



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 11:1-19

“2 Witnesses and the 7th Trumpet”

Revelation

TRANSCRIPT

Our text this morning is Revelation chapter 11. We’re going to look at the entire chapter, and if you’re visiting, this is really the heart of the book of Revelation, I think, when you think of what it is and how daunting some of the passages are. We sometimes read it and we scratch our head and we wonder, “What was that about?” And this is one of those chapters.

But I think – maybe I’m being a little bold here – but I think that it’s a little clearer than we might give it credit for being, as we just read through it. But try to give credible interpretation to some of these symbols and events that are described here, and hopefully it won’t be so opaque or difficult as it might seem, as we read through it. But we’re reading Revelation 11, beginning with verse 1:

“Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, ‘Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.

Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.

And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty 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 wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way.

These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not 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 plague, as often as they desire.

When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.

And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.

And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.

And in 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 is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

Then the seventh angel sounded; 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 will 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 You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.

‘And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.’

And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this time as we come together, open your Word, and read what at least at first blush is an arcane text of Scripture. It causes us to puzzle over its meaning, and yet it has meaning, and it’s something we need to know and understand.

I pray that you bless us with an understanding of the things that we’ve read, and not only an understanding of the meaning of the text, but how the text applies to each one of us. It does. Your Word is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, and it separates our lives, aspects of our lives.

And I pray that that will be the effect of our time together; that you will use this text to cause us to look at ourselves, and understand more about you and our relationship with you. So we pray that you bless us and build us up in the faith, and make this a profitable time together.

And not only in this hour, but I pray that for the hour to come, the Sunday School hour, and pray you’d bless all of those who teach, and give them your grace to teach in the power of the Holy Spirit; may the Spirit of God open hearts to receive the ministry that’s given.

We thank you for the teachers you’ve raised up, and pray you’d bless them, and all of the workers, Father, those who minister throughout the church during the week, those who teach on Sunday, those who teach during the week. We pray for the women’s ministries, pray you’d bless them.

And bless each aspect of the ministry of this church as your Word goes out through tapes and CDs and over the radio and through publication ministries. Bless each aspect of the ministry. And Lord, bless us materially as well. We are physical beings with physical material needs. We pray for those that are in need of employment; bless them. We pray for those who are in need of health, who are recovering from surgeries or procedures.

We pray that you bless them and give them speedy recovery and health. Thank you for the health that we enjoy; it’s a gift from you; help us never to take that

for granted, but to always be appreciative and thankful for all that we have, because Lord, we must recognize everything we have is a gift from you. We live and move and we have our existence in you, and you give us each moment of life that we have.

We give you the praise and the thanks for that, and most importantly, thank you for the eternal life that you granted to us in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s in his name we pray. Amen.

[Message] In the preface to his journals, the 18th century evangelist George Whitfield wrote, “I find we are immortal till our work is done.” I know I’ve quoted that before; in fact, I think I’ve quoted it many times, but it is true and encouraging – and the lesson of our text in Revelation 11, where two witnesses unexpectedly make their appearance. They face strong opposition, but are invincible till their work is done.

Even then, after they have been killed, after their martyred bodies have lain in the streets of Jerusalem for three days, they’re raised from the dead. It illustrates the fact that though God’s people will suffer at the hands of the world, still we will ultimately triumph, because God is sovereign, and he’s faithful. That is the general application of the text, but if the broad meaning of it is clear, the details of it are not – at least not to some people.

Chapter 11 has been called the most difficult section of the book of Revelation, and we do wonder as we read through it, what is the meaning of the temple that John measures in verses 1 and 2? Who are the witnesses who are slain by their enemies, and who in turn have slain those who seek to capture them? Slain in that great city – what is that great city? Well, these are questions people puzzle over.

Particularly those who deny the futurist approach to the book, and see it as largely about the past and purely figurative. So for them, the temple represents the church. The two witnesses are the church militant, engaged in evangelism, and the great city where they are killed is the unrepentant world. As I remind you periodically, and I will continue to do so, John tells us from the very outset of this book, from the first verse of the book, that this revelation was given to him in signs.

We must bear that in mind. There are figures in this book, but at the same time, not everything in the book of Revelation is a symbol. It is about real people. It is about actual events, future events. And when we simply take God’s Word as it is written, and have faith in it, things become a lot clearer to us. It may be amazing to us, may be startling to us, but I think much clearer to us.

Even where many of us disagree on the details of the book, and the general perspective of the chapter there, there is agreement on the assurance given to God’s people: that we are secure, and will triumph. Chapter 10 and chapter 11, to verse 14, when the seventh trumpet is sounded, are an interlude, or an intermission in the book, when events on earth are explained. The nearness of Christ’s coming has been proclaimed back in chapter 10:6.

There will be delay no longer, we’re told, and John has just eaten the little scroll that was sweet to his mouth and bitter to his stomach. The scroll, if you remember, is about judgment, and John is told to prophesy judgment about the nations. He does that throughout the remainder of the book, but in chapter 11, he gives a prophecy about the nation, about Israel, when he is told to measure the temple.

Now, some interpret this literally, this measuring of the temple, to be about the temple that is to be built during the tribulation period. What Paul refers to in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, where the man of sin will set himself up as an object of worship, as someone who will be considered to be god, and that may be what John is referring to here. But we’re not told what temple this is.

From the description given, it appears to be the first century temple of Herod, the temple that John was familiar with, which, by the time he writes this book, had been destroyed by the Romans. But John is not seeing what is actually there; he’s seeing things in a vision. He’s told us that from the beginning of the book, and is in that experience now. It was what he was experiencing in chapter 10 when he eats the scroll, or the little book, that’s given to him.

That is a vision that he had, and there was a purpose, and there was a lesson in it. The meaning of the vision here is found in the Old Testament, and that, as we have pointed out in the past – we need to bear this in mind – is the key to understanding the book of Revelation. There are lots of extra-biblical things that commentators and students of the book of Revelation bring into the interpretation of the book that are sometimes helpful.

But the real key to understanding this book is understanding the Old Testament, and the meanings of the prophecies and the visions of that. And in Zechariah 2:1-5, there is a similar vision that was given to the prophet – one that explains this vision that’s given to John. And in fact, the book of Zechariah is crucial to understanding this chapter. But in Zechariah 2:1-5, the prophet Zechariah has a vision in which a man is measuring the city of Jerusalem.

And then in verse 4, Zechariah is told the meaning of it: Jerusalem will be inhabited without walls because of the multitude of men and cattle within it, and the Lord would be the wall around it. In other words, Jerusalem will prosper greatly. It will be at peace – something that it’s never known in its existence – and it will be secure. God will be its security; not manmade walls, but the Lord God will keep it secure.

That is a promise that’s made there in the Old Testament in Zechariah, but it’s a promise that has never been fulfilled. It is a promise of the future for Israel and the assurance that God has not rejected his people. And that’s the meaning here. Measuring was done in order to rebuild a building, or repair a building, so when John is given a rod and he’s told to measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship in it, the preservation and the salvation of the Jewish people is being assured.

Verse 2: “Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.” Again, John is seeing things in a vision – told us that back in 1:10. It’s clear from chapter 10 that he’s seeing a vision, but back at the very beginning of the book, he said that he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.”

And so he continues to be in the Spirit and seeing a vision, and here, the court of the Gentiles represents the time of the Gentiles, which is referred to throughout biblical prophecy – the time of the Gentiles. It represents the time from Nebuchadnezzar, when he destroyed the temple, to Christ’s return at the second coming. Jesus spoke of it in Luke 21:24.

He said, “Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Well, they’ve not yet been fulfilled. But here, their end is prophesied, from the middle of the tribulation period to the end, they will last 42 months, which is 3-1/2 years. This is the amount of time that Daniel gives the antichrist, that wicked ruler to come, that he gives in both Daniel 7:25 and 12:6.

A time, times, and half a time – that’s the measurement, the time that the antichrist will have in his dominion on this earth, which equals a year, two years, and half a year, or three and a half years. Then Christ will come, and that will happen without delay, according to 10:6. The point is, Gentile dominion will end, and Jerusalem and the Jews will be preserved.

During this time, these final 42 months, 2 witnesses will appear in the city. Just as John the Baptist announced Christ’s first coming, these two witnesses will

herald the second coming. They’re given great authority, according to verse 3. They will be clothed in sackcloth, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, which is the same as 42 months. Sackcloth is their clothing, and there’s significance in that. It represents mourning. It represents sadness.

And these men will be dressed in this way because they will be prophesying judgment, and that calls for mourning. That calls for sadness and sorrow over what’s to come. In verse 4, they are described as being two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. You might wonder what in the world does that mean. Well, again, need to interpret these symbols – and that’s what this is, is a symbol.

We need to interpret these by the Old Testament, and again, we go back to Zechariah, and this time to chapter 4, where Zechariah sees a gold lampstand, a menorah, and two olive trees on either side of the lampstand, and from the olive trees, the lamps get their oil. The lampstand, the light-bearer, represents truth, and the oil of the olive trees represents the Holy Spirit. You find that all through the Word of God.

Oil is representative of the Spirit of God, so when these two witnesses are described as two olive trees and the two lampstands, they are prophets, bearers of truth, proclaimers of God’s Word, who do so in the power of the Holy Spirit. And Zechariah 4:6 the Lord explains it: “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts. Well, what an important statement that is to learn and to believe.

God’s power is more than sufficient for us. When we’re called to minister for him, we do it in his power. He calls us to do impossible things. In fact, if you read the next verse, it talks about tearing down mountains – that nothing can stand before Zerubbabel, his servant, not even a mountain. And through Zerubbabel, from the Lord God will come grace – grace that fills the earth.

So what is being said there in Zechariah 4 is that everything that God calls upon for us to do can be done, as difficult as it may be, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and he will make us sufficient. More than the armies of the earth, more than any who might oppose us. Well, we see that here. These men were made powerful in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that they prophesied, and they are untouchable.

According to verse 5, “If anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemy.” Verse 6 says they could shut up the sky to prevent

the rain, turn the waters into blood, and strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desired. That’s an amazing ministry that they have, and so we naturally wonder, who are these two witnesses?

And some, as I indicated earlier, say this is figurative, it’s a figurative description of the church; they represent the church militant, going out throughout the earth preaching the gospel. The number two represents adequate testimony; that is based upon the requirement by the law of Deuteronomy 17:6 that a testimony in a court of law must be established on the witness of two or more witnesses.

That certainly may be the case for the two witnesses; that they do demonstrate the legal justification of the testimony that’s given. But the fact that the two witnesses and their ministry are described in such detail, and the place of their ministry is identified unequivocally as Jerusalem, indicates that – at least suggests I think strongly to myself – that they are historical figures of the future.

These are real people, not representatives of the church as a whole, but real individuals that will appear on the scene of history in the coming days. That seems too fantastic in the minds of some to be the meaning. When, for example, we read in verse 7 that the beast, the antichrist, makes war on them, some say this must be a large group; this must be the church, since the antichrist wouldn’t make war on two individuals.

That’s too strong a word. That’s too vast a description of his opposition to be limited to just two men. So they take this figuratively of the church. But then I ask you, if these men can speak fire and consume their enemies, what would the antichrist do? What would the beast do to oppose them? Nothing can touch these men. Imagine that he sends two of his policemen to arrest them, and they’re devoured by fire.

So he increases the force; he sends ten more, and they’re devoured. And pretty soon it’s an army that he sends against them, and this has happened before. What’s described here – in fact, all of the aspects of this ministry – are not unprecedented. We see these things in the Old Testament. There were armies that were sent against Elijah in 2 Kings chapter 1.

He’s sitting on a hill. The king of Israel wants him apprehended. An army comes to do that, and – in fact, he sends two armies. Twice he sends an army, and each time Elijah calls down fire to consume them. Well, that was a real event; that

was a historical event; that really happened, so there’s nothing described here in chapter 11 that hasn’t literally happened in the past, and that real individuals don’t do.

From commanding fire on the enemies to turning water into blood – that’s what Moses did in Egypt. So I say that to make the point that as amazing as this is – and granted, these are amazing events. These are startling events. Nevertheless, they’re not unbelievable events; not if we believe the testimony of the Word of God in the Old Testament. Not if we believe the accounts of Elijah’s life, and Moses’ career.

Elijah and Moses, as I said, did both of these things, which has led many interpreters to identify these two witnesses as them, come back from the dead. Elijah and Moses will precede the Lord’s return to earth. That’s not a certain interpretation; it’s somewhat speculative. We can’t be hard and fast about that. But the two witnesses may simply be similar to Moses and Elijah.

That may be the reason that they can be described in this way. You remember that John the Baptist is described as Elijah. He wasn’t actually Elijah, but he’s described that way, because his ministry was so similar to that of Elijah. But there are some things that give credence to identifying the witnesses as those two individuals. First of all, Elijah, you remember, never died. He was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire.

The burial of Moses is shrouded in mystery. He died on Mount Nebo in Moab, and Deuteronomy 34:6 says “no man knows his burial place to this day.” God deliberately kept that a secret, and then Jude wrote that the angel Michael disputed with the devil over the body of Moses, which suggests that God had a further purpose for it.

And both men, you remember, appear with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, where the Lord was revealed in his glory as the Son of God, and Israel’s Messiah, Israel’s king. So their presence there had to do with the kingdom to come, which is what these events are about – the soon coming of Christ, the judgment that will come upon the nations, and the coming of his kingdom.

Those two prophets represent the Old Testament. They represent the law and the prophets, and indicate that just as the Old Testament spoke of Christ’s first coming and his death, the Old Testament speaks as well of his second coming and kingdom. Well, whoever these two men are, they will be real individuals who will prophesy in Jerusalem. That’s where verse 8 identifies the scene of their ministry.

The city which it says is where their Lord was crucified; that could only be Jerusalem. But mystically, John says, it is called Sodom and Egypt, and he calls it Sodom and Egypt because that’s how the Old Testament prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel – describe Jerusalem in their day. In their day, it was a city full of idols and unbelief. Jerusalem wasn’t a holy city at all.

It was really no different from the Gentile cities of the nations, so they called it “Sodom.” Terrible things happened in that city. They called it “Egypt,” and Egypt is an appropriate name for this future city of Jerusalem, because Egypt enslaved God’s people, and Jerusalem will do that in the last days, when it’s under the control of the beast; when it is being treaded underfoot by the Gentiles during the time of the Gentiles.

So the holy city will be unholy when these two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, return and prophesy. They will speak against the sin of that place. They will speak against the rulers of the city, the rulers of the world, the beast, the antichrist, and they will prophesy about the Lord. They will speak of his first coming, of his death, there in that city, which John mentions here.

They will speak then of his atonement. They will speak of the significance of his death; the need of atonement for the forgiveness of sins. They’ll preach the gospel in that city, and they’ll speak of his resurrection, and declare that he is alive, and at the Father’s right hand. They will declare that he is coming again, and he’s coming soon. That’s the message that’s just been given.

And in preaching that, they’ll preach that everyone who remains in unbelief and does not turn to him is doomed. So they’ll call men to repentance, but men will resist that, as they always do, and fight against them, without success. These prophets will be immensely powerful and impregnable. They will have control over the elements, just as Moses and Elijah did.

Able to cause draught and pollute the water supply with blood, and do it as John says in verse 6, as often as they desire. They can do it at will. But, as Whitfield observed, we are immortal till our work is done. And when their work is done, we’re told in verse 7, the beast will overcome them and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the streets of the great city, in Jerusalem, and the world will throw a victory party described in verses 9 and 10.

“Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.”

Members of all the nations will be present there in Jerusalem, a cosmopolitan city, and they will gloat over the prophets’ bodies because they tormented them. They had a long ministry – it was a three and a half year ministry of tormenting these people. Now, they tormented them with their powers; their ability to call down fire upon the enemy. But I think principally it wasn’t their powers as much as their prophecies that tormented these men.

Because men hate the sting of rebuke, and hate the warnings of judgment. Ahab hated that from Elijah. He called Elijah “the troubler of Israel,” which is ironic, because it was Ahab that was the troubler of Israel. But that’s the way the world looks at those who preach the truth and give the gospel. They trouble people, and they trouble them in a most disturbing way.

And that’s how Ahab described Elijah, and these men in the future will be troubled, tormented by these two prophets. So when they’re finally silenced, when their ministry is put to an end, the world will rejoice. They will declare a holiday. They’ll exchange gifts, and they’ll celebrate, which shows the real difference between the world and the righteous.

The prophets, you remember, preached clothed in sackcloth. They mourned the message that they preached. They mourned over the demise of the world. They warned it, and they troubled it, so that people would repent and flee the wrath to come. They took no joy in this harsh message that they proclaimed. They took no delight in the destruction of the wicked; God doesn’t take delight in the destruction of the wicked.

But the wicked, as we see here, delight in the death of the righteous. The light of these lamps could no longer expose them, so they have a party. But the party is short – verse 11 says “But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.”

And then, as the world stares in amazement, the resurrected prophets ascend into heaven, to the astonishment of their enemies, who watched it happen. The very hour that happened, verse 13 says “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.”

Well, does that mean that they were converted – they gave glory to God in heaven? Maybe, but probably not, because the judgment continues, so this is giving glory in fear, not faith. Man’s heart – and we see this, don’t we, throughout the book of Revelation – this tells us so much about the nature of man. But man’s heart is so hard that even divine threatenings and resurrections cannot change it.

But with the celebration of those who dwell on the earth cut short, the celebration of those in heaven begins. It’s preceded by the announcement in verse 14 that the second woe is ended, and the third woe is imminent. It will happen in chapters 15 and 16, with the bowl judgments, which are the contents of the seventh trumpet, so these judgments are moving toward their close and becoming more intense.

Just then, the seventh trumpet sounds, but instead of judgment coming, the judgment of the third woe, a great shout of heavenly voices is heard, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.” The 24 elders in heaven fall down on their faces and worship God, praising him as the one who has begun to reign.

Now, all of this is said, this celebration is made, in anticipation of what will happen, so that verses 15 through 19 are a summary of what will take place after the events that we’ve just read about. And the certainty of this, the certainty of the reign that’s described, the coming of our Lord, the certainty of it is emphasized by the repeated use of the aorist tense.

Now, the aorist tense – I know I’ve told you this more than once – is just a simple past tense in Greek grammar. And what it’s doing here is it’s describing a future event in the past tense – the coming of Christ and his kingdom. And there’s significance to that, because putting a future event in the past tense is a way of saying that this is so certain to occur that it’s as though it’s already happened.

This future event is so certain to happen that it’s as though it’s a past event. He has already begun to reign, and that’s the great theme of this book. Christ is

coming on the clouds, and he will reign upon the earth. It’s one of the central themes of the Bible. It’s found throughout the Old Testament. In Daniel chapter 2, there is this great image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that gives a preview of history.

The image represents the kingdoms of the earth during the times of the Gentiles. It’s a colossal statue. It’s glorious in its appearance. But it collapses when a stone from heaven strikes it at the feet, then crushes it into dust, and fills the world with its presence. That’s the second coming of Christ and his kingdom. And the blowing of the seventh trumpet announces that that moment of his coming, when the world will be judged and the kingdom will be established – that has arrived.

It will not only bring destruction to the world, to those described in verse 18 as those who destroy the earth, but it will bring reward to all who fear the Lord. That’s what John says in the last verse of this chapter. Now, rewards are all of grace, but they’re given according to what each person has done. Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 3:8. We’re rewarded for the things that we do.

And yet we must always bear in mind that ultimately, the things that we do are a work of grace. A great text on grace in Ephesians 2:10 – we’re very familiar with verse 8 and 9, but verse 10 speaks of the works that God has prepared beforehand that we walk in. They’re gifts, but we walk in them; we must do them, and there’s reward for doing that.

Well, this is the future. This is what we look forward to, the coming of Christ, the establishment of his judgment and his kingdom, and the rewards that are given to his faithful servants. God is working out his plan, and those in heaven who celebrate are saying, “And that plan will certainly, unfailingly unfold.” It’s God’s plan, and he’ll do it.

In one of his books, William Hendriksen recounted an experience he had many years ago – this is back in the 1930s while he was at a theater – and they had newsreels. Actually, I remember newsreels. Some of you do. I can remember as a kid going to the movie on Saturdays. I enjoyed the cartoon and I hated the newsreels, and then I got to where I liked them.

I got a little older, and just about the time I started liking the newsreel, they quit showing newsreels. But Mr. Hendriksen was there in a theater. He saw a newsreel, back in probably the late 1930s, because he saw the likeness of Hitler, and

Mussolini, and others. Then the words appeared on the screen, large letters, “In the hands of these five men rests the destiny of the world.”

Well, that’s the way the world looks at things, and many Christians as well. We watch the news and we read the morning paper, and we think the destiny of the world rests with these leaders. The leaders are important. We need to be conscientious about politics and voting and all of that. But no, the destiny of the world does not rest with world leaders. God is sovereign.

Isaiah gives great pictures of our Lord God, and in chapter 40 pictures him as seated on the throne over the vault of the heavens. He rules over this universe, and he has a plan, an eternal plan, and he cannot – cannot – be frustrated in it. He will bring it to pass. That’s the testimony of the heavenly host. He will destroy those who destroy the earth, and reward his people, the small and the great, as he says.

It is so certain to occur that, as one commentator put it, “the hosts of heaven and the 24 elders can proclaim it as a *fait accompli*.” Christ has already begun to reign. It’s all over but the shouting. The chapter ends with a confirmation of all of this. Heaven opens up, and the ark of God’s covenant appears among flashes of lightning and peals of thunder.

It is a vision. The actual ark was probably destroyed when the Babylonians razed Jerusalem and burned and looted the temple in 586 B.C. But the ark was the symbol of God’s presence with Israel, and his covenant with the people, so the vision of the ark here is given to signify God’s faithfulness to the nation, and his purpose to restore it and bring the kingdom that he promised to Israel to this earth.

God is faithful to his promises, in spite of the sinfulness of that nation. In spite of the sinfulness of that city of Jerusalem that’s described here as Sodom and Egypt. In spite of all of that, he has not cast it off. He still has a purpose for it, and that’s what he verifies throughout the Old Testament. You may have looked at Micah 7:19-20, where he reaffirms his commitment to his people.

You see that in Jeremiah 31:36, where he says words to this effect: that if the sun and the moon and the order of things can stop and cease to be, well, then I’ll cease to be faithful to Israel, and Israel will cease to be a nation. Well, that will never happen, and it’s a dramatic way of saying God will be faithful to his people. There is a future for Israel, and that is not only interesting to us Gentiles, but deeply encouraging for us.

For if God is faithful to the nation, as wicked and sinful and unbelieving as it is, then he will certainly always be faithful to us. If he’s unfaithful to Israel, what guarantee do we have? But the guarantee that we have is that he is always faithful to his promises, and we’re reminded of that here at the end of this chapter. He is a promise-keeping God. He will have his kingdom, and Christ’s people will be part of it; that is certain.

He will never cast us off. He gives eternal life, not temporary life. We’re absolutely secure; isn’t that a good thing to know? Eternally secure, but temporally secure. I think this is the application of the passage to us. We are immortal till our work is done, and God has put us in some difficult places. There’s some of you he has. All of us must pass through the valley at some point.

But God sometimes puts us in hard places, just as he will put these two witnesses in a hard place, in a hostile city. And he may have put you in a hostile home, or in a hard office. But wherever he has put you, he calls you to be his witness. And you can be that, because like the two witnesses of Revelation 11, you have the Holy Spirit.

And in Mark 13:11, the Lord gave his disciples the promise that in the hour of trial – that is, when they are put on trial. When the authorities arrest the disciples, and they bring them before the judges, and they’re going to have to speak, he says, “Don’t worry. Don’t fear, because it won’t be you that speaks, but the Spirit of God.” And it’s the same for us.

We’re sealed with the Spirit of God, and as we walk by the Spirit, he enables us to do the right thing. Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts. That’s true for you. That’s true for me. That’s true for all of us, wherever we are. So in that strength that the Spirit gives, let’s be faithful. Let’s continue on. There’s great reward for doing that.

And the day is coming soon when the Lord will return and give his rewards to those who are faithful. But if you’re here this morning without Christ, you don’t have that assurance. That’s not the application of the text for you. Rather, the application of the text is very hard, and that is, judgment is coming. As unpopular as it may be, the Bible speaks of God’s wrath.

It speaks of it here. God is patient, but his patience will run out. Don’t be caught in the storm that comes. Don’t be like the beast and those with him, who made

war against the Lord’s messengers and their message. Repent, believe in Christ, and be saved. Repentance is a gift. That should be clear from this. It’s plainly taught in Scripture – Acts 11:18.

Repentance is a gift, so look to the giver of the gift. Look to the Lord. Ask him to give you that repentance. Ask him to give you faith to believe in his Son, who died for sinners, and he’ll do that. Believe upon him, and be saved. May God help you to do that, and help all of us who have to rejoice in what he’s given us, and given us in the Spirit that dwells within us, and given us in the hope that we have of a future kingdom that’s coming. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] We do thank you, Father, for the hope this text gives us. It describes a future event. It describes future prophets. But all that is described does apply to us today. We find ourselves in hostile environments where we’re not wanted and our message is not received, and yet we can stand firm in the power that you give us, and the message we give is what the world needs to hear; a message of grace and mercy and salvation in Jesus Christ.

We pray that we would be faithful to that message, be used of you, and we pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.