

Newsletter April 2018

In this Newsletter, as we move on in our study into Chapter 11, we still find ourselves within the interval of time between the sixth and the seventh trumpets as described in last month's newsletter. Up until this point, the narrative of the Revelation has been chronological, as one event directly followed the next. However, we find that this chapter constitutes a temporary break in the overall chronological narrative of this book; it contains a fold-back in time to Jerusalem at the very beginning of Daniel's seventieth week. The text from now on details events chronologically paralleling Daniels seventieth week – until we reach Chapter 15, verse 5. There, the earlier chronological narrative resumes as seven angels step out of the Temple in Heaven (cf. vs. 19 below) carrying seven bowls of God's pure wrath, each of which will be poured out upon the earth's inhabitants (Re.15:5-16:1-21) as the seventh trumpet repeatedly punctuates each plague in turn (cf, Re. 10:9; 11:15 below).

“And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein” (Re.11:1).

As we mentioned in our introductory newsletter of March 2017 and have already discovered, the Revelation is decidedly Jewish in its imagery throughout; this representational process is no more in evidence than in this chapter. The Temple mentioned here is apparently the one that will be built in Jerusalem at the beginning of the reign of the Antichrist – the rider of the white horse in Chapter 6, verse 2. This future Temple is commonly referred to as the Third Temple, inasmuch as Zerubbabel's second Temple was not razed when Herod the Great expanded and renovated it; although we must note, others may refer to it as the Fourth Temple, since Zerubbabel's Temple had fallen into a very poor state of repair and disuse in Herod's day.

The “rod” that John was given to measure the Temple is *rhabdo* in the Greek, which can refer to a cane, a sceptre, or staff, and this particular rod was made from what is called *kalamos* in the Greek – the stem of a reed-like plant that often grew to be as much as 20 feet high; the stem was hollow making the rod lightweight. Such rods were commonly used to determine measurements of length. Although the common unit of length in that day was a cubit (about 18 inches), we note that this rod's length is not specified here, nor is any physical dimensions for this third Temple recorded by John. That and the additional fact that John was told by the angel to measure the people that “worship therein” as well as the Temple and the altar, indicates that something other than a linear measurement of physical length is meant. God often “maps out” that which He intends to protect or that which He intends to destroy through a measurement of its conformance to his will.

Practice of the ceremonial law was the primary purpose for which Solomon's first Temple was constructed. We must note that this Third Temple is not in direct conformance with God's will, inasmuch as the destruction of Herod's Temple in AD 70 had put a permanent end to the old sacrificial system. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross has fully resolved man's sin problem once and for all through his own blood, and any effort to return to animal sacrifice in the future would amount to a blasphemous rejection of God's gift of his Son. Not surprisingly the Antichrist permits its construction. Nevertheless, God is making a favorable distinction between the unenlightened Jewish worshipers inside the Temple and the ungodly Gentiles without, as an act of grace.

“But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty *and* two months” (Re.11:2).

The court outside the third Temple was not to be measured by John. The historian Josephus wrote that there was a wall within the outer court of Herod's temple, which was breast high having regular columns with lettering on them in Greek and Latin warning that non-Jews were forbidden to approach any nearer the Temple proper under penalty of death. That “middle wall” of separation between Jew and Gentile was broken down by the Christian Gospel of Jesus Christ, wherein both Jew and Gentile are made one in Him (cf. Ep.2:14). Nevertheless, Jews will not yet have accepted that fact when they build this third Temple.

If you travel to Israel today, you will discover an ecumenical city, which is trodden down by religious Gentiles of every kind. There are Roman Catholic edifices of every description, as well as many Muslim mosques. The most notable Islamic edifice is the Dome of the Rock, which is located on the Temple Mount, along with the Al-aqsa Mosque – the very area where today's Jews intend to build this future third Temple. Obviously, this difficult issue must somehow be resolved before the third Temple can be built.

John is informed that all Gentiles have been allotted another forty-two months (3 ½ years) to trample upon Jerusalem, after which none will remain in the city. This mass exodus of Gentiles from Jerusalem will most likely take place near the middle of Daniel's seventieth week, as Jesus puts an end to the great period of tribulation with catastrophic signs from Heaven including the sign of his own return to earth in judgment (cf. Mt.24:30).

“And I will give *power* unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth” (Re.11:3,4).

These two messengers will be sent to witness to Israel during the entire second half of Daniel's seventieth week. There is little doubt that one of these two witnesses is Elijah the Tishbite of upper Galilee (cf. Mal.4:5), but there has been much less certainty concerning the identity of the second witness. The olive tree is symbolic of Israel, thus implying that both men are of the nation of Israel. Some say the second witness is John the Baptist, whose person represented a type of Elijah at Jesus' first advent. Others say he is Elisha, or one of the other old-testament prophets. However, we must agree with the majority that he is most likely Moses, who represents the Old-covenant Law, as Elijah represents the Old-covenant prophets (cf. Mal:4:4). It takes two witnesses to verify any truth, and God is providing his own witnesses through these two men. Their comparison to two candlesticks suggests the light and truth of their witness, which are spiritually fueled as oil from the two olive trees. They will witness to the Jewish population of Israel by preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom thus signifying to them that Jesus is their awaited Messiah and King. Those who accept their witness, repent, and believe in Jesus Christ will receive the seal of God before the great Day of the Lord dawns in severe Judgment (cf. Re. 7:2-8).

“And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will” (Re.11:5,6).

The two witnesses will also warn the entire world of the terrifying judgments, which are close at hand, through illustrative examples. They will exercise the power given them to create droughts over the earth's surfaces, turn bodies of water into blood, and send forth plagues upon the earth as a preview of the terrible judgments to come. Nevertheless, debased men and women of that period will not heed their warnings, but will seek instead to kill the two messengers. Nevertheless, any attempt to kill them will be met by an all-consuming fire issuing from their mouths that will devour all their attackers. This is probably a literal fire spoken of here, but whether it will directly come out of their mouths, or materialize at their command to consume their enemies is impossible to determine. In this manner, they will continue to witness during the remaining three and one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week.

“And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies *shall lie* in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified (Re.11:7,8).

As Daniel's seventieth week is rapidly coming to an end, the “beast” (Greek, *thērion* = a dangerous creature) who has ascended out of the bottomless pit will attack and overcome the two witnesses.. Many associate this “beast” with the Antichrist's false prophet, who is later introduced as a beast coming out of the earth (cf. Re. 13:11). However, considering the present context given here, he most likely is Apollyon, the king of the demons, who ascended from the bottomless pit as Satan opened it. This “beast” will make war against the two witnesses to overcome and kill them. Whereas no mortal man could withstand them, Satan will have succeeded by enlisting the power of the underworld. Demons, who had long survived the perpetual fire of the bottomless pit, would not be deterred by fire that came from the mouths of the two witnesses.

The death of these two witnesses likely comes about during the demonically inspired war described in Revelation 9:16-18. The city spiritually referred to as Sodom and Egypt is Jerusalem, “where our Lord was crucified.” At this time, Jerusalem will have become the seat of the Antichrist, and it will be awash with the basest forms of immorality on a par with that found earlier in Sodom and Egypt. The demonic worship by godless Gentiles will resemble the demonic polytheism practiced in ancient Egypt. The bodies of the two witnesses will

be laid out in the street of Jerusalem for three and one-half days without burial – both in order to intimidate the Jewish inhabitants of the city and to shake their fists at God who had sent them.

“And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth” (Re.11:9,10).

Their murderers apparently will fear to bury the witnesses out of sight because after three days following our Lord’s crucifixion, He had arose from the sealed tomb in which his body had been placed. They apparently assume from ancient tradition that resurrection of the witnesses can not take place if they closely observe them for more than three days. During those three and one-half days, we are told of the grotesque rejoicing of all the inhabitants of the earth upon hearing of the death of the two witnesses. The entire world will gloat over their dead bodies, gleefully observing them through television, or perhaps some more-advanced future media, for more than “three days and three nights” to assure themselves that they are truly dead and will remain so.

After three days and nights have past, the people of earth will begin to rejoice because they believe that they have permanently cut off the source of God’s wrath that they have been suffering. Of course, they have only killed the messengers because they did not like their message; it will not deter God’s ultimate judgment that must soon follow. In a mocking parody of what seems very much like the present-day highly secularized Christmas celebration, they will send each other gifts and make merry. This will be for them Christmas and New Year all wrapped up in one day. Much as many today ignorantly make the annual celebration of the birth of Christ a drunken orgy and in so doing dishonor Him, the partying will be even more sinfully blatant at this time. It will be an “in-your-face” celebration intended to defy and dishonor God, inasmuch as they will have killed the means of God delivering his harsh messages to them.

“And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them” (Re.11:11,12).

After three and one-half days, God breathed life back into the two witnesses and they began to stir. Soon thereafter, they stood upon their feet. Terror immediately fell upon all who watched them, because they feared what these men would do in retaliation. However, God called down to them to return to Heaven. The work, for which they had been sent to earth, had been completed. Their final message to a sinful world was in their ascension into Heaven before the eyes of their enemies in clouds of glory. God had finished his pleading with mankind for them to repent; eternal judgment before the great white throne was all that remained for them.

“And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven” (Re.11:13).

This great earthquake will slay seven thousand men in Jerusalem as a consequence of a tenth part of the city being destroyed. A great fear will come over the faithful Jewish remnant remaining in Jerusalem, who had not participated in this blasphemous farce, and they will give glory to God for his swift and decisive action.

“The second woe is past; *and*, behold, the third woe cometh quickly. And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Re: 11:14, 15).

At last, the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, and the third and last woe announced by the flying angel will come upon the earth-dwellers very quickly. This seventh and last trumpet marks the beginning of the closing judgments of the great and fearful Day of the Lord during which time God will no longer be pleading with men to repent. As this last trumpet sounds, the “kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our God, and of his Christ; and He shall reign over it for ever and ever.”

Although the seventh trumpet is sounded here, we will not see the terrifying effects of it upon the earth until Chapter 16 as seven bowls of God’s fierce wrath will be poured out full strength upon the earth-dwellers thus putting to an end mankind’s sinful rebellion against Him. Only after the destruction of the worlds false religious and corrupt commercial systems recorded in Chapters 17 and 18 will we observe Christ’s victorious return to

earth in Chapter 19 as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” to establish his kingdom on earth. Nevertheless, the rejoicing in Heaven is seen here as being immediate.

“And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned” (Re.11:16,17).

In Heaven, John saw the twenty-four elders, which he had earlier observed seated before the throne of God, fall upon their faces and worship God, because He had exercised his sovereign power to reign over the earth.

“And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth” (Re.11:18).

The twenty-four elders are looking forward to four actions, which they know God will take in this final hour: First, God will pour his wrath full strength upon the angry nations that had long thwarted his efforts to redeem mankind. Secondly, God’s servants, prophets, and saints, as well as all who have revered his Name will be rewarded for their faithfulness. Third, in complete contrast, the reprobate dead will at long last be raised and judged before the great white throne to determine their eternal state in Hell. Forth, God will utterly destroy all of those whose sinful activities had warranted the destruction of his perfect and beautiful earth (cf. Ge.1:31).

“And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail” (Re.11:19).

In complete contrast to the Temple we saw at the beginning of this chapter, we discover that God has a Temple in Heaven that is not made by the hands of men. This Temple in Heaven was likely the blueprint after which the Tabernacle and later the first Temple on earth had been constructed. This heavenly Temple had been kept closed, its contents hidden, but now it is opened to view. Amazingly, the Ark of the Covenant is seen in this majestic Heavenly Temple. It was once the central and most sacred object in all of Judaism, and it stood alone hidden out of view within the holy of holies of the Temple. It is mentioned more than 200 times in the Old Testament, and then after Jeremiah 3:16 it is not mentioned again except as one historic reference to it in Hebrews 9:4. Finally, it is mentioned here in Revelation 11:19 as existing in the Temple of God in Heaven.

The Ark mysteriously disappeared on earth around 700 BC soon after the reign of King Hezekiah, most likely during the reign of his wicked son, Manasseh (cf. 2Chr. 33:1,2). In Jesus’ day, Herod’s Temple had no Ark standing within it. When the High Priest entered into the holy of holies each year on the Day of Atonement, there would have been no mercy seat on which to sprinkle the blood offering for the people. It has been supposed that there was but a low platform in the holy of holies, which was prepared to receive the Ark should it be found; but, the Ark was never again seen upon the earth.

Speculation abounds concerning what has happened to the Ark, and many theories have been put forth. One recent premise put forth by Robert Cornuke, a noted biblical investigator and explorer, is that the Temple priests had removed it to keep it safe, and that over time it had come to rest in a small but heavily fortified chapel in Axum, Ethiopia where it remains today. Nevertheless, no one has been allowed to examine the artifact to verify its authenticity, or even to look upon it to determine its existence. Without proper protection from the elements, the Ark could have long ago crumbled away into dust. All of that speculation becomes irrelevant because any reasonable interpretation of Revelation 19 requires us to accept the fact that God Himself had removed the Ark when his Shekinah glory had departed from the Temple on earth (cf. Ez. 10:1-22), and that He has kept it safely preserved out of sight within this majestic Temple in Heaven to be revealed during this period in time.

The lightnings, voices, and thunderings coming from the Heavenly Temple, indicate that God is preparing to undertake very forceful decisive action. The earthquake and hail that simultaneously takes place upon the earth is a solemn warning to a reprobate mankind that God is about to send forth his ultimate judgments. As we shall discover later in this continuing study, God’s final judgment will involve seven angels coming out of this Heavenly Temple holding seven shallow bowls filled with his great wrath (cf. Re. 15:5-7). At Christ’s express command, the angels will pour out the contents of these bowls upon the remaining earth-dwellers, thus bringing mankind’s ungodly rebellion to an absolute and final end. © Arthur J. Smith April 2018