

Introduction

Revelation 11:1–13 ESV

¹ Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, ² but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. ³ And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. ⁶ They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. ⁷ And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, ⁸ and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. ⁹ For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, ¹⁰ and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹² Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. ¹³ And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

A. Context and Setup

Before we can understand what's happening in Revelation 11, we need to know where we are in the book's flow and what tools John is using to speak to his readers.

Placement in Revelation's Structure

Revelation 11 sits between the sixth and seventh trumpets. The first six trumpets (chapters 8–9) unleashed increasingly severe judgments on an unrepentant world. But before the final trumpet sounds, John slows down and shifts perspective. He's done this before. In chapter 7, between the sixth and seventh seals, he paused to show us the sealing of God's servants. Now, between the sixth and seventh trumpets, he pauses again to focus on God's people and their mission.

This pattern matters. Revelation isn't just about what God does *to* the world. It's also about what God does *through* His people while history unfolds. Chapter 11 zeroes in on the church's calling to bear witness in a hostile environment.

Where This Fits in History

John wrote Revelation around AD 95, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. Christians across Asia Minor faced mounting pressure to participate in emperor worship and pagan rituals. Refusal meant social exclusion, economic hardship, and sometimes death. The question on every believer's mind was: "How long will this last? Will God protect us? Does our witness matter?"

John's vision answers those questions. It doesn't promise escape from trouble. It promises that God knows His people, controls the calendar, and will vindicate faithful witness.

Literary Style and Symbolism

Revelation is apocalyptic literature, a genre steeped in vivid imagery, cosmic symbolism, and Old Testament echoes. John doesn't write a linear timeline. He gives us overlapping visions that show the same realities from different angles. Numbers, colors, and creatures carry meaning. When John mentions "42 months" or "1,260 days," he's not primarily giving us a date to calculate. He's using biblical shorthand to communicate theological truth.

This is how the prophets spoke. They wrapped their messages in symbols that God's people would recognize. If you miss the Old Testament background, you'll miss much of what John is saying.

Time Markers: 42 Months, 1,260 Days, 3½ Days

Three time periods dominate Revelation 11: 42 months (v. 2), 1,260 days (v. 3), and 3½ days (v. 9, 11). All three revolve around the number three and a half.

This number comes from Daniel. In [Daniel 7:25](#), the saints are given into the hand of the little horn for "a time, times, and half a time"—that is, three and a half years. In [Daniel 9:27](#) and [12:7](#), similar periods mark times of persecution and desolation. The number became a symbol for a limited period of intense trial under God's sovereign control.

Forty-two months equals 1,260 days (based on a 30-day month). Both point to the same span: a season of suffering that is real, painful, and bounded. It's half of seven, the number of completeness. God allows a time of incompleteness, but He sets the limits.

The 3½ days (v. 9, 11) echo the same symbolism on a compressed scale: a brief exposure to death and shame before divine vindication.

John's readers would have heard this and understood: "The pressure we're under is temporary. God has set the clock. He will bring it to an end."

Theological Anchor: God's Sovereignty and the Church's Mission

[Revelation 11](#) holds two truths in tension. God protects His people and God permits their suffering. He measures the temple and counts the worshipers (v. 1), yet He allows the outer court to be trampled (v. 2). He empowers the two witnesses with miraculous authority (vv. 5–6), yet He permits the beast to kill them (v. 7).

This is the way of the cross. Jesus Himself was vindicated through death and resurrection. His church follows the same pattern. [Revelation 11](#) doesn't promise us escape. It promises us significance, protection of our souls, and final vindication. Our witness matters. Our suffering is not random. And death is not the end.

I. Measuring What Belongs to God (11:1–2)

Verse 1: The Measuring Commission

Revelation 11:1 ESV

¹ Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there,

John receives a command to measure. The Greek word for "measuring rod" is *kalamos*, which can refer to a reed or cane. In the ancient world, reeds grew tall and straight along riverbanks, making them useful as measuring instruments. Ezekiel saw a similar vision where an angelic

figure measured the temple with a reed ([Ezekiel 40–43](#)). Zechariah saw a man with a measuring line going out to measure Jerusalem ([Zechariah 2:1–5](#)).

In both Old Testament passages, measuring signified God's intention to restore, protect, and claim what was His. In Ezekiel, the measuring anticipated a renewed temple and restored worship. In Zechariah, the measuring preceded a promise: "I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the LORD, and I will be the glory in her midst" ([Zechariah 2:5](#)).

John's readers, familiar with these texts, would recognize the symbolism. To measure something is to declare ownership, assess its condition, and mark it for preservation.

But what exactly is John measuring? He's told to measure three things: the temple, the altar, and the worshipers.

The Temple of God

The physical temple in Jerusalem was still standing when John received earlier visions in Revelation, but by the time the book reached its final form (likely around AD 95), the temple had been destroyed by Rome in AD 70. So what temple is in view here?

Three main options emerge:

1. A rebuilt physical temple in Jerusalem. Some interpreters believe this refers to a future, literal temple during a final tribulation period. They point to other prophetic texts that seem to anticipate temple worship in the last days.
2. The heavenly temple. Throughout Revelation, John sees a temple in heaven ([Revelation 7:15](#); [11:19](#); [14:15](#), [17](#); [15:5–6](#), [8](#); [16:1](#), [17](#)). This temple represents God's dwelling place and the true sanctuary of which the earthly temple was only a copy ([Hebrews 8:5](#)).
3. The people of God as temple. Paul tells the Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" ([1 Corinthians 3:16](#)). Peter calls believers "living stones" being built into a spiritual house ([1 Peter 2:5](#)). In this reading, John measures the church.

The third option fits best with the rest of the verse. John is told to measure "those who worship there." You don't measure people with a literal measuring rod. This is symbolic language. God is counting, knowing, and claiming His worshipers.

The Altar

The Greek word *thusiastērion* refers to the altar of sacrifice. In the Old Testament temple, two main altars existed: the bronze altar of burnt offering in the outer court and the golden altar of incense inside the sanctuary. John likely has the altar of incense in view, since he's measuring the inner sanctuary, not the outer court (which he's told to exclude in verse 2).

The altar represents acceptable worship, mediated access to God, and the prayers of the saints rising before Him. In [Revelation 8:3–4](#), an angel stands at the golden altar and offers incense mixed with the prayers of the saints. The altar is where God's people come near.

Those Who Worship There

The Greek verb for "worship" is *proskyneō*, meaning to bow down, to reverence, to give homage. John measures "those who worship." God knows who truly worships Him. He counts them. He owns them. He guards them.

You may feel forgotten, overlooked, or abandoned. But God has His measuring rod out. He knows exactly who belongs to Him. Not one true worshiper is lost from His sight.

Jesus made this same promise: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" ([John 10:27–28](#)).

Verse 2: The Trampled Outer Court and the 42 Months

Revelation 11:2 ESV

² but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

John is told *not* to measure the outer court. The Greek verb *ekballō* means "cast out" or "exclude." This outer area is handed over to the nations.

The Outer Court

In the physical temple, the outer court was the Court of the Gentiles. It was the only area where non-Jews could enter. It represented the boundary between God's people and the world. But it was still part of the temple complex. It was holy ground.

Here, the outer court is "given over to the nations." The Greek word for "nations" is *ethnē*, often translated "Gentiles." In Revelation, "the nations" frequently represents the unbelieving world in rebellion against God ([Revelation 11:18](#); [19:15](#); [20:3, 8](#)).

The outer court symbolizes the visible, external aspects of God's people that are exposed to the world. The nations are allowed to trample it. The Greek verb *pateō* means to tread down, to trample underfoot. It's a picture of contempt, oppression, and desecration.

Jesus used the same word when He prophesied about Jerusalem: "They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" ([Luke 21:24](#)).

The Holy City

John identifies what's being trampled: "the holy city." This phrase appears elsewhere in Revelation to describe the New Jerusalem ([Revelation 21:2, 10; 22:19](#)). But here it seems to refer to the earthly people of God under assault.

Some interpreters see a reference to literal Jerusalem, especially in light of [Luke 21:24](#). Others see it as symbolic of the church, the community of God's people living in a hostile world. The imagery draws from [Daniel 8:13](#), where the sanctuary and the host are trampled.

Forty-Two Months

The nations trample the holy city for "forty-two months." As we noted earlier, this equals 1,260 days or three and a half years. It's half of seven, the number symbolizing completeness and perfection in Scripture.

This period appears throughout Scripture as a time of trial:

- Elijah shut the sky for three and a half years ([1 Kings 17–18](#); [Luke 4:25](#); [James 5:17](#)).
- The "little horn" in [Daniel 7:25](#) oppressed the saints for "a time, times, and half a time."
- The "abomination of desolation" in Daniel desecrated the temple for a limited period ([Daniel 9:27](#); [12:7](#), [11](#)).

The number signals incompleteness. It's a broken seven. The persecution is real, but it's not final. It's bounded by God's decree. The enemy gets his season, but God sets the timer.

Theological Tension: Protected Yet Trampled

Here's the tension John presents: The inner sanctuary is measured and preserved. The outer court is trampled. God guards the true worshipers, yet He permits external assault.

What does this mean?

God protects what matters most: the souls, the faith, and the eternal standing of His people. But He allows external suffering, visible loss, and physical persecution. The world can harm the body. It can destroy buildings, scatter congregations, and kill believers. But it cannot touch what God has measured and claimed.

Jesus promised this same dynamic: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" ([Matthew 10:28](#)).

Paul experienced it: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" ([2 Corinthians 4:8–9](#)).

The measuring of the temple and the trampling of the outer court happen at the same time, for the same duration. God's preservation and the world's persecution run on parallel tracks. Both are real. Both are under God's sovereign hand.

This is the reality of Christian existence between Christ's ascension and return. We are secure in Christ, sealed by the Spirit, and kept by God's power. Yet we suffer, face opposition, and sometimes die for our faith. The inner sanctuary stands firm. The outer court endures assault.

And both last exactly as long as God decrees: forty-two months. Not a day longer.

II. The Two Witnesses: Empowered Testimony (11:3–6)

Verse 3: Commission, Duration, and Clothing

Revelation 11:3 ESV

³ And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

God speaks. The "I" here is either God the Father or Christ. The authority to witness doesn't originate with human courage or initiative. God grants it.

Two Witnesses

The Greek word for "witnesses" is *martyres*, from which we get the English word "martyr." By the time John wrote Revelation, the term had already begun to carry the connotation of bearing witness unto death. A witness is someone who testifies to what they have seen and heard, regardless of cost.

Why two witnesses? The Law of Moses required two or three witnesses to establish a matter (Deuteronomy 19:15). Jesus sent His disciples out in pairs (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). Two witnesses provide corroboration, mutual support, and legal credibility.

The number two also recalls specific prophetic pairs in Scripture. Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh together. Joshua and Caleb stood together against unbelief. Zerubbabel and Joshua led the post-exilic community. In the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, representing the Law and the Prophets bearing witness to Him.

Who are these two witnesses? Interpreters have offered several answers:

1. Two literal individuals in the end times. Many identify them as Moses and Elijah returned, or Enoch and Elijah (the two men who never died), or two future prophets endowed with Moses-like and Elijah-like powers.
2. Symbolic of the church's witness. The two witnesses represent the faithful, prophetic testimony of God's people throughout the age. Just as the seven lampstands in Revelation 1 symbolize the churches, these two lampstands (v. 4) symbolize the witnessing community.

Each view has merit. For our purposes, we'll focus on the pastoral message: God raises up, empowers, and protects a faithful witness in every generation. Whether that witness is embodied in two specific individuals at the end or spread across the global church over centuries, the pattern remains the same.

1,260 Days

The witnesses prophesy for 1,260 days. This is the same period as the 42 months of trampling in verse 2. The timeline of persecution and the timeline of witness overlap completely. While the nations trample the outer court, the witnesses prophesy. Suffering and mission happen together.

The verb "prophesy" (*prophēteuō*) means more than predicting the future. It means speaking God's word, calling people to repentance, exposing sin, and announcing God's purposes. The witnesses are preachers, truth-tellers, and covenant enforcers.

Clothed in Sackcloth

Sackcloth was coarse cloth made from goat or camel hair. It was uncomfortable, scratchy, and dark. People wore it as a sign of mourning, repentance, or distress. Prophets often wore sackcloth to embody the message they preached.

When Jonah preached to Nineveh, the king and the people put on sackcloth ([Jonah 3:5-6](#)). When David mourned, he wore sackcloth ([2 Samuel 3:31](#)). Isaiah walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign against Egypt and Cush ([Isaiah 20:2-3](#)). Prophets didn't just speak God's word. They enacted it.

The two witnesses dress in sackcloth because their message is one of judgment and call to repentance. They mourn over sin. They grieve the rebellion of the nations. Their appearance matches their message.

This stands in sharp contrast to false teachers who dress for comfort, popularity, and applause. The true witness wears sackcloth. The false prophet wears fine clothes and seeks the favor of the crowd.

Verse 4: Identity in Biblical Imagery

Revelation 11:4 ESV

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

John identifies the witnesses using imagery from [Zechariah 4](#). In that vision, the prophet saw a golden lampstand with seven lamps, flanked by two olive trees. When Zechariah asked what they meant, the angel replied, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" ([Zechariah 4:6](#)).

The two olive trees in Zechariah represented Zerubbabel (the governor) and Joshua (the high priest), the two anointed leaders who would rebuild the temple after the exile. The olive trees supplied oil to the lampstand continuously, without human effort. The message was clear: God's work succeeds not by human strength but by His Spirit's power.

John applies this imagery to the two witnesses. They are olive trees and lampstands. They shine with the light of testimony, and they are supplied by the oil of the Holy Spirit. Their witness is Spirit-empowered, not self-generated.

Lampstands

In [Revelation 1:20](#), the seven lampstands represent the seven churches. Lampstands give light. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world" ([Matthew 5:14](#)). The church's calling is to shine in the darkness, to bear witness to the truth, and to display the character of God.

A lampstand without oil goes dark. A witness without the Spirit becomes powerless. The two witnesses are lampstands because they shine. They are olive trees because they are perpetually supplied with the Spirit's enabling.

Standing Before the Lord of the Earth

The witnesses "stand before the Lord of the earth." The Greek verb *histēmi* means to stand firm, to take a position, to remain upright. It's a posture of service, readiness, and authority.

The phrase "Lord of the earth" (*kyrios tēs gēs*) is significant. The witnesses don't stand before Caesar, or the beast, or public opinion. They stand before the one true Lord. Their accountability is vertical, not horizontal. They serve an audience of One.

This phrase echoes Zechariah 4:14, where the two olive trees are called "the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth." It also recalls the story of Elijah, who declared, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand..." (1 Kings 17:1). To stand before the Lord is to represent Him, to speak on His behalf, and to draw authority from His presence.

Verse 5: Protection While the Mission Lasts

Revelation 11:5 ESV

⁵ And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed.

The witnesses are protected by divine power. Anyone who tries to harm them faces immediate judgment. Fire pours from their mouth and consumes their enemies.

This is probably not literal fire breathing. It's symbolic of the power of God's word spoken through His messengers. Jeremiah heard God say, "Behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them" (Jeremiah 5:14). The word of God is compared to fire throughout Scripture (Jeremiah 23:29).

The fire comes from their mouth because they speak God's word. Their authority is verbal. They don't carry swords. They carry proclamation. And that proclamation carries the force of divine judgment.

The doubling of the warning ("if anyone would harm them... if anyone would harm them") stresses certainty. This is not a possibility. It's a guarantee. God protects His witnesses until their task is complete.

This echoes the experience of Jesus. No one could seize Him before His hour had come (John 7:30; 8:20). When the hour arrived, He laid down His life willingly (John 10:18). The same pattern applies to the witnesses. They are untouchable until their testimony is finished (v. 7).

Application for Today

This promise doesn't mean Christians today are immune from harm. Believers are imprisoned, persecuted, and killed around the world. But it does mean that God's mission will not be thwarted. His word will go forth. His witnesses will complete their task. And no power on earth can silence the gospel before God's appointed time.

Paul understood this. He wrote from prison, "I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!" ([2 Timothy 2:9](#)). They could chain the messenger, but they couldn't chain the message.

Verse 6: Signs That Echo Moses and Elijah

Revelation 11:6 ESV

⁶ They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

The witnesses wield power reminiscent of two great Old Testament prophets: Elijah and Moses.

Power to Shut the Sky: Elijah

Elijah prayed, and the sky withheld rain for three and a half years ([1 Kings 17:1](#); [James 5:17](#)). This judgment fell on Israel during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, who had led the nation into Baal worship. The drought was both a demonstration of Yahweh's sovereignty over nature (Baal was supposed to be the storm god) and a covenant curse for idolatry ([Deuteronomy 11:16–17](#); [28:23–24](#)).

The two witnesses have the same authority. They can shut the sky. This shows that God, not nature or false gods, controls the weather. It also signals covenant judgment on a rebellious world.

Power Over Waters and Plagues: Moses

Moses turned the Nile to blood ([Exodus 7:14–24](#)) and brought plagues on Egypt ([Exodus 7–12](#)). These signs demonstrated God's power over the gods of Egypt and secured the liberation of His people.

The witnesses can turn waters to blood and strike the earth with every plague "as often as they desire." The Greek phrase *hosakis ean thelēsōsin* means "as many times as they wish." They are given broad authority to execute judgment.

This doesn't mean the witnesses act on personal whim. Their desires are aligned with God's will. They are His representatives. What they desire reflects what He has authorized. Jesus promised the apostles, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" ([Matthew 18:18](#)). The principle here is similar: God backs the testimony of His authorized witnesses with supernatural confirmation.

Why These Specific Powers?

Why does God give the witnesses Moses-like and Elijah-like signs? Several reasons emerge:

1. Continuity with the prophets. The same God who sent Moses and Elijah still sends messengers with the same authority and power.
2. Authentication of the message. Signs and wonders confirm that the witnesses speak for God ([Hebrews 2:3–4](#)).
3. Confrontation of idolatry. Just as Moses confronted Egypt's gods and Elijah confronted Baal, the witnesses confront the idols of the world system.
4. Call to repentance. Plagues and judgments are meant to turn people back to God ([Revelation 9:20–21](#); [16:9](#), [11](#)).
5. Typological fulfillment. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration ([Matthew 17:3](#)). Some Jewish traditions expected them to return before the Messiah. Whether literal or symbolic, the witnesses embody the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) bearing testimony to Jesus.

The Reluctant Response

Tragically, Revelation shows that even miraculous signs don't guarantee repentance. After six trumpet judgments, John writes, "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent" ([Revelation 9:20](#)). Later, under the bowl judgments, "People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds" ([Revelation 16:10–11](#)).

Signs authenticate the message. But they don't override human will. People can witness the power of God and still harden their hearts, just as Pharaoh did in Exodus.

The witnesses perform signs not to coerce belief but to remove excuse. The world will have no ground to claim ignorance or lack of evidence. God will have sent empowered, Spirit-filled, miracle-working messengers who called the nations to repentance. The rejection of that witness will be willful and fully culpable.

III. The Clash: Apparent Defeat and Global Mockery (11:7–10)

Verse 7: The Beast and Timing of the Attack

Revelation 11:7 ESV

⁷ And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them,

A dramatic shift occurs. The witnesses who were untouchable (v. 5) are now killed. But notice the timing: "when they have finished their testimony."

Divine Timing

The Greek phrase *hotan telesōsin* means "when they complete" or "when they finish." The verb *teleō* carries the sense of bringing something to its intended goal. Jesus used this word on the cross: "It is finished" (*tetelestai*, [John 19:30](#)).

The witnesses are not cut down prematurely. They finish what God sent them to do. Their 1,260 days run their full course. Only then does the enemy strike. The beast cannot touch them one moment before God permits.

The Beast from the Bottomless Pit

This is the first mention of "the beast" (*to thērion*) in Revelation. The beast rises from "the bottomless pit" (Greek: *abyssos*, the abyss), the place of demonic confinement ([Luke 8:31](#); [Revelation 9:1–2](#), [11](#); [20:1](#), [3](#)).

The beast represents satanically empowered opposition to God and His people. It's not just individual hostility. It's organized, supernatural evil working through political, religious, and cultural structures. John will develop this figure extensively in chapters 13 and 17.

John's original readers would have recognized the beast in the Roman Empire, which demanded emperor worship and persecuted Christians. But the beast is more than Rome. It's the world system in rebellion against God, appearing in different forms throughout history.

Make War, Conquer, Kill

Three verbs describe the beast's action: make war (*polemeō*), conquer (*nikaō*), and kill (*apokteino*). The beast doesn't just oppose the witnesses. It defeats them and executes them.

How can the beast "conquer" when Revelation calls believers to be conquerors? The answer lies in what conquest means. The beast conquers outwardly, physically. The witnesses conquer inwardly, spiritually. The beast kills their bodies. The witnesses keep their souls. In Revelation's paradoxical logic, the martyrs win by losing.

Jesus set the pattern. The cross looked like defeat, but the resurrection vindicated Him. The witnesses follow the same path.

Verse 8: The Great City, Spiritually Named

Revelation 11:8 ESV

⁸ and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

The bodies of the witnesses are left unburied in the street. In the ancient world, this was the ultimate dishonor. Proper burial was a sacred duty. To leave a body exposed was to treat the person as worthless and accursed.

Three Symbolic Names

John calls this place "the great city" and gives it three symbolic identities: Sodom, Egypt, and where their Lord was crucified.

Sodom symbolizes moral corruption and hostility to God's messengers. The prophets used Sodom as shorthand for rebellion, pride, and sexual sin ([Isaiah 1:9–10](#); [Ezekiel 16:49](#)).

Egypt represents oppression, slavery, and idolatry. It was the house of bondage from which God delivered Israel. Egypt is the kingdom that says, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?" ([Exodus 5:2](#)).

Where their Lord was crucified points to Jerusalem. Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem's walls ([John 19:17–20](#); [Hebrews 13:12](#)). Jerusalem killed the prophets and stoned those sent to her ([Matthew 23:37](#)).

John says the city is called these things "symbolically" or "spiritually" (Greek: *pneumatikōs*). He's layering meanings. The "great city" is any place that embodies the rebellion of Sodom, the oppression of Egypt, and the religious hypocrisy that crucified Jesus. It's the world system in its hostility to the gospel.

Verse 9: Worldwide Spectacle and Forbidden Burial

Revelation 11:9 ESV

⁹ For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb,

The death of the witnesses becomes a global spectacle. John uses his standard phrase for the whole world: "peoples and tribes and languages and nations." This is universal visibility.

The bodies lie exposed for three and a half days, echoing the symbolic time periods we've already seen. The suffering is real but brief compared to the 1,260 days of testimony. The three and a half days also recall Jesus in the tomb.

People from all nations stare at the bodies continuously. They "refuse to let them be placed in a tomb." This is deliberate desecration. In Jewish and Greco-Roman culture, denying burial was a grave insult. The world wants the witnesses to stay dead and exposed. Their corpses are trophies.

Verse 10: Celebration and Gift-Giving

Revelation 11:10 ESV

¹⁰ and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.

The world throws a party.

Those Who Dwell on the Earth

This phrase appears eleven times in Revelation. It's not just a geographic label. It's a spiritual description of people whose hearts, hopes, and identities are bound to this world. They have no citizenship in heaven ([Philippians 3:20](#)).

A Twisted Celebration

Three verbs describe the party: rejoice (*chairō*), make merry (*euphrainō*), and exchange presents (*dōra pempousin*). The exchanging of gifts is particularly striking. This is a dark

inversion, a twisted Christmas. Instead of celebrating the birth of the Savior, the world celebrates the death of His witnesses.

Why the Celebration?

"Because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth."

The Greek word for "torment" is *basanizō*—to torture, to cause severe pain. The witnesses tormented the world not by physical violence but by the truth they spoke. Their message exposed sin, called for repentance, and announced judgment. The very presence of righteousness is painful to those who love darkness ([John 3:19–20](#)).

The celebration reveals the hardness of human hearts. Even after 1,260 days of witness, signs, wonders, and plagues meant to provoke repentance, the world responds not with sorrow but with glee. Conscience is not just ignored. It's killed and celebrated.

The world's party over the witnesses' corpses is the nadir of rebellion. It's the moment when evil seems to have won, when the righteous are silenced, and when the wicked dance on their graves.

But it doesn't last.

IV. Vindication: Resurrection, Ascent, and the Fear of God (11:11–13)

Verse 11: Breath of Life and Rising

Revelation 11:11 ESV

¹¹ But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.

The party stops abruptly. God intervenes.

A Breath of Life from God

This echoes [Genesis 2:7](#), where "the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."

It also recalls [Ezekiel 37](#), the vision of the valley of dry bones. God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, and "breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly

great army" ([Ezekiel 37:10](#)). What seemed permanently dead came back to life by God's power.

The witnesses' resurrection is public and undeniable. The same people who stared at their corpses now watch them stand up.

Great Fear

"Great fear fell on those who saw them." This is the terror of those who realize they've been celebrating prematurely. The witnesses they thought were finished are alive. The God they thought was defeated has spoken.

Verse 12: Heavenly Summons and Public Ascension

Revelation 11:12 ESV

¹² Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.

Come Up Here

God calls the witnesses to heaven. The same phrase, "Come up here" (*anaba hōde*), was spoken to John in [Revelation 4:1](#). It's an invitation into God's presence, a summons to glory.

The witnesses ascend "in a cloud." Clouds represent the presence and glory of God throughout Scripture. God led Israel by a pillar of cloud ([Exodus 13:21](#)). He descended on Sinai in a cloud ([Exodus 19:9](#)). Jesus ascended in a cloud ([Acts 1:9](#)) and will return in the clouds ([Revelation 1:7](#)).

Their Enemies Watched

The ascension is public. "Their enemies watched them." The Greek verb *theōreō* means to observe, to look closely, to witness. The same people who celebrated their death now witness their vindication.

This public vindication reverses the public shame. The world wanted their bodies displayed as trophies of defeat. God displays them ascending as trophies of His victory.

Verse 13: Earthquake, Casualties, and Reluctant Glory

Revelation 11:13 ESV

¹³ And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

A Great Earthquake

God shakes the earth. Earthquakes in Revelation signal divine intervention and judgment (Revelation 6:12; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). The Greek word *seismos* means a shaking, a trembling.

A Tenth of the City Fell

The fraction is significant. Not the whole city, but a tenth. Seven thousand people are killed. The numbers suggest measured judgment, not total destruction. God is still leaving room for repentance.

Gave Glory to the God of Heaven

"The rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." Does this represent genuine repentance or forced acknowledgment?

The phrase "gave glory to God" can mean true worship (Revelation 14:7; 19:7) or compelled recognition without heart change (Joshua 7:19; John 9:24). The word "terrified" (*emphoboi*) suggests fear-driven response rather than love-driven worship.

The text leaves it ambiguous. Some may truly repent. Others merely acknowledge God's power while their hearts remain hard. What's clear is that God's vindication of His witnesses produces an unmistakable response. No one can pretend it didn't happen.

Summary of the Pattern

Verses 1–13 give us the full arc of Christian witness:

1. (vv. 1–2) **God measures and claims His people**
2. (vv. 3–6) **God empowers their testimony**
3. (vv. 7–10) **God permits limited opposition and apparent defeat**
4. (vv. 11–13) **God vindicates through resurrection and exaltation**

This is the way of the cross applied to the church. Suffering precedes glory. Death leads to resurrection. Apparent defeat becomes ultimate victory.

The world celebrates too soon. Evil always does. But God has the last word.