

REVELATION

Chapter 11

The Two Witnesses

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, 2 but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. 3 And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. 6 They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. 7 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, 8 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. 9 For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, 10 and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. 11 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13 And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

11:1–14† The two witnesses, the second part of the interlude. (CSB)

11:1-2 Beginning with chapter 10 John’s role is more than merely that of a viewer: he now becomes a witness and an active participant. In 10:8–11 he takes the opened scroll from the angel and is told to eat it and to proclaim its message. In chapter 11 John’s active participation continues, as he is told to “measure the temple of God” (11:1). John is now not only to view the events pictorially prophesied, he is also given a role in the dramatic action. This should not be surprising because chapters 10 and 11 have most to do with the church’s mission on earth, witnessing about Jesus Christ to the world. John has long been a part of that ministry and will be until his death. (CC pp. 284-285)

11:1 *measuring rod*. A bamboo-like cane that often reached a height of 20 feet and grew in abundance in the waters along the banks of the Jordan. Straight and light, the reed was a convenient measuring rod (see Eze 40:3; Zec 2:1–2). (CSB)

measure the temple – Measuring the temple may help preserve it from desecration (cf v 2) and from being lost. (TLSB)

John is given a “measuring rod” in the form of a “cane” (κάλαμος ὅμοιος ῥάβδῳ), by which he is to “measure the temple of God” (11:1). The prophet Ezekiel had a similar experience (Ezek 40:1–5). In a vision he saw a heavenly figure with a measuring rod (κάλαμος μέτρου, LXX Ezek 40:3) in his hand. The measuring of the temple (Ezekiel 40–42) was a promise that the temple would be rebuilt and the glory of Yahweh would return to the temple and Yahweh would live among his people forever (Ezek 43:1–7; 48:35). (CC p. 285)

The temple described in Ezekiel 40–48 is different in many ways from the Solomonic temple and from the second temple. These differences imply that the fulfillment of the promise was not the second temple, not is it some future building of another earthly temple (as some Christian dispensationalists hold). Rather, the fulfillment is in the temple John see – God’s people, the church on earth from the time of Christ’s ascension up to His second coming. This temple that John sees, the church on earth, also is a type of the heavenly Jerusalem (the holy city) in which God will dwell forever with His people in the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21). (CC p. 285)

God’s promise for the future was so certain that even now it could be physically measured as a concrete reality. Also the prophet Zechariah had a vision in which he saw a heavenly figure with a “measuring line” (Zech 2:1–5 [MT/LXX 2:5–9]) CC p. 285)

This measuring line was a length of rope that served as a unit of measure (“a rope of measure”). The LXX translated this “rope of measure” as “surveying rope.” Such a measuring or surveying line or rope could be used when the distance measured would be many times longer than a measuring rod. (CC p. 285)

In that case Jerusalem was to be measured, symbolizing the promise that God would protect the city and that He would be its glory. (CC p. 285)

This promise too pointed to something different and greater than a mere reconstruction of the earthly city. For example, there would be no wall around Jerusalem, for God Himself would surround it like a wall of fire. (CC p. 285)

Thus the instruction to John to use a measuring rod puts him in line with this prophetic tradition. His measuring of the temple of God and its dwellers indicates that God’s people, His holy dwelling, will be protected as they carry out the mission given to them – the proclamation of the Gospel. (CC p, 285)

temple.† Here it is figurative for the holy Christian church (cf. 2Co 6:16; Eph 2:21; 2Th 2:4). (CSB)

Represents God’s people. The apostles speak of the Church in this way (cf 1Pt 2:4–5). (TLSB)

altar. The context of worship suggests that this is the great altar. (CSB)

The incense altar (θυσιαστήριον, Rev 11:1) is included in the prophetic and protective measuring. The incense altar represents the prayers of God’s saints ascending to his holy presence (see 5:8; 6:9–11; 8:3–4). The worship life of God’s people in prayer and praise is a part of their mission on earth, and it will also be protected and maintained. (CC p. 285)

In 21:15 there is another measuring of that which belongs to God, the heavenly city of the new Jerusalem. One of the seven angels (21:9–11) who showed to John the heavenly

city, which is also called the bride of the Lamb (21:9), had a measuring rod by which the holy city is measured. Although this measuring is in a different context and is primarily concerned with the protection and wholeness of the new Jerusalem, it also implies that life with God in the new heaven and new earth will be protected and cared for by His holy presence forever. (CC p. 285)

11:2 *court outside*. The court of the Gentiles, approximately 26 acres. (CSB)

The realm of unbelievers. (TLSB)

The outer court of the temple is *not* to be measured, for “it has been given over to the pagan nations” who will “trample [it] underfoot” (11:2). In the temple of Solomon there were two courts (1 Ki 6:36). The “inner court” (1 Ki 6:36) was called “the court of the priests” (2 Chr 4:9). The other was a large court with no designated purpose mentioned (2 Chr 4:9). In Ezek 10:5 an “outer court” is mentioned. Also in the later vision in which Ezekiel saw the heavenly temple there is an “outer court,” but again no designated purpose is mentioned (40:17–19). In the rebuilt temple complex of Herod there was both an inner and an outer court around the temple proper. The inner court was divided into three sections: one for the priests, one for Israelite men, and a third for women. The outer court was for the Gentiles. Separating the inner court(s) and the outer court was a partition or barrier on which was inscribed a warning of death to any Gentile who entered the inner court (cf. Eph 2:11–18). This outer court came to be known as a place or house of prayer for the Gentiles (see Mk 11:17; cf. Is 56:6–7). Here in John’s vision in Rev 11:1–2 the outer court (the court of the Gentiles) is *not* to be measured. It will *not* be protected by God from desecration, for the pagan nations will turn against it as a place of prayer and attempt to destroy both it and the temple of God. That is to say, the church of Jesus Christ, the people of God, will be under severe attack. Though the church will be protected by God so that she can carry out her mission, she will suffer persecution and even death as a result of the pagan nations’ opposition. (CC p. 286)

The outer court and the “holy city” (11:2) will be trampled. The “holy city” is later identified as the “new Jerusalem” coming down from heaven (21:2, 10); it is the locus of the holiness of life with God in the new heaven and earth (cf. Gal 4:26; Rev 3:12). But in 20:8–9, where it is called “the beloved city” (τὴν πόλιν ἡγαπημένην), the holy city of God is under siege by the hosts of evil (Gog and Magog) that have been trampling it underfoot here on earth. *The holy city, both now and in the new heaven and earth, represents God dwelling in the midst of his people. It thus is the holy symbol of the church of Jesus Christ, the place where God dwells incarnationally among and in his saints, both here on earth now and triumphantly in God’s presence in the new age to come.* Here on earth the holy city, the church of God, is being trampled underfoot, that is, persecuted. While the temple of God and its outer court symbolize the place of God’s real presence in the continuing worship life of the church, the holy city itself represents the church as it dwells here on earth. The church is sustained in her faith and godly life by God’s presence as the focus, source, and center of her worship, as indicated by the temple and its outer court. While the holy city, the church, is being persecuted, she is sustained and protected in her faith and also (as is emphasized here in Revelation 11) in her mission so that she can carry it out and complete it. But she will suffer because of her mission, as portrayed by the outer court being trampled. Her worship life will be sorely tested but not destroyed, for the incense altar is measured, is protected by God. The outer appearance of the church (the holy city) may well be destroyed. At times even the visible appearance of her worship (the outer court) may be trampled. But her inner soul of worship and faith (the altar and temple) will be nourished and kept by God through Word and Sacrament, so even in dying she will still witness and thus complete her godly mission. (CC p. 287)

nations.† Unbelievers, the opposite of spiritual Israel (cf. 2:9; 3:9). (CSB)

The word Gentiles does not refer to non-Jews, but to non-Christians (That wall that kept Gentiles out of the inner courts has been removed – Ephesians 2:14 outwardly attached to the church. (PBC p. 110)

trample on the holy city. Cf. Ps 79:1; Isa 63:18; Lk 21:24. (CSB)

The fate Jerusalem suffered in AD 70. In the future, the world will run roughshod over the Church. (TLSB)

42 months.† Three and a half years. Some find the background for this period in the time of Jewish suffering under the Syrian tyrant, Antiochus Epiphanes (168–165 B.C.). Others point out that, whereas the temple was desolated for three years under Antiochus, the figure used in Revelation is three and a half years, which no doubt looks back to the dividing of the 70th “seven” (Da 9:27) into two equal parts. The same time period is also designated as 1,260 days (v. 3; 12:6) and as “a time, times and half a time” (12:14; cf. Da 7:25; 12:7). This period of time evidently became a conventional symbol for a limited period of unrestrained wickedness. Here 42 months is a designation of the entire NT period, during which Gentiles, or unbelievers, occupy large areas of the church. During this period God’s two witnesses proclaim his message (v. 3) and the beast from the sea is able to speak great blasphemies against God (13:5). The church is kept safe during this period (12:6), although she is persecuted by the devil (13:6–8). (CSB)

Symbolic period, which appears in varying forms in chapters 11-13 (1260 [11:3; 12:6]; “a time, and times, and a half time” [12:14]; even as “three and half days” [11:11]. This symbol is likely based on the length of time that Antiochus IV Epiphanes terrorized Jerusalem in 167-164 BC. It signifies a period of persecution and testing for God’s people. (TLSB)

The length of time that the outer court will be trampled underfoot is given as “forty-two months” (11:2). This same time period is also represented as “one thousand two hundred sixty days” (11:3), the length of time that the two witnesses will prophesy. Though expressed in two different ways, it is the same time, for while the outer court is being trampled the two witnesses will be prophesying. This same time period is mentioned three more times in Revelation. In 12:6 the woman, after delivering her Child, is protected for 1,260 days while she is being pursued by the dragon. In 12:14 this same woman is again mentioned as cared for and protected by God during the same time period, but now the time period is given as “a time and times and half a time”—best understood as meaning three and a half years. (Three and a half years of lunar months—30 days per month—equals forty-two months and also equals 1,260 days.) And in 13:5 again this same time period, in this case given as forty-two months, is referred to as the length of time that the beast from the sea will afflict the woman and her seed. Though it is designated by three different reckonings of time, days (1,260), months (forty-two), and years (three and a half), it is the same time period in all cases. (There is also the period of three and a half *days* in 11:9, 11; see below.) (CC pp 287-288)

Why the same time period is given in three different ways, when one would seem to be sufficient, for it is the same time period being referred to, is not stated and cannot be determined from the contexts in Revelation. However, these different reckonings are derived from and patterned after the chronology in Daniel. In Dan 7:25 the time period during which the fourth beast will dominate the saints of God is given as three and a half “times” (שָׁנָה וָחֵמֶשׁ), which could refer to years. This is the equivalent of the time period of forty-two months during which the beast from the sea

in Rev 13:5 will persecute the woman and her seed (13:1–10). Dan 12:7 mentions the time period of three and a half “seasons” (מִזְמֹרֹתַיִם), which again could be years. It is the period of time during which the saints of God will endure all the “astonishing things” (Dan 12:6) prophesied to Daniel. And in Dan 12:11 again the same time period is referred to, but this time as days—“1,290 days.” The 1,290-day period of time in Daniel is the time during which the saints of God will have to endure the “abomination of desolation” (Dan 12:11). In Daniel, as in Revelation, the three and a half “times,” “seasons,” or years and the 1,290 (1,260 in Revelation) days designate the same time period. However, as in Revelation, Daniel also does not give an explanation as to why the same time period should be designated by different reckonings of time. (Daniel does not use the designation of forty-two months, as does Revelation, to refer to the time period.) (CC p. 288)

In both Daniel and Revelation this time period is that period of time when God’s people on earth will be trodden underfoot by the pagan nations. Daniel sees this time of suffering and persecution prophetically in the future, while John sees it as the time in which he is living, a time that will also continue until the end of the present world at Christ’s return. According to Mark (13:1–26; cf. Mt 24:1–31; Lk 21:5–28) this time period begins with Jesus’ own suffering, death, and resurrection and extends to his second coming. In other words, it is the entire church age, from Christ’s first advent to his second advent, when this world will end, the final judgment will take place, and then the new heaven and new earth will be the eternal home of God’s saints. The entire church age is a time of tribulation, though toward the end of it, persecution shall increase to the point where it becomes a great tribulation. In Lk 21:24 this entire period of persecution is called the “times of the nations/Gentiles.” The terrifying days before the fall of Jerusalem are a type of the suffering which will be endured by God’s people *throughout the church age*—suffering which reaches a terrible depth just before the End. Here in Rev 11:1–3 this period of time between Christ’s passion and ascension, and his second coming is that time when the outer court will be trampled underfoot. During this time of the Gentiles, expressed as forty-two months, the church will suffer affliction and persecution (11:2). But during this same time of the Gentiles, expressed now as 1,260 days, the two witnesses will also carry out their prophetic ministry (11:3). Though the church in prophetic ministry (as represented by these two witnesses and “the holy city,” 11:2) will suffer through the trampling, *because the temple is measured* the church will be protected and enabled by God to carry out her mission and complete it. (CC p. 289)

Why this time period is designated by three different reckonings—forty-two months (11:2; 13:5), 1,260 days (11:3; 12:6), and three and a half years (12:14)—is not explained. Taking into consideration also the three and a half “times,” “seasons,” or years of Daniel (7:25; 12:7) and the 1,290 days of Daniel (12:11), it is possible that the well-known period of draught and famine during the prophetic ministry of Elijah (1 Ki. 17:1; 18:1, 42–45; cf. Lk. 4:25; James 5:17) established the type from which the expression of three and a half years might have been derived. Another period of three and a half years that became especially well known to Jewish people was the reign of terror in Judea instigated by Antiochus Epiphanes. John himself and many of his readers would probably have thought of this terrible reign of terror as a type of the whole period of time designated by the three and a half years in the prophecy of Revelation. Another period of similar length could be the Jewish war of A.D. 67–70, which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. While these memorable periods of suffering in John’s religious background and tradition would come to mind as possible types for the symbolical use of three and a half years in 12:14 and thus point out the horror and suffering of the whole time period covered by the prophetic message of Revelation, there seem to be no corresponding types for the forty-two months and the 1,260 days. Certainly the three-and-a-half-year period suggests a time of dire suffering for the church as she carries out her mission. But just as God took care of Elijah during the time of persecution under Ahab and Jezebel and during the three-and-a-half-year

famine, so also God would protect and provide for his people to enable them to complete their godly mission. (CC pp.289-290)

There is a *possible* corresponding model for the designation of forty-two months: the forty-two years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land. (CC p. 290)

J. Court, *Myth and History*, and D. Ezell, *Revelations*, 70, both suggest this as a possible source for the forty-two months. While an exodus motif may or may not be behind the symbolic use of the number forty-two, elsewhere in Revelation the influence of such a motif is evident (see 12:6,14). (CC p. 290)

11:3 *two witnesses*. Modeled after Moses and Elijah (see notes on vv. 5–6). They may symbolize testifying believers in the final period before Christ returns. Or they may be two actual individuals who will be martyred for the proclamation of the truth. (CSB)

Prophets who preach repentance. The Law of Moses required two witnesses so that each could corroborate the other’s testimony (cf. Deut. 17:6; Mt. 18:16). (TLSB)

The Two Witnesses Prophecy (11:3–6)

The “two witnesses” of God are “clothed about with sackcloth” (11:3). Sackcloth in biblical literature is a coarse, hairy garment worn as a sign of grief (Gen 37:34) or of sorrow and repentance over sin (1 Chr 21:16; Jonah 3:5–8; Mt 11:21). Sometimes it was accompanied by the throwing of ashes on the head (Esth 4:1; Dan 9:3; Mt 11:21) and/or by fasting (Dan 9:3). In addition, before the sackcloth was put on, it could be preceded by the tearing of one’s clothes (2 Ki 19:1–2; Esth 4:1). The word appears only one other time in Revelation (6:12), where it describes the darkness of the sun. Evidently at the End one of the signs of judgment and doom will be that the sun will become black like “hairy sackcloth.” That the two witnesses are dressed in sackcloth demonstrates that they will conduct their prophetic ministry in a penitential attitude of humble and sacrificial service. The prophets of old were thus dressed at times, as they carried out their own ministry as Yahweh’s spokesmen (2 Ki 1:8; Is 20:2; Zech 13:4); the last of them was John the Baptist (Mk 1:6). (CC p. 291)

The two witnesses are further described as “the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth” (Rev 11:4). This descriptive imagery is similar to that of Zech 4:2–14. In a vision the prophet Zechariah saw a golden lampstand with seven lamps (Zech 4:2). On either side of the lampstand, one on its right and one on its left, were two olive trees (Zech 4:3). The lampstand with its seven lamps of light represented the seven eyes of Yahweh by which he penetrates the whole earth with his omniscience (Zech 4:10)—which sevenfold omniscience is exercised by his Spirit (Zech 4:6). When Zechariah asked what the two olive trees were or represented, he was told that they were two individuals who were anointed to serve Yahweh, the Lord of all the earth (Zech 4:11–14). In the context of Zech 4:2–14, it appears that the lampstand is Israel, the people of God, under the sevenfold guidance of Yahweh’s omniscience as exercised by the Holy Spirit, and that the two olive trees represent the anointed priesthood (at that time in the person of Joshua) and the anointed royal house of David (in the person of Zerubbabel, Zech 2:1–6:15). The two olive trees supply the oil for the lamps of the lampstand; that is, the priesthood and the royal house of David are God’s anointed representatives by which the Holy Spirit cares for Israel. For it is not by might but by the Spirit of Yahweh that God’s people are delivered and kept safe (Zech 4:6). (CC pp. 291-292)

Rev 11:1–4, then, employs some of that imagery from Zechariah 4, but in a new context, and so transformed. The lampstand under the sevenfold light of the Spirit (Zech 4:2) now represents not OT Israel, but rather (as two lampstands) “the temple” and “the holy city” (Rev 11:1–2), that is, the NT church, God’s saints on earth. The two olive trees now represent not Joshua and Zerubbabel, but the two witnesses anointed by God to proclaim the prophetic Word throughout the era of the new covenant. (CC p. 292)

In the this imagery of Zechariah, concerning the priesthood and royal house, is applied in Rev. 11:1-4, one can see the royal priesthood of all believers, for the two witnesses represent the entire church in mission (cf. 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). The two distinct offices in Zechariah 4, priest and king, are combined in Revelation 11 since each of two witnesses carried out both offices. (CC p. 292)

It is noteworthy that the one lampstand in Zechariah has become two lampstands in Revelation 11. John has already been told that the seven churches, which represent the entire church on earth, are the seven lampstands (Rev 1:20). Putting together Zechariah 4 and Revelation 1 and 11, one can say that the people of God, first of all, are viewed and represented in Zechariah 4 by *one* lampstand that is supplied with oil from two olive trees (Zech 4:2–14). Second, the church can also be represented by *seven* lampstands because she is under the sevenfold omniscience of God’s Holy Spirit (Rev 1:20). And third, she can be symbolized by *two* lampstands as seen through and by way of the prophetic ministry, the royal priesthood (combining the priesthood and the line of kings), of the two witnesses (Rev 11:1–4). (CC p. 292)

Thus *prima facie* the church is looked upon as the single lampstand with its seven lights (as suggested by Zechariah) or as seven lampstands (as seen in Rev 1:20). But here in Rev 11:1–4 the church is represented by the two witnesses who in turn are symbolized by the *two* lampstands and the two olive trees, for the church is the royal priesthood of God here on earth as she carries out her prophetic ministry (as depicted by the two witnesses; see 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). *Thus the two witnesses are symbolized by the two lampstands because they represent the church in her royal, priestly, prophetic witness to the Gospel message of Christ to the world. They are also symbolized by the two olive trees*

Elsewhere in the Bible the people of God are likened to an olive tree. For example, in Ps. 52:8 the psalmist says that he is an olive tree flourishing in God’s temple. Memorable is Paul’s use of the olive tree as a symbol of God’s faithful people in Christ, both Jew and Gentiles (Rom. 11:16-24). (CC p. 293)

because God, through his anointed prophets and ministers, edifies and nourishes the church as she (through them and as represented by them) witnesses to the world. (CC pp. 292-293)

R. Mounce, Revelation, 223, says that the witness “are not two individuals but a symbol of the witnessing church in the last tumultuous days before the end of the age.” J. S. Considine, “The Two Witnesses,” 392, suggests that they represent “the universality of Christian preachers and teachers; their mission is to combat the enemies of Christ and His Church.” H.B. Swete, Apocalypse, 134, says that the (two) witnesses represent the Church in her function of witness-bearing” and that the author John sees a correspondence “with the imagery of Zechariah iv. 2ff.” (CC p. 293)

Who are these two witnesses? Whoever they are, they belong to the speaker—God the Father or Jesus Christ—for they are identified as such by the possessive pronoun μου, “my,” in 11:3. The

definite article (τοῖς) indicates that John evidently understood them to be “two well-known figures.” Andreas (sixth century) in his Greek commentary on Revelation thought they might be Enoch and Elijah. Oecumenius (sixth century) in his Greek commentary also thought they were Elijah and Enoch: Elijah because it was prophesied that he would come (Mal 4:5–6 [MT 3:23–24]), and Enoch because he was translated and did not see death (Gen 5:24). Victorinus (third century) in his Latin commentary on Revelation stated that many interpreters thought they were Elijah and Elisha or Elijah and Moses, but Victorinus rules out Elisha and Moses because they died. Victorinus accepts that the first witness is Elijah (cf. 2 Ki 2:11). He says the second must be Jeremiah because the Lord had said to him that he would be a prophet to the nations (Jer 1:5). Tertullian thought they were Enoch and Elijah. Other identifications that have been suggested are Zerubbabel and Joshua (see Zech 4:2–14; 6:9–13); James and John; and Peter and Paul. (CC p. 293)

If it were necessary to identify them as specific biblical persons, the most likely candidates would be Moses and Elijah, because they appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration (Mt 17:3; Mk 9:4; Lk 9:30). The fact that according to Luke (9:31) they spoke about Jesus’ coming “exodus” (ἔξοδος), which was soon to happen in Jerusalem, also lends credence to this identification. And the description of their godly powers in Rev 11:5–6, which speaks of fire from their mouths (cf. 2 Ki 1:10–14) and the closing of heaven so that it would not rain (cf. 1Ki 17:1) and the ability to turn water into blood (cf. Ex 7:14–21), encourages this same identification as well. However, it is not so important to press the identification of the two witnesses as Moses and Elijah. Indeed, Moses and Elijah only serve as models for the two witnesses, who in turn are symbols of the entire church in her mission of witnessing to Christ. Though it seems that Moses and Elijah *best fit the description of the two witnesses* and likely came to the mind of John, the two witnesses are not *actually* Moses and Elijah, nor any other OT prophets. For in the same way that John the Baptist was in spirit that Elijah who was foretold (Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6 {MT 3:1, 23-24}; Mt. 11:14; Lk. 1:76-79), so now these two prophetic witnesses are in the spirit of Moses and Elijah as they symbolize the church. For the church carries out that prophetic ministry in that same spirit of Moses and Elijah, which spirit is now symbolized by the two witnesses. (CC p. 294)

The church is symbolized by *two* witnesses most likely because of Deut 19:15, which prescribes that for a testimony to be received it must be established by two or three witnesses (Cf. Deut. 17:6; Mt. 18:16; 26:60-61; 2 Cor. 13:1-2). In his earthly ministry Jesus followed this Mosaic tradition when he urged his audience to receive his testimony because of two witnesses to it (Jn 8:16–18), and he practiced this when he sent out the twelve disciples and the seventy-two in teams of two (Mk 6:7; Lk 10:1; cf. Acts 15:39–40). This practice of having testimony concerning Jesus established by two witnesses is illustrated by the testimony of the two witnesses on the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah. So now the church is to proclaim prophetically the testimony of Jesus to the world as it is also thus confirmed to be the truth. Whether or not one interprets the fact that there are *two* witnesses to refer to the church’s royal and priestly functions as she carries out her mission (as suggested by a symbolical usage of Joshua and Zerubbabel in Zech 4:2–14 and as illustrated by John’s own reference to the two olive trees and two lampstands here in Rev 11:4), the church’s testimony to the truth of the message of Jesus Christ has a twofold witness. (CC pp. 294-295)

What specifically this twofold witness to the Gospel means at any given time will vary. For example, Primasius (sixth century) in his Latin commentary on Revelation says, “The two witnesses are the church as she preaches and prophetically proclaims from the two testaments.” Akin to this interpretation is one which says that the two witnesses illustrate the church’s twofold witness in proclaiming both Law and Gospel.⁴⁹ The Scriptures themselves may suggest what this

witness might be at times. In Heb 2:2–4 God himself by his Spirit gives an attending witness (συνεπιμαρτυροῦντος) in different miraculous ways and confirms (ἐβεβαίωθη) the message of salvation that has been proclaimed (cf. Rom 15:18–19; 2 Cor 12:11–12). In everyday life today this twofold witness could also be seen when the message of the church is presented by several Christians when not in collusion with each other (cf. Deut 18:17–22). Or, for example, two Christians or two churches may give the same message together in teams of two and thus assure the hearer of the validity of their message. God will, in varying ways, attest to the truthfulness of the Gospel as it is proclaimed by the church (cf. 1 Sam 3:19–21). (CC p. 295)

The end of Rev 11:4 states that the two witnesses “stand before the Lord of the earth.” They are in his presence, his glory and holiness, as they minister for him in their prophetic witness to Christ. The fact that they stand in God’s presence also suggests that they (that is, the church) are under God’s protection. During the time of their witness (cf. “the days of their prophetic proclamation,” 11:6) no one can “harm them” (11:5). As Swete says, “to kill God’s witnesses is impossible, so long as their witness is unfulfilled; those who attempt it bring destruction upon themselves.” Their ministry cannot be stopped or destroyed, for “not even the gates of hell can overcome it” (Mt 16:18). (CC p. 295)

The imagery of fire from their mouth which destroys their enemies (Rev 11:5) is reminiscent of God’s protection of Elijah when King Ahaziah in Samaria sent messengers to take the prophet into custody (2 Ki 1:1–15). Fire twice came from heaven and destroyed the messengers so that the king could not place his murderous hands on Elijah (2Ki 1:10, 12). Fire also came from heaven on Mt. Carmel to devour the sacrifice of Elijah as a demonstrative proof that the true God is Yahweh and not the Baal of the false prophets (1 Ki 18:38–39). The language here in Rev 11:5 is more likely to be metaphorical of God’s manner of protecting his witnesses, for in Jer 5:14 it is the word of Yahweh, spoken by the prophet, that would consume the ungodly people like fire consumes wood. Victorinus (third century) in his Latin commentary on Revelation suggests a similar interpretation when he says, “Fire goes out against the adversaries, as he [the witness] speaks the power of the Word.” In Sirach 48:1, the word of Elijah burned like a fiery lamp (ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ ὡς λαμπὰς ἐκαίετο). Whatever and whenever this protection of God will be, it is under God’s will and control and not that of the witness himself, though he may pray to God for it (cf. Lk 9:54). (CC pp. 295-296)

Similarly, “the authority to close heaven so that rain will not shower” (Rev 11:6) is like that of Elijah when he announced to Ahab that there would be no rain for several years (1 Ki 17:1). Again Sirach (48:2–3) states that it was by the word of the Lord that Elijah shut the heavens and as a result famine came about. God himself is the one who controls and dictates how even the forces of nature will aid the prophetic ministry of the church. As the prophet Amos (4:6–8; cf. Jer 3:3; Zech 14:17–19) declares, it is God who withheld rain, resulting in drought and hunger. It was God who struck the people’s vineyards with blight and mildew (Amos 4:9), all for the purpose of aiding the proclamation of his prophetic Word—in this case to move people to repentance (Amos 4:9-13; cf. Jer. 3:2-10; Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9, 11). (CC p. 296)

The witnesses also “have authority over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with any plague” (Rev 11:6). Under God’s will and judgment against Egypt, Moses exercised such authority. At the Lord’s command to Moses, Aaron lifted his staff and struck the waters of the Nile, and they became blood (Ex 7:19–20). Moses also had authority by God’s command to send many other plagues on the land of Egypt (Ex 8:1–11:10). Again, God himself, in aid of his people, controls and directs all earthly powers, natural and human. As the prophet declares, it is God who sends plagues on the earth to aid the prophet’s ministry (Amos 4:10). (CC p. 296)

Because of this descriptive imagery of God's protective power in Rev 11:5–6, it is quite natural to see Elijah and Moses as the prototypes of the two witnesses. However this may be, the two witnesses certainly are a representation of the church's prophetic witness to Jesus Christ. As the church carries out this prophetic ministry, no one and no power—human or demonic—can stop her mission. For it is God himself, in his sovereign and gracious rule through the exalted Christ, who will provide for and protect his church in her godly mission. For John must (δεῖ, 10:11) and she must carry out and complete this mission for the sake of the human race (10:8–11). (CC p. 296)

1,260 days. These are months of 30 days (42 months x 30 days = 1,260 days). (CSB)

sackcloth. † A coarse, dark cloth woven from the hair of goats or camels. It was worn as a sign of mourning and penitence (Joel 1:13; Jn. 3:5–6; Mt 11:21). It may indicate repentance and sorrow for sin, a mark of every true preacher of the gospel, or the sorrow and suffering that the witnesses will experience at the hands of the unbelievers. (CSB)

11:4 † The imagery emphasizes that the power for effective testimony is supplied by the Spirit of God. Oil in Scripture is associated with the Holy Spirit (cf. 1Sa 10:1–10; Ps 45:7; Ac 10:38; 2Co 1:21–22). The Holy Spirit comes through word and sacrament. (CSB)

two olive trees...two lampstands – Cf Zec 4:2–3, which describes God's chosen (anointed) leaders. (TLSB)

11:5 *harm.* Jesus predicted hardship and persecution for His followers but also assured them that the wicked could not hurt them in an ultimate sense (cf Mt 10:28; Lk 10:19). (TLSB)

fire pours ... and consumes. † Cf. Elijah's encounters with the messengers of Ahaziah (2Ki 1:10, 12). Fire is a symbol of God's consuming wrath (cf. also 2Th 1:7–8; Heb 12:29). (CSB)

God's prophets speak in the power of God's Spirit, who was symbolized by seven flames (Rv 4:5; cf Ac 2:3–4). (TLSB)

11:6 *power to shut up the sky.* Cf. the drought in the days of Elijah (1Ki 17:1; see also Lk 4:25; Jas 5:17). (CSB)

In days of Elijah, a famine lasting 3 ½ years was intended to move King Ahab to repentance. (TLSB)

waters into blood. God used Moses to bring the same plague on the Egyptians (Ex 7:17–21). (CSB)

God's purpose in all these plagues is to relieve His people's suffering while bringing the oppressors to repentance and justice (TLSB)

11:7 *when they have finished* – The witnesses must complete their testimony before they succumb to the beast's destructive power. (TLSB)

the beast. † First mention of the major opponent of God's people in the final days (see chs. 13 and 17). Suggested identifications of the beast include: (1) Roman antichrist, (2) every anti-Christian movement, civil or ecclesiastical, (3) Satan, parallel to 20:3; cf. 1Pe 5:8. That he comes up from the Abyss (see note on 9:1) indicates his demonic character. (CSB)

kill them. † They will suffer the same fate as their Lord (see v. 8). The time is shortly before the end of the world (cf. 20:3; Mt 24:14), when the church will suffer one final, and apparently successful, persecution. (CSB)

The Two Witnesses Are Killed (11:7–10)

But the church will suffer as a result of completing her mission. For when the two witnesses “have completed their witness,” the beast from the abyss “will make war with them and will conquer them and will kill them” (11:7). While the church is active in God’s mission, the fury of the enemy and its opposition never slackens, and finally, when the church has completed the mission, this fury of the enemy will be unleashed to destroy the witness of the church. (CC p. 297)

This enemy is symbolized by “the beast which is coming up out of the abyss” (τὸ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου, 11:7). Already in 9:1–11 John had seen the demonic forces from the abyss (τῆς ἀβύσσου, 9:1, 2, 11) afflicting the human race. And the leader of this demonic force was “the angel of the abyss” (τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου) whose name is “Abaddon” (Ἀβαδδὼν) and “Apollyon” (Ἀπολλύων, 9:11), which both mean “Destroyer.” In Revelation 13 John will see two beasts, one from the sea and the other from the earth, who are under the control of the dragon. That dragon is identified in 12:9 as Satan, the devil. This must also be the angel of the abyss, the leader of the demonic forces. While in 9:1–11 the demonic hosts (under their leader) afflict the unbelieving portion of the human race, in Revelation 12 and 13 they afflict the church—the woman who bore the Son. Here in 11:7 “the beast,” identified by the definite article (τὸ), is clearly the angel of the abyss (9:11) and the dragon and Satan (12:9). In particular, because the devil is called “the beast” here in 11:7, this designation refers to the dragon who operates against the church through the two beasts of Revelation 13 and who is thus a symbol of all the enemy forces (human in particular) who are under demonic influence and control (see 11:9–10). (CC p. 297)

Even though it causes much suffering (12:13–18), the fury of the enemy cannot stop the church as she witnesses. But when her mission of witnessing is completed, then she will be put to death and her prophetic voice will, for the moment, be stilled. In God’s own stewardship of time, not that of the two witnesses, when their prophetic ministry is completed, God will permit the beast to overcome them and kill them. Their death will be illustrative of the death of their Lord Christ (cf. 2Cor 4:10–11). Their bodies will be unburied for a time and on display, thus bringing to mind the depravity of the place where they died (Rev 11:8). (CC p. 297)

Wherever the church is trodden underfoot, that place and its inhabitants are as evil before God as Sodom and Egypt. In its most evil days of apostasy, Judah was likened to Sodom and Gomorrah, so much so that God for a time would no longer receive their worship and prayers (Is 1:8–15; cf. Ezek 16:46, 55). Jerusalem had become so evil and idolatrous that, in God’s eyes, she had become a harlot (Is 1:21). The place where the bodies of the two witnesses lay unburied is also likened to Egypt, which was the place of slavery for the Israelites. “Sodom” and “Egypt” are to be understood “spiritually” (Rev 11:8) and connected to Jerusalem, where the Lord was crucified. Every place where the witnesses carry the message of redemption becomes, for the time of their prophetic ministry, a holy place, like the holy city of Jerusalem. But when the inhabitants of that place reject their witness, the place of their ministry becomes like apostate Jerusalem, that is, like Sodom and Egypt. For to reject the witness of the church is to come into a depraved and idolatrous state (like Sodom), resulting in a spiritual slavery (like bondage in Egypt). (CC pp. 297-298)

The two rejected witnesses in Rev. 11:7-10 might be compared to the angelic messengers rejected by Sodom (Gen. 19:1-16). (CC p. 298)

It is for this reason that when the disciples of Jesus were sent out to proclaim the Gospel and it was rejected, they would shake the dust off of their feet as a testimony against the depraved idolatry of that place, a place that would be judged more severely than Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt. 10:14-15). (CC p. 298)

Many of the inhabitants of the city, now in a depraved exile from all that is holy, do not permit the bodies to be buried. The bodies are left in public view on the streets, so as to evoke from the population a prideful, joyful attitude which caused them to heap shame on the dead witnesses. The denial of proper burial was an insult by which scorn and ridicule could be placed upon those left exposed to the public eye. Psalms of Solomon 2:27 states that when no one buries a body, it shows how much the dead person was despised and held in contempt. Ps 79:1-4 presents a terrifying description of how the pagan nations defiled God's temple and shamed his people, so much so that the mockers of God did not even permit the bodies of those of his people whom they killed to be buried (Ps 79:3). To prevent such shame in Israel, the Mosaic Law stipulates that dead bodies were not to be left unburied (Deut 21:22-23; cf. 1 Sam 31:8-13; Jn 19:31). But the bodies of these two witnesses in Revelation 11 were not to receive burial. This is to be interpreted symbolically. Though there have been instances of bodies literally left unburied for public ridicule, this description metaphorically suggests the ongoing shame and ridicule that the unbelieving world heaps on the testimony of the church, especially in her demise, and particularly on her martyrs. (CC pp. 298-299)

The bodies of the witnesses are left unburied for "three and a half days" (11:9, 11). This number of days can be compared to the number of years of their prophetic ministry: 1,260 days (11:3), if converted to years (twelve lunar months of thirty days each month), would result in three and a half years. That is, in microcosm, for three and a half days, their death and the stillness of their prophetic voice is a reminder of the whole NT era, which is symbolized by the three and a half years during which they prophesied. However, their death and the silencing of their prophetic and living voice of witness does not eliminate their influence. Though silenced, even their unburied bodies are a testimony, a testimony that haunts those who rejected their witness, for these people cannot quite stamp the witnesses' testimony out of their memory. And in the end that testimony will judge them (see Jn 12:48). For the place and for the people of that place who heard their witness and then put to silence the voice of the church, that silence will endure. The next time that they will hear that witness will be in the judgment at the End—for their eternal ruin. The silence of the church for three and a half days in any given place at any time throughout the entire period from Christ's exaltation to his second coming is also a warning that the people who live there and their children may not again have an opportunity to hear the Gospel voice of God. (CC p. 299)

The people not only shame the bodies by leaving them unburied; they also "rejoice over them and celebrate and ... send gifts to one another" (11:10). They no longer are "tormented" (11:10) by the witnesses; they no longer have to listen to that prophetic voice that reminded them of God's holy laws and their sins and that there is only one way to salvation, the cross of Christ. The pagan inhabitants of the earth are so joyful that they are finally rid of the witnesses and their testimony, they send gifts to each other. And in such celebration they attempt even to obliterate any memory of the witnesses or their testimony. Such hatred of the church's Gospel is evident in the world's attempt to destroy the voice of the church. (CC p. 299)

Matthew 24:35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

11:8 *Their bodies will lie in the street.* In the Near East the denial of burial was a flagrant violation of decency. (CSB)

great city. Possibly Jerusalem, though some say Rome, Babylon or some other city. It may be symbolic of the world opposed to God (see 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18–19, 21). Sodom (see similarly Isa 1:10) refers to its low level of morality (cf. Ge 19:4–11), and Egypt emphasizes oppression and slavery. Some say that Jesus could have been crucified in Rome in the sense that her power extended throughout the known world and was immediately responsible for Christ’s execution. (CSB)

These places symbolize unbridled moral perversion (Gn 18:20) and exile for God’s people (Gn 15:13–14). Accordingly, this description of the two witnesses lying dead in the streets signifies that the morally perverse will kill Jesus’ witnesses and that God’s people will live as exiles and sojourners in this wicked world. (TLSB)

11:9 *three and a half days.* † A short time when compared with the three and a half years of their ministry. Cf. 20:3: “a short time.” (CSB)

Matthew 24:22, If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

11:10 *rejoice over them and make merry* – Just as the world rejoiced at the death of Jesus, so also it rejoices here at the demise of His witnesses. (TLSB)

The people not only shame the bodies by leaving them unburied; they also “rejoice over them and celebrate and ... send gifts to one another” (11:10). They no longer are “tormented” (11:10) by the witnesses; they no longer have to listen to that prophetic voice that reminded them of God’s holy laws and their sins and that there is only one way to salvation, the cross of Christ. The pagan inhabitants of the earth are so joyful that they are finally rid of the witnesses and their testimony, they send gifts to each other. And in such celebration they attempt even to obliterate any memory of the witnesses or their testimony. Such hatred of the church’s Gospel is evident in the world’s attempt to destroy the voice of the church. (CC)

11:11 *a breath of life from God entered them* – A dramatic validation of the true faith (cf. Ezek. 37:5, 10). (CSB)

Recalls both the creation account and the vision recorded by Ezekiel where the breath of God restores life to dry bones. Though the witnesses suffer temporal death, resurrection and vindication awaits (cf. v. 5). (TLSB)

But the joyful celebration over the demise of the church is short-lived, for after the three and a half days the two witnesses come back to life. The resurrection of the Christians at the End is the final and great coming back to life from death. Here the bringing to life by the Spirit of God refers more to the church being raised up again to witness after a time of persecution. From the time of Christ’s ascension to his second coming (the 1,260 days or forty-two months or three and a half years), the church—at one place or another—is continually being trodden underfoot and then raised again. Here and there the voice of the witness of the church is stilled, but after a period of time (the three and a half days) the church comes back to life to continue her witness. Just when the enemy thinks the church’s witness to Christ is silenced, God raises up the church

again, giving to her new life by which she begins again to shout out the Gospel of Christ. (CC p. 300)

Perhaps when John saw and heard “the spirit of life from God” (11:11) entering into the two witnesses, he thought of Ezek 37:1–14. There, in the vision of the valley of dry bones, the prophet saw a spirit of life enter into the bodies and cause them to stand on their feet (Ezek 37:10). Resurrection language is strong in Ezek 37:1–14, for 37:12 says that God would open their graves and bring his people out of them; God would lead them to the land of Israel. In Ezekiel this resurrection from the dead signifies that God would again raise up his people from the death of despair in captivity for life again in Israel. So here in Rev 11:11 the church is brought back to life here on earth. Just as assuredly as God will raise up the bodies of his people in the great resurrection at the present world’s end, so he now brings back to life the two witnesses, that is, the witnessing and confessing church. (CC p. 300)

fear fell on those who saw them – Not just the dread of consequences, but also a sense of awe. (TLSB) Mt. 10:24-31

11:12 *come up here* – A Summons out of the great tribulation (cf. 7:14) and into the eternal blessedness in God’s presence. (TLSB)

went up to heaven in a cloud. Cf. 1Th 4:17. (CSB)

Their prophetic ministry on earth was finished according to God’s plan; their apparent end on earth was a humiliating death, without burial. But their real end is to ascend into God’s heavenly glory. Thus their ministry of witness comes to the same conclusion as their Lord’s had: death, then resurrection and ascended glory (cf. 2 Cor 4:7–15). As the Lord Christ ascended into heaven and was received by a cloud, the two witnesses ascend to heaven “on the cloud” (Rev 11:12). The definite article (τῆ) before “cloud” most likely relates the cloud to the cloud of Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1:9), possibly also to the clouds upon which he will come again at the end of this world (Mt 24:30; 26:64). However this may be, the fact that the cloud is mentioned indicates how much God glorifies his two witnesses. The unbelieving world shames them, but God envelopes them in his glory, the glory of the ascended Christ. (CC pp. 300-301)

enemies watched them. Cf. 1:7. (CSB) Phil. 2:10-11

11:13 *great earthquake.* Like the earthquakes coinciding with the death and resurrection of Jesus, this quake also heralds God’s triumph. (TLSB)

The church is raised in such a way that “great fear fell upon those watching” (Rev 11:11). And as they continue to watch God’s people ascend into heaven (11:12), these enemies of the church are struck by a further fear when they experience “a great earthquake” (11:13). The earthquake causes “a tenth of the city” to be destroyed and seven thousand prominent people to perish (11:13). Earthquakes often accompany and attest God’s mighty acts. In Ezek 38:19–20 an earthquake precedes the End, in particular the end of the enemies of God’s people, portrayed as Gog from Magog in Ezekiel 38–39. According to Hag 2:6–9, a great shaking will occur in the heavens and earth, a shaking that will cause nations to tremble when God exhibits his glory on earth. In Zech 14:1–5 on the day of his coming, Yahweh will cause the Mount of Olives to split in half and thus cause the enemies of his people to flee. Matthew’s account of Jesus’ death (Mt 27:51) reports that the earth (ἡ γῆ) was shaken as in an earthquake (ἐσεισθη) and the rocks were split in two (ἐσχίσθησαν), and at his resurrection a great earthquake (σεισμός μέγας) happened

(Mt 28:2). And in the epistle to the Hebrews it says that before the End, God will once again shake (σεισω) the earth and the heavens (Heb 12:26). (CC p. 301)

In Revelation an earthquake (σεισμός) is mentioned seven times. (Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13 {twice}; 11:19; 16:18 {twice}) On two occasions (8:5; 11:19), the earthquake accompanies the revelation of the awesome and fearful majesty of God, together with thunder and noises and lightning flashes. An earthquake also appears in connection with the End (6:12; 16:18). In 11:13 it occurs in connection with God raising up the two witnesses, a demonstration of the majestic and awesome glory that attends the church as God raises her up. However, the earthquake in particular is a pointer to the majestic and fearful judgment of God that strikes the unbelieving world because of the way the pagan nations treated his people. For this judgment the saints in heaven have been praying (6:9–11). God shaking the earth refers not only to literal geophysical tremors, but also (and perhaps more often) metaphorically to political, economic, and sociological shakings by which God shows his displeasure and anger over the way the world treats his church and her witness. Examples of this are evident when political systems have silenced the witness of the church in their effort to destroy God’s people. Imperial Rome was shaken by God so that it eventually lay in ruins while God raised and preserved his church. And at the close of the twentieth century, political and economic powers lie in ruins after trying to destroy God’s church. Yes, “the Word of our God stands forever” (Is 40:8; 1Pet 1:25). (CC pp. 301-302)

seven thousand – This number is likely symbolic, but it is not clear exactly what it signifies. (TLSB)

The earthquake kills “seven thousand men of renown” (Rev 11:13), either famous or notorious persons. “Seven thousand” is a symbolic number, indicating the control of the sevenfold Spirit and the will of God (see 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). Whatever the actual number of those who perish in any given instance, it is according to God’s mind and judgment and not according to some arbitrary fate or accidental chance, for such a capricious understanding of historical events would be idolatrous in character (see Deut 32:39–43; Ezek 31:15–17; Amos 4:6–13). “Seven thousand” is in proximity to the “tenth of the city” (Rev 11:13) which was toppled by the same earthquake. In God’s shaking, great damage was done to the city, and, as a result, many people perished. This catastrophe even causes some of the former hardened unbelievers to “[give] glory to the God of heaven” (11:13). Does this mean that some repent and come to believe the church’s witness to Christ? Possibly so, for the expression “give glory to God” can indicate such repentance (see Lk 5:25; Acts 13:48). (CC p. 302)

gave glory to the God of heaven. Not an act of repentance but the terrified realization that Christ, not the antichrist, is the true Lord of all. (CSB)

This worship is motivated by fear rather than sincere faith. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). (TLSB)

11:14 *second woe.* Cf. 9:12. (CSB)

One or more elements of the conflict in 9:13–11:13. (TLSB)

The second “woe” (8:13) had been revealed by the sixth trumpet-angel in 9:13–21, the scene of the last battle before this world’s end. “The second woe has come and gone. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.” These words in 11:14 are a bridge between 9:13–21 and 11:15–19, and thus they introduce the scene of the seventh trumpet-angel, that is, the third woe. The three woes are, then, the last three scenes of the second vision of events on earth: the demonic forces

attacking the human race (9:1–12); the last battle (9:13–21); and the end of the present world itself (11:15–19). Between the sixth scene (second woe, 9:13–21) and the seventh scene (third woe, 11:15–19) there is situated an interlude (10:1–11:14) consisting of two scenes (10:1–11 and 11:1–14). (CC p. 302)

Conclusion

The interlude of 7:1–17 pictured the church militant and the church triumphant for the purpose of encouraging the Christians on earth with the promise that God would keep them in faith no matter what they suffered. The interlude of 10:1–11:14 portrays the missionary witnessing role of the church: Christians are encouraged to know that despite the persecution of the world, God will protect them in their mission and will provide for them so that they may complete their prophetic ministry. (CC pp. 302-303)

The two witnesses symbolize the entire church during the whole of the NT era. They also represent the entire church during a particular time period within the greater period between Christ's ascension and his second coming—whether during the time of John, during the time of the twentieth century, or any other time. What is symbolized by the two witnesses can also be applied to a particular church or congregation, or even to the life span of an individual Christian. For the church as a whole, as well as for each particular part of it and for each Christian, there is a specific time span during which she may complete her ministry, a time span given by God himself. When that time span is fulfilled and her ministry is completed, God may permit the enemy to trod underfoot the church or individual Christians and thus silence their witnessing voice on earth. But after such a demise God may again lift up his church, reviving or resurrecting her so that she can again witness to the world (cf. the Reformation). As for individual Christians, after their allotted time on earth for witnessing has come to an end, they too will experience a lifting up and then participate in the heavenly worship portrayed in, for example, 4:4, 10–11; 7:9–17. (CC pp. 302-303)

Thus the picture given by the scene of the two witnesses is that the Christian church—composed of individual Christians—is always living in witness, dying for that witness, and being raised again for further witness. And this happens all through the time period covered by the prophetic message of Revelation, the time from Christ's ascension to this world's end. When the church and/or a segment of it is crushed by the enemy, many, if not most, of the individual Christians of that particular church may die, in which case their own being filled with the spirit of life and standing up again (11:11) will be when they ascend to God's glory in heaven (11:12). When that particular church is revived so that she can again witness, her witnessing ministry will be carried on by new Christians who have taken the place of those who have gone to heaven. However, some of the individual Christians who have suffered through the crushing of the church may survive, and instead of ascending to heaven, they may be a part of that church's revived and new mission. (CC pp. 302-303)

The final and terrifying assault on the church and her witness to Christ will be Armageddon (16:12–16) and the battle of Gog and Magog (20:7–10). And the final and great instance when the church will be caused to stand on her feet (11:11) and called to “come up here” (11:12) will be the resurrection at the End, when the Lord Christ will come to claim his bride for eternal life in the new heaven and new earth (19:1–21; 20:11–15; 21:1–22:5). Each revival of the church here on earth in order to witness again, and each raising of a Christian to God's heavenly glory throughout the time period of the NT era, is a type and foreshadowing of the great and final revival—the resurrection at the End. (CC pp. 302-303)

third woe. The dramatic climax of the trumpet vision is soon to follow. It should end with Judgment Day, but as at 8:1, the vision ends just short of that event. (TLSB)

11:1–14 Using the figure of twin witnesses, John describes the response of a hostile world to the preaching of God’s Word. Though ample opportunity is given for people to receive the blessings of repentance and the Gospel, most choose to reject the Church and persecute it. However, the apparent triumph of the Gospel’s enemies is never the last word. Jesus’ promise stands true: those remaining faithful unto death will be given the crown of life (2:10). • “Lord, be our light when worldly darkness veils us; Lord, be our shield when earthly armor fails us; And in the day when hell itself assails us, Grant us Your peace, Lord.” Amen. (LSB 659:3)

The Seventh Trumpet

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” 16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. 18 The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.” 19 Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

11:15–19† The seventh trumpet: the end of the world. (CSB)

11:15 *seventh angel blew.* The series of trumpet blasts is now continued (see 9:13) and completed. (CSB)

Introduces the climactic scene of this cycle of visions. (TLSB)

were loud voices – The scene switches from earth to heaven when the saints arise (v 12). (TLSB)

With the sound of the seventh trumpet-angel the seventh and last scene of the second vision of events on earth appears. “Great voices in heaven” pronounce or sing out the glorious news that “the kingdom of the cosmos has become our Lord’s and his Christ’s” (11:15). Whether the song is another stanza in the great Te Deum begun in 4:8 and continued in 4:11; 5:9–14; and 7:10–12 or whether it is an independent shout of praise, it is a voice and verse of celebration. The hymn celebrates the victory of God and his Anointed One. (CC pp. 306-307)

This shout of joy and praise is in sharp contrast to the opening of the seventh seal and the ensuing silence (8:1)—the seal which concluded the first vision of events on earth (the seven seals) and introduced the second vision (the seven trumpets). The silence then suggested the fear and awe and the anticipation that the mighty God was about to act in and through the events to be displayed in the second vision, the scenes of which were then introduced by the seven trumpet-angels. Now the mighty acts of God’s judgment have been completed, and God’s people in their faith are now vindicated at the moment when God openly takes his reign at the end of all things. The “great voices in heaven” now recognize this final triumph of God through his Christ—which is also the triumph of his people. (CC p. 307)

The voices are not identified. In 7:9–10 the saints in heaven (the church triumphant) shout out with a “loud voice” their praise of God and the Lamb. In 19:1 “an immense crowd in heaven” proclaims in a “loud voice” its joy that God has judged the great enemy of his people, the harlot. In 19:6 John will hear the “voice of an immense crowd” praising God because he, at the End, has taken his reign; it is a shout of celebration that is similar to that of 11:15. Though the voices in Revelation 19 are not identified, they seem to be that of the heavenly host of saints, as in 7:9–10. The reason for the praise in the scene here in 11:15 is the kingdom and reign of God and his Christ. That reason is similar to the one in 5:9–10, where the heavenly hosts, both saints and angels, praise the triumphant Lamb at his exaltation, for he has made the saints “a kingdom and priests, and they rule on the earth” (5:10). This similarity suggests that in 11:15 (cf. also 11:17) the cause for the celebration includes God’s reign over and through his saints and so the saints are likely to be prominent among those expressing the acclamation. Another similarity is the proximity of the twenty-four worshiping elders in both 5:8 and 11:16, and these elders represent the entire church—the saints of both testaments. (CC p. 307)

kingdom of our Lord. Cf. Ex 15:18; Ps 10:16; Zec 14:9. (CSB)

of our Lord and of his Christ. Cf. Ps 2:2. (CSB)

For a time, creation has suffered the usurpation of the devil, “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31). He offered dominion to Christ in exchange for His worship, on the basis that the world’s authority and glory had been delivered to him (Luke 4:5-7). Rather than comply, however, Jesus established His rightful and eternal reign through His cross, which inflicted a mortal wound on His enemy. (TLSB)

The heavenly host sings in celebration because “the kingdom of the cosmos has become [their] Lord’s and his Christ’s.” Saints and angels celebrate the fact that the entire creation of God, because of Christ’s redemptive and reconciling victory, has now become God’s again (see Rom 8:18–25; 2 Pet 3:11–13; Rev 21:1, 5). The “world-empire, once dominated by an usurping power ... has now at length passed into the hands of its true Owner and Imperator” (cf. Ps 82:8; Dan 2:44). As was promised in Ps 2:4–9 and in Zech 14:9, the Lord Yahweh through his Anointed One will become King of the earth, and on that day when it happens, the whole earth will acknowledge that there is but one God, whose name is Yahweh, and only one anointed King through whom he saves and through whom he is known (cf. Acts 4:10–12). However one interprets “cosmos,” at the End it belongs to God and to the one who won it back for him, the Christ. (CC p. 308)

The “cosmos” (κόσμος) can refer to the entire created universe or to any part of it, in particular the earth and the human race. It is not always possible to determine in every instance exactly what the nuance in the Bible is, though for the most part it refers to the world. However, there are instances in both the LXX and in the NT where it might mean the universe. (CC p. 308)

In Revelation the word κόσμος (“cosmos”) appears only three times. Rev 13:8 refers to “the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world” (τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου). Rev 17:8 refers to those who are impressed by the beast as those whose names are not written in “the book of life from the foundation of the world” (ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου). In both instances the “foundation of the cosmos [κόσμου]” could refer either to the world or to the entire universe. However, because the world is the focus of God’s redemptive activity, 13:8 and 17:8 most likely refer to the “foundation of the *world*,” but as a part of the universe. (See Gen. 1:1; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 102:25; Acts 14:15; Heb. 1:10) (CC pp. 308-309)

Here in 11:15 the cosmos is that part of God's creation that was/is contested by the forces of evil, that part the devil claimed as his own. It thus refers to that part of God's creation which rebelled against him, the human race, but also to that creation itself which was placed under the judgment of God because of human sin (Gen 3:17–19; Rom 8:18–23). *At the End in the final display of the victory of Christ, God will openly claim all of his creation as his own, in particular that part of creation that was once under the prince of darkness. God will publicly display his reign over all his creation as he lays claim to that realm of his creation that has been restored through Christ's redemption.* Thus God in his Christ will gloriously demonstrate that he is once again the Lord of all creation and alone its sovereign Lord. (CC p. 309)

11:16-18 This is cause for celebration: God's everlasting reign through Christ over his cosmos and especially over his redeemed people. The "twenty-four elders" (11:16) continue the hymn of celebration by adding their stanza of thanksgiving to the Te Deum. In the vision of the elevation and coronation of the Lamb in 5:6–8 the twenty-four elders, together with the four winged creatures, praised the Lamb because by his blood he purchased a people for God and thus made them his kingdom. Now at the End the elders again sing in thanksgiving to God, but this time by a hymn of praise in which they laud him because he has assumed his great power and has begun his reign. As in 5:6–8 the elders represent the entire people of God, the church universal both before and after the incarnation of Christ. This rejoicing at the End, when God takes his reign, John will see once again (19:6–8), but then it will be expressed by all the saints as the bride of the Lamb. (CC p. 309)

When God takes his reign at the End, it means a time of judgment for the pagan nations, a time for destroying those who were destroying the earth. It is therefore designated the third woe (see 8:13; 9:12; 11:14). While the Christians celebrate in worship of God, the unbelieving nations are suffering their woe, their eternal judgment (cf. 2 Thess 1:6–7). (CC p. 309)

The fact that the pagan nations "were destroying the earth" (Rev 11:18) is a descriptive way of saying that they were participating with the devil and all evil forces in their attempt to usurp the power of God and take over his reign. In the OT the destroying or defiling of the earth and especially the sacred land of Israel was often stated to be the result of the sinful depravity of the people, a spiritual corruption which even physically cursed the land (see Amos 4:7–9). In Lev 18:24–28 the Israelites are warned by God not to defile themselves and the land by the sins of the people around them (Lev 18:1–23), for the pagan nations had committed such horrifying actions of depravity that the land was moved to vomit out its inhabitants (Lev 18:28; cf. Ezra 9:11). Here in Revelation 11 the pagan nations were destroying the earth because they were *unclean*, and they made the land *unclean*. But now they are judged. (CC pp. 309-310)

As God takes back his reign from the usurpers, the pagan nations seethe with anger. But their fury at God as he vindicates his righteousness and that of his people in Christ is quickly turned into a terrified fear. For God's wrath overwhelms them as he now claims his kingdom (see 6:15–17). The time had come "for the dead to be judged" (11:18). Judgment will take place at the resurrection so that both those still living at Christ's return and the raised dead (1 Thess 4:15–17) will stand before God's judgment seat (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10; cf. Mt 25:31–46; Rev 20:11–13). (CC p. 310)

11:17 *who is and who was.* In 1:4, 8; 4:8 he is also the one "who is to come." This is now omitted because his reign is here pictured as having begun. (CSB)

begun to reign – Cf. v. 15. At present, Christ's reign can be resisted; His subjects must willingly submit to His rule. At Judgment Day, however, things will be very different. Then,

Christ will no longer tolerate any opposition. He will once and for all forcibly His enemies. (TLSB)

11:18 *nations raged.* See Ps 48:4. (CSB)

your wrath. God's wrath triumphs in 14:10–11; 16:15–21; 20:8–9. (CSB)

dead to be judged. † Resurrection of both unbelievers (a day of wrath) and believers (a reward). Anticipated in 6:10, carried out in 20:11–15. (CSB)

Judgment Day is again announced (cf. v. 12). The reward of the faithful and the destruction of the impious is a hand. (TLSB)

your servants the prophets. See Da 9:6, 10; Am 3:7; Zec 1:6. (CSB)

saints ... name. † Could be translated: "your saints, namely, those who reverence your name" (epexegetical *kai*). (CSB)

Both small and great. † An alternate rendering: "in respect to both small and great" (accusative of respect, not active *s* in previous phrases). (CSB)

11:19 *temple.* † The holy Christian church. Now it is opened, so that all (not only the high priest in the OT) believers will have access to the presence of God. (CSB)

The temple is God's habitation (heaven). As such, this opening indicates that the Lord is accessible to His people. (TLSB)

After the judgment all is ready for the heavenly temple of God (ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) to appear and be opened in plain view to be seen by all. God's saints, in the perfect righteousness into which their mortal bodies have been raised (see 1 Cor 15:52–55), will now see God's presence and glory face to face (cf. 1 Jn 3:2; Rev 22:3–4). The ark of the covenant (ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης, Rev 11:19) in God's heavenly temple also appears in clear view for all to see. In the OT the ark of the covenant (1 Ki 8:1) was the symbol of God's covenantal presence with his people. (CC p. 310)

ark of his covenant. The OT ark was a chest of acacia wood (Dt 10:1–2). It symbolized the throne or presence of God among his people. It was probably destroyed when Nebuzaradan destroyed the temple in Jerusalem (2Ki 25:8–10). In the NT it symbolizes God's faithfulness in keeping covenant with his people. (CSB)

Previously this was absolutely inaccessible. Those who approached it were punished with death. John foresees that the face-to-face communion with God draws ever nearer. (TLSB)

The ark which first stood in the tabernacle later resided in the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple (1 Ki 8:6). When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, probably the ark was also destroyed (2 Ki 25:9). However, there is a legend (2 Macc 2:1–8) that tells how Jeremiah rescued the ark and the incense altar. He hid them in a cave on Mt. Nebo, from where Moses saw the Promised Land (Deut 34:1). Jeremiah supposedly blocked up the cave's entrance and then made the prophecy that the ark would not be brought to light again until the Lord God would regather his people. Whatever happened to the ark, it became for God's devout people a reminder of God's promise that one day he would rescue them from all evil and bring them to

everlasting glory, all because of his covenant of grace through atonement by shed blood. (CC pp. 310-311)

While the legend of Jeremiah hiding the ark encouraged this hope, Jeremiah himself (Jer 3:16) prophesied that the ark would no longer be missed nor even come to mind and that another one would not be made. This suggests that the ark itself would never be found again. It most likely was destroyed with the first temple and that is why it is absent from the list of temple furnishings brought back from exile to the second temple (Ezra 1:7–11; 5:14–16; 7:19). Here in Rev 11:19 the promise of God’s saving mercy, as represented by the ark, has come to its glorious conclusion before his heavenly presence. In his Greek commentary on Revelation Oecumenius (sixth century) says that the ark represents “the good things in the coming age that have now been hidden from men, as made evident in the saying” (ἀγαθὰ τέ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ μελλόντι αἰῶνι ἀποκεκρυμμένα ἀπὸ τῶν νῦν ἀνθρώπων, δηλοῖ ὁ λέγων), and then he quotes 1 Cor 2:9, “What the eye has not seen and the ear not heard, and what has not arisen in the heart of a man, these things God has prepared for those who love him.” (CC p. 311)

lightning ... heavy hail. † Symbols of the destruction that God’s anger finally will bring on an impenitent world population. (CSB)

These events regularly accompany OT theophanies (cf. Ex. 19:16-19; Ps. 18:11-15). These signs indicate that God is about to appear. However, the vision is cut short (cf. 8:1). (TLSB)

The “lightning flashes and noises and thunders and an earthquake and large hail” (Rev 11:19) are (as at Mt. Sinai) a majestic affirmation of God which speaks a loud “amen!” Such manifestations of nature attend God’s holy presence (see Ex 19:16; Rev 8:5; 16:18). As Alford states, these are “the solemn salvos, so to speak, of the artillery of heaven.” And when such “salvos” sound, all fall face down in fear and awe. (CC p. 311)

11:15–19 John describes the transition from Satan’s temporary rule of the world to the consummation of God’s reign. For now, people can refuse to obey God. But such resistance will someday be met with an irresistible outpouring of wrath and judgment. Christ’s people need not fear that day. Instead, they may long for the day when God will be all in all, and perfect harmony will again prevail. • “And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, Steals on the ear the distant triumph song, And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia!” Amen. (LSB 677:5)