

Why does God say, in Zechariah 2:4, specifically that there will be cattle in the typological Jerusalem?

Considering the measuring line archetype in Zechariah and in Ezekiel (40-47), where it's antitype (the answer) is given in the New Testament as the Gospel going (unmeasured) throughout all the world, what is similar and different about its use in Rev. 11?

Measuring the Temple

One of the texts in Revelation that speaks about the temple and the holy city is crucial to those who hold to an early date, for it is claimed that by implication the temple in Jerusalem is still standing when the apostle John is told to measure it. These are the words in 11:1–3.

And I was given a reed like a rod and was told, “Arise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there. But exclude the outer court of the temple and do not measure it because it has been given to the Gentiles, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. And I will give [power] to my two witnesses and they will prophesy for 1,260 days and be clothed in sackcloth.”

The argument is that the entire New Testament is silent about the demise of the temple. This shocking event, predicted by Jesus in the Gospels and fulfilled forty years after his ascension, would presumably have been mentioned in Revelation if this book were written after the fall of Jerusalem. One writer concludes, “It has been shown that at the time of the writing of Revelation the Temple complex is spoken of as still standing. It is inconceivable that a book of the nature of Revelation could fail to mention its already having been destroyed, if Revelation were written after A.D. 70.”¹

The New Testament uses the Greek term *hieron* for the temple complex (e.g., Matt. 24:1; Acts 3:1) and the word *naos* for the inner sanctuary (see Matt. 27:51). Throughout Revelation John never uses the first term to refer to the temple but always the second one (sixteen times).² The inner sanctum was the place the high priest entered once a year on the Day of Atonement. There he was in the presence of Almighty God to sprinkle blood for himself and the people of Israel in remission of sins (Lev. 16:6–14). But when Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, shed his blood on the cross and

¹ ⁶² Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 192.

² ⁶³ Rev. 3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 2, 19 (twice); 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8 (twice); 16:1, 17; 21:22 (twice). No other New Testament book has as many occurrences: there are nine in Matthew; four each in Luke and 1 Corinthians; three each in Mark and John’s Gospel; two each in Acts and 2 Corinthians; and one each in Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians.

died, the curtain of the Holy of Holies was split from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). God made it known that no longer only the high priest but rather all God's people might freely enter his presence. The emphasis, then, is not on the temple complex in Jerusalem prior to its demise. Rather John accents the people of God who now with Jesus, their mediator, have the privilege of entering God's presence (Heb. 9:24). They are the temple of God and offer their sacrifices of praise on his altar. By contrast, the outer court where the altar of burnt offering stood is given to the Gentiles, the unbelievers, who are cast out from God's presence. They trample on the great city, which is no longer holy but unholy and figuratively called Sodom and Egypt (11:8; see also Luke 21:24). John intends to convey not a literal interpretation of the temple and the earthly city but rather a symbolical understanding of God's people who dwell in his presence, that is, in his temple.³

Next, if the period of forty-two months or 1,260 days refers to the beginning of the Jewish wars and ends with the destruction of Jerusalem, we would be able to determine the date for the composition of Revelation. This period lasted from the spring of 67 to the autumn of 70, until the fall of Jerusalem. The persecutions instigated by Nero also lasted that long: from the late autumn of 64 to the ninth of June, 68, when the emperor took his own life. An approximate date for Revelation would then be the middle or latter part of the 60s.⁴

Interpreting the time frame of forty-two months or 1,260 days not symbolically but literally creates a number of problems. First, these numbers also appear in contexts (12:6; 13:5) where a literal interpretation fails. Next, Nero set the city of Rome ablaze in July 64 and certainly did not wait until late autumn of that year to make the Christians a scapegoat. Third, the Jewish revolt against Rome broke out in the spring of 66 and came to an end with the destruction of Jerusalem in August–September 70. And last, the trampling of the holy city by the Gentiles could begin only when Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Roman soldiers. To place the

3 ⁶⁴ Consult Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 272.

4 ⁶⁵ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, p. 256; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Dominion, 1987), p. 4.

forty-two months after September 70 is meaningless, for there is no historical incident that marks their termination.

John portrays the conflict between Christ and Satan, God's people and Satan's masses. He describes the scene of conflict symbolically, so that the numbers in the account of chapter 11 should be interpreted similarly. Furthermore, the other parts in this chapter receive a figurative interpretation: the measuring rod, the measuring, the two olive trees, and the two lampstands (11:1–4). Where a passage is filled with symbolism, one would not expect literalism. We conclude by saying that the text of 11:1–3 does not prove a date prior to the ruin of Jerusalem in 70.⁵

(1) The Temple – 11:1–2

1. And I was given a reed like a rod and was told, “Arise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there.”

a. *Reed.* John received a measuring rod and a command to measure the temple of God. We are not told who gave him the reed and the command, but we assume that an angel as a heavenly messenger supplied it and gave him instruction concerning its use. An Old Testament reference lies back of this text, for God gave the prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah a vision of the new temple area. There was a man with a measuring rod that was about 10½ feet (3.2 meters) long, who surveyed the temple buildings and grounds (Ezek. 40–43; see also Zech. 2:1–2). In the New Testament an angel measures the new Jerusalem (city, gates, and walls) with a rod of gold (Rev. 21:15).⁶

b. *Command.* The writer is told to get up and measure three parts: the temple of God, the altar, and the people worshiping there. He fails to identify the speaker. The purpose of making these measurements is to delimit the area that is holy from that which is profane; measuring means to protect God's temple, altar, and people. John's task is to safeguard that

5 Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, [*Exposition of the Book of Revelation*](#), vol. 20, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 29–30.

6 ⁸ Kenneth A. Strand (“An Overlooked Old Testament Background to Revelation 11:1”, *AUSS* 22 [1984]: 317–25) argues that the more likely background passage is not Zechariah 2:1–5 and Ezekiel 40–48 but Leviticus 16. This chapter outlines the Day of Atonement but says nothing about the command “measure the temple.” See also Frederick D. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective*, BZNW 54 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1989), pp. 319–21.

which God has set aside as holy and to shield it from intrusion and desecration. The destroyer cannot enter the place that God has marked off as holy and within whose boundaries his people are secure.

The place where the people are safe is God's temple, which throughout the Apocalypse means not the temple complex but the temple building, which includes the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place. God opened to full view the inner sanctuary when at the time of Jesus' death the curtain separating these two places was torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). This area is the very presence of God, where he welcomes and dwells with the saints after Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice and removed the sins of his people (Heb. 9:12). The temple of God, therefore, is a symbol of the true church that worships the triune God.⁷ In the church God meets his people, accepts their praise and adoration, listens to their petitions and confessions, and acknowledges their expressions of gratitude. As the saints in heaven are always in God's presence, so the saints on earth have the divine promise: "for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20 KJV⁸).

John presents a picture of the inner sanctuary he must measure. No measurements are listed because the assignment of measuring an area where the saints meet their God proves to be an impossible task. The saints are a great multitude that no one can number (7:9). Measuring the temple of God symbolizes the knowledge and care God provides for his people.

What is the significance of the altar? It can be either the altar of sacrifice or the incense altar in front of the curtain. The altar of burnt offerings stood outside the temple building in the outer court. Because John is told not to measure the outer court (v. 2), which was the court of the priests, I interpret the altar to be the one on which incense was offered. This is the altar in the heavenly sanctuary (6:9; 8:3 [twice], 5; 9:13; 14:18; 16:7). By contrast, there are no references to the altar of burnt offerings,

7 ⁹ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), p. 127; Caird, *Revelation*, p. 132; Lenski, *Revelation*, pp. 326–30; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), pp. 219–21.

8 KJV King James Version (Authorized Version)

for the death of Jesus terminated its usefulness. The incense offered is the prayers of the saints (8:3, 5), and measuring the altar's dimensions signifies that the saints have access to God and enjoy his protective care.⁹ At the altar they are safe.

The multitude of saints, counted in chapter 7 and measured in chapter 11, are worshiping in Christ's church anywhere and everywhere. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob that the time had come that true worshipers would neither worship on Mount Gerizim nor in Jerusalem, but everyone would worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:21–24). Christians worship anywhere, and wherever they are God shields them from spiritual harm. Although from time to time they endure physical suffering, they will never experience spiritual death. They are safe and secure in the hollow of God's hand. "The 'measuring' of the temple is a variant of the 'sealing' of the Church in 7:1–8."¹⁰ Only God's people are measured or counted, not the profane, who are in the outer court outside the church and are doomed.

2. "But exclude the outer court of the temple and do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months."

At first sight, this appears to be a puzzling passage, for a literal translation reveals an apparent redundancy: "And the court of the temple, the one outside, cast it outside." But not really so. God makes a clear division between the saints who worship him in spirit and truth and those people who pay him lip service but whose hearts are far from him (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8–9). The first group of people worships in holiness and receives his blessing; the second must be cast out because of their hypocrisy. The first group is in the presence of God and is alive; the second is outside God's sphere and is dead. Here is the contrast between holy and profane that John describes all through the Apocalypse. The saints are those who have God's seal on their foreheads (9:4); they are measured, that is, protected. The profane are the people who refuse to

9 ¹⁰ James L Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, BIS 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 94. A number of commentators interpret the altar as the altar of burnt offerings (Aune, 52B, p. 606; Swete, p. 132; Beckwith, p. 590; Zahn, 2:424). Beale (p. 563) avers that believers sacrifice themselves "on the altar of the gospel."

10 ¹¹ Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, SP 16 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 119.

repent of their evil deeds (9:20–21); they are not to be measured, that is, they are rejected.¹¹ Jesus notes that God’s people enter the gates of the holy city (22:14), but outside are those who are unclean (22:15).

The temple of Solomon had an inner court for the priests and an outer court (1 Kings 6:36; 7:12; 2 Chron. 4:9; Ezek. 10:5; 40:17–47). When Herod the Great built the temple, the outer court was divided into three parts: the court of the women, of the Israelites, and of the priests. Beyond the three-part court was the court of the Gentiles. But in Revelation John speaks symbolically of the outer court of the temple and thus refers to those people who are within the outer perimeter of the church but not part of it (1 John 2:19). These people are part of the world; they have joined arms with the Gentiles bent on destroying the church, if possible. They are those who in John’s day were members of Satan’s synagogue and were indistinguishable from the Gentiles (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). All of them are driven by the spirit of the Antichrist set on trampling and desecrating everything that is holy.

The last part of this verse raises questions concerning place and time. How do we interpret “the Gentiles ... will trample the holy city for forty-two months”? Is John alluding to the holy city, namely, Jerusalem, destroyed by the Gentiles in the second half of the first century? Should the period of forty-two months be taken literally?

First, let us study the expression *holy city* in scriptural context. The Old Testament calls Jerusalem the holy city because it was the place God had chosen to dwell with his people (Ps. 48). The Jews in Jerusalem called themselves “citizens of the holy city” (Isa. 48:2) even though they refused to live in truth and righteousness. Daniel spoke prophetically about the holy city (Dan. 9:24), and Nehemiah noted the restoration of Jerusalem when the Jews resettled in the holy city (Neh. 11:1, 18). In the New Testament, however, the appellation occurs at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry when the devil tempting him takes him to the holy city (Matt. 4:5). When Jesus died on Calvary’s cross, some graves were opened and those who were raised appeared in the holy city (Matt. 27:53). These

11 ¹² Consult A. Feuillet, “Essai d’interprétation du chapitre XI de l’Apocalypse,” *NTS* 4 (1957–58): 186–87. And see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), p. 66.

references are to the beginning and the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. After that period, the term *holy city* no longer occurs. For God took up residence not in Jerusalem but in the church; at Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled not the temple or Jerusalem but the apostles and all those who repented and were baptized (Acts 2:1–4, 38–39). This exegesis is confirmed in Revelation where John describes the new Jerusalem as the holy city (21:2, 10; 22:19).¹² He explains that this is “the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (20:9), which Jesus calls “the city of my God” (3:12). The holy city is the spiritual Jerusalem of the saints.

In short, the New Testament shows that earthly Jerusalem lost its claim to be called the holy city when the Holy Spirit changed his dwelling place from Jerusalem to the hearts of God's people, the saints. They are persons of every nation, tongue, tribe, and people; together they are residents of the holy city, the new Jerusalem. The Christian church is symbolically called the holy city, for in that place God dwells with his covenant people (21:3).

Next, Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem forty years before it happened. He said, “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24; compare Isa. 5:5; 63:18; and Dan. 8:13).¹³ Jesus defines the length of time as “the times of the Gentiles,” while John writes “forty-two months.” The Apocalypse makes this period equal to 1,260 days or “time, times, and a half time,” which is three and a half years (11:3; 12:6, 14). The three and a half years comprise the period of the Maccabean war when the temple was desecrated from June 167 to December 164 B.C. (compare Dan. 7:25; 12:7). Swete offers the following equation: “the duration of the triumph of the Gentiles = the duration of the prophesying of the Two Witnesses = the duration of the Woman's sojourn in the wilderness.”¹⁴ In short, these periods showing harmony in duration and extent appear to refer to an

12 ¹³ Refer to Hendrik R. van de Kamp, *Israël in Openbaring* (Kampen: Kok, 1990), pp. 174–75; Homer Hailey, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 252; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (reprint, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1943), p. 184.

13 ¹⁴ Louis A. Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse* (Kampen: Kok, 1965), pp. 120–25.

14 ¹⁵ Swete, *Revelation*, p. 134.

interval of undetermined length that extends from Jesus' ascension to his return.¹⁵

Last, some interpreters apply the period of forty-two months to the years immediately preceding the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. But the length of time does not fit the record. The Jewish revolt against Rome began in the late spring of 66 and ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in August–September 70. Also, the trampling of the holy city by the Gentiles began after Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Romans. Placing the forty-two months after September 70) is pointless, for then there is a beginning without an end.

Accordingly, John takes this prophecy of Jesus and applies it not to the earthly Jerusalem but to the church, which is the image of the new Jerusalem. The Gentiles are not non-Jews but rather non-Christians who trample all that is holy and make it profane. The trampling of the holy city refers to a period of persecution that Christians suffer throughout the ages. But remember that God sets the limit for its duration. Indeed, this period spans the time from the ascension to the return of Jesus. I conclude that in Revelation time is an idea presented in summary form that should not be expressed in literal terms of years or even centuries. Chronological time is of fleeting importance in this book, because not time but principle governs the Apocalypse.¹⁶

15 ¹⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, p. 567; Mathias Rissi, *Time and History: A Study on the Revelation*, trans. Gordon C. Winsor (Richmond: John Knox, 1966), p. 40.

16 Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, [*Exposition of the Book of Revelation*](#), vol. 20, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 324-327.