

Revelation Chapter 11

In the last chapter we saw that St. John was given a scroll of prophecy to eat just as the Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel was given a scroll to eat, to prophesy about many things. Now in the second interlude we see this prophecy beginning to unfold.

Revelation 11:1. 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. 2 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.

This second interlude has two parts: the measuring of the Temple and the action of the two witnesses who prophecy.

Revelation 11:1. 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.

The first part takes place on earth. A measuring rod made of reed is given to St. John to measure the Temple of God, the altar, and the worshippers there. You will remember that the Jewish Temple was destroyed by the Romans under the Emperor Vespasian and General Titus in 70 AD. St. John received this revelation in 96 AD, so what Temple is this? St. Andrew of Caesarea and Archimandrite Athanasios believe it to be the true Church in the times of the Antichrist.

In the New Testament faithful believers are called temples of God. Therefore, the faithful, the members of the Church, grow into a holy temple in the Lord, *in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit* as St. Paul says in Eph 2:22. Thus, St. John is measuring out sacred space, the space allotted for the Church and her members. This altar is where the Body and Blood of Christ is prepared and consecrated. In Hebrews 13:10 St. Paul writes, *We have an altar from which those who minister in the ~~Tabernacle~~ [Temple] have no right to eat.* The faithful who worship in this new Temple are those who worship there in spirit and in truth, live the Orthodox Christian life, and partake of the Body and Blood of Christ in communion.

Revelation 11:2a But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles:

Note that St. John is told not to measure the outer court. It seems odd not to measure only one-half of the Church. How do we explain this?

It appears that the inner area of the Church will not be trod upon; it will be protected from the attacks of the Antichrist. The inner area of the Church is made up of the faithful, of those who always remain faithful, regardless of the decomposing world around them. They encircle the altar and prove to be the true worshipers of God. However, the outer area of the Church will be trod upon.

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To understand this a little better, let us review the structure of the Jewish Temple as it was in the time of the Apostles. The outer court of the Temple in ancient Israel was also called the Court of the Gentiles (the non-Jews, i.e., those with whom God had not entered into a solemn covenant as a nation). Although the outer court was the first part of the Temple that all worshippers entered into, it was outside of the high stone walls that surrounded the main section of the Temple complex (known as the *Azarah*) which was open only to covenant people of God, the Jews. Inside the *Azarah* were, first, the Court of Women, then the Court of Israel open only to male Israelites, and, lastly, the Temple itself, i.e., the Holy Place which was open only to the priests, with its tables of showbread, the menorahs with their lamps, and the altar of burnt incense set before the curtains that veiled the Holy of Holies, into which only the High Priest entered in, and only once per year. In there was the Ark of the Covenant whose golden top had the 2 angels facing each other with their wings extended those of the opposite angel. Between the 2 angels on the top of the Ark was the mercy seat, where the High Priest sprinkled the blood of atonement once a year on Yom Kippur, first for his own sins and then for the sins of all Israel.

Surrounding these holy spaces was that tall stone dividing-wall of separation which kept the Gentiles out of the Holy spaces. Immediately surrounding the wall was the *Soreg*, a low wooden fence where a sign was posted forbidding entry beyond this point to non-Jews. Just as the Oral Law of the Jews was a “fence around the Law of Moses”, such that if you didn’t break the oral Law they believed that you wouldn’t break the Torah either, so it was with this fence. This was the point beyond which non-Jews were not allowed to enter. So if a Gentile attempted to go beyond the *soreg* fence, he would be apprehended and potentially executed. As we know, this Temple in Jerusalem was patterned after the Temple in Heaven, a pattern given to Moses directly by the Lord back in the book of Exodus. This tall stone wall corresponds with that middle-wall of partition that the Apostle Pauls talked about in Ephesians 2:13-14. *But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.* Thus, our Lord Christ Jesus, with His passion and resurrection, figuratively broke down this middle wall of partition allowing the Gentiles access to God through the Gospel, through the Church. So, here in Revelation, the Court of the Gentiles outside of the tall dividing wall, is what St. John was told not to measure. Yes, it was part of the Temple complex but not part of the sacred area allotted to the truly faithful and worshiping Israelites, the covenant people -- the only ones allowed access to the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob.

Revelation 11:2b and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

The Holy City is a title for Jerusalem, as we see many times in the Old and New Testament. “It appears that the inner area of the Church will not be trod upon; it will be protected from the attacks of the Antichrist. [But] the outer area of the Temple will be trod upon. This inner area of the Temple is made up of the faithful, of those who always remain faithful, regardless of the decomposing world around them. They encircle the altar and prove to be the true worshippers of God.

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The outer area of the Temple, according to St Andrew of Caesarea, is the assembly of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. According to Archimandrite Athanasios, it is also “made up of all those so-called Christians who wish to be called Christians. They are the Christians of heresy, the lukewarm Christians, the Christians who compromised with the world, the secularized Christians. Such Christians and their secularized churches will not be able to obtain the protection of God, as they will be trod upon by the nations [i.e., by the Antichrist and his minions]. Christ will not protect such worldly Christianity, such a secularized Church, symbolized here by the outer courtyard. How much such Christianity is to be judged by Christ is blatantly obvious in this mandate that they *not* be counted in the measurement conducted by St. John ... During the last days, the Antichrist will compel these indecisive, compromising, unstable Christians, who will go back and forth for 42 months, or 3 1/2 years. Naturally, he will pressure the true Christians as well. The difference is that the true Christians will be steadfast. They will keep the faith because they will have the divine protection, whereas the unstable, compromising Christians will be victimized by the [delusions and] demands of the Antichrist.” (Archimandrite Athanasios).

We all wish to be saved by Christ, but are we doing everything we can to be included in that holy space measured by St. John with his reed? Are we struggling against our passions, struggling to acquire an Orthodox mindset, growing in virtue, partaking of the real Body and Blood of Christ as our hierarchs and priest instruct us?

In business, it's *location, location, location*. And so it is with the Church as well -- the *location* is in the True Orthodox Church, under True Orthodox Bishops and priests and nowhere else -- not in the Orthodox Church of the New Calendarists, the false Church of World Orthodoxy and the Ecumenists, not in the Moscow Patriarchate or other “old calendarists” who are in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and thus share in his heresy, not in the Roman Catholic Church, nor among the thousands of communities of Protestants, Evangelicals, or Pentecostals, whom to their dismay, may find themselves in the “outer court” where they will be subject to being trampled upon by the nations and find themselves subject to the Antichrist and his followers:

Matthew 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Now we will learn about the two witnesses who prophesied to the unbelievers during those 42 months.

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Revelation 11:3 *And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. 4 These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.*

Archbishop Averky: “By these two witnesses all the Holy Fathers and teachers of the Church understand almost unanimously the Old Testament righteous ones Enoch and Elias/Elijah, who were taken alive into heaven.” For the whole 3 1/2 years of their preaching, they will have authority and power over the elements in order to chastise and bring the impious to their senses. These are the same two witnesses whom the prophet Zechariah saw imaged in the

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form of two olive trees and lampstands that supply the light of knowledge by the oil of their God-pleasing works.

“The eighteen century Saint Anthimos of Jerusalem states that these two ... will teach the people of those days that the Antichrist is not the true Christ but a deceiver. He is an imposter, full of prelest [spiritual delusion] and an ambassador of destruction ... Just as the false Christ will possess every diabolical activity and all false signs and miracles, and will be more glorious than all sorcerers and deceivers, so also will God arm these [two] saints with the power of true signs and miracles, so that by offering truth and light they might overthrow the lie and darkness and convert the deceived either by the word of teaching or by the blows of chastisement (drought, fire, changes in the elements, and so forth), and might expose the deceiver himself without themselves suffering in the least either through him or others.”

(St. John of Kronstadt quoted by Vladimir Moss in *Revelation: The Book of the End*).
“Enoch will be the evangelist of the pagans, while Elijah the Thesbite – of the Jews. The apostolic preaching of the Evangelist John will be required for the sake of the elect, for the restoration of the lost meaning of the Christian teaching, perverted by the interpretations of the rationalists among the Christians... There remains no one Gospel commandment which, like the Talmudists in relation to the law of Moses, the Protestants did not have to change, either by narrowing or by broadening its meaning to an unrecognisable degree... Corresponding to the success of the preaching of Elijah the Thesbite amidst the Jews, it must be supposed that the preaching of Enoch among the pagans and the preaching of John the Theologian among the Christians will have great success.”

Why are there two witnesses? Scripture itself mandates that every word shall stand *on the evidence of two or of three witnesses* (Deuteronomy 19:15). Even Christ Himself sent out his disciples in pairs.

Revelation 11:5 *And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. 6 These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.*

Saint Arethas writes, “The two witnesses will have the protection of God, which is why fire will proceed from their mouths to devour anyone that wants to harm them.” [These powers are very reminiscent of the plagues on Egypt in Moses time, and the calling down of fire by Elijah upon the 2 groups of 50 soldiers sent by King Ahaziah of Israel to apprehend Elijah.]

St. Andrew of Caesarea: How deep is the divine goodness! For he brings a healing that is commensurate with the wound. For since he has received the full operation of the devil, the Antichrist will come with every false sign and wonder and will be more wondrous than every sorcery and enchantment. And so in the power of true signs and wonders, God will equip these saints for the promotion of truth and light, and they will expose the lies and darkness (of the Antichrist), and to those who have been deceived they will give correction through the word of

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their teaching and through chastising scourges (drought, fire, changes in the elements and the like), and they will make an example of the deceiver, while until the completion of their prophesying they will remain uninfluenced either by him or by someone other.

Revelation 11:7 *And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them 8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.*

St. Andrew of Caesarea: “After the two witnesses have witnessed and urged escape from this deceit, the beast, that is, the Antichrist, comes forth from the dark and deep recesses of the earth [the bottomless pit] to which the devil had been condemned. And, with God’s allowance, he will kill them and leave their unburied bodies in Jerusalem ... In this city he [the Antichrist] will establish his kingdom and royal throne in the likeness of David ... so as to prove [to the Jews and everyone else] that he is Christ [the Messiah] who fulfills the prophet’s word: *In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and will rebuild the ruins of it, and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down, and will build it up as in the ancient days: that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me, saith the Lord who does all these things.* (Amos 9:11, **LXX**).” The Antichrist will also rebuild the Jewish Temple, and many will believe in him.

Archimandrite Athanasios: “Let us keep in mind that the Antichrist [for his first 3 1/2 years of his 7 year reign] will appear meek, holy, like a lamb. He will appear to be a philanthropist. When he is in power, he will implement means of feeding the hungry and eliminating poverty; he will perform miracles; he will heal the sick. One could easily come to the point of asking, ‘What else can humanity want?’ Or, people could say that he is the messiah [that the Jews have expected] and then, they will worship the beast -- the great deceiver, the destroyer of souls. This is precisely why Holy Scripture and the Church Fathers take such great care to warn us and show us the characteristics of the Antichrist so that we will be able to recognize him when he comes. This is no trifling matter.

St. Arethas: “The term, beast, is used [here] as a name for the Antichrist because of his cruelty; inhumanity, and bloodthirstiness -- not because he will not be a man; this most evildoer and hater of holiness, being full of destruction, will indeed be a man. He is called beast because of his love for blood. He will have our human nature, he will be a human being, but he will be empowered by the energy of Satan.”

St. John of Damascus, in his ***An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith***, Bk IV, Ch.26: has given us a succinct summary of all this: “But Enoch and Elias the Thesbite shall be sent and *shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children*, that is, the synagogue to our Lord Jesus Christ and the preaching of the apostles: and they [the two witnesses, Enoch and Elias] will be destroyed by him [the Antichrist]. And the Lord shall come out of heaven, just as the holy apostles beheld Him going into heaven, perfect God and perfect man, with glory and power, and

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will destroy the man of lawlessness [the Antichrist], the son of destruction, with the breath of His mouth. Let no one, therefore, look for the Lord to come from earth, but out of Heaven, as He himself has made sure [2 Thess 2:8].”

Revelation 11:9 *And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. 10 And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.*

Archimandrite Athanasios: “The expression *people and kindreds and tongues and nations* [shows] that the event is universal in nature ... Just how all the people of earth [would] see this event was unimaginable for centuries.” But now it is quite easy to understand with our televisions, cell phones, and computers with live streaming. “The text says [in Greek] *to gaze at*, to continuously see the corpses of the prophets exhibited for three and a half days in the center of Jerusalem ... the fact that people will be glued to their televisions and gaze at this event perfectly depicts the attitude of spectators eager to witness not only the murder of the two prophets but also the indecent exhibition of their corpses in the city of Jerusalem.” This is not much different than the bloodthirsty lustfulness of the citizens of the Roman empire gorging their eyes on the slaughter of the Christians in the arenas by gladiators or by wild beasts in the early Christian era, except these eager audiences will encompass the entire earth.

Why would the people rejoice? Because the prophets’ piercing and stinging sermons so tormented their darkened consciences that they rejoiced at the silencing of the Lord’s prophets and the liberation of their consciences from the remembrance of the God they had renounced and turned away from. Moreover, St. Andrew of Caesarea says: “Those Jews and Gentiles, who ... were overpowered by the false wonders of the Antichrist, and who had indelibly engrafted that abominable name on their hearts ... rejoiced because they were free from the torments that the prophets gave for their correction.”

It is a very interesting that the citizens of the earth would exchange gifts among themselves out of their sheer joy and relief. Yet, there is a precedent in the Old Testament Scriptures: The Hebrews established this practice after the time of the Babylonian exile under King Xerxes I of Persia as shown in the book of *Esther*. After the Jews had been delivered from genocide at the hands of their arch-enemy and adversary Haman through Queen Esther’s brave actions, Mordecai the Jew instituted the feast of Purim and, along with the other activities, arranged for an exchange of meals or gifts. Why? Because of the joy and relief that they had been delivered from their destruction at the hands of the Antichrist of their times, Haman. Interestingly, Haman is described as an **adversary** in *MT Esther* 3:7, 8:1, 9:10, 24 by the word צָרָר *Tso-rayr* which is the word commonly used in modern Hebrew for *Antichrist* and the root of the Old Testament word for the *Tribulation*. As we see when we study the Antichrist, he is frequently an imitator of Christ as well as a deceiver. So, almost in perfect imitation of the feast of Purim, here in Revelation, after the death of the prophets, the joy is so overwhelming that the citizens of the earth exchange gifts because they are finally free of the tormenting sermon of the two prophets. They probably would have inaugurated a feast for the occasion, for the triumph of evil, were it not for what happens next, in which their joy is

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shattered:

Revelation 11:11 *And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. 12 And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.*

Archimandrite Athanasios: “Here is the triumph [of God] after the very short-lived victory of the Antichrist! Here is the triumph of heaven -- in the resurrection of the two prophets!” -- and their ascension *in the sight of their foes*. “In the Greek, the verb again shows continuous action, *their enemies were watching them continuously*. For three and a half days, all the people on earth will continually witness these events as they are broadcast.” Moreover, as if further proof were needed, just as at the time of the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ there was an earthquake in Jerusalem, so also here -- but a much bigger one:

Revelation 11:13 *And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14a The second woe is past;*

Archimandrite Athanasios: “The [remainder] of the citizens will be afraid and give glory to God. However, this is a doxology under pressure ... The fact remains that in the dismal end of days people will glorify God out of pressure, by the element of supernatural fear, and not out of repentance [which leads to salvation].” *The second woe is past*; but there is still another woe yet to come.

The Book of Revelation 11:14b *and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly. 15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. 16 And the four and twenty elders, which sit before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, 17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. 18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the nations, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, to them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. 19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of of the Lord's covenant: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.*

The commentary which follows will be derived primarily from Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilianos, **Revelation, Volume 3: The Seven Trumpets & the Antichrist**, Zoe Press, Dunlap, CA 2015, pp. 159-172.

Revelation 11:14b *and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly. 15 And the seventh angel*

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sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.

Unlike the silence in Heaven after the 7th seal was opened, here we hear the trumpet blast and then great voices in heaven, the voices of celestial beings, the angels, expressing joy over the impending victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [Spoiler alert!] The kingdoms of the world, under the dominion of the Adversary, now belong to the Lord, and from this point on, the Lord will reign over them.

Revelation 11:16 *And the four and twenty elders, which sit before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, 17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. 18a And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the nations, that they should be judged,*

The 24 elders, representatives of the Old Testament and New Testament Church, fall down in prostration and worship God [on His Throne], giving thanks to Him because His eternal plan is now coming to fruition: giving rewards to His servants, and punishing the ungodly. The announcing of victory beforehand increases the morale of those Christians who will experience the great persecution of the Antichrist, whether martyrs or survivors.

Revelation 11:18b *and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, to them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.*

Notice the different categories of those who will stand on the right hand of Christ in the judgment: Sts. Andrew and Arethas consider the first group of the Lord's servants to be the prophets and apostles, who produce fruit one-hundred-fold. Then there are the saints -- who surround us and whom we honor, e.g. St. George and St. Demetrios, St. Seraphim of Sarov & St. John of Kronstadt, and so forth. These are those who produced fruit sixty-fold. In the third category, are those who produce fruit thirty-fold are those who fear the name of the Lord. Note: All those who fear the Lord but do not reach the heights of a saint, are nevertheless fruitful. This category includes the good man who fears the name of the Lord. He prays; he lives and participates in the Mysteries of the Church; he partakes of the Holy Mysteries; he does not wish to do anything evil; he stays away from wrongdoing; he struggles. He sacrifices for the Lord. He desires to be well pleasing to the Lord. Of course he has imperfections! But he fears the Lord.

Archimandrite Athanasios: St. Anthimos [of Jerusalem (1717-1808), Patriarch of Jerusalem (1787-1808), who learned from Sts. Andrew of Caesarea (563-614) and Arethas of Caesarea (860-939),] writes, "Small are those who do not reach the perfection of virtue, all those who are still afraid of the wrath of God and the punishment after death. Great are those who reach a perfection of virtue, all those who still fear God and don't wish to fall away from His

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love.” The question that such a person keeps asking within his heart and mind is, “Will I be saved?” He fears God’s punishment and talks of the perfected fear of the great ones, that perfect love that casts out fear that St. John the Theologian talked about in his first general letter (1 John 4:18). The fear of losing what we have, is perfected when we hold on tenaciously and do not fall away from the love of God. There is imperfection in both the great and the small categories; but what we need to do is continue our struggle. At some point the Lord Jesus Christ was asked, *Lord, will those who are saved be few? And He said to them, “Strive to enter by the narrow gate”* (Luke 13:23-4). Note: the Lord does not tell us whether there will be many or few, but exhorts us to keep struggling to enter the life of the Kingdom of God. Each person, the great or the small, will receive payment according to the works of his hands [and heart]. The pious will receive the Kingdom of God. Let’s at least enter the Kingdom of God, and we will be happy even with the last seat.

The category, *the destroyers of the earth (11:18)*, is a reference to the ungodly, the impious, the corrupt, the followers of the Antichrist and Satan.

Revelation 11:19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of the Lord’s covenant: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

[When the prayer, thanksgiving, and doxology of the 24 elders ends, God’s temple in heaven opens and St. John sees the Ark of the Covenant that had been housed in the Temple. In Hebrews 9:1-7, the Temple and its furnishings, including the Ark of the Covenant, were described for us:]

Hebrews 9:1. Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. 2 For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. 3 And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; 4 Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; 5 And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly. 6 Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. 7 But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:

Let’s talk about the Ark of the Covenant for a few minutes. The Ark was a box made after the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. It was constructed in the desert of Sinai of acacia wood, plated with gold inside and out, covered with a gold crown perimeter on the top. Also on top were two golden angels facing each other, and the “mercy seat” between them, where the blood of animal sacrifices was sprinkled by the High Priest once per year for himself and for the people of Israel on the Day of Atonement.

Inside the Ark were the 10 commandments written on stone tablets, a jar containing of

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manna from the wilderness, and Aaron's rod that budded and produced almonds overnight (as a witness to the tribe of Levi having been selected as priests and levites over the other tribes, after Korah, Dathan, and Abiram's rebellion against Moses and Aaron).

Originally the Ark was placed in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, and later, in the Temple of Solomon. The jar of manna and Aaron's rod disappeared from the Ark when it was captured by the Philistines in the days of Israel's great judge and prophet Samuel. However, because of the plagues that beset the Philistines and the destruction of their idols of Dagon in the 5 cities to which Ark was taken, like a hot potato, it was sent back to Israel missing the jar of Manna and Aaron's rod ever since.

After the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, the Temple was destroyed. All of its wealth and utensils, etc., were looted and transported to Babylon. Later, while the Medo-Persian empire was attacking Babylon, King Balthazar, while hosting a banquet full of debauchery, ordered that the holy vessels of the Temple of Solomon be brought out so that he and his concubines can use them to drink wine. Then there appeared the apparition of the fingers of a hand which wrote a message on the wall. *Daniel 5:25 And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.* [and only the prophet Daniel could interpret it:] *26 This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. 27 TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. 28 PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. which: You are weighed, measured, and you were found inadequate.* That very night the Babylonian empire was overrun and destroyed by the Medo-Persians under Darius the Mede.

In later years, the Persian king gave permission for the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple under Zerubabel's direction. He also returned the vessels of the Temple to Jerusalem. However, the ark was not mentioned anywhere. Furthermore, the rabbis clearly affirm that even after the vessels had been returned, the Ark of the Covenant was not in the second Temple built after the captivity.

[Similarly, Josephus states that when the Romans, under Titus, conquered Jerusalem in some six centuries later, in AD 70, they not only destroyed the city and the Temple, but also took the vessels with them. Josephus relates that the Ark of the Covenant was not among the vessels taken by the Romans, because it was not there for them to take. So if the Babylonians and the Romans didn't take it, what happened to it, and where is it? [This is the question that many have sought the answer for, and drives the plot in the famous Steven Spielberg movie, *The Raiders of the Lost Ark*. There are also those who believe that the Ark was transferred to a Jewish city way up the Nile River on Elephantine Island, in Upper Egypt, where the Jewish colony there had built a 2nd, illegal (according to the Laws of Moses) Temple. Legend has it that the Ark was then taken to Ethiopia, where it is now housed in the city of Axum, and paraded out one a year by the Coptic Ethiopian Christian community in celebration.]

[However, here is where we Orthodox, who read the Septuagint version of the Old

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Testament have an advantage over our Jewish and Protestant brethren. The answer to what happened to the Ark of the Covenant is found in Second Maccabees 2:1-8.]

After the Babylonians initially conquered the city of Jerusalem in 586 BC under Nebuchadnezzar, but before the destruction of the Temple itself, Jeremiah the prophet alerted some of the priests. One night, he took the Ark, the golden censer of incense, which stood before the Ark, and the ancient tabernacle, and crossed over the Jordan River to Mount Nabab in the land of Moab (now Jordan). That was same mountain where Moses died and was buried, no one knows where. There, in a large cave, Jeremiah placed the holy objects, sealed the entrance with stones, and left. Those who accompanied him during the transport of the objects turned back, desiring to place markers in order to remember the place. However, when they got back to Mount Nabab, they could not find the cave at all. Returning to Jeremiah, they told him that they had gone back but could not find anything, no one knew where it was. Rebuking them, the prophet declared that *the place shall be unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. And then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as there was in the dedication of Moses' Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple.*

The question is: How are we to interpret these words of the prophet Jeremiah? Could it be that we will someday find the historical Ark in that cave in Jordan? Most Jewish interpreters and ancient Christian commentators believed that this prophecy would not be fulfilled until the last days. Because God allowed the Temple to be destroyed means that there is no longer a Temple and a Holy of Holies for the Ark to be placed in. But, what if another Jewish Temple is built? Many believe that the Temple will be rebuilt again by the Antichrist, who will enter it and declare himself to be God half-way through his 7 year reign. As we have discussed previously, that Temple doesn't have to be built on the Temple mount, at the site of the Dome of the Rock, because the ancient Jewish Temple was located directly above the Spring of Gihon on Mt. Zion/Ophel, 600 feet south of the southwest corner of today's Temple Mount. That site above the Spring of Gihon today is a Jewish residential neighborhood. The Dome of the Rock was built over the site of a previous Christian Church at the site of Pontius Pilate's judgment seat and the Temple Mount itself was the Antonia Fortress, home of the Roman Legion, the troops that maintained the peace during Temple times and thereafter. So when will the next Temple be built?

In *Breaking Israel News* (2015) Rabbi Natan Greenberg, head of the Bat Ayin Yeshiva, announced: "When the Temple is restored and the moshiach (messiah) comes ... the kingdom of David will be restored, and the vessels of the Temple will be returned to their proper use."

Just this week, only 3 years later, in Israel there is great excitement. For the first time it was announced that more Jews are living in the land of Israel than in the diaspora [Has God gathered His people? Perhaps, but He has not yet shown them His mercy.] One of the signs the rabbis deemed necessary for the coming of their Messiah was that most Jews would have returned to Israel! Secondly, conservative Jewish rabbis are reporting that the Messiah, the

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Christ, has just been born [on Tisha B' Av, our Jul 21, the day on which the last Temple was destroyed]. Plans for the reconstruction of the Temple have been drawn up. Furniture for the Temple including altars, tables for the holy loaves, the menorah, the altar of incense, and even the Ark of the Covenant, have been designed and are completed or under construction (see <https://www.wnd.com/2018/07/messiah-mania-hits-fever-pitch-in-israel/>). Priests have been training in all the Temple offices and sacrifices. What does all this mean? It means they will build their Temple for the Antichrist to enter and declare himself God. Were the true Ark of the Covenant to be found in a cave in Jordan, the Antichrist could certainly exploit it for his own sordid purposes. It means that not only will the Jews be eagerly looking for their Messiah, they might readily accept an imposter, the Antichrist as the Messiah. But this will be a false Messiah, the Antichrist, whom the 2 witnesses of God, Enoch and Elijah, will prophecy against at the same time proclaiming the Gospel, the Good News, of Christ Jesus, the Resurrected Christ, to the Jews and Gentiles in Jerusalem with great power and chastisement, to bring salvation to the remnant of Israel and the remnant of the Gentiles who will listen, believe, and be saved -- the true sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thus filing up the Church, the Living Body of Christ Jesus. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

In the next chapter, we will begin looking in greater depth at the Antichrist.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Amen