

Sermon – 22/07/2007 pm

Measure the Temple of God

Study Text: Revelation 11:1-2

Why do you go to the beach? To swim you say. Well not in India! The sight of a family with four blonde children going to the beach to swim was too much for the locals at a beach in south India. As we went along the road, lots of local children followed. When we spread out our towels and sat down they also sat down. They watched our every move and drew closer and closer until they could touch the blonde children. The blonde children soon got sick of such intimacy. We could not ask them to move away as we did not know the local language. Eventually we took a stick – and drew a line in the sand. When a large circle was drawn in the sand we persuaded the locals to stay on the outside. The little blonde children felt safe and played happily inside the circle.

We often measure things to protect and preserve them, and this is the meaning of measuring that we often find in Scripture (Zechariah 1:16, Jeremiah 31:38). Sometimes things are measured as a prelude to judgment as when an army ‘measures’ the enemy before destroying it. But in this scene John is told to *measure the temple of God, the altar and those who worship there* for divine protection, not destruction (11:1).

Measure the Temple

John was given a reed like measuring rod, just like the man in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 40). He was told, presumably by the same angel that gave him the little book, to *measure the temple of God, the altar and the people who worship there* (11:1). We have come to a new chapter and a new scene within the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments. This scene must be understood in the context of this interlude. John was commissioned to prophesy after eating the book. In this chapter two witnesses are given power to prophesy.

The previous interlude between the sixth and seventh seals should also be kept in mind. In that interlude the saints of God were sealed and numbered. That sealing protected them from later torment and judgment (9:5). Moreover, the wider context of Old Testament apocalyptic writings must also be kept in mind, particularly Ezekiel (40-43) and Daniel.

Why was John told to measure the temple? As already suggested it was for the divine protection of the people of God. He was only to measure the inner courts and not the outer court of the temple. Those occupying the outer court did not come under this divine protection.

Which Temple?

Jewish believers in the church would have been familiar with the structure of the temple. You may also be familiar with the central sanctuary, the Holy of Holies in which was the Ark of the Covenant. The presence of God was above the Ark. Priests entered the next court and then other Jews. Outside this was the court where Gentiles came to worship. This basic layout was given to Moses when he was on Mt Sinai. The tabernacle he built, and later the temple were

constructed on the basis of this divine revelation. It was a copy of the heavenly temple (Hebrews 9:24).

This was all under the old covenant. What became of the temple under the new covenant? What did the temple signify under the Old Covenant? God's presence was there. It was the place of sacrifice and worship. Under the New Covenant God came to earth as God the Son. Jesus referred to his body as the temple (John 2: 19). Under the New Covenant there are no more blood sacrifices. The church is also referred to as the temple of God with *the Spirit of God dwelling in you* (I Peter 2:5, I Corinthians 3:16).

Despite this change in meaning from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant regarding the temple, dispensational futurists read this passage literally and say that the temple must be rebuilt in Jerusalem. They say that the church is raptured in 4:1 and that this passage refers to the Jews who will literally rebuild the temple in Jerusalem immediately before the second coming of Christ. The worshippers John measures are a remnant of believing ethnic Jews according to this interpretation. Some even believe that animal sacrifices will resume in this temple. The outer court according to this interpretation is identified with Gentiles who will persecute the remnant and overrun a literal Jerusalem for a period of 42 months.

This is why some Christians are ready to support Zionists in their effort to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem today. However, this vision is not to be understood literally. Besides the word 'temple' takes on a different meaning in the New Testament as we have seen. *The most high does not dwell in temples made with hands* as the first Christian martyr, Stephen, said, quoting the prophet Isaiah (Acts 7:48). How foolish to think that divine revelation speaks of the temple being literally rebuilt by human hands.

In this very chapter the temple of God was opened in heaven (11:19). Revelation closes with a vision of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. There is no temple in this city because the Lord Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (21:22). God the Father and God the Son are present in all their glory in this New Jerusalem.

The Outer Court and Holy City

The temple, the outer court and the holy city all represent the Christian community or church. But how is it that only the inner courts are measured and so protected from judgment? The explanation given by Hendrickson is as follows

'Divine protection does not extend to 'the court', that is to those who although outwardly belonging to the church are not true believers. Just as in the vision the heathen trample upon Jerusalem, so the world tramples upon the outside court of merely nominal Christendom. The world invades the false church and takes possession of it. Worldly church members welcome the ideas of the world; they feel perfectly at home with the world; they have a good time in worldly company; in voting for political offices they are prompted by worldly considerations; in brief they love the world'.

Do you sometimes wonder about Christians and church leaders who deny the virgin birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Do you sometimes wonder how Christians can promote homosexuality which is so clearly condemned in the Bible? Remember there are many who call themselves Christians but in the end it will be revealed that they are not among the elect of

God. The Westminster Confession of Faith (XXV) speaks of the true church or the invisible church as 'consisting of the whole number of the elect'. The visible church includes many who are only elected only by themselves.

In the churches to which John wrote there were Jews who were persecuting the Christians. They thought they were the chosen ones of God but Jesus calls them children of the devil, and members of the synagogue of Satan (2:9). So it is within the church today – there are those who not only compromise with the world but actively side with the world in persecuting the true church.

Trampled For 42 Months

Our adversaries have trodden down your sanctuary (Isaiah 63:18). The prophets spoke in such a manner referring to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 597 BC. Daniel was in that exile and he also spoke of a time when a ruler will *persecute the saints of the Most High for a period of times, times and a half time* (Daniel 7:25). This was the interpretation given to him of a vision which he had. He was speaking of the terrible suffering the Jews faced when Antiochus Epiphanies took Jerusalem with great violence and desecrated the temple in 167 BC. The holy city, including its temple was again destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

John appears to adopt the time frame of 42 months from Daniel (see 12:14). Time, times and a half time is taken to mean three and a half years. Three and a half years is equivalent to 42 months or 1260 days, time periods found later in this chapter. "John is 'mirroring' this concept (of Daniel) speaking of the '42 months' or '1260 days' or 'three and a half years 'during which there will be persecution and trial'" (Thomas).

This period of 42 months is not literal but 'a long but not unlimited historical period'. It refers to the period between the first and second coming of Jesus, the period otherwise spoken of as 'the last days' or sometimes as the 'church age'. For Christians suffering intense persecution, as they were in the churches to which John sent this letter, the call 'how long O h Lord' is common. How long will the people of God suffer tribulation? The message John gives is 'it is a definite time set by God and a short time in the context of eternity'.

Worldly people believed 'their world' would go on forever. They saw no end to the present universe. John had a different message. God had set a day when he will judge the world. Humanistic or worldly thinking has changed in recent years. Now there is the proviso that man must act soon to make sure that the present world continues. Man's thinking changes, but the word of God remains firm. The time of the end has been set and will not change.

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