

At this point in the book of Revelation, we are still in the break between the sixth and the seventh trumpets. And at this point, John sees a new vision where he is told to measure the temple, but to leave out part of it because the nation is going to trample that part for forty-two months. Now, there's a lot to unpack in this passage if we want to understand what it means. But when we understand it, we will see that it is a passage of great comfort for us, because this passage shows us, Christians, that we can entrust ourselves to God even in the midst of the most difficult situations.

So in this passage, then, John is told to measure the temple. And this is very similar to a vision which Ezekiel saw at the end of his book. Because starting in Ezekiel chapter 40, Ezekiel saw a vision of a new temple. The first temple, Solomon's temple, had been destroyed, and Israel had been sent away into exile. They needed something to hold on to. They needed something to help them get through this difficult time. But Ezekiel saw this temple in his vision which was a far greater temple than even the first one, because it was a spiritual temple, one that was meant to give Israel hope. And so in the vision, then, Ezekiel is set outside the city of Jerusalem, and we are told in chapter 40: "When he brought me there, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand. And he was standing in the gateway." Now this, of course, is an angel, and this angel had been sent with a long rod in his hand to measure the temple. And he goes about carefully measuring everything about it. He measures the rooms, he measures the height of the walls, he measures the distance between things, everything. He is taking very careful, very exact, very accurate measurements of everything about this temple. In fact, he does this for a number of chapters, as many as eight or nine in the book of Ezekiel. Now, he was not doing this just because he wanted to be accurate or so that we would have some kind of blueprint that we could follow. Rather, he was showing by this careful measurement just how much this temple meant to God. It's like God wanted to know everything about it. He wanted to know every nook, every cranny, every little measurement that there was. Everything that could possibly be known about this temple, because it meant that much to him.

If we want understand that, compare it to Psalm 48, where we hear this: "Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever." Zion in that psalm, of course, is the city of Jerusalem, and Israel is being told to carefully consider everything about it: to count the number of the towers, to consider the walls, to look at all the defensive buildings, everything, to take careful detail. Not just to know these things, but so that they could see that this was God's city, that he cared about it, that he was going to guide them, that he would lead them through whatever was to come. And the same thing is happening here, Christians, with John measuring the temple. It shows just how much God cares. It shows his concern for everything about it.

But God is not concerned for a physical building. The physical temple has long been destroyed. In our day, it's been gone for thousands of years. That's not what God cares about. Rather what God cares about is his true temple: us. We are his temple. We are the living stones built up together to make the Church of God. It's like Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." We are the temple, Christians. God's concern is for his Church. God's care is for his people. And he is carefully

measuring them in this way to show just how much they mean to him. It's just like Jesus says in Matthew chapter 10: "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered." Do you know how many hairs are on your head? Would you be able to give me a number? Could you even tell me how many hairs are on the head of somebody that you love? God even knows that about you, Christians. He knows everything, because you mean that much to him. You belong to him. He is concerned about everything that is going to happen to you. And if that's true, Christians, if God cares for us that much, why should we worry about what is to come? If God cares for us that much, why should we be afraid of what is to be in the days ahead? If God knows so much about you that he can even tell you the number of the hairs on your head, do you think he's just going to forget you? That he's just going to cast you off when things get a little rough? No, it's just like Isaiah says, Isaiah chapter 49: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you," says the Lord. Your own mother would forget about you long before the Lord would cast you off. So why should we be worried? We belong to God through whatever may come.

But the promises that God makes here are not just for sunny days. It's not like God promised that there's only going to be sunshine throughout the rest of our life. There will be storms. There will be tribulation. Through much suffering we will enter into the kingdom of God. And that's why John is told here only to measure the temple, but to leave out the court of the temple. He is not supposed to measure that at all. It's not because God doesn't care about that part. It's not as if God's care and concern only goes so far. But rather because he allows that part to be affected. What we see here is a picture of what it means to be a Christian.

Because the temple, the part that is measured, is a picture of our soul, of our salvation. God carefully measures that part, because nothing can take us out of his hands. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. It's like Jesus says in John 10: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." Nothing can change that, Christians. We are safe in the hands of God. God has measured the temple.

But on the other hand, the court is a picture of our body, of our physical existence. And God in that part allows us to suffer. He allows us to be trampled on by the nations. Because God never said that we were never going to suffer. In fact, he said that we would if we are following after him. Jesus says, Matthew 16: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." So what we see here, then, is a picture of that cross. We have to become like Jesus even in the midst of suffering, because how can we be like Christ if we don't? So the picture that we have here is everything that it means to be a Christian: to be safe in God's hands even as we suffer for him.

But we are told that the courts are trampled by the nations for forty-two months. Now, this is the first time we've actually encountered this number in the book of Revelation, but it's an important one, one that's going to keep coming up, especially in the next few chapters. But it's not this number specifically that's so important, but the idea that it represents that's so important. This is why this same idea will be expressed in a few different ways. Forty-two months, for example, is three and a half years, so forty-two and three and a half represent the same thing. In a sense, they are the same number. And we first encounter this idea all the way back in Daniel, where Daniel expresses it as a time, times, and half a time. And if we take "time" to mean one, then time, times, and half a time is three and a half, so it's the same number again. But Daniel uses that

expression to talk about the length of time that God's people suffer in this world, and it's the same thing in Revelation. Forty-two months is a symbol of everything that we endure as Christians here in this life.

But why forty-two? What's so special about that number? Because it's similar to a few events that happened in history. First of all, the Exodus itself. The Exodus out of Egypt to the promised land took forty-two years, because it took them two years after they left Egypt and then their forty years of wandering began. The whole time that they spent in the wilderness was forty-two years. We also see it with Elijah in his days when he called for a drought on Israel because of their idolatry. That drought lasted for three and a half years. And we also see it in 167 B.C., when God's people suffered under a Greek king named Antiochus Epiphanes for three and a half years. He tried very, very hard to get them to fall away from God. He was doing everything that he could to make them stumble and fall. So all of these together, then, show the same thing. This three and a half, this forty-two, however you want to put it, is a period of great suffering, a period of wandering, a period of wondering what is going to happen.

I think it's also rather interesting that Jesus' ministry lasted about three and a half years from the time that he was baptized until the time that he died. And Jesus certainly also suffered many things. So we see here also a picture of Christ and his suffering, and we as Christians enduring the same thing. So with all of this, then, Christians, we have a picture of the tribulations that we endure, everything that we must suffer in this life as we wander, heading towards the promised land.

That can be very difficult to deal with. It can make us wonder: how long does this have to go on? Will we be able to deal with all of this? How will we make it through? We may even become like Israel in the wilderness, complaining about every little thing.

But Christians, there's two things that we have to remember here that will help us to get through this. And that is remember, first of all, that we still belong to him. The temple, after all, is measured. The Church cannot fall, no matter what she suffers, no matter what she has to go through. We belong to him, no matter what. Doesn't Paul say in Romans chapter 8: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword"? None of these things can, because God has made us his own through Jesus Christ, his Son. Even if we are trampled underfoot by the nations, they cannot take us away from God.

The other thing that we need to remember, Christians, is that for these forty-two months, this period of suffering, it's only forty-two months. It comes to an end. Israel didn't wander forever. It's not like they're still stuck out in the wilderness. God brought them through to the promised land. And so it is also with us. Even if we must suffer for a time, it will come to an end, and it will give way to a glory which will never come to an end. Because what is forty-two months, even if you want to take that literally, what is three and a half years compared to eternity? What is one lifetime of suffering compared to eternal life and peace with God? Though we must suffer, Christians, we will enter into glory, and for that reason we can face all that is to come.

So trust him. Put yourselves in his hands. God knows you. God loves you. God cares for you. Even what you must suffer as a Christian is meant for your good. And it will come to an end and give way to a glory without end. So hold on, because God is your loving Father!

Let us pray. O Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, who lays the cross of Christ on all who trust in you for their everlasting good, lift us up in the midst of all our troubles, so that we may always look to you, knowing that when this night of suffering is over, you will bring us to the day of everlasting glory. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.