollar or selling back their t-bills, or any number of scenarios. God is creative, but I can think of any number of ways that God could take our nation through the buzz saw. The tell-tale signs of His judgment are everywhere. And we shouldn't be so naive in our day-to-day dealings as to ignore that fact.

Does that mean we should be scared? Far from it. The previous point shows that we can trust God 100% during such times. If it is our time to go, we can be confident in death. If it is God's purpose to save us, we are safe wherever we are. But we cannot use a trust in God's sovereignty to relieve us of our responsibility to try to prepare. God gives the prophetic books of the Bible to show us how to recognize His hand measuring and cutting, measuring and cutting, and we need to realize that we are not invincible from total social chaos even in America. Be prepared for the unthinkable to happen. Just like those who don't learn from history are bound to repeat it, those who don't learn from the tell-tale signs of Scripture that we are headed to judgment will suffer under it - even though they are Christians. It was unthinkable for this temple to be destroyed. Even Titus didn't want it to be destroyed - but a soldier acting against orders torched it, the gold started melting, and that began the process of plunder. To get the gold that was melting into the cracks, they turned every stone over.

D. But like the two witnesses, we should never stop praying for, grieving over, and calling our nation to repentance (v. 3)

But can we know for sure what will happen? No. And thus my last application. Verse 3 shows two witnesses who brought God's Word to bear upon the culture and by wearing sackcloth called the culture to repentance. If they could do that right up to the end, the church should try to do that right up to the end.

Why would we bother to do this if we are already on the downhill slide to judgment? Because Jeremiah 18:7 says,

7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.

May we as a church pray for repentance, work repentance, and on behalf of

our nation grieve over the lack of repentance as these witnesses did. But like those witnesses, let us look to Christ and to Christ alone for salvation and security. These witnesses were a testimony against the false trust of the Jews who trusted their temple, their city, their political leaders, and their social structures to protect them. But without repentance, it was foolhardy. May we be more like the witnesses and less like the Jews who continued to worship before the altar. May we be Christocentric in our view of life. Amen.