



# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## 10: THE TWO WITNESSES

### Chapter 11



### WHERE DOES THEIR WITNESS TAKE PLACE?

Where the Temple of God (v.1) is situated.

In the 'holy city' (v.2).

#### JERUSALEM

- This is where the literal Temple was situated.
- The 'holy city' (v.2) referred to elsewhere in Revelation is Jerusalem (21v2,10). And in both Old and New Testaments Jerusalem is described as being the 'holy city' (Ps.46v4; 48v1; Isa.48v2; 52v1; Dan.9v16,24; Mt.4v5; 27v53).
- It is the place where the Lord 'was crucified' (v.8).
- The imagery of Sodom and Egypt (v.8), standing for oppression, immorality and defiance of God, is also used of Israel in Isa.1v9-10 and Ezek. Ch.16, (where the language used to describe faithless Jerusalem is eerily similar to the language used to describe the rise and fall of Babylon in the Book of Revelation).

#### BABYLON – ROME

- Wherever the phrase 'the great city' (v.8) is used elsewhere in Revelation, it refers to Babylon – Rome (16v19; 17v18; 18v10,16,18,19,21).
- Can where the Lord 'was crucified' be taken to mean not so much Jesus Himself but His Body, His people, the Church of God (cf Acts 8v1-3; 9v4-5; Rev.18v24)? And Heb.6v4-6 uses that very analogy.

#### CAN THE LOCATION BE A COMBINATION OF BOTH CITIES?

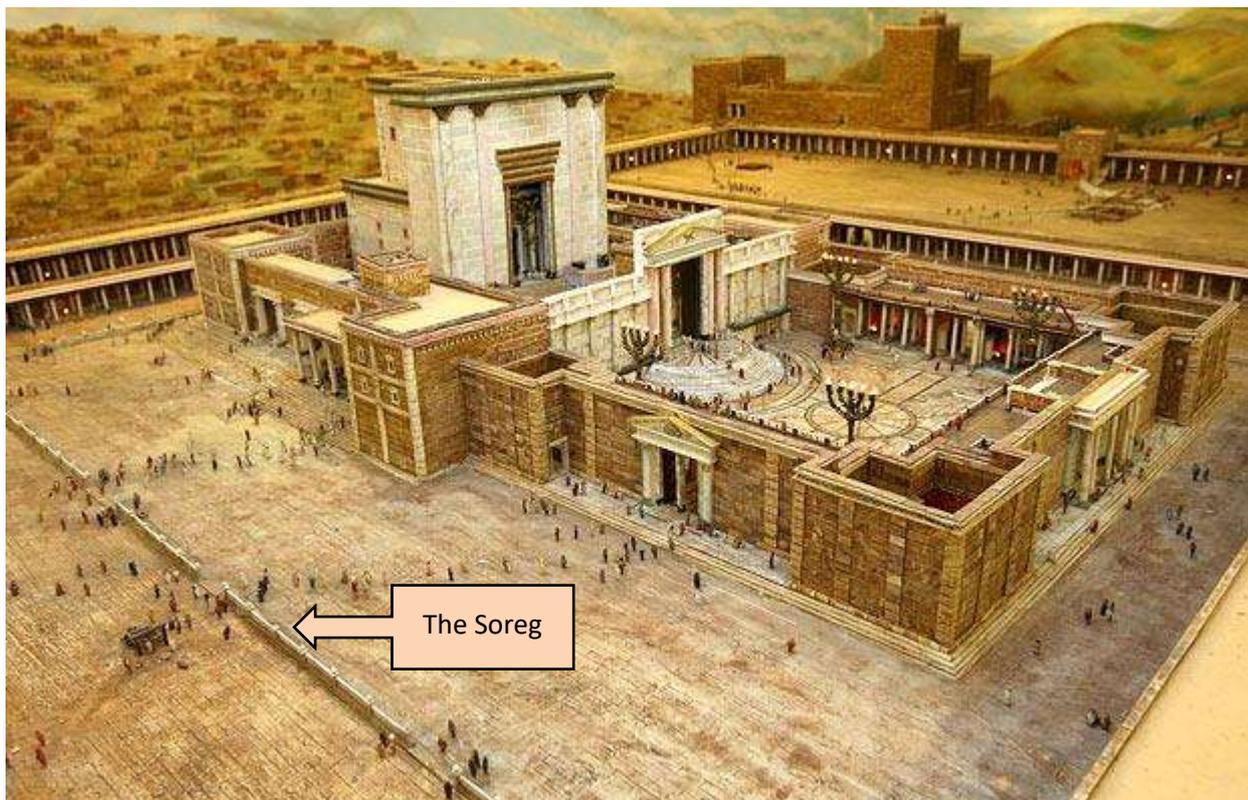
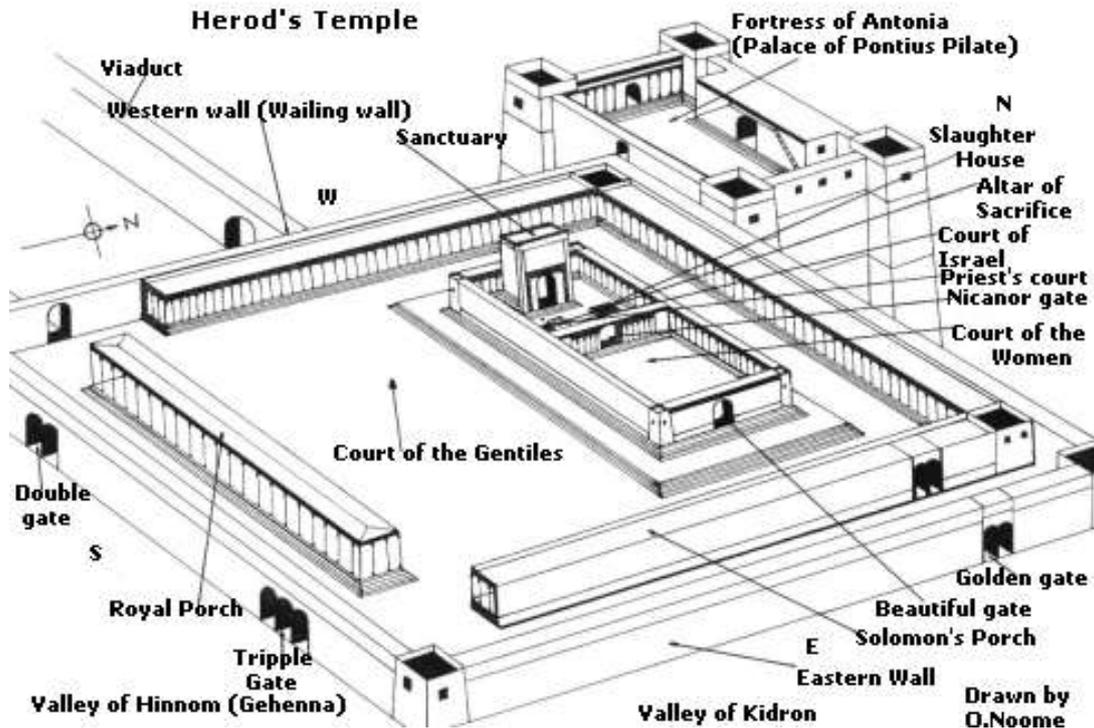
John is primarily interested in the Temple and of necessity that means that it has to be in Jerusalem. However the emphasis is on the Temple not on the city: a Temple beset, besieged and 'trampled' on by the Gentiles – short-hand for the ungodly, pagan nations, but ultimately untouched and untouchable. Maybe the fact that he is happy to use both a phrase, the 'holy city', which refers to Jerusalem and 'the great city' which always refers to Rome, tells us not to be too concerned as to the actual location but to listen to the truths that he is sharing with us through these images.

#### IT IS NOT SO MUCH A PLACE OR PLACES BUT A PEOPLE

John is happy to portray the Messianic Community as a Woman clothed with the sun, giving 'birth' to the Messiah in ch.12 and yet that same Messianic Community is also portrayed as being both the 'Wife of the Lamb' and the Heavenly Holy City of Jerusalem (21v2,9f). In other words he does not feel constrained to use one metaphor only but rather seeks to communicate a truth and then looks for an image that serves that purpose.

In the N.T. the Church is referred to as the Temple of God (1 Cor.3v16-17; 2 Cor.6v16; Eph.2v19-22) and to the overcomer in the church at Philadelphia is promised, 'I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God' (3v12). Moreover the actual Temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed in AD 70 and however significant it had been for both Jews and for Jewish Christians, it cannot have held the same importance for Gentile believers.

## THE SECOND TEMPLE AT THE TIME OF JESUS AND OF JOHN



Within the Temple complex there was first of all the Court of the Gentiles, facing a low wall that surrounded the actual Temple itself. For a Gentile this was as far as they were allowed to go and there were notices posted all around this wall or *soreg*, in Greek and in Roman characters, warning of the dire penalty for going further, 'No Gentile is allowed within the wall surrounding the Sanctuary, nor the enclosed courtyard. Anyone apprehended doing so is at the risk of taking his own life into his hands.' (Josephus: WAR V.5.2; cf Eph.2v14). That this was no idle threat is demonstrated by the incident in Acts where Paul was accused of bringing a non-Jew into this forbidden area (Acts 21v27-36; cf Ezek.44v6-9).

For 42 months (1260 days), the battle will rage between the enemies of God and the people of God (cf Lk.21v24; Dan.7v21-22). The Gentiles are given power to 'trample' upon the 'holy city' and to occupy the Temple's outer court. But rather than this being a demonstration of the extent of their power, it is in fact a demonstration of the limits of their power. In the actual, physical Temple, the 'outer court' was the area into which Gentiles were allowed access anyway, but on pain of death were forbidden to go any further.

So the Gentiles are simply operating in an area that God had always said they could be in but are unable to go any further. The true heart of the Temple - the Sanctuary, consisting of the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place remains inviolate. The Gentiles may violently oppress the Church but they cannot destroy her nor touch her holy heart. Hence the significance of measuring the Temple (v.1-2 cf Ezek.ch.40-42). God has clearly marked out the limits of the power of the ungodly and just as clearly marked out what belongs to Him. 'Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," (2 Tim.2v19).

## THE TWO WITNESSES

### ○ ENOCH & ELIJAH

Two people neither of whom were recorded as dying (Gn.5v24; 2 Kngs 2v11). And of course Elijah was prophesied as coming before the advent of the Messiah (Mal.3v1; 4v5).

### ○ ELIJAH & MOSES

Elijah is prophesied as coming before the Messiah and it was Moses and Elijah who appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, speaking with Jesus about His death and resurrection.

The various signs and wonders that they perform (v.5-6).

Fire from heaven (1 Kngs 18v38; 2 Kngs 2)

No Rain (1 Kngs 17v1; Lk.4v25; Jas.5v17).

Every kind of Plague (Ex.3v20; 6v1; 7v3-5)

Elijah had been caught up into heaven and there was a belief / legend that Moses similarly had also been caught up in a cloud into Heaven (2 Kngs 2v11; cf Jude 1v9; Josephus: ANT 1V.8.48).

**BUT** the 'Witnesses' of John's time until the Lord comes again are not actual or symbolic figures from the O.T. but:

○ **THE CHURCH** 'given power...to prophesy' (11v3; cf Acts 1v8).

• Far from the Church being the passive recipient of persecution and in spite of the violence of the opposition, the Church of God continues its powerful testimony (v.3,7). This is the testimony of Jesus (1v2,9; 6v9; 11v7; 12v11,17; 17v6; 19v10; 20v4; 22v16).

• From their mouths comes flaming fire against which their enemies cannot stand (Jer.5v14; 23v29; Lk.21v12-15)

• These Two Witnesses are also 'lampstands' (v.4), which previously in Revelation have represented the churches (1v20; 2v1; cf Zech. 4).

• They are also 'two olive trees' (v.4; cf Zech.4; ).



The Jews –  
the cultivated olive tree

Jer.11v16; Rom.11v17-24



The Gentiles -  
the wild olive tree

### Why Two Witnesses?

• Moses and Elijah symbolise the Law and the Prophets i.e. the entire weight of Scripture which bears witness to Jesus (Lk.24v25-27; Jn.5v39).

• In the O.T. Law, it required two witnesses to confirm a capital charge.

'On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness'. (Deut.17v6)

'One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses'. (Deut.19v15; cf Jn.8v17).

### **Their Fate and Ultimate Destiny (v.7-12).**

After, and only after, they have completed their mission and ministry, the 'beast from the Abyss' (i.e. Anti-Christ), is enabled to overcome them and to kill them – the martyrs of 6v11, 7v9-17 and 20v4.

As the ultimate indignity (cf Jer.8v1-2), their bodies lie unburied on public display for 3 ½ days mirroring the 3 ½ years of their ministry. There is a great outpouring of malevolent demonic glee that these Witnesses are finally destroyed and the earth is rid of their fiery testimony. Except of course, that they are not destroyed!

Raised up (cf Ezek. 37) and then caught up into heaven (1 Thess.4v13-17), there follows a great earthquake. The reaction of humankind is one of terror (11,13) but two different kinds of terror. For the enemies of God, the fear is of the power and glory of God and of the vindication of these Two Witnesses. What more can you do to people whom you have already killed? However, following the earthquake there is another fear, which seems to lead some to godly repentance (v.13).

### **AND THEN WHAT HAPPENS?**

*'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.'* (v.15)



Suddenly, the true Temple in heaven is revealed (v.19)! And not just the true Temple but the actual Ark of the Covenant, the copy of which had originally resided in the Sanctuary of God in Jerusalem! (cf Rev.15v6-8).

The earthly Ark had contained the two tablets that Moses had brought down from Mount Sinai and a jar of manna and Aaron's rod which had budded, the confirmation of his authority and ministry (Heb.9v4). Legend had it that at the destruction of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC (2 Kngs 25v8f), Jeremiah the prophet had hidden the Ark at Mount Nebo. There it waited until God's final coming (2 Macc.2v4-8).

When Moses was receiving instructions as to the design and furnishings of the Tabernacle, he was told to follow the precise pattern that he had been shown by God and the belief grew that there was an original in Heaven (Ex.25v9,40; Num.8v4; Acts 7v44; Heb.8v1-5). The Essene community at Qumran for example, believed that in the Messianic Age there would be worship in a new Temple and drew up elaborate regulations as to how this should happen. In this they were not alone as had not Ezekiel been given detailed instructions about the new and true Temple that was to come? But now the true Ark is made visible, the way to God is open – Heb.10v19-22! God has kept His promises – He is the covenant keeping God.

### **GOD'S TIMES**

Consistently throughout Revelation, John is at pains to emphasise the sovereignty of God in the face of the apparent power of the enemies of God. How better to do that than by the constant reminder that everything is running according to God's timetable?

And so the Gentiles will only be able to occupy part of the Temple for 42 months (v2); the Two Witnesses will have power for 1260 days (v.3); drought, water to blood and 'every kind of plague' occur, 'as often as they want' (v.6); only when they have finished their testimony will the Beast be able to kill them (v.7); their bodies will lie unburied for exactly 3 ½ days (v.9); after 3 ½ days their bodies will be raised to life (v.11); 'at that very hour' an earthquake will strike (v.13); the kingdom of Christ has now begun (v.15); God has begun to reign (v.16); the time has come for judgement and for reward (v.18); then God's temple in heaven is opened (v.19).