

REVELATION CHAPTER 11

THE FINAL APPEAL OF CHRIST TO REPENT

The book of Revelation is not a historic, but an apocalyptic book.
Therefore the symbolic or figurative interpretation must be followed (11:8).

PART 1. Revelation 11:1-2. THE MEASURING OF THE TEMPLE.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

11:1 And (then) I was given (*Greek: didomi, doso, edoka, dedoka*)(*arist*) a reed (*Greek: kalamos*) like (*Greek: homoiōs*) a (measuring) rod (*Greek: rabdos*) and he said (*present*), 'Go (*Greek: egeiro*)(*imperative, present*) and measure (*Greek: metreo*)(*imperative, arist*)'. John must take a specific action. He must perform a symbolic action as a sign what God was going to do (cf. Isaiah 20:1-6; Ezekiel 4:1-8). He was given a reed like a measuring rod and told to measure the temple of God and the altar. He had to measure the inner sanctuary, that is, the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place. The Most Holy Place had a cubic form of 10 x 10 x 10 metres (1 Kings 6:20) and contained the ark with a pair of cherubim of olive wood, each about 5 meters high (1 Kings 6:23-28). The Holy Place contained the incense altar before the curtain separating the two parts, the table and the lampstand with seven arms.

Jesus Christ, who speaks in Revelation 11:3, probably gave this command to the apostle John. This is the only instance in the book of Revelation where the apostle John is commanded to perform a symbolic action as a sign of what God is doing through the work of his servants.

the temple (*Greek: naos*) of God. In the vision, John sees the temple of God, but in this passage there is no mention of any particular stone building or of any particular period in the history of Israel.

▪ (1) The temple of Solomon.

It was built between 967-960 B.C. by king Solomon (1 Kings 6:37-38) and destroyed in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar.

▪ (2) The temple of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was a member of a priestly family and was one of the exiles taken from Judah to Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar's second invasion in Judah in 597 B.C. He was a prophet to the exiles in Babylon from 593 to 571 B.C. In a vision a person can see things which no longer exist, as was also the case with Ezekiel's vision in Babylon of the temple of Solomon at Jerusalem (the literal first temple which was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. His measuring of the temple was not about the measurements of a literal new temple building, but was *a symbol of the future new community of God* (compare Ezekiel 43:4 with Ephesians 2:22 and Ezekiel 47:1 with Revelation 22:1). The message of Ezekiel is that the inner new life of God's people (Ezekiel 36:25-27) should be expressed in new outward forms: in a new temple, a new land and a new people (Ezekiel chapter 40 to 48).

▪ (3) The temple of Zerubbabel.

King Cyrus ordered in 539 B.C. to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-2). In 520 B.C. Zerubbabel and Joshua (Ezra 5:1-2) began the building and completed the task in 516 B.C. (Ez 6:15). The Jews expected that a beautiful temple would be built in Jerusalem during the Messianic Age. Thus, after the return from Babylonian exile, they built the temple of Zerubbabel.

Later king Herod took 46 years to add more buildings to it and beautify it (John 2:20) and completed it in A.D. 60. However, 10 years later (in 70 A.D.) this temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans under Titus. The Jews should have understood the words of Jesus that the new era would be ushered in, not by the building of the temple, but by destruction of the temple (Matthew 24:1-3; cf. John 2:19-22; Hebrews 9:8-10)!

▪ (4) The Church as the temple of God.

Likewise since Christ's first coming and crucifixion the literal temple in Jerusalem or the temple of the Jews had completely lost all meaning. The curtain was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). And in 70 A.D. it was destroyed (Mt 24:1-2). The New Testament message was that God does not live in houses built by men (Acts 7:46-50; Acts 17:24-25; cf. 2 Chronicles 6:18)! Christ's first coming ended forever the significance of a literal temple building (Hebrews 9:8-10) with its ceremonial laws (Matthew 5:17; Ephesians 2:14-15; Colossians 2:14,17) and inaugurated God's spiritual temple (cf. John 2:19-21; John 4:23-24; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:22).

Christians from both Jews and Gentiles together form the (symbolic) holy temple of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Acts 15:32), and in which God himself lives by his Holy Spirit (3:12; 7:15; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:16-17; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5).

▪ (5) The temple in Revelation 11.

Revelation 11:1 does not speak of the temple of Jerusalem or the temple of the Jews, but of the temple of God! The vision does not speak about a *literal* temple building with *literal* Jewish worshippers, but about the temple of God where worshippers pray (symbolically bringing incense on the burning altar)(cf. 8:3). It describes the New Testament Christian Church in terms of its Old Testament symbols. Like in the whole New Testament the temple in this vision

symbolises the genuine Christian Church with all true Christians occupied with spiritual service for God (2 Cor 6:16; Ephesians 2:21-22; 1 Peter 2:5-6).

The vision *cannot* refer to any literal historic temple building, because never during the whole world history the whole city of Jerusalem and the whole temple court have been in the power of the Gentiles, while only the inner sanctuary and sanctuary (the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place) remained in the power of God's people!

Moreover, the context (11:8) speaks of *the figurative meaning* of the city of Jerusalem. Thus, the vision in Revelation 11:1-14 does not concern a literal historic temple building, a literal historic Jerusalem or two literal historic witnesses. The whole vision in this apocalyptic book has figurative meaning, just as the whole book of Revelation is made known in signs, symbols or figures (1:1)!

(Go and measure ...) and the altar (*Greek: thusiasterion*), and (count) the worshippers (*Greek: proskuneo*)(*present*) there. See "measuring" in the background above. To measure can signify three things:

- Measuring signifies "total destruction" (2 Kings 21:13; Isaiah 34:11)
- Measuring signifies durable rebuilding or reformation in the sense that the inner new life must find expression in the outward forms (Ezekiel 40:2-5; 43:13, etc.) and "what is genuine holy must be separated or set apart from what is common" (Ezekiel 42:20).
- Measuring signifies limitation, delimitation, staking out, setting apart, in order that thus separated it may be perfectly safe, protected from all harms (11:1). The true people of God, who worship him in spirit and truth, are "set apart as holy for God and are protected over against the unholy world".

The measured temple of God and the counted (literally: measured) people worshipping there signify that the true people of God are set apart (delimited, staked out, pointed out) as belonging to God and are watched over (protected) by God. Although the opposing powers will attack them and even kill them, they can never touch or destroy the souls of believers (cf. 20:4; Matthew 24:24). The salvation of believers is secure for all eternity (John 6:37-40; John 10:27-30; John 18:9)! While the judgements of God are being inflicted on the godless, wicked and persecuting world, the true Christians are protected, not from suffering severely, but from perishing together with the wicked world (Matthew 10:16-31; John 3:16). There is no doom for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). This is a great consolation for the persecuted Christians.

In Revelation 7:3-4, all true Christians are *sealed and numbered* (144 000) as a sign that they belong to God and are protected by God from eternal damnation. Likewise, in Revelation 11:1, the true Christian Church with its faithful members is *measured* as a sign that it is set apart for God and protected by God from perishing together with the wicked world. In both Revelation chapter 7 and chapter 11 the New Testament Militant Church is described under the symbolism of the Old Testament "tribes of Israel" (Galatians 6:16; James 1:1) and the Old Testament "temple of Israel" (2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21-22).

11:2 But throw out (exclude) (*Greek: ekballo*)(*imperative, aorist*) the outer (*Greek: exothen*) court (*Greek: aule*) of the temple; do not measure (*Greek: metreo*)(*subjunctive/imperative, aorist*) it. John was told not to measure the outer court of the temple, because it has been given to the Gentiles. The outer court of the temple of Herod was used to exchange money, to buy and sell animals for the sacrifices and to do things that desecrated the temple (John 2:14-17). It was not a place where the true worshippers worshipped God in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23-24).

While a part of a literal building (the outer court) cannot be "cast out", the term must refer to people rather than to a building. "To exclude" probably does not mean, to leave out of consideration, but rather to cast the people in the outer court out of the community of God's people, to excommunicate as in John 9:34. Literally, the outer court belonged to the temple building. But figuratively (symbolically) in this context the outer court does NOT belong to the temple of God!

The picture of the outer court symbolises people, who outwardly seem to belong to the community of God's people (the Church), but in reality are rejected (cast out, excommunicated). They are those who are not really true priests of God, not really lovers, worshippers and servants of God. They are not really believers in Jesus Christ. They symbolise the unfaithful members of the Church, the nominal Christians and the nominal Church. They are excluded from measuring: excluded from being set apart by God for God and excluded from God's protection. They are excommunicated, that is, rejected by God.

because it has been given (*aorist*) to the Gentiles (*Greek: ethne*). The One who has *given* the outer court to the Gentiles is God. In the Old Testament revelation "the Gentiles" were a symbol of the "heathen" (the non-Jewish nations) that persecuted "God's people" (Israel). But in the New Testament revelation "the Gentiles" are a symbol of the godless and wicked world, a symbol for the unbelievers in the heathen and in the Jewish nations, that is, a symbol for all non-Christians! In Romans 1:24,26,28 God has given the Gentiles over to gross sexual immorality, because of their unbelief, godlessness and wickedness. The Gentiles sow godlessness and wickedness (Romans 1:18) and so they reap godlessness and wickedness (Galatians 6:7-8).

In Revelation 11:2 God has given the nominal Christians over to be trampled by the non-Christians, because they are not really born again Christians (i.e. they only pretend to be Christians). The nominal Christians from non-Jewish and

Jewish background sow unbelief (cf. 2:5; 3:1; 2 Cor 13:5) and so they reap being trampled by the godless and wicked world (11:2).

They (the Gentiles) will trample (*Greek: pateo*)(future) on the holy (*Greek: agios*) city (*Greek: polis*) ... the great city (11:2,8). The word “trample” is used of the undisciplined swarming of a victorious army through a conquered city. Its heedlessness, which acknowledges no limits, causes the word to take on the concepts “mistreatment, abuse and plundering”. The former holy city of Jerusalem and outer court of the temple and all the people in them are rejected and handed over to the Gentiles to treat with contempt and disdain, unless they repent.

▪ **The literal trampling of the literal city of Jerusalem.**

The Old Testament prophets already spoke of the trampling of the literal temple: In 586 B.C. the temple was trampled by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Isa 63:18). In 167 B.C. the temple was trampled by Antiochus IV Epiphanus of Syria (Daniel 8:13; Daniel 9:26; Daniel 11:31; cf. 1 Maccabees 1:29-61; 2 Maccabees 5:11 to 6:11). In A.D. 70 the temple and Jerusalem were trampled and destroyed by the Roman general Titus and his army.

In the New Testament Jesus spoke of the trampling of the literal Jerusalem by the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). The Gentiles are here also a symbol for the godless and wicked nations. The period of trampling would begin at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., which is associated with Christ’s first coming. The trampling of physical Jerusalem (the historical city) would continue “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”, which is associated with Christ’s second coming, because the chosen Gentiles in their full number become Christians during this period (Romans 11:25). Thus, the period of the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles is a symbol for the whole New Testament period, just as the number “42 months”, “1260 days” or “time, times and half a time” is a symbol for the whole New Testament period from Christ’s first coming (12:5-6,14) to Christ’s second coming (11:7-18). Thus, the period of oppression for physical Jerusalem will last to the end of the centuries, until the second coming of Christ in glory. The literal city of Jerusalem in Palestine will never again be “the city of God” (Psalm 48; cf. Ezekiel 48:35).

The claim that “the time of the Gentiles” ended on May 14, 1948, when Israel became an independent state or that “the Jews have returned to their country in fulfilment of prophecy” is contradicted by the following facts:

- Even today only about one out of every five Jews lives in the State of Israel.
- Even today the very existence of Jerusalem as an independent Jewish city is threatened.
- The great majority of Jews do not regard Jesus as the Messiah or as their Lord and Saviour.
- Since 1948 millions of Gentiles and thousands of Jews have become Christians!

The times of the Gentiles has certainly NOT come to an end!

▪ **The figurative trampling of the figurative Jerusalem and the figurative outer court of the temple.**

Jesus speaks in Revelation 11:2 and 8 *figuratively* of the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles. The picture is of the temple of God (figuratively representing *genuine Christians*), surrounded by the outer court (figuratively representing *nominal Christians*), in the midst of the city Jerusalem (figuratively representing the *non-Christians* – the unbelieving and persecuting Jews and Gentiles)!

The meaning of the symbolic picture is that the true Church (the temple of God) is surrounded and besieged by the anti-Christian persecution and the anti-Christian religions of the trampling masses in the world. The outer court of the temple figuratively represents the nominal Christians from both Jewish and non-Jewish background. It represents the nominal Christians and the nominal Church. It is not measured and not counted, that is, it is excluded from God’s protection. The godless and wicked world (the non-Christians) treats the pseudo-Christian Church (the nominal Christians and Christian cults) with contempt and causes it great harm. The unbelievers and persecutors also infiltrate and invade the unprotected nominal Christian Church and take possession of it. They fill the Christian Church with its worldly ideas, values, practices and people. In this way, the worldly members of the Church (the nominal Christians) welcome their ideas and ways and conform themselves to the godless and wicked people of the world. The historical Christian Church consists of genuine believers (figuratively: the sanctuary) and nominal believers (figuratively: the outer court). The historical Christian Church (all denomination in the world) is like “God’s field” (the world) in which God sows “the good seed” (the sons of the kingdom) and the devil sows his sons (the sons of the evil one). Thus, at the present time the historical Christian Church is a mixed community (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43).

Thus, “the temple of God, the altar and those worshipping there” represent the Militant Church (all true Christians who are waging spiritual warfare on earth) as set apart and protected by God (measured) amidst the nominal Christian Church (nominal Christians) on the one hand and the non-Christian world (false religions and anti-Christian persecutions of the godless and wicked world) on the other hand. The true Church is “not of the world”, but nevertheless “in the world” (John 17:11,14). While the Jews found no protection in the literal temple, the genuine Christians (from Jewish and non-Jewish background) (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13) find real protection within the spiritual temple of God, that is, within the genuine Christian community.

The earthly Jerusalem is called “the holy city” (as in Matthew 27:53) simply because *it used to be holy, that is, in the past it had been set apart for God.* But the city did not live up to its calling. Jesus cried, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How often I have longed to gather your children together, , as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look your house is left to you desolate” (Matthew 23:37-38).

Revelation 11:8 says, “The great city is *figuratively* called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified”. In the book of Revelation the term “the great city” generally refers to Babylon (14:8; 16:19; 17:18; chapter 18). Thus, in God’s eyes, since Jerusalem became the place where its people crucified the Lord Jesus Christ, the city is figuratively called Babylon, Sodom and Egypt. “Babylon” is the symbol of the enemy of God’s people, which destroys God’s people, “Sodom” is the symbol of sexual and spiritual immorality and “Egypt” is the symbol of political and military persecution. The literal city of Jerusalem in Palestine was once the special possession of the Lord, but in the book of Revelation the earthly Jerusalem has become the symbol of the non-Christian world, and even the anti-Christian world of false religions and suppressing powers (cf. Galatians 4:25)! Because Revelation 11:8 clearly refers to the figurative or symbolical meaning of “the city of Jerusalem” as the godless and wicked world, “the temple of God” in Revelation 11:1-2 must also have figurative or symbolical meaning and represent the true people of God.

for 42 (*Greek: tesserakonta duo*) months. The period of 42 ($3\frac{1}{2} \times 12$) months (11:2; 13:5) equals 1260 (42×30) days (11:3; 12:6) or $3\frac{1}{2}$ years (12:14; cf. Daniel 7:25; Daniel 9:27; Daniel 12:7).

In the Old Testament the number “ $3\frac{1}{2}$ ” appears the first time in 1 Kings 17:1 (Luke 4:25; James 5:17; cf. Revelation 11:6) when a very severe drought struck Israel. The number $\frac{1}{2}$ ” became a symbol in the Bible for a period of affliction that is limited by God. For example, the oppression and persecution under Antiochus Epiphanus did not extend endlessly, but was suddenly and unexpectedly broken off (Daniel 7:25; Daniel 9:27; Daniel 12:7). The number “ $\frac{1}{2}$ ” symbolises an unexpected and abrupt breaking off. Although Antiochus aspired to lengthen his $3\frac{1}{2}$ year reign of terror 4, 5, 6 and even 7 years, which is symbolic of “endless or eternity”, the period was unexpectedly and abruptly broken off (167 B.C.)!

In the New Testament the number “ $3\frac{1}{2}$ ” has exactly the same meaning: it symbolises, not a literal period of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, but a period of affliction that is suddenly and unexpectedly broken off. The book of Revelation clearly shows when this period of affliction begins and when it ends. This period of affliction *begins* with Christ’s first coming. Christ was born on earth and ascended to heaven at the beginning of this symbolic period of 1260 days (12:5-6). And the period of affliction *ends* with the final judgement at Christ’s second coming. The kingdom of God and his Christ in its final and perfect phase begins at the end of this symbolic period of 1260 days (11:2-3,11-12,15). Thus, the number “42 months” is symbolic for the long period of time between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming. It is literally a long period of time, but because it is “numbered”, it is limited to a sovereign determined period of time. This period of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years is also called “the great tribulation” in Revelation 7:14.

(2) Different views about the temple (11:1).

A futurist view. This temple is *the tribulation temple* that will be built in Jerusalem during the reign of the antichrist-beast *during the future tribulation period* (Larkin)¹.

The correct explanation. The temple of God, the altar and those worshipping there represent *the Militant Church (all true Christians) throughout the whole New Testament period* as set apart and protected by God (measured) amidst the non-Christians. The Militant Church is set apart and protected from the pseudo forces of nominal Christians (the outer court) and also from the trampling and persecuting forces of the anti-Christians (the Gentiles that occupy Jerusalem) (Greijdanus, Hendriksen, Groenewald)².

(3) Different views about the number 42 months (11:2).

A futurist view. The 42 months is *a literal period of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years*, the last half of Daniel’s so-called 70th week or the last half of the future seven year tribulation period called “the Great Tribulation” (Matthew 24:21) (Larkin)³.

The correct explanation. The 42 months is *symbolic for the long period of time between Christ’s first coming (12:5-6) and Christ’s second coming (11:2-3,11-12,15)* (Greijdanus, Hendriksen, Groenewald)⁴.

PART 2. Revelation 11:3-6. THE TWO WITNESSES.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

In Revelation 11:1-2, the Militant Church is represented under the symbolism of the temple of God and is presented as set apart and protected throughout the period from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming.

In Revelation 11:3-12, the Militant Church is represented under the symbolism of the two witnesses and is presented as bearing witness through its servants and its members throughout the period from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming.

11:3 And. The person speaking must be Christ. He says that the witnesses are “my witnesses”. They testify about Jesus Christ (cf. 1:2,9,13; 12:11,17; 17:6; cf. John 15:27; Acts 1:8).

¹ Larkin, Revelation pp. 83-84

² Greijdanus p. 173, Hendriksen pp. 153-154, Groenewald p.117

³ Larkin, Revelation p. 84

⁴ Greijdanus p. 171, Hendriksen pp. 155-156, Groenewald p. 118

The word “and” with which Revelation 11:3 begins, also shows that the two witnesses are part and parcel of the whole vision in Revelation 11:1-14! Revelation 11:1-2 speaks of the Church as a whole, her condition as set apart and protected and her experience of being trampled on, oppressed and persecuted in the world, until the end. Revelation 11:3-14 speaks of the same Church as represented in her servants (the offices) and members (the saints), their ministry of the Word (their witnessing), their authority and their experience of being destroyed by the world in the end.

I will give (*Greek: didomi, doso, edoka, dedoka*)(future) (probably: power and opportunity) to my two (*Greek: duo, dus*) witnesses (*Greek: martus*). They are symbolically “2” in number. The number “2” is a symbol for “supplementing or complementing one another” and thus a symbol for “witnessing” (Luke 10:1) and a symbol of “establishing the truth that is testified” (Matthew 18:16). These faithful servants do not minister as individuals, but they supplement and complement one another – they need one another’s strengths and contribution (Matthew 19:4-6; John 4:36-38; 1 Corinthians 3:5-10)!

Because they witness during the whole New Testament period (symbolised by the number 1260 days) and no single individual on earth has witnessed for such a long period, the two witnesses cannot refer to any specific two historic individuals, but must be a symbol of “the Church as an institute that proclaims the gospel during” that period. Like “the temple of God”, “the outer court” and “the holy city” (11:8), “the two witnesses” have figurative meaning. The specific article “the two witnesses of mine” (11:3) point to a specific group already known in the Bible, as also their description in Revelation 11:4 proves. Just as Jesus sent out his missionaries two by two (Luke 10:1), in order to supplement and complement one another in their task of witnessing, so throughout the whole New Testament period the Church as an organisation or institute has a missionary task to fulfil.

Jesus Christ especially sends out the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the teachers and the shepherds to proclaim the message of the Bible and to equip other Christians for their work of service (Ephesians 4:11-12). Of course, other Christians should also confess Jesus before men (Matthew 10:32) and be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks them about their faith (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Thus the two witnesses of Christ represent the Militant Church as an institute that proclaims God’s revelation (including the gospel), a mighty missionary movement, functioning through its gifted and faithful servants, whether they are offices or whether they are lay members of the Church, throughout the whole New Testament period from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming.

and they will prophesy (*Greek: profeteuo*)(future). The task of the Militant Church (symbolised by the two witnesses) is to prophesy, that is, to speak forth or to proclaim the gospel. The word “prophesy” means to proclaim God’s revelation (in the Bible). It strengthens, encourages and comforts Christians (1 Corinthians 14:3). It teaches them and spurs them on in the truth (1 Corinthians 14:31)⁵.

for 1260 (*Greek: chillias diakosias heksekonta*) days (*Greek: hemera*). The 1260 days equals 42 months or 3½ years and is symbolic for the long period between Christ’s first coming (his enthronement)(12:5-6) and Christ’s second coming (the final judgement day)(11:2-3,15,18). The very last part of this period will last “3½ days”. The “3½” days is symbolic for the short period of the great tribulation just before Christ’s second coming (11:9,11; 20:7-9; cf. Matthew 24:21-22).

While a siege of a city is usually expressed in terms of “months”, witnessing is expressed in terms of “days”, because witnessing is a day to day activity. As in the book of Daniel, these numbers symbolise a period of affliction that will not extend endlessly, but will unexpectedly and abruptly be broken off. The “½” symbolises an unexpected and abrupt breaking off. The Church as a witnessing institute will continue until just before the one and only second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:14).

clothed (*Greek: periballo*)(perfect) in sackcloth (*Greek: sakkos*). The witnesses are clothed in sackcloth, signifying either that they mourn over the sin of the world and the coming last judgement (Genesis 37:34; Jeremiah 4:8; Jeremiah 49:3) or that they call people to repentance (mourning) and faith (Matthew 11:21).

11:4 These are the two olive trees (*Greek: elaia*) and (or: that is) the two lampstands (*Greek: luchnios*) that stand (*Greek: histemi, steso, esteka, hesteka*)(perfect) before the Lord (*Greek: kurios*) of the earth. In the Old Testament there was one lampstand that stood in the Holy Place before the Presence of the Lord in the Most Holy Place. That lampstand was fed oil by two olive tree containers.

In Zechariah 4 the lampstand in the temple served as a symbol of the Lord in heaven who through the Holy Spirit was enabling his two servants, Zerubbabel and Joshua, to accomplish the building of the second temple for his people. Zechariah 4:2 speaks literally of one lampstand, but Revelation 11:4 speaks figuratively of two lampstands. Zechariah 4:11-14 speaks literally of the two olive trees as referring to the two anointed servants of the Lord of the earth, Zerubbabel and Joshua, but Revelation 11:4 speaks figuratively of the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth as referring to the two witnesses. They are enabled to witness because of the anointing by the Holy Spirit (cf. Matthew 10:19-20; Acts 1:8). They are spreading the light of Christ and the gospel (cf. Matthew 5:14-16).

⁵ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich

In Revelation 11:4 the picture is different than in Zechariah and figurative, just as “the temple of God”, “the outer court” and “the great city” are figurative (11:8). The explanation of the angel to another Zechariah about John the Baptist is figurative (Luke 1:17). The teaching of Jesus about John the Baptist is figurative (Matthew 11:13-14; Matthew 17:10-13). And also here in Revelation 11:3-4 the description of the two witnesses is figurative.

As most of the symbolism in the book of Revelation, the two witnesses are only described in terms of Old Testament symbols. Although they are described in terms of Zerubbabel and Joshua as God’s anointed servants on the one hand and in terms of Elijah and Moses in their authority and power on the other hand, they are not literally Zerubbabel and Joshua and also not literally Elijah and Moses! This characterisation does not explain *who* these witnesses are (their names could easily have been mentioned), but rather *what kind of people* they are! They are the anointed servants of the Lord: gifted and with authority.

The two witnesses especially represent the gifted and faithful ministers, missionaries and other lay members of the New Testament Church who are Christ’s instruments to spread the light of the gospel in the world in dependence on the Holy Spirit and with the authority of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 6:10).

They “stand” before the Lord of the earth (11:4) means that they serve the Lord Jesus Christ who has all power (in heaven and) on earth (Mt 28:18; Eph 1:20-22). And it means that the Lord watches over them and is with them everyday until the end of the age (Mt 28:20). It is the Lord Jesus Christ who makes their task effective and significant for the whole earth. This is a great encouragement for Christians!

11:5 An if anyone (*Greek: tis*) wants (tries)(*Greek: thelo*)(*present*) to harm (*Greek: adikeo*)(*arist*) them, fire comes out (*Greek: ekporeuomai*)(*present*) from their mouths and devours (*Greek: katesthio*)(*present*) their enemies (*Greek: echros*). And if anyone wants (*Greek: thelo*)(*subjunctive, arist*) to harm (*Greek: adikeo*)(*arist*) them, thus (*Greek: houtos*) he must (*Greek: dei*)(*present*) die (*Greek: apokteino*)(*arist*). In the execution of its task, the Militant Church and its servants face great opposition. There are people from the nominal Christians, from the false religions and from the anti-Christian world that desire to harm them.

Figuratively fire from their mouths would devour their opponents. This is a symbol of the authority and power of their message. God gave Elijah the power to bring fire from heaven that consumed those that came to arrest him (2 Kings 1:10). God made the words of the prophet Jeremiah “a fire” and the arrogant Israelites “the wood it consumes” (Jeremiah 5:11-14; cf. Jeremiah 23:29). Jesus spoke as one who had authority (Matthew 7:28-29). The crowds were astonished at his teaching (Matthew 22:33). No one could say a word in reply to his answers and no one of his opponents dared to ask him any more questions (Matthew 22:46). The opponents of the gospel could not stand up against the wisdom or the Spirit by whom Stephen spoke (Acts 6:10). And the apostle Paul said, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

The opponents and persecutors of the Church and its servants must face God’s judgement, either in calamities that may fall upon them on this earth or in the calamity of eternal death in hell. Everyone who tries to harm God’s servants “must die” in such calamities. They will ultimately be removed out of the way! They will not be able to escape, because they had tried to destroy God’s work. They had tried to keep people away from Jesus Christ. He who rejects the servants of Christ rejects Christ! And he who rejects Christ, rejects the One who sent him (Lk 10:16)!

11:6 These men have (*present*) the authority (power, ability) to shut up (*Greek: kleio*)(*arist*) the sky (*Greek: ouranos*) so that rain (*Greek: uetos*) will not rain (*Greek: brecho*)(*subjunctive, present*) the days of their prophesying (*Greek: propheteia*). Their power is pictured in terms of the power God gave to the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:1). The draught lasted 3½ years and was an event that Israel could never forget (James 5:17-18) and an event associated with the rejection of God’s servants (Luke 4:24-26)!

These 3½ years became a symbol in the Old Testament and the New Testament for every period of affliction! It became the symbol of every antichrist in history (every antichristian government with its kings) (1 John 2:18) that try to change the set times and the laws and that try to change one time into two times and two times into three times and three times into four times, etc. But every antichrist in history that attempts to lengthen his government and power to seven times (a symbol of eternity) is suddenly and unexpectedly cut in half (half a time) (Daniel 7:23-27)! These 3½ years became the symbol of every period of affliction that would definitely end when “all these things will be completed” (Daniel 12:7). Compare this with the statement, “In the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets (10:7). The period of affliction would definitely end when the full contents of the plan of God (salvation through the proclamation of the gospel and judgement through the trumpets) would have reached its goal.

And they have (*present*) authority (power, ability) over the water to turn (*Greek: strepho*)(*present*) them into blood (*Greek: haima*) and to strike (*Greek: patasso*)(*arist*) the earth with every kind of plague (*Greek: plege*) as often as (*Greek: osakis*) they want (*Greek: thelo*)(*subjunctive, arist*). The power of the two witnesses is also pictured in terms of the power God gave to the prophet Moses in the execution of all the plagues (Exodus 7:19-21).

These Old Testament events are pictures of all kinds of calamities that would fall on the opponents or enemies of the Militant Church (the two witnesses).

The enemies of the Church as an institute that proclaims the gospel will not be able to stand against the words, wisdom and Spirit by which the Church speaks (Matthew 10:19-20; Acts 6:10) or by which the Church judge them (Acts 5:1-11; Act 13:4-12). Christ has also given other such powers to the Church that remains true to the Word, prays and exercises faith. The Militant Church and its servants will even do greater things than Jesus did (John 14:12,14). For example, they will not only witness in one country as Jesus did, but in every country of the world. They will not witness for a few years as Jesus did, but for many more years. They will not just make 11 disciples that remain lasting fruit, but many disciples (John 15:5,8,16). And their prayers will be powerful and very effective (James 5:16-18; cf. Ephesians 3:20).

(2) Different views about the two witnesses (11:3).

A futurist view. The two witnesses are *literally* Elijah and Moses who will proclaim that the time has come to rebuild Jerusalem and to re-establish the Jewish temple worship, because the future millennial kingdom is at hand. They will witness *during the second half of the future tribulation period* (Larkin)⁶.

A second futurist view. The two witnesses are *literally* Elijah and Enoch (Larkin). His argument is that the second witness cannot be Moses, because Moses had died and was *resurrected before the transfiguration* on the mountain (Mt 17:3). Moreover Moses cannot die again, but the two witnesses must still die. Because both Enoch and Elijah were caught up in their bodies without dying, they only qualify to return as the two witnesses and then die after they have completed their future witnessing. However, the majority of futurists argue that there is no Scriptural ground for saying that *Moses cannot die for a second time*, because Lazarus died two times.⁷

A third view. The two witnesses are Peter and Paul (Munck)⁸.

Remarks. Neither the apostle Peter nor the apostle Paul witnessed during the *whole* New Testament period from the first coming of Christ to his second coming. By the time the book of Revelation was written they had already died. The Militant Church through all its gifted and faithful servants witnesses throughout the whole New Testament period.

A fourth view. The two witnesses are *the minority of Christians, the faithful missionaries* and ministers of the Word in the Church, that proclaim the gospel *throughout the whole New Testament period*. The argument is that in Revelation 1:20, the seven lampstands represent the seven congregations, which in turn symbolise the Church in the whole world. Of these seven congregations, only two congregations (two lampstands) were without blame: Smyrna and Philadelphia. The two witnesses therefore represent *the minority of Christians, the faithful ministers and missionaries of the Church* (Greijdanus)⁹.

Remarks. Also the ordinary Christians have a responsibility to be witnesses of Christ (Matthew 10:32; 1 Peter 3:15-16).

A fifth view. The two witnesses are literally two Christians who will again inspire the anxious Church *during the end-time just before Christ's second coming and especially during the reign of the final antichrist*. The argument is that because the world will become tired of "freedom", it will become ripe for tyranny. Although true freedom always means a strong binding to God's Word and commands, "freedom" will become synonymous with "do as you please", with an unrestrained expression of animal passions and with a lack of law and order. Just one option will be left for the world and that is tyranny. One tyrant will demand what everyone must believe, say and do. It will be the inauguration of the final antichrist. Through the words of two literal witnesses the fleeing Church will again take courage. There will be an increase in prayer and faith and joy. There will be a spirit of submitting themselves to God and the end-time events. But it will not be a period of missions and evangelisation anymore, but rather of apostasy, chaos and disruption. Like modern man, many nominal Christians will discard the faith as old fashioned and useless myths and withdraw from the Church. These two witnesses will be God's final rebuke and call to repentance. But also these two witnesses will be killed as the prophets before them (Bavinck)¹⁰.

Remarks. The two witnesses represent the Militant Church throughout the whole New Testament period. Of course, the Church will witness during the time of the final antichrist until he will destroy the Church as an institute proclaiming the Biblical message (11:7; cf. 13:7).

The correct explanation. The two witnesses of Christ represent the Militant Church as an institute that proclaims God's revelation (including the gospel), a mighty missionary movement, functioning through its gifted and faithful servants, whether they are offices or whether they are lay members of the Church, *throughout the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming*.¹¹

But because the book of Revelation is also a progressive revelation of the apocalyptic events in the end-time, the emphasis in Revelation chapter 11 is especially on the witnessing of the Militant Church during the end-time just before Christ's second coming.

⁶ Larkin, Revelation pp. 84-85

⁷ cf. Larkin, Revelation p. 85

⁸ Munck

⁹ Greijdanus pp. 174-175, 48

¹⁰ Bavinck pp. 223-229

¹¹ Hendriksen pp. 155-156

PART 3. Revelation 11:7-10. THE BEAST MAKES WAR AGAINST THE WITNESSES.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

11:7 And (now) when (*Greek: hotan*) they have finished (*Greek: teleo*)(*subjunctive, aorist*) their testimony (*Greek: marturia*). The testimony of the two witnesses will not go on endlessly. The gospel will be proclaimed in the whole world as a testimony for all the nations and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14). When the sinful world has completely refused to receive the gospel in order to be saved, then God will withdraw his grace and the preaching of the gospel and allow the powers of hell to gain the power on earth.

the beast (*Greek: to therion*). The beast represents every one of Satan's antichristian governments and their kings (cf. 13:1-10), but here he represents the final antichristian government and the final antichrist (11:7; cf. 17:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). The meaning of this picture is that just before Christ's second coming, the final antichrist will appear and all people that have rejected Christ will be handed over to him (cf. 20:7-9a). This will be "the great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21-22).

that comes up (*Greek: anabaino*)(*present*) from the Abyss. It could mean: he *continuously or again and again comes up* to do his destructive work. Or he *is coming up* out of the Abyss in this vision to do his final destructive work.

The Abyss is generally contrasted with the sky and earth and refers to the depth of the sea (Psalm 33:7; Psalm 107:26)¹². It is commonly pictured as a place deep under the earth, connected to the surface of the earth by a shaft. It is the abode of the dead (Romans 10:7); the abode of demons (Luke 8:31); and the abode of the angel or king of the demons (9:11). It is the dungeon where the devil is kept (20:3); and the abode of the beast, the final antichrist (11:7; 17:8). Symbolically the Abyss is capable of being closed with a lid that is locked and sealed (20:1,3). And symbolically it can only be opened with "the key" which God provides, that is, by God's permissive decree (9:1).

While in Revelation 20:1 Satan is pictured as being shut up in the Abyss with respect to his deceiving the nations (his immense power is definitely limited!), in Revelation 9:1 Satan is pictured as having received the power (the key) to release the demons inside the Abyss. Of course this power and authority is only insofar God permits him!

The Abyss must be distinguished from Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek) in the sense of the state of the dead (Mt 16:18; Revelation 1:18) or in the sense of the grave, the place of the dead body (Acts 2:27,31). But the Abyss is identical with Sheol or Hades in the sense of the place of destruction (Abaddon)(Job 26:6) or hell, the place of the dead spirits of the wicked (Matthew 11:23; Lk 16:23-24). And the word Abyss must be distinguished from the word "Tartarus" (in Jewish apocalyptic literature, in Job 41:24 in the Greek Old Testament translation and in 2 Pet 2:4). The Greeks regarded Tartarus as lower than Hades (the abode of the dead); as a subterranean place where divine punishment was meted out.

Before the final judgement day hell is called "the Abyss" (9:2; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-3,7; Luke 8:31). After the final judgement day hell is called "the lake of burning sulphur" (19:18; 20:14,15; 21:8).

will make (*Greek: poieo*)(*future*) war (*Greek: polemon*) with (NIV: attack) them. Because nothing less than "war" (*Greek: polemos*) is made against them, the two witnesses cannot refer to two *literal* persons, but rather *symbolise* the Militant Church as expressed in its faithful servants and members proclaiming the gospel. The same Greek words are used in Revelation 13:7 and there refers to "all the saints", that is, all the true Christians. The final antichristian government with its king, the final antichrist, will stir up the whole wicked world to make war against the true Church and the proclamation of the gospel. That will be "the final battle" (the final war) that is also mentioned in the parallel passages in Revelation 11:7; 13:7; 16:14,16; 19:19; 20:8.

and overpower (conquer)(*Greek: nikao*)(*future*) and kill (*Greek: apokteino*)(*future*) them. The same Greek words are used in Revelation 13:7. The final antichristian government and its king, the final antichrist, will conquer and destroy the Church as a mighty organisation and as a missionary movement on earth. Although there will still be individual Christians on earth at Christ's one and only second coming (Luke 18:8; Matthew 24:37-41; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52;

1 Thessalonians 4:17), just before Christ's second coming, many Christian workers will be martyred and the Church as an institution (organisation) will seem as if it has been completely wiped out.

The beast (the final antichristian government and the final antichrist) will attack the two witnesses, overpower them and kill them. For 3½ days their dead bodies will lie openly exposed in the street of the great city, which is *figuratively* called Sodom and Egypt, where also Jesus Christ was crucified.

11:8 Their bodies (lit. that which is fallen, corpse)(*Greek: ptoma*) (will lie) in the street (*Greek: plateia*). The corpse of the true Militant Church as an institution on earth, whose official and public testimony has been silenced and smothered by the godless and wicked world, will lie on the main street of the great city.

of the great city, which is figuratively (*Greek: pneumatikos*) called (*kaleomai*)(*present, passive*) Sodom and Egypt, where (*Greek: hopou*) also (*Greek: kai*) their Lord was crucified (*Greek: stauroo*)(*aorist*). In the book of Revelation, "the great city" always refers to Babylon, a great worldly city, which is figuratively the centre of anti-

¹² A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1952

Christian power and the centre of the kingdom of antichrist (17:5). “The great city” has no literal meaning, but a figurative meaning! Because in Revelation 11:8 the great city is the place where the Lord was crucified (Mt 23:37) it refers to Jerusalem. The literal city of “Jerusalem” is a symbol of the non-Christians and anti-Christian world.

Thus, when Jerusalem and its inhabitants crucified Jesus Christ the city that once was “the holy city” (11:2) became like Babylon, the symbol of the godless and wicked world powers that always attacked God’s people. It became like Sodom, the symbol of anti-Christian sexual and spiritual immorality (Gen chapter 19; Jeremiah 23:14, Ezekiel 16:46-47). And it became like Egypt, the symbol of anti-Christian political and military oppression, persecution, imprisonment, slavery and ethnic cleansing (Exodus 20:2).

In the historical past, Jerusalem was the symbol of God’s believing people, the Lord’s special possession (Isaiah 2:1-3). But since the first coming of Christ and his crucifixion, Jerusalem has become the symbol of the unbelieving and persecuting Jews and Gentiles, the symbol of the enemy of God’s people, the centre of anti-Christian power and the centre of the kingdom of antichrist. It has become the symbol of pseudo-Christian religions (the corruption of the Christian faith and teachings) and even the symbol of anti-Christianity (the opposition of the Christian faith by the religions and politics of the world). Jerusalem together with its inhabitants has become the place of slavery to sin (Galatians 4:25).

Jerusalem (and its people) has not only become like one of the Gentile nations, but has become the centre of the Gentile nations! “Men from every people group, tribe, language and nation” are represented in that great city (11:9-10)! Thus, the great city and its people from all over the world symbolise not any particular city in present history (e.g. the city of Jerusalem in Palestine), but every city in the world, every organised community of civilized man¹³, every dwelling place of man that crucify the Son of God all over again and subject him to public disgrace (Hebrews 6:6)! The great city symbolizes every possible political group, philosophy or religion on earth that opposes Jesus Christ and his Church, that deliberately keeps on sinning, that tramples the Son of God under foot, that treats the blood of the covenant (the death of Jesus Christ on the cross) as an unholy thing and that insults the Spirit of God that offers grace and forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 10:26-29)!

Because all the cities in the world and all the people in the world throughout the history of the world are involved in either witnessing or opposing this witnessing, the two witnesses cannot refer to just two literal persons. The two witnesses rather symbolise the true Militant Church on earth as an institute of proclaiming the gospel through its faithful witnesses in the whole godless and wicked world throughout the whole New Testament period. But because the book of Revelation is also a progressive revelation of the apocalyptic events in the end-time, *the emphasis* in Revelation chapter 11 is especially on the witnessing of the Militant Church during the end-time just before Christ’s second coming.

The murder of the two witnesses will be an event of universal importance. In the midst of the anti-Christian world, the Church as an institution will be killed. It will no longer exist as an influential and powerful missionary organisation. This is a picture, not of two literal dead bodies, but of the ruin of the whole Church as an institution in the world, the torn remains of the gospel ministry in the world, the lifeless signs of the right worship and service of the living God and his Christ in the world. The true Christian Church as an institution in the world will be wiped out.

11:9 And (men) from (every) people (*Greek: laos*), tribe (*Greek: phule*), language (*Greek: glossa*) and nation (*Greek: ethne*) will stare (*Greek: blepo*)(*present*) for three (*Greek: treis*) and a half (*Greek: hemisu*) days (*Greek: hemera*) at their bodies (*Greek: ptoma*) and refuse (*Greek: aphiem*)(*present*) to put (*Greek: tithemi, theso, etheka, tetheika*)(*aorist*) them into a grave (*Greek: mnema*). The destruction of the Church as an institution that lives and proclaims Christ will last symbolically for only 3½ days. The number “3½” symbolises the very short time of the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21-26; Revelation 20:7-9a). Just as in the book of Daniel, the number “3½” symbolises a period of affliction that will not extend endlessly, but will unexpectedly and abruptly be broken off. The “½” symbolises an unexpected and abrupt breaking off. Although the godless and wicked world will aspire to lengthen this period of affliction of 3½ days (to 4, 5, 6 and even 7 days, that is to “eternity”), God will limit this period in a sovereign way and bring it to an unexpected and abrupt halt. This period of the great tribulation will not extend endlessly. God will intervene in a sovereign way so that his grace and mercy will triumph. “Mercy triumphs over judgement” (James 2:13)!

Jesus taught that the period of the great tribulation would be *cut short* for the sake of the elect, that is, for the sake of born again Christians (Matthew 24:22-23). The antichrist and his followers will try to deceive the elect. But thank God, *it is impossible to deceive the elect* (Matthew 24:24)(cf. John 6:37,39; John 10:28; John 17:12; John 18:9)! This is a great encouragement for Christians!

11:10 And the inhabitants (*Greek: katoikeo*)(*present*) of the earth will rejoice (gloat) (*Greek: chairo*)(*present*) over them and celebrate (*Greek: euphraino*)(*present*) and send (*Greek: pempo*)(*future*) each other gifts (*Greek: dorea*). This event is not a local event in one particular literal city (e.g. Jerusalem), but a *worldwide event*. The inhabitants in every city and country of the world will gaze at and gloat over the dead remains of the Church as an institute of proclaiming Jesus Christ and the Bible in their country. These people are the followers of the antichrist, the rejecters of God and his Christ. Their refusal to bury the bodies of the two witnesses symbolises their utter contempt

¹³ S. L. Morris, *The Drama of Christianity*, 1928

and hatred for the true Church and the Lord Jesus Christ. They may even leave the ruins of the Church in every country as a testimony of their victory. They will treat the Christians as “godless”: “At that time the bones of the kings and officials of Judah, the bones of the priest and prophets and the bones of the people of Jerusalem will be removed from their graves. They will be exposed to the sun and the moon and the stars of the heavens, which they have loved and served and which they have followed and consulted and worshipped. They will not be gathered up or buried, but will be like refuse lying on the ground” (Jeremiah 8:1-2). The godless and wicked people of the world will celebrate the destruction of the Church and the silencing of the preaching of the gospel by sending each other gifts. Thus also the godless commercial world will make its profit out of the persecution of Christians.

because these two prophets had tormented (*Greek: basanizo*)(*ao*rist) those who live (*Greek: katoikeo*)(*present*) on the earth. The preaching of God’s revelation and the gospel had disturbed people’s false sense of security (Acts 17:6; Acts 24:25). The non-Christians have loved the darkness more than the light (Jn 3:19-21). They cannot experience peace anymore. “The wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. There is no peace, says my God for the wicked” (Isaiah 57:20-21)!

Just before Christ’s second coming the Church as an institution will be destroyed and the public proclamation of the gospel will be silenced. But this does not mean that there will be no more Christians on earth. Christians will be on the earth right up to Christ’s second coming, because they will *see* Christ coming on the clouds (1:7) and then they will be caught up in the clouds to meet and welcome Christ (Matthew 24:40a,41a; Matthew 25:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10).

(2) Different views about the great city (11:8).

A futurist view. The great city is *literally* Jerusalem in Palestine *during the second half of the future tribulation period*. It is *figuratively* called Sodom and Egypt, because during the future tribulation period *the character of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will resemble that of Sodom (immorality) and Egypt (persecution)* (Larkin)¹⁴.

The correct explanation. “The great city” *symbolises* the immoral and antichristian world (Hendriksen)¹⁵, every city in the world, every organised community of civilized man, every dwelling place of man on earth that opposes Christ and his Church, that defile themselves with all the idols, refuse to give up prostitution, but become more and more promiscuous throughout the whole New Testament period and especially at the end time. Read Ezekiel 23:1-8,19.

PART 4. Revelation 11:11-14. THE RESURRECTION.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

11:11 And (but) after (*Greek: meta*) 3½ days a breath (*Greek: pneuma*) of life (*Greek: zoe*) from God entered (*Greek: eiserchomai, eleusomai, elthon, elelutha*)(*ao*rist) them and they stood (*Greek: histemi, steso, estaka, hesteka*)(*ao*rist) on their feet and great fear (*Greek: phobos*) fell on (*Greek: epipipto*)(*ao*rist) (terror struck) those who saw (watch)(*Greek: theoreo*)(*present*) them. In Ezekiel 37:4-5 the breath entering people symbolised “the resurrection of Israel from their social state of death in exile in Babylon” (Ezekiel 37:11-14). In Revelation 11:11 the breath entering the two witnesses symbolises “the resurrection of the Militant Church (the physical resurrection of all Christians) in order to become the Triumphant Church at the second coming of Christ”.

The celebration of the godless and wicked world will be premature. After 3½ days, Christ’s one and only second coming will take place, the physical resurrection of all people from the dead (Matthew 24:27-31; 11:11; cf. John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) and the final judgement day (6:12-17; 11:15-19; 14:14-20; 16:17-21; 20:9b-15).

The verbs “entered”, “stood” and “fell on” are in the past tense¹⁶, but do not indicate that these events have already happened. This form of the verb expresses certainty! This event (the physical resurrection) is so sure that it is described as if it had already taken place! Standing on their feet symbolises their complete restoration. The last enemy, death, will be conquered and every Christian that ever lived will be complete and perfect, not only completely healed, but also completely transformed! But terror will strike the godless and wicked world. For them it will be too late to repent!

11:12 And (then) they heard (*ao*rist) a loud voice (*Greek: phone*) from heaven saying (*present*) to them, ‘Come up (*Greek: anabaino*)(*imperative, ao*rist) here (in this place)(*Greek: hode*).’ And they went up (*Greek: anabaino*)(*ao*rist) to heaven in a cloud (*Greek: nephele*), and (while) their enemies (*Greek: echros*) looked on (*Greek: theoreo*)(*ao*rist). The word “heaven” here refers to the sky (cf. 11:6; 12:11,3; 16:21; Acts 2:19), a synonym for the air in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Christ’s second coming will be audible and visible. There will be no secret rapture of the Church. John *describes* here what Jesus *taught* (John 5:28-29; Matthew 13:40-43; Matthew 24:37-41; Matthew 25:31-46) and what Paul *taught* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52)! Everyone that ever lived will hear the voice or command of Christ (John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16) and everyone will see Christ on the clouds (1:7; 14:14), *see* all the Church (all

¹⁴ Larkin, Revelation p. 87¹⁴

¹⁵ Hendriksen p. 158

¹⁶ These three verbs are in the aorist tense, with meaning of a futurum exactum, expressing certainty.

believers of the Old Testament period and the New Testament period) harvested (14:14-16) and *see* the Church ascend to heaven (into the sky)(11:12), that is, caught up in clouds to meet and welcome Christ in the air (Matthew 24:40-41; Matthew 25:10-13; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10). Later on that same last day, the angels will bring the unbelievers and wicked people before the judgement throne of Christ (14:17-20; Matthew 25:31-33) and the one and only final judgement will take place (11:15-19; 16:17-21; 20:11-15; Matthew 25:31-46).

11:13 And at that very hour (*Greek: hora*) there was (*Greek: ginomai*)(*aorist*) a severe earthquake (*Greek: seismos*). The earthquake and its destruction will take place at that very hour, that is, immediately on the final judgement day (cf. 6:12-17; 11:13; 16:18).

and a tenth (*Greek: dekalos*) of the city collapsed (*Greek: pipto*)(*aorist*). The great city symbolises every city in the world, every organised community of civilized man that opposes Christ and his Church, every centre of the kingdom of antichrist (16:19). The number “10” is a symbol for completeness and the number “a tenth” is a symbol that the work of complete destruction had begun. The kingdom of the antichrist had begun to crumble. The final destruction of this present earth had begun.

The names (*Greek: onoma*) of seven thousand (*Greek: chiliades hepta*) people were killed (*Greek: apokteino*)(*aorist, passive*) in the earthquake. “The names” stand for people, especially the very important or famous people of the kingdom of antichrist.

The number “7000” should not be taken literally. Symbolically it indicates greatness and completeness. The number “7” indicates that the acts of salvation and judgement of the God in heaven are absolutely complete and perfect. The number “1000” (10x10x10) indicates that God’s acts include the absolute complete number of people on earth. The great city will certainly fall and the complete number of those destined for destruction by the earthquake will be destroyed.

and the survivors (the rest)(*Greek: loipos*) became (*Greek: ginomai*)(*ingressive aorist*) terrified (*Greek: emphobos*) and gave (*Greek: didomi*)(*aorist*) glory to the God of heaven.

Although the survivors (of this earthquake) will be terrified and give glory to God, this does not mean that they had repented (cf. Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:34,37). Their praise will come forth out of fear and consist of acknowledging that God is stronger than the beast (Philippians 2:9-11). They had rejected the testimony of the Church about Christ, they had killed Christians and they had remained impenitent. Therefore, the final reckoning must come and will certainly come!

11:14 The second (*Greek: deuterios*) woe (*Greek: ouai*) has passed (*Greek: aperchomai*)(*aorist*); the third (*Greek: tritos*) woe is coming (*Greek: erchomai*)(*present*) soon (quickly)(*Greek: tachy*). The second woe consists of universal wars on earth until the final battle of Armageddon has passed. The third woe is about to happen (11:14).

(2) The three woes.

A “woe” is not only a warning, but at the same time a call to unbelievers to repent and turn (9:20-21).

The first woe is equal to the blowing of the fifth trumpet. The fifth trumpet of judgement consists of *the destructive work of Satan and his demons who martyr and destroy* people five months long who have not been sealed with God’s seal (9:1-12). Satan opens the shaft through which he fills the world with his demons and pernicious activities and influence. The demons terrify the hearts and lives of the godless and wicked people and damage them.

The second woe is equal to the blowing of the sixth trumpet (11:14). The sixth trumpet of judgement consists of *the destructive work of wars* fought by the godless power in the world with their terrifying war machines which they invent during the whole New Testament period (9:13-19). The wars also affect the Christians, especially the final war (Armageddon) which is directed against Christ and his Church (11:7; 13:7). The second woe ends with the resurrection of the dead (11:14).

The third woe is equal to the blowing of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19). The seventh trumpet of judgement consists of the last judgement of people and the creation.

PART 5. Revelation 11:15-19. THE BLOWING OF THE SEVENTH TRUMPET.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

11:15 And the seventh (*Greek: hebdomos*) angel sounded his trumpet (*Greek: salpizo*)(*aorist*) (the third woe, 11:14). The seventh trumpet introduces the one and only final judgement day, which will “accomplish the mystery of God” (10:7). The mystery of God consists of God’s decree concerning salvation (11:18c) and judgement (11:18d) of all the nations in world-history. At the sounding of the seventh trumpet God brings the history of the world once more in its description in the book of Revelation to its conclusion. The history of the world is brought to a conclusion:

- in section 1 (by the rewards promised in each of the seven letters)
- in section 2 (by a vision of the final judgement in 6:12-17)
- and here in section 3 (by the announcement of the final judgement in 11:15- 19).

The final judgement day (11:18ab) is not described, but only introduced. And its significance with respect to God (11:17), Christ (11:15), believers (11:18c) and unbelievers (11:18d) is pointed out.

At Christ's second coming several things will happen:

- Jesus Christ will appear suddenly and unexpectedly coming audibly and visibly on the clouds (1:7)
- In the final battle (war)(Greek: *polemos*) Christ will be the Conqueror (11:7; cf. 12:7-10; 13:7; 16:12-16; 17:14; 19:11-21; 20:7-10)
- All the dead will be resurrected at the same time (11:11-12; 20:12; cf. John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15)
- Only the Christians will be snatched up into the air to meet Christ and welcome him (Matthew 24:40-41; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10)
- The rest of mankind (the survivors) will be left behind on that last day and will experience the wrath of the God and the Lamb, including the great earthquake (6:15-17; 11:13; 16:17-21, cf. Matthew 24:40-41)
- Jesus Christ will sit on his throne and judge the nations and all individuals (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:12-15)
- Jesus Christ will also judge the present earth and renew it completely (6:12-14; 20:11; 21:1-5; cf. Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 10-13).

and there were (Greek: *ginomai*)(*aorist*) loud voices (Greek: *phone*) in heaven. John hears the voices of many singing with all their might and with extreme joy. It is not stated who they are, but they probably are the voices of everyone in heaven: the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, the uncountable number of angels and the believers that are now in their full number with Christ (15:2-4; 19:1-8). The words of this praise song are in the past tense, expressing the absolute certainty of the final outcome. It is expressed as if it had already happened. In his spirit, John hears their praise.

saying (present): 'The kingdom (Greek: *basileia*) of the world (Greek: *kosmos*) has become (Greek: *ginomai*)(*aorist*) (the kingdom) of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign (Greek: *basileuo*)(*future*) for ever and ever. God's kingdom is an *everlasting* kingdom (Psalm 145:13). God has been reigning *forever* (Psalm 9:7; Psalm 146:10). He reigns by caring for the smallest bird (Matthew 10:29), by providing food for people (Acts 14:17), by giving them life and breath and everything else, even a time and place to live on earth (Acts 17:24-27). His kingdom in a general sense is his kingship, rule, dominion or sovereignty through Christ (Psalm 2:2) over everyone and everything.

God's kingdom in a special sense is his kingship, rule, dominion or sovereignty which he establishes at Christ's first coming (Mt 12:28-30) over the hearts (Luke 17:21) and lives (Matthew 6:33) of Christians. He reigns by working out all things for the good of Christians who love him (Romans 8:28).

Nevertheless, God's kingdom of reign is not always apparent to people. Throughout the whole New Testament period it is not always clear that Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18; John 3:35). It often seems as if Satan has more power than Christ. Things do not seem to be what they really are. Christ's kingdom at the present time is still growing (Matthew 13:31-33) and is still mixed with infiltrators (Matthew 13:36-41).

But at Christ's one and only second coming it will be absolutely clear that Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (17:14; 19:16). Then his glorious reign will become completely manifest! He will come with the full and visible sovereignty of God to vindicate Christians, to judge the godless and wicked people and to renew the universe. Then the final and perfect phase of his kingdom will be revealed. He will possess all the nations (Psalm 2:7-12), his dominion will not pass away, his kingdom will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:14) and his kingdom will never end (Luke 1:33). The words: "He will hand the kingdom over to God the Father" does not mean that Jesus Christ stops to reign. It means that he will hand his task as Mediator of the creation, salvation, judgement and kingship over to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). From then on the throne will be "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1,3) and the kingdom will be "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and of the Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11).

11:16 And the twenty-four (Greek: *eikosi tessares*) elders (Greek: *presbuteros*) , who were seated (Greek: *kathizo*)(present) on their thrones before God, fell (Greek: *pipto*)(*aorist*) on their faces (Greek: *prosopon*) and worshipped (Greek: *proskuneo*)(*aorist*) God. See the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4:4.

11:17 saying (present), 'We give thanks (Greek: *eucharisteo*)(present) to you, Lord God Almighty (Greek: *pantokrator*), the One who is (present) and who was (imperfect), because you have taken (Greek: *lambano*, *lempsomai*, *elabon*, *eilepha*)(perfect) your great power (Greek: *dunamis*) and have begun to reign (Greek: *basileuo*)(*ingressive aorist*). The twenty-four elders are the representatives of Christ's complete community in heaven and on earth. They are not identical with the Church, but represent the Church. Their praise consists of Revelation 11:17-18.

God is no longer addressed as "the One who is to come" (1:4,8; 4:8), because after his second coming he has already come! God has taken his great power (which previously on earth was not apparent or always visible) and now possesses this great power permanently (visibly on the new earth). Every power, which Satan and his allies ever exercised by God's permission, have been taken away from them. And God has begun to reign visibly. God has employed his great power to overthrow all enemies and has begun to reign visibly as the undisputed King (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). There will no longer be the illusion that Satan and evil rules. It will be absolutely visible and clear that God in Christ reigns and that all things are now visibly what they really always have been.

The end of this present world has arrived. The Christian multitude rejoices in the fact that the Lord has reached the zenith of his power and authority, now publicly displayed! He has begun to reign visibly and gloriously!

11:18 The nations (*Greek: ethne*) were angry (*Greek: orgizo*)(*ao*rist); and your wrath (*Greek: orge*) has *once for all time* come (*Greek: erchomai*)(*ao*rist). “The nations” represent the godless and wicked people on earth who have rejected the God of the Bible, his Anointed (the Messiah) and his message (the gospel). They have become “angry” or better: “arrogant”. The Septuagint translates, “For what reason are the heathen arrogant, haughty, insolent” (Psalm 2:1-3)? In their anger they had opposed, oppressed, persecuted and destroyed the true Christian Church on earth. But now God’s righteous wrath in his final judgement has fallen upon them!

and (*with this*) the (appointed) time (*Greek: kairos*) (*has come*) for judging (*Greek: krino*)(*ao*rist) all the dead (*Greek: nekros*). Everyone who ever lived will be judged (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12). God’s servants will be rewarded and his opponents will be destroyed.

for giving (*Greek: didomi*)(*ao*rist) the reward (*Greek: misthos*) to your servants (*Greek: doulos*) the prophets and your saints and those who *continually* fear (reverence) (*Greek: phobeomai*)(*present*) your name, both small (*Greek: mikros*) and great (*Greek: megalos*). “God’s servants the prophets” is a reference to all God’s Old Testament and New Testament workers. And “God’s saints” is a reference to all God’s Old Testament and New Testament believers.

The Bible does not acknowledge four categories of people that will be rewarded: God’s servants, God’s prophets, God’s saints (Christians) and (according to some expositors) non-Christians who have shown in one way or another “reference” to God’s Name. The Bible does not acknowledge salvation outside Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5)! The Bible does not allude to respectable non-Christians, “the better classes of men” entering into a so-called future millennial kingdom (as the futurist, Larkin, puts it). The Bible does not allude to “good” people from the other religions in the world. Outside Jesus Christ no one is good (Romans 3:10-12). Only God’s servants and God’s people will be rewarded and all others will be lost and destroyed.

and for destroying (*Greek: diaphtheiro*)(*ao*rist) those who destroy (*present*) the earth. The destroyers of the earth will be destroyed, not in the sense of annihilation, but in the sense iron is spoilt by rust, clothes are eaten by moths, bodies are corrupted (decayed) in the grave and all moral sense is ruined. They will be thrown into hell, where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mk 9:48). They will go away to *eternal punishment* (Mt 25:48) and will be punished *with everlasting destruction* and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (his kingdom) (2 Thessalonians 1:9). **The word ‘destruction’ (Greek: olethros) ολεθρος (destruction) does not mean ‘annihilation’, but implies ‘the loss of all things that give worth to existence’.**

11:19 And (then) God’s temple (*Greek: naos*) in heaven was opened (*Greek: anoigo*)(*ao*rist) and within his temple was seen (*Greek: horao, opsomai, ophthen, heoraka*)(*ao*rist *passive*) the ark (*Greek: kibotos*) of his covenant (*Greek: diatheke*). Already during the Old Testament period the ark hidden behind the curtain in the temple symbolised the presence and rule of God by his commandments (Exodus 25:16,22; Exodus 40:3) as long as permanent atonement for sin had not yet been made (Galatians 3:19-25). After the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. the ark would never be missed, nor would another ark be made (Jeremiah 3:16).

But in the beginning of the New Testament period, when Jesus Christ was crucified, the curtain in the temple was torn as a symbol that henceforth anyone may enter into God’s presence through faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:59; Ephesians 2:18; Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 10:19). Everyone, whose sins are atoned for, is ruled directly by God through his Spirit in the heart. While the ark could not be seen during the Old Testament period, because it was hidden behind the curtain, the ark in the heavenly temple is the visible symbol of the covenant that is based on the atonement of sins during the New Testament period. The ark of God’s covenant symbolises the real, intimate, perfect and eternal fellowship between God and his people (Hebrews 7:18-28; Hebrews 8:7-13). In the symbol of the ark God reveals himself to Christians as the faithful and gracious God of the covenant.

For Christians in tribulation the vision of the ark of God’s covenant in God’s temple in heaven is a great assurance of the reality of God, his presence and his faithful and gracious work of atonement. At Christ’s one and only second coming, God will reveal himself as the faithful God of the covenant to his people and his covenant of grace will be fully realised: he will live among his people forever (21:3). After the second coming of Christ nothing will remain veiled, hidden or concealed anymore. Jesus had already taught his disciples, “There is *nothing concealed* that will not be disclose, or hidden that will not be made known” (Matthew 10:26; cf. 1 Corinthians 13: 9-12).

And there came (*Greek: ginomai*)(*ao*rist) flashes of lightning (*Greek: astrape*), rumblings (*Greek: phone*), peals of thunder (*Greek: bronte*), an earthquake (*Greek: seismos*) and great hailstones (*Greek: chalaza*). These phenomena symbolise God’s manifestation whenever he makes a revelation. In this symbol God reveals himself as the God of wrath to non-Christians. They will certainly be judged. These flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and the great hailstorm come from God’s throne and symbolise God’s immense majesty, glory, power and terrible justice. Once more God is going to shake, not only he earth, but also the heavens ... so that what cannot be shaken may remain” (Hebrews 12:26-27; cf. Isaiah 2:17- 21; Revelation 6:12-17).

While all people are being judged before God’s throne of judgement in the air (Matthew 25:31-33), the present earth will also be judged and completely renewed (Matthew 24:29-30; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 20:11-15).

(2) Different views about the seventh trumpet (11:15).

A futurist view. The seventh trumpet includes everything that happens *chronologically between Revelation 11:15 to Revelation 20:3* (Larkin and Tenney). The sounding of its blast or blasts extends for “days” (10:7), actually for 3½ years of the second half of the future tribulation period (the second half of Daniel’s 70th week). It includes the seven personages, the seven bowls and the four dooms and is followed by *the future millennial kingdom on this present earth* (11:15 - 20:10)¹⁷. Revelation 11:15 is merely an announcement of the coming millennial kingdom, which would only come 3½ years later.

Remarks. By such kinds of interpolations in their chronological scheme the futurist view tries to circumvent the very clear parallel passages about the last judgement day in the book of Revelation!

The correct explanation. The seventh trumpet *introduces the one and only final judgement day*, which brings the history of the world once more (for the third time in the descriptions in the book of Revelation) to a conclusion. It is followed by *the eternal kingdom of God on the new earth*.

¹⁷ Larkin, Revelation p. 88, Tenney p. 76