

BITTER HONEY: THE REVELATION

Rodger Dalman

SECTION THREE - HISTORY AND WOES IN GREATER DETAIL

CHAPTER 11: ISRAEL'S HISTORY

Verses 1-2

As Revelation 10 ended, Christ ordered John to digest and repeat his prophecy about the nations. In the rest of Revelation, John will see an expanded repetition of the vision that he had already seen. John began his new prophecy by pointing back to the seals of Revelation 6. Much of Revelation 6 had come from Zechariah. When the first four seals were opened, John saw four horsemen. John's horsemen were taken primarily from Zechariah. The fifth seal brought martyrs who were waiting for the full number of their brethren. A similar theme was found in Zechariah. The sixth seal brought Armageddon and Christ's return. Both were described in Zechariah. Although Revelation 6 traced themes found in all of prophecy, Zechariah was probably John's most immediate source. Understandably, John began his repetition by looking back at Zechariah. Revelation 11 is a brief summary of Zechariah's vision. John began the chapter with two verses of introduction. These verses reflect a theme found in the first chapters of Zechariah.

John was given a measuring rod. He was told to measure God's temple, His altar, and those who worshiped in it. John was told not to measure the outer court because the gentiles would tread Jerusalem under foot for 42 months. John was not simply recording a description of heavenly objects. John could have measured the physical dimensions of the temple, but it is less clear that he would have measured the people in it. Measuring was a symbol for something else. John's measuring can be understood by looking at the Old Testament. In Scripture, the symbol of measuring describes God's evaluation, His judgment, and His reward.

This symbol was used most often by the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 28:17, God promised through him, "I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the level. Then hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the secret place." God said that He would make justice and righteousness His standard of measurement. Then God would use His standard of justice to judge men's sin. In Isaiah 65:7, God promised to judge Israel by measuring their works into their bosom. God also measured the gentiles in judgment. In Isaiah 34:11, God promised to stretch over Edom "the line of desolation and the plumb line of emptiness." In Isaiah 34:17, God measured out this desolation as Edom's eternal inheritance. The motif of measuring was also used in the context of judgment in Isaiah 36:17; II Samuel 8:2; Micah 2:4-5, and Amos 7:7-17. God also measures out an inheritance of abundance and life for His people. Psalm 60:6-8 described this kind of inheritance.

There was also a second kind of measuring theme in the ancient Near East. When an old and broken down temple was to be rebuilt, the first step in the process was to hold a formal measuring ceremony. Before a brick was laid, the measuring ceremony guaranteed that the temple would be rebuilt exactly in accord with the will of the god who would dwell in the temple. The idea of a formal temple ground breaking and measuring ceremony was also not uncommon in the biblical text. In Ezekiel 40:3, the prophet saw a man with a measuring line. In the following chapters, this man measured God's temple, His courts, His altar and His land. When Ezekiel 40 was written, Judah was in captivity. God reassured His captive people by declaring that He had already held His formal measuring ceremony, and the land would be rebuilt exactly according to His will. A similar promise can be seen in Zechariah 1:16. In Zechariah 1, God promised to rebuild and restore Jerusalem. In Zechariah 1:16, God promised that a measuring line would be stretched out over Jerusalem. Then in Zechariah 2:1-2, the prophet saw a man with a measuring line. The prophecy pointed both to God's evaluation of His people and His promise to rebuild His land.

In the first two verses of Revelation 11, John was told to measure Israel. The time had come for God's judgment. Rebels in the Old Testament community would be destroyed. Believers would enter Christ's presence and remain with Him during the New Testament age. This measuring out of Israel's inheritance was described with more detail in the last half of Revelation 7. Jerusalem would be trodden under foot for 42 months. This was the 3½ time periods of the New Testament age. After this time, the court of the gentiles, or the gentile church, would be measured. These verses preview the rest of Revelation 11. This chapter will describe Israel's destruction by Rome, her desolation throughout the New Testament era, and her return at the close of history.

Verses 3-6

The first two verses of Revelation 11 can be compared to Zechariah 1-3. The rest of Revelation 11 may be based on a symbol drawn from Zechariah 4. John sees two witnesses who are granted authority to prophecy for 1260 days. John calls these witnesses the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before God. These two witnesses are the Law and the Prophets which Israel proclaimed to the world. The witnesses can be identified as the Law and the Prophets by looking at Zechariah 4. Zechariah also spoke of these witnesses. He described them in three ways. First, they were the Word of the Lord. In Zechariah 4:3-6, the prophet saw two olive trees. Zechariah was told that these olive trees were the Word of the Lord to Zerubbabel. The olive trees may have been the Word of the Lord because they represented the Law and the Prophets, God's written Word.

Zechariah's two witnesses were also the believing community which taught God's Word. Zechariah's olive trees stood beside a golden candle stick with seven lamps. The golden candle stick was a common symbol for Israel. Revelation 1:20 used similar lamp stands to represent the dispersed New Testament community. The seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 were the lamps of Israel's exiled candle stick. Finally, Zechariah described the two witnesses as anointed ones. Zechariah 4:14 called them "the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth." This description would be picked up by John in Revelation 11. John mentioned that the witnesses were Zechariah's candle stick and olive trees. Then John spent the rest of the chapter describing two anointed ones, Moses and Elijah, who represented the Law and the Prophets.

John describes the anointed ones in an unusual way. They prophesied in sackcloth. They devoured their enemies with fire from their mouths. They shut up the heavens so that it would not rain. They turned water to blood, and they smote the earth with plagues. All these characteristics were drawn from the lives of Israel's two anointed ones, Moses and Elijah. They were Israel's greatest prophets. Elijah closed the sky so that it would not rain (I Kings 17:1; 18:1). When Ahaziah tried to capture him, Elijah called down fire from heaven on his enemies (II Kings 1:10). Moses' enemies were also destroyed by fire from God (Numbers 16:35). Moses turned the rivers of Egypt to blood, and he smote the land with many plagues (Exodus 11:10).

In John's day, Scripture was often referred to as the Law and the Prophets or as Moses and the Prophets (Luke 16:31). These Scriptures proclaimed God's law to the world until John the Baptist. Then the gospel was introduced (Luke 16:16). Moses was probably chosen to represent Scripture because he wrote the Law. Elijah was probably chosen for three reasons. First, Elijah was thought by the Jewish community of the first century to be Israel's greatest prophet. Second, Elijah had already served as a representative of the prophets when he stood with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, and John had seen both Moses and Elijah on the mountain (Matthew 17:3). Moses and Elijah were on the mountain to share with Christ the Old Testament Scriptures about His death and resurrection (Luke 9:31). On the mount, Moses and Elijah were indeed two anointed ones standing before the Lord of the whole earth as Zechariah had written.

Elijah may have been chosen to represent the prophets for a third reason as well. That reason may have been Elijah's conflict with Ahab. The symbolism of Revelation 11 required that the two witnesses

prophesy for 1260 days. This was the 3½ time periods from the exile to Christ. Revelation 11:6 added that the witnesses shut up the sky for the 3½ years of their prophesying. While Elijah's drought may only have lasted for a little over a year in the area around Tyre according to the Ethbaal's record, it lasted for 3½ in Israel (James 5:17). John may have been paralleling the 3½ year drought with the 3½ years of Revelation 11:3.

Zechariah 4 spoke of the two anointed ones but did not call them witnesses. The witness theme was carried over from the court room scene in Zechariah 3. Christ was both judge and advocate. Satan was the prosecutor while Joshua the high priest was the defendant. Zechariah 4 and 5 inherited overtones of the courtroom flavor. This time, the whole world was on trial. God's people witnessed against it by proclaiming His Word. There were two witnesses because in the Old Testament, it took the testimony of at least two witnesses to execute a criminal (Deuteronomy 19:15; 17:6). The symbol of two witnesses was not limited to Zechariah and Revelation. Isaiah used it in Isaiah 8:2. Here God promised to take for Himself two witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberchiah. The Jews of John's day still required two witnesses to speak at any trial (John 8:12-20; Mark 14:55-59).

Verses 7-10

Revelation 11 followed the pattern of history found in Zechariah. Two witnesses were called in Zechariah 4. In Zechariah 5:1-4, God's written curse went out from Israel over the whole earth. This flying scroll may have represented the Law and the Prophets. In Zechariah 5:5-11, the Babylonian Empire was established in Mesopotamia. In Zechariah 6, four chariots conquered the earth. These chariots may have been the world empires of Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Zechariah 6:9-15 pointed to Christ's birth. Then Zechariah 7 described Israel's destruction. Beginning with Zechariah 8, the prophet pointed to Israel's restoration from captivity, to God's judgment on the nations, to Christ's return, and to the eternal kingdom. Revelation 11 repeated this pattern.

The two witnesses may have been the Old Testament community that proclaimed God's Word and testified against the world. The witnesses testified against the world for 1260 days. This may have been the 3½ time periods from the exile to Christ. The Old Testament community finished its testimony when Christ died. Then they were killed by the beast that came up out of the pit. This beast was the Roman Empire which killed Christ, decimated Israel, and leveled Jerusalem. The Roman Empire would die when it was replaced by the rise of the mixed nations. Yet it would return from the pit with the Antichrist's new Rome at the end of history. The witnesses' dead bodies lay in the streets of Jerusalem where their Lord was crucified as Israel was driven from its land for its revolts against the Roman Empire. John named Jerusalem as Sodom and Egypt to show that the city was destroyed for its sins (Isaiah 1:10; 3:9; Jeremiah 23:14; Amos 4:10-11).

The gentiles rejoiced over their death and did not allow the witnesses to be buried for 3½ days. These 3½ days followed the first 3½ days and represented the second half of the "last days." The witnesses were not buried for the time from Christ to the end of history. The motif of unburied witnesses may have come from Jeremiah 16:4-6. Jeremiah claimed that when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, the men who died would not be buried or lamented. The two witnesses may have not been buried to show that Israel would not exist as a sovereign nation ruled from Jerusalem until the end of history. The motif of dead witnesses also might reflect Israel's rejection of her Lord and her spiritual death until the revival of the last days. Jews were alive in exile, but they were dead to their Lord. Revelation 11:10 added that the whole earth rejoiced because God's people were slain. This pointed to Israel's destruction. When Babylon leveled the city, the nations rejoiced over her fall (Jeremiah 50:11; Lamentations 2:17; Ezekiel 25:6; 35:15). However, God's plan for Israel was not finished. Israel's dead body remained throughout history because God had promised to bring His people back to Him and back to His land (Isaiah 11:11-16; Ezekiel 38:8; Hosea 3:4-5).

Verses 11-14

After 3½ days, the breath of life came back into God's two witnesses, and they stood on their feet. The days represented the time from Christ to the end of history. John was talking about the 3½ periods in a rather general way. John was saying that near the end of history, Israel would return home as a nation. Zechariah described Israel's return in Zechariah 8. Then Zechariah 10:9-12 added that Israel would return to belief when she returned to Palestine. Hosea 3:5 and Isaiah 61:4-6 made the same promise. That could be part of what Revelation 11:11 meant by standing on their feet (Ezekiel 2:1-2; Psalm 130: 3). Revelation 11:11 could be compared to Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. Israel was a valley full of bones, but God brought the breath of spiritual and physical life back to them. God's people became once more a great army, and God brought them back to Palestine (Ezekiel 37:1-14).

When God's witnesses rose from the dead, great fear fell on all who saw them. This could point to Israel's return to the Promised Land. Jeremiah 33:9 said that the nations would fear and tremble when God restored Israel from exile. The two witnesses who were raised up from the dead were still Moses and Elijah, the believing community teaching the Law and the Prophets. So the nation's terror may be related to passages like Exodus 23:27. God promised Moses that the nations would fear Israel as she went up to possess the land.

God's two witnesses returned to Palestine after nearly two millennia in exile. The witnesses heard a voice from heaven saying, "Come up here." They went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies beheld them. When that happened, there was a great earthquake. A tenth of the city fell, and 7,000 people were killed by the earthquake. Those who remained were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. What do these verses mean? Revelation 11:14-15 identified these verses as the second Woe and the sixth trumpet. Both represented the events around Armageddon.

In that hour, there was a great earthquake. In the prophets, an earthquake like this was consistently associated with Armageddon and with Christ's return. Then a tenth of the city fell. The figure 1/10 may have come from the Law of Moses. The first tenth of everything was holy to the Lord (Leviticus 27:32). Isaiah talked about this tenth in Isaiah 6:13. God told Isaiah that he would prophesy until Israel was desolate and Jews were scattered through the world. Even after the Jews were scattered, a tenth portion would remain. This tenth portion was the holy seed that would again be subject to burning. So the tenth of Jerusalem that fell in Revelation 11:13 may have been the believers who died in the events associated with Armageddon.

Revelation 11:13 also promised that 7,000 people would be killed. This may have been the same kind of figure as the 1/10, but it may have come from the life of Elijah instead of Moses. In I Kings 19:18, God assured Elijah that He had preserved 7,000 men who had not bowed the knee to Baal. The Antichrist would persecute Israel more severely than Jezebel had done so in her time. Yet, God would preserve His remnant. Part of this remnant would die in the events associated with Armageddon. With the description of Jerusalem's fall, John ended the parallel with Zechariah. As the prophet Zechariah concluded his vision, he said that Jerusalem would be overrun. Then Christ would return to reign. Zechariah 14:1-4 said that the nations would gather against Jerusalem for battle. The city would be plundered. Jerusalem's women would be ravished, and half of the city would be exiled. The rest of the Jews would not be cut off from the city. Then as the nations destroyed each other, Christ would return. He would stand on the Mount of Olives, and He would establish His kingdom.

Revelation 11:13 concluded by saying that those who remained in Jerusalem would be terrified and would give glory to God. This may have described believers who survived Israel's defeat at Armageddon. Unbelievers in Revelation cursed God no matter what He did to break their rebellion. Believers always responded to God's judgment by praising Him. Israel's terror may be drawn from the Law and the Prophets. Israel was terrified when God descended onto Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 5:5). Israel was also terrified when Elijah called down fire from heaven (I Kings 18:39). Both events prophesied Christ's return in judgment. Fear is the normal emotion for people who stood in God's presence. The disciples were

terrified on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:6). Manoaah, Isaiah, and Daniel were no less terrified than the disciples (Judges 13:22; Isaiah 6:5; Daniel 10:8-10).

At the same time that the earthquake destroyed Jerusalem, God's two witnesses heard a voice from heaven saying, "Come up here." This command may also have been drawn from the lives of Moses and Elijah. Both prophets entered Christ's presence alive. Christ descended on Mount Sinai in fire, smoke, thunder, and an earthquake. All these things would also be present as Armageddon unfolded and Christ returned. Moses was told to climb Mount Sinai and to walk alive into Christ's presence (Exodus 19:20). Later, 73 men accompanied Moses up the mountain in sight of rebellious Israel (Exodus 24:9-10). In II Kings 2:11, Elijah was carried alive to heaven in a fiery chariot. The fiery chariot might be compared to the fire of Armageddon. Elijah passed through the fire and entered God's presence. So the theme of Revelation 11:12 may be that as Armageddon occurred, Christ would return. Then those believers who were still alive would rise to meet Him in the air.

Revelation 11:13 concluded the vision of the two witnesses. The witnesses represented Israel using the Law and the Prophets to testify against the world empire. Israel was made desolate for her sins shortly after Christ died. For nearly two millennia, Jews were scattered as a spiritually dead people. Finally, Israel returned home as the Antichrist was about to re-establish the Roman Empire. Then Israel would return to belief and would again use the Old Testament to testify against man's empire. Then the Antichrist would gather the world against Israel at Armageddon and Jerusalem would be overrun. The nations would then destroy each other as Christ returned in judgment. Revelation 11:14 said that the second Woe of Armageddon was past, and the third Woe was coming quickly. That would be the final judgment.

Verses 15-19

Revelation 11:15 began with the words, "And the seventh angel sounded." This was the climax which followed verses 13-14. In verse 13, Armageddon had come, and men had seen Christ returning on the clouds of heaven. Revelation 11:14 declared that the second Woe was past and the third Woe was coming quickly. Then immediately, the seventh angel sounded. This was the angel who blew the seventh trumpet. So this angel can be compared to Revelation 8:1. In Revelation 8, the seventh trumpet sounded bringing eternal rest for God's people. In Revelation 11, the seventh trumpet brought the third Woe of final judgment. The remaining verses in Revelation 11 described the 24 elders praising God for judging the earth. God heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "The Kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign forever and ever." The 24 elders on their thrones echoed these words. They praised God because He had taken His great power and had begun to reign. These verses said that the kingdom would begin after Christ returned in judgment. Several other Scripture passages made the same point.

However, the biblical teaching of the kingdom is much more complicated than that. In the first place, God has always been King over all His creation and over all men. In this sense, the whole world was always His kingdom. All of Psalm 47 teaches this, particularly Psalm 47:8, "God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne." Other verses stressing the same truth were I Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalm 29:10; Psalm 47; Jeremiah 10:7; Daniel 4:17; 4:37, and I Timothy 1:17. In a different kind of way, God was king over the Old Testament community, and His people were His kingdom. II Chronicles 9:8 taught this by declaring that Solomon sat on God's throne as king for the Lord. Although Solomon administered the kingdom, the rule really belonged to God. Christ made an interesting comment in Matthew 8:11-12 which can be taken in the same light. He claimed that many gentiles would sit with Abraham in the kingdom, but the sons of the kingdom would be sent to hell. Christ was calling the Jews of His day who rejected the Gospel sons of the kingdom who would end in hell. Christ was calling the Jews of His day the sons of the kingdom so the Old Testament community was part of the kingdom. Other verses which should be interpreted this way include: Isaiah 9:7; Ezekiel 20:32-33; Micah 4:8, and John 1:49.

The Old Testament church consistently rejected God as king over them. God told Samuel to listen to Israel and anoint Saul, "for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them" (I Samuel 8:7). As Israel ran further into sin, her rejection of God strengthened. Jeroboam set up two golden calves as idols, intending, "to resist the kingdom of the Lord through the sons of David" (II Chronicles 13:8). Finally, Christ declared in Matthew 21:43 that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and it will be given to a nation that produces the fruit of it." Christ also condemned the Pharisees "because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men, for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:13). After a long history of rejecting the kingdom, Israel found itself outside of it and in opposition to it.

This rejected kingdom came once more new with the teaching of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. John preached, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). John the Baptist called Israel to repentance because the rejected kingdom was about to arrive. Jesus began His ministry by repeating John's warning (Matthew 4:17). Jesus taught both that the kingdom was coming and that it was already present. In Luke 17:20-21, Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming. Jesus responded, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." The rejected kingdom was present around the Pharisees, and they did not even see it.

The kingdom will also begin new when Christ returns in judgment. The same kingdom which was in the Old Testament, and which Christ announced in Jerusalem, would be renewed and made new when Christ removed sin from the world. Hebrews 12:26-29 explained how the kingdom would begin in its final form. Paul said that God would shake the earth in judgment so that the things that could not be shaken would remain. Paul added that believers had a kingdom which could not be shaken. God would shake the earth to remove unbelievers so that the kingdom may remain alone. Then God's children would inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the earth (Matthew 25:34). The kingdom must begin in its final form after the judgment because flesh and blood could not inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 15:50).

The 24 elders in Revelation 11:17 praised the Lord because God had subjected all things to Him. Having made that point, the elders end Revelation 11 praising God in a summary of what He had just done. The nations were enraged, and the time for God's judgment had come. Sinners would be judged and Christ's children delivered. The lightning, thunder, hailstones, and earthquake found in Revelation 11:19 described God's wrath on the earth. The earthquake also spoke of Christ's immediate return. The arc of the covenant appearing in God's temple represented Jesus Christ returning on the clouds of heaven. He is seated on the throne of God above the cherubim. The ark of the covenant with its mercy seat and cherubim was a copy of Christ's throne. This can be seen in I Chronicles 28:18 where the cherubim in David's temple are called "the model of the chariot." So Revelation 11 traced Israel's history from the exile to Christ's return.