



Sunday, February 18, 2024
Revelation 11

As we step into the next section in our study of the book of Revelation, we are going to be looking at chapter 11 today. Scholars and theologians agree that this is one of, if not, the most difficult passages in the revelation to decipher. And as we attempt this, we will notice that chapter 11 contains the seventh and final trumpet. The seventh and final trumpet is one of the most amazing of all seven because it is a complete and utter call to worship. It's basically a magnificent hallelujah chorus. However, before we get to the seventh and final trumpet, which starts in verse 14, we first have to make sense of verse 1 to 13 as it seems to be misplaced. It doesn't follow the narrative of the seven trumpets.

Revelation 11:1-19 (NKJV)

'Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. 2 But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. 3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. 5 And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. 6 These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

The Witnesses Killed

7 When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. 8 And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. 9 Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. 10 And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

The Witnesses Resurrected

11 Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. 13 In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14 The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

Seventh Trumpet: The Kingdom Proclaimed

15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" 16 And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying:

"We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty,
The One who is and who was and who is to come,
Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.

18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints,
And those who fear Your name, small and great,
And should destroy those who destroy the earth."

19 Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.'

The first thing we need to understand about this seemingly misplaced section is that it is to be viewed as an interlude just like with the seals in Chapter 6. Six seals were presented in succession and then there was an interlude before the seventh was revealed. In the seals, the interlude was chapter 7 and if you remember Chapter 6 was where John took the perspective of what would happen to the wicked during that season and Chapter 7 was a parallel view of the exact same scene, but this time from the perspective of the godly. And so in similar fashion, chapter 11 also serves as an interlude before the 7th trumpet is sounded.

So the format here is interesting because the last thing we read in Chapter 10 is the instruction to John to keep on preaching the hard stuff. Now comes this interlude where we are introduced to two witnesses who are eventually killed and then resurrected and after this is the 7th and final trumpet which is a sound of great worship.

Now, as you've likely noted already, Revelation 11 is saturated with Old Testament imagery and John, being well-versed in the Bible draws from the OT because that was the Bible that He was able to draw from at that time. So, when he conveys the apocalyptic experience that he has witnessed, he does so through symbols and imagery that are already known to him and his first century audience. And so for those of us who did not grow up in that timeframe, we have to dig a little bit to be able to understand that context and as we all know, context is key.

The first thing we are introduced to is John's invitation now to be a part of this heavenly scene by the request to now measure the temple. Now, this is interesting because John is writing this vision in AD 96 and as history teaches us, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 as predicted by Jesus, that not even one stone would be left upon another. It was never rebuilt and there is much debate about whether or not the temple will be rebuilt before the return of Christ so almost all theologians suggest that the temple that is being referenced here is not a literal brick and mortar temple but a figurative one. We get a bit of a clearer picture when looking at Revelation 21 when John sees the new heaven and new earth and the new Jerusalem descending. In verse 22, John makes the comment that:

Revelation 21:22

'I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.'

This signifies that in the new heaven and earth and New Jerusalem there is no need for a designated place of worship because God Himself, along with the Lamb (Jesus Christ), becomes that focal point for worship for all eternity.

Which is fascinating to me, because if you follow the progression from the old testament up until this point, we can see that originally the presence of God was housed in a temple made of brick and mortar, and it was necessary and important because sinful man could not approach perfect God without being destroyed. When Jesus died on the cross however, making that connection possible again, we saw the temple veil tear in two symbolizing that the role of the brick and mortar temple had now shifted. Which we clearly see as a major theme all throughout the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul teaches us that the age of a brick and mortar temple has passed because as Christians, we are now the temple of the Holy Spirit. His presence resides, not within a temple of brick and mortar, but now His creation - a temple of flesh and blood, living and breathing, active and moving. The temple of God is now the People of God. But again, this was a designation that was limited because humanity is limited. So now in Revelation 21, in this great reversal of roles, we see that we are no longer the temple inviting the Holy Spirit but now, as it should be, the Lord is the temple and we are invited into Him - for all of eternity. The way it has always meant to be.

So because the temple was destroyed well before John's vision in AD 96 and there will be no temple to measure in the new Heaven and Earth, what then is John measuring? Again, keeping in mind, the context for John is New Testament, where we as Christians are the temple of the Holy Spirit. So the temple that he is measuring is a figurative temple that represents the church - the temple of God is the people of God. Which raises an interesting question then. If it's not a literal building that John is measuring but figuratively the people of God, what significance then does the act of measuring take?

So the act of measuring is actually a very specific action taken from the pages of the prophet Zechariah of old. He also received a vision and in that vision he saw an individual who was given a measuring rod and asked to measure the city of Jerusalem. Why? Well, it was ultimately for protection. In Zechariah 2:5, the Lord explains the measuring by saying, 'I will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in the midst.' So, based on this, John's act of measuring the people of God now in Revelation 11 has Zechariah's vision in mind and speaks to the idea of a coming conflict for the church and that God knows and protects those who belong to Him, even in the midst of trials and challenges. That our eternal future is secure in Him and in Him alone no matter what happens to us here on earth.

This idea of conflict comes from the next part of the verse that references the Gentiles trampling the outer court. The phrase, 'trampling on the outer courts by the Gentiles' represents opposition to the people of God by those who have rejected God. And so this period of time tends to be viewed as a time of persecution/tribulation against the Christians - who are being protected by God. Now, it's

important to remember that the protection of God, as we see all throughout the Revelation, thus far, does not mean that Christians will have to walk through difficult seasons, or pain or suffering, or even loss of life, but that this wall of fire around us protects our eternity. And that is the focus of the protection of God that He will give us the strength to persevere during times like this, where persecution and tribulation are extreme.

To which John says will be there for a period of 42 months. This number is also translated as 1260 days or 3.5 years or even as we'll see in chapter 12, 'a time, two times and a half.' And these aren't just random numbers that appear in the book of the Revelation. These are numbers that are actually used on various occasions throughout the Bible. For example, the book of Numbers talks about the various stages of Israel's journey from Egypt to the promised land and records exactly 42 of them. 3 1/2 years is the length of the drought in Elijah's day. In the book of Daniel on two occasions, Daniel mentions that the saints will undergo trials for a time, two times and a half - referencing 1260 days, 42 months or 3.5 years. The two witnesses will preach for 1260 days, and the woman in chapter 12 will flee to the wilderness for 1260 days...42 months....3 1/2 years....a time, two times and a half....

There are two thoughts on this duration of time. Like with everything else in the book of the Revelation, these numbers are either viewed literally, or symbolically. With the literal explanation, this is a literal set time, but with the symbolic interpretation, the focus is placed more on the nature of the duration instead of the length of the duration. Through this lens, the number is not viewed as much in regards to the length of time, but the nature of what that time will entail as represented by the number used to describe it. And with all of the examples that we just talked about they all share the same significance of it being a time of trial, persecution, or oppression against God's faithful people which is the significance of the number 1260, 42, 3.5....time, two times and a half.

Which again, is consistent with the story here as it is being unfolded. The people of God will face a season of oppression and persecution from those that have rejected the Lord as represented by the gentiles in the outer court. How long this season lasts is open to interpretation.

But this is where the story develops a really interesting turn of events as two new characters are now introduced in verse 3 as two witnesses of the Lord, empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel for 1260 days until they are killed, laid out in the streets for all to see and then 3.5 days later arise from the dead.

There has been much debate over the identity of these two witnesses over the years: some suggest it could be Zerubbabel and Joshua - which is pulled from the Zechariah prophecy where these two

were referred to as the anointed ones. Some think Moses and Elijah or even Enoch and Elijah - as they were two men of God in the Bible who never actually died but were taken up to heaven; Peter and Paul; symbolically, Israel and the church or the old covenant and the new covenant...and the list goes on.

It's interesting however, that, as we read the description of these two witnesses we can see very clearly that John uses the imagery of lampstands that are filled with oil. This isn't the first time that we have seen lampstands in this book. If you go all the way back to the beginning of the Revelation, we see that lampstands represent the church. Oil - which is what olive trees produce - represents the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for the church, and is what is necessary for lampstands to do their job of being light in dark places. In addition to that, when we see the seven messages from Jesus to the seven churches, we see all but two are unfaithful and receive rebuke and correction from the Lord. Ephesus lost its first love; Pergamum and Thyatira tolerated the spirit of compromise; Sardis was wealthy and famous, but self-absorbed and dead; Laodicea was lukewarm. There are only two churches - Smyrna, and Philadelphia - that had the oil of the Lord burning in their lamps whom the Lord called, faithful and obedient - the uncompromising church.

And so it seems to fit with the overall prophetic language here, that these two witnesses are symbolic of the faithful church going through a season of great persecution and oppression, but in the midst of that, being able to boldly declare the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because the power of the Holy Spirit - as symbolized by the oil - is keeping their light burning bright.

Verses 5-6 say that if anyone desires to harm them, fire will proceed out of their mouth and devour their enemies. And that they have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall, turn the waters into blood and even to pronounce plagues upon the earth.

Sound familiar? This is all prophetic imagery isn't it? We've seen all of this before haven't we? In the story of Elijah, we read of two instances where he was confronted with 50 soldiers who wanted to kill him, and both times he was able to call down fire, which consumed them. And what about the time when after praying he was instructed to pronounce a drought that stopped all the rain for 3 1/2 years? And you can't leave Moses out of this equation either, because after all, he was the first one to turn water into blood, and pronounce plagues upon the gods of Egypt.

So again, this is all prophetic imagery that I think is meant to draw the reader back to moments in history when the people of God faced oppression, and the Spirit of God took control and gave them the power to overcome. That God will vindicate His message and overcome His enemies.

But then we read that this beast rises up out of the bottomless pit, and is set loose upon these witnesses and actually kills them. How do we now reconcile this destructive event in light of the previous victorious one?

Part of the reason, for the introduction of this beast at this moment is John's way of reminding us that all evil and oppression ultimately stems from the source, which is Satan himself. That as the apostle Paul teaches:

Ephesians 6:12

'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.'

So since this beast represents the satanic or antichrist forces of evil and Almighty God has ultimate power over them - as we have just seen, why then would He allow the witnesses to succumb to the beast?

So let's walk through this. It says that the death of these witnesses takes place in the streets of the Great City which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt - where also Jesus was crucified. The reference to Sodom and Egypt here is key. Historically, Sodom And Gomorrah were two of the most immoral and obstinate cities to ever grace the planet and were well known for their extreme immorality and complete disregard for the commands of the Lord. Egypt on the other hand was the land that held the people of God in slavery and oppression for the people of God. So by labelling this 'great city' as such, John is referring to the people there as being the most immoral and corrupt and oppressive and resistant. They're the worst of the worst. Is John saying that Jerusalem has become like Sodom and Egypt? Well, that would be assuming that the Great City mentioned here is actually Jerusalem but if it is, why not just say Jerusalem, right? Why go through the trouble of identifying this city as having the characteristics of Sodom and Egypt, and also where Jesus was crucified, but not call it Jerusalem? Because I actually don't think John has Jerusalem in mind here at all. I like how New Testament scholar Gerhard Krodel puts it: "the great city ... is every city that embodies self-sufficiency in place of dependence on the Creator, achievement in place of repentance, oppression in place of faith, the beast in place of the Lamb, and murder in place of witness to God."

So if the interpretation of these two witnesses is the faithful church, then the death of these two lying in the middle of the streets is symbolic of a period of time where the church will look as though it has been defeated. John goes on to say however, that after 3 1/2 days, the witnesses will be brought back to life. There's John and his numbers again. In my opinion symbolic, not literal. The

number seven means completion, and if they were dead for seven days that would signify completion - that it was over - but because the number $3\frac{1}{2}$ is used to describe the nature of their death, John is specifically drawing the reader to understand that their death is actually incomplete and therefore not final.

And this is now confirmed in verse 11, when the breath of God enters them, and they stand back on their feet. The point being that the church of Jesus Christ cannot be destroyed. Why, because Jesus Christ, Himself cannot be destroyed. And they tried. They put Him to death, put Him in a grave, but death could not hold Him. The grave could not contain Him!

The church of Jesus Christ cannot be destroyed because Jesus Christ cannot be destroyed.

And the most amazing thing is that although John is witnessing this as an event that is to take place, the reality is that history, time and time again, has witnessed this exact event from generation to generation. In first century times, when the Romans thought that they had destroyed the church, the church bounced back. Even in our generation, we see that in those countries that have brought oppression, persecution, and even death against the church - just look at China, India, Africa - the church always responds, even stronger than it was before. Why?

Because the church is the bride of Christ and He has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And the resilience of the church throughout history and moving into the future is and will be a testament to the sustaining power of Christ, who empowers His people to overcome adversity and to continue to spread His message of love and redemption to the ends of the earth.

And so, the next thing we read is that there was a great earthquake, and a 10th of the city fell, and 7000 people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to God in heaven.

1/10 or 7000 are killed during this earthquake but if you do the math, 63,000 actually come to faith through repentance. This is actually phenomenal, but a really weird way for John to share this information right? Why would he put the emphasis on those that died instead of those that repented? This reminds me of the cry of the martyrs, under the altar who also died for their faith, saying how long, oh Lord, will you allow evil to have its day? The Lord responded with the trumpets, which was his active judgement toward sin, and towards those who would not repent. But it was partial and not full. If you remember, only 1/3 of creation was destroyed thus giving 2/3 of creation opportunity to repent. Perhaps this is John's way of keeping with the overall theme of this section by reminding

us that unless sin is repented of, it still has to be accounted for. And God, as the righteous judge, is the only one who is able to do this. But that, even in the midst of God's active partial judgment here, there is opportunity to repent. And so we see the incredible revival of sorts that is now birthed out of fear. Yes fear. Note the end of verse 13: 'and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.'

We have to understand that fear is not necessarily a negative attribute when used appropriately, and in its right context. Most of us, when we think of fear, we might think of ghosts and goblins, Halloween, things under the bed, or hiding in the closet, spiders, credit card bills...right? However, the Bible teaches us in Proverbs, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom is defined not just as the knowledge of good and evil but the application of it. And I think that's exactly what all those in that scene understood that day. They saw the power of God, as He breathed life into death, and then they saw the power of God pronouncing judgement upon sin. The power over life and death would, of course, naturally, place, great fear in their hearts, because in that moment, they would have finally understood the consequence of their sin. And I think the realization finally came upon them that they were powerless to save themselves, but that they needed to respond and repent. Again, this goes back to the end of chapter 10 where John was encouraged to keep on preaching the hard stuff, because that gives people the ability to understand that there is consequence for sin but freedom through repentance.

This is wisdom.

And so, as Darrell Johnson so eloquently puts it, the heart of the message in Revelation 11 is this: 'If witnesses get killed doing their prophetic work, they win. They win because they have a new life in Heaven, but they also win because killing the witnesses does something to the great city. It breaks the heart of the city. It breaks the heart of those who kill, and ultimately wins the killers. This is the mystery of the cross. Jesus wins when it appears he has lost. Jesus wins when it appears evil is in control. Jesus overcomes the enemy when He lets the enemy overcome Him. Jesus, the faithful witness, did not back off as death sought to threaten Him. Because He did not back off, but remained faithful unto death, He defeated death through the resurrection. And so, this is the mystery that John is picturing in here in Revelation 11. The witness of those who remain faithful unto death wins the world. Because in that moment of faithfulness, they are giving evidence that this present world, is nothing compared to the world to come, filled with a presence of the one true God.

And if you do a quick google search, you will read story upon story about how the persecuted church - even through the pain and suffering and torture and death, has become a force that is

stronger than it ever has been before.

And this is why all of heaven rejoices and responds with worship at the sounding of the 7th trumpet. Because ultimately, as John says, the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of God. And whenever the kingdom of darkness gives way to the kingdom of Light, there will always be rejoicing and worship in heaven. So, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify our father, who art in heaven.

So remain faithful church.

Josh Hageman

Lead Pastor

Kingsview Community Church

Stoney Creek, ON

www.kingsviewchurch.com

<https://www.facebook.com/KingsviewCommunityChurch/>

