

Bearing Witness 'Til Kingdom Come

Text: Revelation 11.1–14

Theme: God will protect His gospel witnesses against satanic opposition until His Kingdom fully arrives.

Introduction — As we come to this portion of ch. 11, first fourteen verses, know this:

- some biblical texts are quite easy to understand
- “love one another; be kind to one another; be patient” and others
- very straightforward; applying them in our lives may be harder, but understanding them is not

Revelation 11 is NOT one of those texts

- this is a weighty portion of Revelation
- so we’ll go verse by verse, line by line, precept upon precept
- by doing so, I believe we will then understand what John saw and recorded for us
- hopefully, then, at the end, we’ll see how to apply this section of God’s Word
- but above, this is what we’ll see:
- God will protect His gospel witnesses against satanic opposition until His Kingdom fully arrives.

Let’s start in vv. 1–2 by...

I. SEEING THE TRUE CHURCH

- **read vv. 1–2**
- we do well to remember OT background for these two verses
- John uses over 500 allusions to OT passages
- this is certainly one of those

1. Ezekiel 42–48

- we could go over all of Ezekiel 42–48, but let me summarize
- most of Ezekiel is apocalyptic, just like Revelation
- this means we have to interpret accordingly
- we can’t take everything literally; it won’t make sense
- and just because we don’t take it literally doesn’t mean we don’t believe it’s true
- final chapters of Ezekiel, he is taken thru temple & city
- given description & measurements
- and final word of Ezekiel’s prophecy is this:
- **“And the name of the city from that time on shall be, ‘The Lord is There.’” [Jehovah Shammah]**

2. Temple & Holy City are metaphors

- metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison

1) some examples

- Garden of Eden was a temple
- everything in it reflected God’s beauty & glory
- He was present there, even walking with Adam & Eve
- but when they sinned, He withdrew that presence
- that temple could no longer be entered
- then, we see Moses & Israel in wilderness heading to a rest

- God gave instructions for tabernacle: a tent
- people would know: The Lord is There
- they'd take comfort, have hope, endure in wilderness
- then David brings peace & rest to Israel
- God told him something permanent would be built
- son, Solomon, built a marvelous temple
- all with beauty & glory reflecting God's glory
- image of God's presence with His people
- not literally confined there, you know, but symbolically there
- but Israel disobeyed, became idolatrous
- so God withdrew again, temple taken away
- God fulfills His promise
- people return from captivity, temple rebuilt
- true, smaller than Solomon's
- but still represented God's presence with His people
- but sadly, returned to sinful ways
- temple destroyed 164 B.C.
- later, in 4 B.C., Herod, rebuilt temple for Jews
- once again they rejoiced to know God's presence
- yet even better: John 1.14—Word flesh, dwelt among ut
- “dwelt” literally means “tabernacled,” “tented”
- Jesus is Immanuel: God with us
- but Jews did it again: rejected ultimate presence of God
- not only rejected Him but put Him to death
- Jesus had already predicted that their temple would be destroyed...again
- and out of their stubborn, rebellious hearts, God did just this thru Rome in AD 70
- Temple destroyed, never to be rebuilt

2) no more temple...ever

- vv. 1–2 cannot be about a literal temple, because no longer needed
- Jesus came to be “God with us”
- He did away with need for literal sacrifices to atone for sin
- He was last Lamb sacrificed to be the propitiation for our sins
- no longer is a building needed because we worship God in spirit and in truth
- to rebuild a literal temple would be a great affront to God
- it would be saying: we will have Your presence with us on our terms, not Yours
- the temple now is spiritual; see this throughout NT
- 1 Peter 2.5 says, **“you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”**
- Ephesians 2.19–22 says, **“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”**
- this temple — the whole church of Jesus Christ — is more impressive than any built here

3) what about the city?

- Rev 3.12 says, **“Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from God.”**
- when Revelation wants to talk about God’s people, says at least two things
- one: name written on foreheads of His people
- second: they are a temple or a city: all point to God’s people
- so, John, measure temple, altar, worshipers there
- God’s people are in His temple: the place of safety — in His presence spiritually
- like being sealed in ch. 7, you are measured inside temple
- you’re safe, you belong here, bound, protected, measured, kept secure

4) outer court

- this place was for Gentiles, which shows the play on words here: for the nations
- note: this court will be trampled by the nations
- meaning: outside the temple not safe
- place of harm and danger; the nations will trample you
- John switches to “holy city” here
- why? What does this mean?
- those in temple, in God’s presence; safe, secure, kept
- those in outer court: same thing as outer court: God’s people suffering for His name’s sake
- God’s people kept spiritually safe
- recall Jesus’ words: do not fear those who may kill the body
- but you may still be killed for name of Jesus
- God’s people kept spiritually safe even as we are physically trampled, opposed, persecuted
- been happening ever since Jesus ascended into heaven

3. Forty-two months & 1,260 days

- **Rev 13.5:** Beast allowed to exercise authority for 42 months
- 42 months is 1,260 days: 42x30days
- also **Rev 12.6:** woman (the church) in wilderness but nourished for 1,260 days
- **Rev 12.4:** speaks of time, times, and half a time — 3 ½ years, 42 months, 1,260 days
- all amount to same thing, but what does this means

1) time of trial for God’s people

- John going back to Daniel 12 here
- Daniel 12.7: **“And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.”**
- so many connections here in Revelation
- like what we saw in Rev 10
- a great one swearing by Him who lives forever & ever
- John is saying there and here, with reference back to Daniel 12: this is being fulfilled!
- how long will it be? time, times, half a time; 42 months, 1,260 days
- again, don’t believe it’s literal
- based on our study of Daniel (you can go back and listen to that sermon online)
- but also based on how we’ve seen this so far in Revelation
- so what are these numbers?

- way of speaking of time of trial and suffering of God's people

2) examples of this metaphor

- partial fulfillments of prophecy abound
- such as, what Daniel was given to see fulfilled in 167 B.C. by Antiochus Epiphanes IV
- that siege & destruction lasted...about 3 ½ years
- when Rome, in AD 70, lay siege against Jerusalem...lasted about 3 ½ years
- Jews often associated these numbers then with time of suffering for God's people
- now again, don't worry because I'm not taking this literally
- in v. 5, we see fire pouring out of mouths of two witnesses: not human flame-throwers
- 42 months is symbolic of time of tribulation; God's people kept safe spiritually, but suffer

v. 3 offers a transition as we see...

II. THE TWO WITNESSES OF THE CHURCH

- **read vv 3–6**
- these two witnesses remind of Moses...and Elijah
- regarding Moses, just one more thought on the number 42
- Numbers 33; not a high priority passage in your reading, skip when read thru in year
- but recounts the number of stages of Israel in wilderness; each encampment
- do you know how many God's people endured in wilderness, suffering that judgment?
- 42; Moses led thru 42 encampments
- Elijah, OT prophet
- Luke 4 tells us that by God's hand, Elijah made it stop raining for...how long? 3 ½ years!
- so, not some secret code only the enlightened can unlock; right there before us

1. Another picture of the church

- church is to bear witness to Jesus Christ to all nations
- witness can be preaching, proclaiming, giving a tract, living stark life of holiness
- v. 5: like **Jeremiah 23.29**: **"Is not My word like fire,"** declares the Lord?
- authority of Jesus Christ with us as His witnesses
- v. 7 When they have finished their testimony, beast comes & attacks, overpowers, kills them
- same as we'll see in 13.7: beast allowed to make war on the saints & to conquer them
- in ch 11: beast conquers two saints, trying to silence their witness
- in ch 13: beast conquers the saints trying to silence their witness
- witnesses are the metaphor for the church bearing testimony to Christ before earth-dwellers

2. Olive trees & lampstands

- once again John goes back to OT, to Zechariah ch 4
- Zechariah given vision of olive trees and lampstands
- when asks who are these olive trees, he is told: **"These are two anointed ones...gone out into the world"**
- here, in Rev 11, refers to Moses & Elijah, two great witnesses
- as for lampstands, well, we've already seen in Revelation these represent...the church
- seven churches, seven lampstands, seven witnesses to Jesus
- so let these words embolden us in our witness as part of church of Jesus Christ
- given authority and power to do so; and we stand in good company

However, while on earth we'll also see...

III. THE TERRIBLE TRIALS OF THE CHURCH

- **v7–10**
- the beast that rises from the pit
- as we'll see, beast is Satan's agent of horror and devastation
- as seen in ch 13: allowed to make war against the church
- and the church is overcome, conquered, killed
- but didn't Jesus say the gates of hell...?
- yes, but be patient
- how many times has the death and demise of the church been forecast & declared?
- and the church always comes back and grows
- plus, we see this worst case scenario taking place right before the final death blow from Christ
- in Matthew 24 Jesus foretold these things
- 2 Thessalonians 2.3, Paul tells us not to let anyone deceive us
- seems as if in darkest hour, but take heart: Jesus will come at last!
- in this church age, since Jesus ascended, church has, is, and will face great tribulation
- there will come an intense period right before the end
- Satan is unleashed, given power & measure of authority & church will look doomed
- world will rejoice at this — v. 8–9

In the gloom, however we see the hope thru...

IV. THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH

- but just as our Lord and Savior was dead & buried for three days and rose, so shall church!
- **v. 11:** 3 ½ days, not years; intense suffering for shorter period than what has been
- while church looks doomed, she is not
- remember: Jehovah Shammah—the Lord is There!
- **finally, v. 13**
- earthquake in Revelation usually means beginning of the end
- with 6th seal: earthquake
- with coming 7th bowl: earthquake
- here: earthquake, so we know this comes just before the final judgment & consummation
- and from this we should take hope!
- like Beaver in Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia said
- **“There's a right bit more than hope; Aslan is on the move!”**
- when this happens the nations will bow their knee and confess with their tongues
- oh, not because they're all converted, but because now...at last and too late...they see it
- God is truly God, Jesus is Lord of all, and He has come to judge the world
- but in all this: God will protect His gospel witnesses against satanic opposition until His Kingdom fully arrives.

Conclusion – v. 14: Second woe has passed, behold, the third woe is soon to come

- four trumpets sound forth like plagues
- three woes pronounced
- an interlude of ch 10 & 11 give John & us opportunity to catch our breath

So what do we do with all this?

Acknowledge the church's vulnerability

- accept that we are kept safe in God's hand spiritually
- but physically, here on earth, we will suffer for His name
- if we're really being the church, we will suffer

- if not experiencing this, are we really being the church?
- recent study on Puritans, it was said **“Problem with modern preachers today is no one wants to kill them anymore”**
- meaning, far too many will not stand on the Word of God bearing witness to Jesus Christ
- pray that failure will never, ever happen here at Albion, no matter what it brings

Second, believe in the church’s invincibility

- expect that best & worst days of church still ahead
- I do not believe the Word or Revelation teach that we sail off into some glorious millennial-reign sunset
- but not pessimistic that all we have left is unchecked ungodliness after ungodliness
- no, church, even after pain & suffering, is protected by God
- He is with us! Jehovah Shammah! Jeshua Immanuel!
- Gospel will not be lost!
- nations, tribes, and people are coming to worship Jesus

Church is not losing this spiritual battle

- God has promised she will not
- you may lose your life, your prestige, your money or possessions
- but you will not lose in only struggle that really matters
- yes, church is vulnerable, but she is invincible
- there’s a right bit more than hope; God is on the move!