

Revelation 11-12 • Israel in the Tribulation

Introduction

In chapters 11 and 12 we're definitely trodding on Jewish ground. We see the Jewish temple (11:1-2), Jerusalem (11:8), the ark of the covenant (11:19), the ruling Messiah (12:5), the angel Michael (12:7) and Satan's persecution of the Jews. (12:17) These are not allegories or spiritualizations of the church, but literally applied to the nation Israel. It's one of the scriptural proofs that in the Last Days God's favor turns back to His chosen people, most likely to fill the gap when the church proper has been removed and separated from "those who dwell on the earth".

¹Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.

²Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months. ³And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

⁴These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

[Read 11:1-4]

Q: So what is implicit in v.1-4? What will have to happen that has yet to take place?

A: The temple will be rebuilt and Israel as a nation will once again begin to worship Yahweh. You really can't measure (the temple) what isn't there yet.

Q: To what do both "forty-two months" and "twelve hundred and sixty days" refer to?

A: They're both equivalents of 3-1/2 years.

Point: The Great Tribulation is often described as two 3-1/2 year halves, some things ascribed to the first half, others to the second half.

Q: What event probably marks the end of the first half and the beginning of the second half of the tribulation?

A: The "abomination of desolation". The Antichrist will break his covenant with Israel and take possession of the temple area in order to set himself up as a god to be worshiped. (See 2 Thess. 2; Dan. 9:27; Mt. 24:15)

Q: What does it mean to measure something?

A: It's a symbolic action that not only goes back to Ezekiel 40-41 and Zechariah 2, but to the conquest of Canaan recorded in Joshua. To measure something means to claim it.

Point: Although the forces of Satan have taken over the rebuilt temple, Christ will claim it again and restore it to His people.

Q: Who is being alluded to in v.4?

A: Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest in Zechariah 4-5. These two men were God's servants for reclaiming and rebuilding the temple and the nation after the Babylonian Captivity.

Point: The problem is that **EVERYONE**, both Jew and Gentile alike, is misusing the temple and the things associated with the worship of God. There's not only the worship of a false god in the person of the Antichrist, but the Jews have only returned to the ways of the Old Covenant, yet to embrace the New Covenant through Christ.

⁵And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way.

⁶These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power

[Read 11:5-6]

Q: Why do many scholars believe that the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah?

A: Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ during the Transfiguration (Mt. 17:3) and the signs listed in these verses are all signs which were performed by Moses and Elijah.

over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

Point: *Whether this is the literal reappearance of Moses and Elijah or two witnesses coming “in the spirit of” Moses and Elijah, studying the lives and ministries of Moses and Elijah greatly aids in understanding the purpose and ministry of these two witnesses.*

Q: But what is the thing they’re going to do which is actually far greater than performing signs and wonders?

A: Their ministry is described in v.6 as “*the days of their prophesying*”. In fact, in v.10 they’re directly described as “*prophets*”. Their greater work is preaching the Word of God – the signs and wonders merely follow and confirm the greater ministry of the Word.

Point: *God always has a faithful remnant dedicated to preaching His Word even in the most difficult and overwhelming of circumstances. Jews in particular would be sensitive of prophets who combine Old Testament types of signs and wonders with a New Testament message.*

[Read 11:7-10]

Q: What is probably the greater spiritual message contained in this description of the persecution of the two witnesses’ ministry? What is Jerusalem, and by inference the rest of Israel, called?

A: In v.8 Jerusalem is called “*Sodom and Egypt*”. These are two Old Testament symbols of rejecting God and living according to one’s own ways and desires. They express spiritual unfaithfulness.

Point: *It’s not merely that the Antichrist will be present and active and working against God’s messengers, but that Israel herself will be so spiritually backslidden that they won’t fully receive the message of His messengers either.*

Q: How is the rest of the world described spiritually?

A: They’re described as “*those who dwell on the earth*”. (v.10) It’s the repeated reference used throughout Revelation to describe those rejecting God’s Word and ways.

Point: *This “Satanic Christmas” celebration is actually an expression of the spiritual problems existing among everyone during this time. When the messengers are gone, they celebrate because they think they’re no longer responsible for not doing anything with what they heard, both Jew and Gentile alike. Because the messengers are gone, they think they’re no longer liable for the message.*

[Read 11:11-14]

Q: What is significant about the number “three and a half”? What might it be alluding to?

A: Most people state that Christ’s ministry on earth lasted for 3 years, but it was actually 3-1/2. So there are many parallels to Christ seen in the ministry of these witnesses to include their death, resurrection, and the way in which they ascend into heaven. In essence, through these witnesses it’s not just the ministry of Moses and Elijah that is on display but a confirmation of the ministry and example of Christ Himself.

Q: What is the greater spiritual accomplishment of God’s messengers?

A: Back in v.4, they were witnesses to the “*Lord of the earth*”. By the time their ministry is finished, they are acknowledged witnesses in v.13 to “*the God of heaven*”. They get even God’s enemies to acknowledge that He is God of both heaven and earth.

⁷When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. ⁸And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. ⁹Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. ¹⁰And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

¹¹But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. ¹²And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. ¹³And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

¹⁴The second woe is past; behold, the

third woe is coming quickly.

¹⁵Then the seventh angel sounded; 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 will reign forever and ever.”

¹⁶And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷saying,

“We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. ¹⁸And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

¹⁹And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

Point: As with all signs and wonders in the Bible, they point to a greater spiritual message to be accepted than merely the signs and wonders themselves.

[Read v.11:15-19]

Q: So is this the point at which Christ gains control of the world?

A: Think of it more like the “beginning of the end”. That specific point of control does not come until Rev. 19:11 or so. This is the formal declaration of events to come.

Point: What is happening might be called a milestone, a delineation between general judgment and the actual wrath of God. It's like the plagues brought about to free Israel from Egypt – the first few were experienced by everyone as a testimony of God's authority and judgment, but then the later ones only experienced by those upon whom God's wrath had come because of continued unbelief.

Q: This is the third time we've witnessed heavenly praise. How does this compare/contrast to the other times?

1. In Rev. 4:10-11 Christ was praised as the Creator.
2. In Rev. 5:8-10 Christ was praised as the Redeemer.
3. Here Christ is praised as the King and Judge.

Point: They combine to form the whole picture of Christ as He brings together the fulfillment of all things together in these final days.

Q: How does v.18 serve as a basic outline for what we can expect to happen in the last 3-1/2 years of the Tribulation?

1. “And the nations were enraged...” The nations will openly display their hatred for Christ and His people. (See Ps. 2; Ps. 83; Joel 3:9-13)
2. “...Your wrath came...” There is a significant difference between God using signs and wonders to support a message of repentance and the wrath of God come in final judgment for rejecting that message.
3. “...the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants...” Everyone's deeds will be judged, but whereas the saints will be judged to determine their reward, the wicked will be judged to death for their sin. These two groups are contrasted by their labels as “those who fear Your name” as opposed to “those who destroy the earth”.

Q: How does chapter 11 close quite differently than it opened?

A: Whereas it opened with the temple on earth, it closes with the temple in heaven.

Q: What might be significant about “flashes of lightning and sounds and peal of thunder”?

A: It's the same as they were used previously in Rev. 4:5 coming from the throne and in Rev. 8:5 coming from the altar, they're warnings of the coming storm.

Q: Why would we expect to see the ark of the covenant again accompanied by these signs and thundering?

A: The ark is the symbol of both God's presence and covenant. Just as there were signs and thundering accompanying the giving of the Law through Moses on Sinai, so they again accompany God's final judgment for breaking His Law.

Point: When the rapture will occur is greatly debated. Those who take a “pre-Tribulation” stand believe the church will avoid the Tribulation completely; those subscribing to a “post-Tribulation” stance believe the church will go through the entire Tribulation; and those opting for a “mid-Tribulation” position believe the church will share in part but not all of the Tribulation. Walk with the Word prefers to describe its beliefs as “pre-Wrath”, meaning that the church will be extracted before God’s judgments turn from being demonstrations of His power and authority to actually executing His wrath. Biblically speaking, everyone falls under judgment, but only the wicked incur God’s wrath.

¹A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; ²and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

³Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. ⁴And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. ⁵And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. ⁶Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

⁷And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, ⁸and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. ⁹And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying,

“Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. ¹¹And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. ¹²For this reason, rejoice, O

[Read v.12:1-6]

Q: So what is the greater meaning of the woman?

A: It’s a picture of Israel, just as in the Old Testament Israel is often referred to as a woman and mother. (See Is. 54:5; Jer. 3:6-10.) It describes one of the themes running throughout the entire Bible that the Messiah would come specifically through a seedline of Israel and that one of the reasons Satan is always at war with Israel is to extinguish that seedline.

Q: What is the greater meaning of the dragon?

A: If we sneak a peek down at v.9, it states plainly that the dragon “is called the devil and Satan”. References in Rev. 13:1 and 17:3 indicate that the heads, horns, and crowns refer to the Beast (Antichrist).

Point: The symbolism provided here is a reminder of the greater meaning of all human history both in terms of the spiritual struggles between heaven and hell and as they will ultimately come to completion in the end. Everything that happens on earth, although it will be physically real, is also a reflection of issues in the spiritual realm.

[Read v.12:7-12]

Q: What is particularly telling about the fact that Michael is mentioned by name?

A: We know from Scripture that he is the archangel assigned to protect Israel. (See Dan. 10:13; 10:21; 12:1; Jude 9.) Therefore what is being revisited here is the age-old persecution of literal Israel, not a spiritual substitute for it.

Q: What does Michael’s name mean? How does it contrast to Satan’s intentions?

A: “Michael” means “who is like God?” It is a kind of answer to Satan’s desire, “I will make myself like the Most High!” (See Is. 14:14.)

Q: What does it mean when he is called “the devil and Satan” in v.9?

A: “The devil” means “accuser” and “Satan” means “adversary”. They describe the dual aspects of his work as the enemy.

Q: Why might it be significant that Satan is described as either a “dragon” (v.7) or a “serpent” (v.9)?

A: Whenever Satan is described as a serpent it goes back to the garden when he deceived Eve and expresses when he’s working to destroy God’s people through deception; when he’s described as a dragon it expresses how he works to openly destroy God’s people through persecution.

heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.”

Q: How is it that God’s people overcome Satan spiritually as the accuser and adversary and physically as the serpent and the dragon?

1. “...because of the blood of the Lamb...” (v.11)
2. “...and because of the word...” (v.11)
3. “...and they did not love their life even when faced with death.” (v.11)

Point: It wasn’t just knowledge alone or simply “believing”, but putting into practice the admonition to “pick up your cross daily and follow Me”. These are the characteristics of those who are described as “bond-servants”.

¹³And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. ¹⁴But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. ¹⁵And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. ¹⁷So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

[Read v.12:13-17]

Q: So what is being described here?

A: Since Satan can no longer accuse God’s people before God in heaven, he will seek to persecute them on earth. His primary target is Israel since he failed to kill the woman’s Son so he tries to exterminate all of her remaining seed.

Point: Every historic instance of Anti-Semitism has been and will be Satanic in its origin.

Q: Now some scholars say that the reference to being given “the two wings of the great eagle” is a reference to the role of the United States. How can we determine what the biblical meaning of “the wings of an eagle”?

A: We determine the meaning by examining it as used in other places in Scripture:

1. Ex. 19:4 – It’s how God described His leading ancient Israel out of Egypt.
2. Dt. 32:11-12 – It’s how God described caring for Israel in the wilderness as a mother eagle would her brood.
3. Is. 40:31 – It’s how God described Israel’s return from the Babylonian Captivity.

In other words, it always describes God’s supernatural protection of the believing remnant of His people.

Q: Why would Israel’s escape “into the wilderness” actually be something we’d expect?

A: Again, because it is spoken of in other places in Scripture such as Is. 26:20-27:13 and Dan. 11:41. It specifically states that His people will take refuge in places like Edom, Moab, and Ammon. Jesus Himself in the Olivet Discourse advises that those living in Israel who become witnesses of these events flee in this manner. (Mt. 24:16-21).

Q: What is different about the war that is now taking place?

A: It’s now a dual war wherein God is warring against the unbelieving world and Satan is making war on God’s people. It’s no wonder Jesus said...

“Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

Matthew 24:22

Q: What do you suppose the symbolism of the water and the flood represent?

A: Often in Scripture great bodies of water are a symbol of all the Gentile nations of the world. It most likely represents how Satan will use everyone possible to persecute Israel during this final 3-1/2 year period.

Q: What is a sure way to avoid this persecution?

A: According to v.17, don't be someone who "keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus".

Point: The Great Tribulation has as much to do judging everyone for their treatment of Israel in regards to corporate sin as it does for holding everyone accountable to God's judgment for personal sin.

Overall Application

There are several practical lessons to be learned here:

- Satan is at war with the saints and we can only overcome him by putting into practice the Word of God.
- Since Satan is the accuser of all brethren, we need to remember that our sin gives Satan all the evidence he needs before God's throne. Yes we should thank God that Christ is our Advocate in this regard (1 Jn. 1:9-2:2), but it's also an added incentive to repent from and reject sin.
- We ourselves should never be liable for accusing the saints for that is actually working on Satan's side. This is what James meant when he states that love "will cover a multitude of sins". (James 5:16) We should always seek repentance and mercy, not merely accusing and finger-pointing.
- We should never be guilty of anti-Semitism. Israel is God's elect people without whom we would have neither a Savior or His Word. We must love Israel, pray for its peace, and seek to win our Jewish friends for Christ. Israel hasn't always been right politically, but they are God's people and have an important task yet to be fulfilled according to His will.