

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE VICTOR

Two Witnesses and the Seventh Trumpet

Revelation 11

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Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come. Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail (Rev. 11:1–19).

Several years ago, I heard Ray Ortlund say something that was profound and moving: "I've never met anyone suffering from too much encouragement in Christ." He was attempting to elevate the value that

we place on helping one another to keep perspective. In this way, encouragement is simply to lay something hopeful alongside the challenging realities of life. Discouragement saps our energy, blurs our spiritual vision, and results in a cascading effect of negativity. When you are discouraged, it's easier to be suspicious, to believe the worst about everything, to fall into temptation, and even to struggle with unbelief.

No wonder the writer of Hebrews says this:

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24–25).

As the Great Day (the Day of Jesus' return) draws near, Hebrews tells us that we need more encouragement—not less. There's some of you who, the reason God has you here, is because you need a soul-reorientation. You need to be encouraged by what's really true amid an environment of all kinds of things that are very painful and hard.

Today is the twelfth message in our series on the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It's the conclusion of the second series entitled “The Victor,” and we are going to pick up our series on January 8. Next Sunday we'll begin a short series for Advent on the Psalms of Ascent—the songs that people sang on their journey to the temple.

Our text today is a thematic extension of chapter 10 where we learned about an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet. The focus was on John's experience in eating the little scroll which was sweet and then bitter. Chapter 11 extends that further by drawing our attention to the way in which God passionately protects the witness of his glory. You could summarize the theme of this text as **“God powerfully preserves the witness of his kingdom.”**

In other words, the encouragement here is, as James Hamilton writes: “God will protect his people against all satanic opposition, and they will proclaim the gospel until the kingdom comes.”¹ This text shows the encouragement to keep proclaiming and living out the gospel message even as life becomes increasingly hostile. Revelation 11 is meant to encourage you, embolden you, and motivate you. And we'll see that by looking at two main points: (1) protected witness and (2) unstoppable kingdom.

Let's look at each of these to see how and why God powerfully preserves his witness in the world.

1) Protected Witness (vv. 1-13)

In verses 1-13 we find a very complicated section of Scripture—a section that is full of imagery. There are a lot of different ways to interpret these symbols in terms of what they represent. But the overall

¹ James M. Hamilton Jr., [Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches](#), ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 232.

message of encouragement ends up being the same. Namely, that God powerfully protects his witness in the world

The chapter begins with a new instruction to John. In verse one he's given a measuring rod and specific instructions: "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there." Once again, we find a parallel between the books of Revelation and Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 40-42 records that the prophet was taken on a tour of a new temple. The rebellion of God's people caused the glory of God to depart (see Ezekiel 10). But in Ezekiel 40 there is hope as a new temple will be filled, once again, with the glory and presence of God. Then, in Ezekiel 46-47 there's even a river that flows from the temple, which is similar to what we'll find in Revelation 22. So there are many connections here. As it relates to Revelation 11, Ezekiel witnesses the measuring the new temple:

"In visions of God he brought me to the land of Israel, and set me down on a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city to the south. 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. And the man said to me, "Son of man, look with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and set your heart upon all that I shall show you, for you were brought here in order that I might show it to you. Declare all that you see to the house of Israel." And behold, there was a wall all around the outside of the temple area, and the length of the measuring reed in the man's hand was six long cubits, each being a cubit and a handbreadth in length. So he measured the thickness of the wall, one reed; and the height, one reed" (Ezek. 40:2-5).

Throughout Ezekiel 40-42 this tour and measuring continues until the glory of God gloriously returns in Ezekiel 43. And so, it seems that this measuring of the temple in Ezekiel is connected to the divine plan of God. In other words, the measuring of the temple is intended to send a message about the certainty of God's plan.

But notice that in Revelation 11 John is told to measure the temple, the altar, and those who worship there, but not to measure the court outside the temple. This presents an interpretive challenge because there are some people who take this temple to be a literal temple that will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Others see it as another spiritual symbol for the people of God. They especially point to the measurement of "those who worship there." Whether one takes it as figurative or literal, the measuring communicates the same thing: a connection to the intentional plan of God as it relates to his people.

This measurement, however, is not without conflict. Notice that the outside court isn't measured because it is a place of conflict and destruction. Interestingly, we have a reference to forty-two months. Some take this to be a symbol for the time between Christ's ascension and his return. Others take this, along with 1,260 days which is the same amount of time as forty-two months, to refer to the halfway point of the Great Tribulation. (Once again, we see the challenge of knowing which things to take figuratively and which to take literally).

Verse 3 highlights the emergence of two witnesses who will prophesy during the 1,260 days while clothed in the sackcloth of mourning and repentance. It probably won't surprise you to learn that

scholars differ on whether the two witnesses are figurative or actual people. One view sees these witnesses as representative of the church. They would argue that the two witnesses are merely symbolic for the church's witness, and they connect it to the Old Testament principle of having two witnesses confirm the validity of testimony (Deut. 19:15). Others take this more literally to refer to two prophetic-like figures who emerge during this time and who speak boldly for the people of God in the tribulation.

Additionally, these two witnesses are described with four images from the Old Testament in verses 4-6:

- **Two olive trees and lampstands**—taken from Zechariah 4 where the exiled people returned to rebuild the temple under Joshua and Zerubbabel
- **Fire consuming their foes**—similar to the fire summoned by Elijah in 1 Kings 1:9-12
- **Shutting the sky from rain**—this was the prayer of faith by Elijah in 1 Kings 17
- **Turning water to blood along with plagues**—a parallel reference to the plagues in Egypt from Exodus 7-12²

The proclamation ministry of these witnesses reaches its ordained conclusion in verse 7, after which they receive fierce opposition from “the beast that rises from the bottomless pit.” This image is connected to Daniel 7 where a worldly king and kingdom oppose the people of God. In the upcoming chapters of Revelation we'll see this expanded with images of a dragon, two beasts, and Babylon. Remember that John is recording what he sees as it relates to the message, not necessarily a timeline.

These messengers are not seduced by the beast, but they are killed. Verse 8 marks the location as Jerusalem while referring to it as “Sodom and Egypt.” The point is to link the city with all cities that are in historical rebellion.

According to verses 9-10 the world (“peoples and tribes and languages and nations”) rejoices over the death of these two witnesses because of the “torment” that they have been to those who dwell on the earth. It would seem that the witnesses have lost. But not so fast!

After three and a half days, the witnesses are raised to life. Some take this to be literally three-plus days; others connect it to three and a half years where it seems that the people of God have lost while under horrendous persecution. According to verse 12, a loud voice from heaven calls to them: “Come up here!” And just like Jesus, they are taken from the earth as their enemies watched them. And in similar fashion at Jesus' death, there was an earthquake. This one results in seven thousand people being killed, many people are terrified, and they realize that they are on the wrong side of God's glory.

Whether you think these two witnesses are literal people or whether they symbolize the church, or if you think the temple is a literal rebuilt temple in Jerusalem or you think the temple is a figurative picture of the church, the message of these thirteen verses need to be fully understood.

² James M. Hamilton Jr., [*Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*](#), ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 237.

God protects his people and his Word from defeat.

Last week we needed to be reminded about hopeful confliction as a normal experience for Christians. Here we see that the plan of God involves substantial opposition. Have you felt that this week? Do you sense it even more broadly? This text shows us the way that God protects his people and his message through suffering and opposition.

Jesus commissioned his followers to be his witnesses. *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

“If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you...but when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you” (John 15:19; 15:26–16:4).

These texts remind us that faithful witness is rarely affirmed and loved by the world in which we live. That shouldn't give us a persecution complex or a martyr's syndrome, but help us to live faithfully and confidently. God protects his witness in the world.

Martin Luther knew the fury of being opposed for the gospel. Can I remind you about one of the verses of “A Mighty Fortress is our God”?

And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!

2) Unstoppable Kingdom (vv. 14-19)

The last section in chapter 11 is a glorious celebration of where history is headed. Verses 14-15 indicate that it happens again through judgment as the second woe is past. The third is soon to come. It is the seventh trumpet, and the final trumpet is blown.

Remember that there were seven seals, so this represents the culmination of God's plan. It's as if we are taken to the mountain to see the conclusion of everything. Verse 15 tells us that there are loud voices in heaven who make a glorious announcement: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." You could think of this as the center of the book of Revelation. It's where the Revelation of Jesus Christ is heading.

[James Hamilton suggests](#) that you can think of this book in chiastic formula.

Table 18.1: The Chiastic Structure of Revelation 7-14

7:1-9:21, The Sealing of the Saints and the Seven Trumpets

10:1-11, The Angel and John (a True Prophet)

11:1-14, The Church: Two Witnesses Prophecy for 1,260 Days, Then Opposition from the Beast

11:15-19, the Seventh Trumpet: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." Worship!

12:1-13:10, The Church: The Woman Nourished for 1,260 Days, Then Opposition from the Dragon and the Second Beast

13:11-18, The Deceiving Beast (False Prophet)

14:1-19:10, The Redemption of the Saints and the Bowls of Wrath

Why is that important? Because this text shows us what Martin Luther was talking about when he said, "God's truth abideth still; his kingdom is forever." Our assurance in life is longing for the coming day when the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

In response to this incredible proclamation, the elders who are seated around the throne fall down and worship. They break into a beautiful hymn which involves three themes:

1. **Sovereignty**—They praise the Lord God Almighty, who is and who was because he has begun to reign in power.
2. **Judgment**—They highlight the way in which the nations have raged—a reference to Psalm 2. And in response to that global rebellion, the wrath of God has come along with the dead being judged.
3. **Deliverance**—What follows immediately is a statement about God's reward for prophets and saints, those who fear God's name, along with the small and great resulting in the destroying of the destroyers.

We have heard these themes before, haven't we? They are central throughout the book of Revelation. We'll find them again as we continue our journey next year.

Revelation 11 ends with another image of God's glory. In verse 19 we see a temple that is open. The ark of the covenant was visible, something that was never the case in the Old Testament. Only one person

saw the ark one time a year. And with this image there's powerful flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and hail.

It's a glorious vision of the victory afforded to God's people, and it's meant to be deeply encouraging.

To that end how might this chapter serve to encourage us as we see the Day approaching? What kind of encouragement do you need today? Christian, let me give you four encouragements from Revelation 11:

God will empower you—from both Revelation and Jesus' words to his disciples, we see that the encouragement doesn't come from the absence of suffering or hardship. Rather it comes from God's ability to help you, empower you, and walk with you. The reason for the sending of the Holy Spirit is to be both our comforter and enabler.

Satan will not defeat you—the track record of God is to rescue his people from the devices of Satan. That doesn't mean that it never looks bleak or dark, but the reason we have Revelation in the Bible is to remind us that "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet..." (Rom. 16:18).

The church is unstoppable—the people of God are far from perfect, and our track record is spotty when it comes to faithfulness. But Jesus promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. Sunday after Sunday we gather to proclaim the message that rescues people from the clutches of the enemy.

It's not long now—The book of Revelation calls us to faithfulness, endurance, and patience. And one of the ways that we help one another is to remind each other that we're closer now than we've ever been to the return of our King. So, "... let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24–25).

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