

Trusting God in Hard Times

Revelation 11:1-2, 19

“And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty *and* two months.” (Revelation 11:1-2)

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

How do you work through a difficult reading, studying verses you don't comprehend?

Look for the Lord, for His Wisdom, His Mercy, knowing His ways are much higher than men's

Study His words, think through all of their meanings; ask Him for wisdom He promised to give

Look for the ways to apply what you've studied; asking the question, “How then should I live?”

The passage before us introduces what many consider to be the most difficult chapter in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The main reason for this difficulty is that the passage contains a number of objects, persons, times and places that could be taken literally or figuratively. No preacher, no interpreter, would be wise to be dogmatic about his interpretation of this passage. There are simply too many difficulties to overcome to be dogmatic. Here are a few examples from the first 2 verses.

What Do We Know about the Objects in this Passage? (see footnotes below)

A reedⁱ, like a rod: the spike or stalk of a common plant that grew several feet tall, but could be broken into pieces for various uses including measuring; a heavenly reed for measuring ⁱⁱ

The templeⁱⁱⁱ of God: Used of the Jerusalem temple in the New Testament.^{iv} Also used as a description for New Testament congregations, and “the temple of my God” in heaven^v

The holy city: the earthly Jerusalem in Israel and the heavenly Jerusalem^{vi}

How to Approach this Passage

But our failure to be certain about all of these objects doesn't mean that these verses are without meaning to us today. No, the example the psalmist gives us a pattern for careful thought: **“I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways”** (Psalm 119:15). Yes, even in the hardest of times, we can pray with the psalmist, **“Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts”** (Psalm 119:78). Revelation 11 can teach us to trust God in hard times and give Him glory.

Hard Times

What almost every commentator on this passage can agree on is this: The phrase, **“it is given to the Gentiles [the nations]...”** represents power given to God's enemies. And, like Satan in the Book of Job, God's enemies use this power to persecute God's people. Who gives them this power? And why would God allow His people to go through these taunting trials?

What Do We Learn about the Lord in this Passage?

Using the pattern given to us in Psalm 119:15 and 78, we can look for the Lord in this passage. What do we learn directly about His character or indirectly from His works? How can we see His glory?

God, the Giver

More than forty times in the Book of the Revelation, God is described as giving something to men and angels. Sometimes, this giving is a reference to power given to God's enemies. Sometimes God the Giver gives endurance to His people; He also gives answers to their prayers and promises to give rewards. At times, John was given something by an angel, but the authority to do so clearly came from God.

What is quite surprising in verse 2 is that God's enemies are given power to trample over that which God designates as holy. When God's people experience persecution from the nations, it would be tempting to think that God is not a good giver. But even God's Son endured this evil with the full knowledge that His Father had granted power to evil doers. Jesus told Pilate that he, as governor of Judea, could have no power or authority over Jesus unless it had been given to him from above (John 19:11).

In Psalm 19, David wrote, **“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes”** (Psalm 19:8). God's statutes (or precepts) and commandments “indicate the precision and authority with which God addresses us...”^{vii} Think about the impact of God's precepts and commandments in these verses. They cause the heart of the believer to rejoice; in this dark world, with all its ethical and moral muddling, God's commandments give us light for our eyes. In today's service, we have sung the hymns of God's love. These hymns have been reminded us of the God who loves us and gave Himself for us. God is the Giver, and we can trust Him to give us good gifts. In Revelation 11:1, the Apostle John was given a reed to measure with. What does this tell us about the Lord?

God the Judge of all

Before we get into the specifics of what the measuring stick meant or even what was measured, let's look for the Lord. God is the Giver, and, in this case, He gave the apostle something to measure with. In other words, this was a God-given standard. This reminds us that God is the Judge of all. His Righteousness is that standard by which we measure what is right.

Understanding this measurement is one of the most important components of the way you view the world. When Leonardo da Vinci sketched his well-known “Vitruvian Man,” he artistically presented the concept: *“Man is the measure of all things.”* You can see this when you see the man measuring with outstretched arms within a circle and a rectangle.

Da Vinci derived this concept from Vitruvius. He was a Roman architect who believed that the dimensions and proportions of the human body were significant standards for the earth and the heavens. From these men, Humanism draws its central principle: *“Man is the measure of all things.”* Yet in Revelation 11:1, the reed – the standard – is God-given. So, how do you see it? Is man the measure of all things? Or is God the measure of all things? You can work this out practically, using Scripture. Do you foolishly measure yourself by other people (2 Corinthians 10:12)? Or do you measure yourself by “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13)?

Measuring the temple corresponds to the pictures we find in Ezekiel 40:3 (and following) and Revelation 21:15. This act of measuring the temple also corresponds to what we find in Zechariah 2:1-5. In Revelation 11, John was commanded to precisely measure the temple, the altar, and those who worship therein. By contrast with the trampling evil of the Gentile nations, the temple and the people appear to honor God with genuine worship.

In the Old Testament, some of those who received special revelation from God were called “seers.” In 2 Chronicles 16:9, Hanani the Seer told King Asa of Judah, **“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose heart is perfect toward him. . .”** So, even now, God the Giver, the Judge of all, the Righteous Owner is looking upon our hearts. How does your heart look, according to His righteous standard? God gives His strength to those who will pursue a close relationship with Him.

Now as to what the reed represents, commentators disagree widely. Some insist that this is a reference to the Word of God, the Protestant Reformation and/or the rapid printing of God's Word via the Gutenberg press. Some say that the temple is a reference to the church. Others point to the Jewish character of the temple as an actual building in the future of national Israel. But clearly, the act of measuring with a God-given standard points to God's ownership over all. He is the Judge; He gives us the righteous standards with which to measure.

The God Who dwells with men

Even though there are disagreements over what the temple refers to, almost everyone agrees on one point: The Temple reminds us that God dwells with men. All of the references to the Tabernacle and the Temple point to the coming fulfillment: **“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God”** (Revelation 21:3). God's Son, Immanuel, fulfilled in Matthew 1:23 what was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14. What is the meaning of “Immanuel?” **“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”**

*Immanuel, God dwells with men, the miracle of Bethlehem!
God gave His Son, His promised Lamb, the sacrifice for sins of man,
to save poor sinners just like me, to save for all eternity,
to bring His new adopted sons to glory through His promised One.*

The temple of God in Revelation 11:1 speaks of an earthly temple, trampled by the nations. Many of us would agree that this means that a new temple will be built in Jerusalem on the temple mount. Those of you who have been to Jerusalem recently have probably seen the way that the Jewish people are preparing for this. But verse 19 speaks of the temple in heaven, where God will dwell with His people eternally. The real point is this: God dwells with men!

The God who is to be worshiped and praised

The reference to worship reminds us that God seeks true worshipers. As Jesus expressed it in John 4:23, **“But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship Him.”** Let us honor Him today with true worship from the heart. The act of measuring the worshipers may refer to quantity or could refer to their quality. In either case, God knows His own.

The God who is Holy

The reference to the holy city indirectly reminds us that God is Holy. God is Holy and He sets apart His people to holiness (Ephesians 1:4; 4:24, Colossians 3:12). The references we find to “the holy city” (Matthew 4:5; 27:53) remind us that God sets aside special places for His glory as well.

The God who is Sovereign, even over evil

The fact that the Holy Judge, The True God over all, the Giver of all good gifts would give His holy city over to the Gentiles is puzzling. Yet this act reminds us that God is the Sovereign King who reigns over evil. For His purposes, He gives that which is holy to be trampled by the nations.

But it is only for a specific time. Those of us who take this passage literally point to the 42 months, or the last 3 ½ years of Daniel’s 70th week (Daniel 9:27), spoken of in Daniel 12:7 and Revelation 12:14. But even those who take these numbers to mean something else would agree with us that God is Sovereign, even over evil.

Our God reigns; everything is proceeding according to His plan. We can trust God, even in hard times. Our Lord’s sovereign control is evident in the powerful display in verse 19: **“And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.”** (Revelation 11:19).

How Then Should I Live?

Study His words, think through all of their meanings; ask Him for wisdom He promised to give

Look for the ways to apply what you've studied; asking the question, "How then should I live?"

- Keep looking for the God of the Word in the Word of God; meditate on His precepts and learn to respect His ways. He is the God who should be worshiped and praised.
- In a perverse society, trust the Lord who gives us the right standard for our belief and practice
- Prepare for hard times knowing that God sometimes gives wicked people power over His own people for a specific time in order to accomplish His purpose
- Remember God's precious gift of Jesus Christ – Immanuel – and rejoice that God dwells with men. God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world and His people will dwell with Him forever.
- Trust the Lord in hard times for He is governing wisely at all times. Remember that the world is not spiraling out of control; God is in complete control. God knows His peoples' identity and God plans His peoples' adversity. He is doing all things for His own glory.
- Remember that you can trust God in hard times.

Pastor Gordon Dickson, Calvary Baptist Church, Findlay, Ohio
<https://www.cbcbfindlay.org/trusting-god-in-hard-times/>

ⁱ The Greek word *kalamos*

ⁱⁱ Matthew 11:17; 12:20; 27:29-30, 48; 3 John 1:13, Revelation 21:15-16

ⁱⁱⁱ The Greek word *naos*

^{iv} Matthew 27:5, 51; John 2:20

^v 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19, Ephesians 2:21, Revelation 3:12

^{vi} Daniel 9:16, 24, Matthew 4:5; 27:53, Revelation 21:2, 10; 22:19

^{vii} Derek Kidner, [*Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 15, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 117.

