



river west church

Stand and Deliver

Revelation 11:1-14

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The Sweet and the Sour

The first part of Revelations 11 (verses 1-14) has been called the most difficult passage to interpret in the whole book. Wow! Considering the whole book is a challenge, that's really saying something. It's difficult for people to sort out what is to be taken literally and what is symbolic or figurative in the passage. That's part of the problem. Some people see the passage as a literal prophecy about a physical temple (rebuilt) and two literal witnesses who will come and give prophetic witness to the world at a future date.

There is nothing to preclude this from happening in the future plan of God, but I think the passage carries way more meaning than that. And I'm glad! Because, for one thing, if the primary meaning of this passage is a literal temple and two literal witnesses in the future, then what you see is what you get and the passage doesn't hold a lot of meaning or application for our lives right here and now.

There are two other things to notice in this regard. First, this passage is layered with more symbolism from the OT than just about any other passage. Telling us that the passage is meant to be seen for its symbolic meaning and not just taken at face value. We saw this before in the first vision of Christ in Revelation 1. All the symbolic images were not designed to tell us what Jesus actually looks like, but to give us insight into His glory, character, power and mission. Likewise, the complex imagery of this passage is designed to tell us about our character, mission, message, impact and true source of power as we answer Christ's call to be His witness in our world.

One more thing, we need to see chapters 10 and 11 together as one unit. When we do, we find one more key for interpreting the passage. It's all about the bitter and the sweet of faith in Christ and witness for Christ. Remember, as Chapter 10 ended, John took the scroll and ate it. It was sweet in his mouth but sour in his stomach. That picture isn't just for John; it's for US too! You need to hold that picture in your mind as you go into chapter 11. The vision of the temple being measured and the two witnesses tells us a lot about the sweet and the sour of the Gospel in our lives and our ministry.

The Lord wants to challenge us through this passage. It's a challenge for us to see our world as He sees it, even though that can be painful. It also challenges us to speak the message that He wants us to speak, even though that can be difficult. We are also encouraged to believe that His power is at work through our witness, even though we often feel weak and ineffective. In the end, this passage is designed to challenge and empower us. The two witnesses are incredibly courageous. They stand and deliver! The Lord wants us to be like them. That's why we are given this picture. Sure, it's tough going. But basically God says, "Don't wimp out on your calling, and don't let go of your message!"

Here are three of the themes we will look at as we explore this passage:

Insiders and Outsiders (the sweet and sour of our perspective)

Telling the Whole Truth (the sweet and sour of our message)

God's Power Through Your Weakness (the sweet and sour of our efforts)