

A Persecuted Yet Preserved Church

Revelation 10:1–11:19

Studies in Revelation #19

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Turn back with me to chapter 6. Since Revelation is so foreign to us I want to continue making it familiar by highlighting what we've seen so far and bringing it forward to what we'll see today:

- Chapter 6 is the opening of the first six seals that describe the judgments of God upon the world during the time between Jesus' ascending to heaven and returning to earth.
- Chapter 7 pauses this history before the seventh seal is opened and shows God's sealing his people for salvation.
- Chapter 8:1–5 is the opening of the seventh seal, which brings us to the second coming of Jesus Christ.
- Chapter 8:6–9:21 is the sounding of the first six trumpets, which again announce the judgments of God upon the world *and* upon the unbelieving in the world.
- Chapters 10–11—like chapter 7—pauses this history again.
- Chapter 10 is where we hear a **mighty angel** (10:1) swear that when the seventh trumpet sounds **there would be no more delay** of God's vindication of his martyred church and **the mystery of God would be fulfilled** (10:6–7). And we see that final judgment at the end of chapter 11. Like Ezekiel, John eats the scroll of the Lord's will for human history, but this would leave a bitter taste in his stomach (10:9). Why? Because John was to **prophesy about** God's judgment on **many peoples and nations and languages and kings** (10:11). More importantly, it tastes bitter because while the church is sealed from God's eternal wrath (Ch. 7) it will still experience the wrath of the Satanic-inspired nations.

This brings us to our focus this morning in chapter 11. What we learn here is the truth that while the church experiences great persecution in this age at the hand of **many peoples and nations and languages and kings** (10:11) who are

empowered by **the beast that rises from the bottomless pit** (11:7), the church is preserved for the age to come. *A Persecuted Yet Preserved Church* is our theme. We see this truth in the two symbols in chapter 11: temple and witnesses.

1. *The Measured Yet Trampled Temple*
2. *The Retribution of God*

The Measured Yet Trampled Temple (11:1–2)

We see the church is persecuted yet preserved in the symbol of *the measured yet trampled temple*. Look at verses 1–2. Many, many Christians today take this in a crassly literal way about a literal temple in Jerusalem. Some among the Reformed believe this is about the past temple in Jerusalem before the Romans came and destroyed it in 70AD. On the other hand, most evangelical churches in our land and time believe this is about the future temple that will be rebuilt in Jerusalem in the last days.

But you have to stop and ask yourself what is the “temple” not politically but biblically? What is the temple according to the New Testament and especially here in Revelation? Let me summarize for you what could be a lengthy book. The church of Jesus Christ is the temple according to Paul in places like 1 Corinthians 3, 2 Corinthians 6, and Ephesians 2. The church of Jesus Christ is the temple according to Peter in places like 1 Peter 2 and 4. The church of Jesus Christ is the temple according to John in places like Revelation in chapters 3 and 21. So there’s a shift in thinking according to the apostles about the temple that they saw made

with hands before them and the temple made without hands that Jesus is building. “But that’s other passages; this one is about the temple.” So I want you then to note in this passage what John is commanded to measure: **the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there** (11:1). Notice how they are all lumped together as the thing John measures. What this means is that when John is told to measure the temple he is being symbolically told to measure the people of God, which the rest of the New Testament says is the new temple in the New Covenant.

Why does this matter? Because when you take this image to mean a literally temple you miss the theological and practical comfort this image is meant to communicate to you: God preserves his people. The measuring of the temple is a visionary way of describing what we sing about:

Safe in the arms of sovereign love we ever shall remain;
Nor shall the rage of earth or hell make Thy sure counsel vain.

But why does the angel tell John, **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** (11:2)? It is a way of saying that while the church is preserved by God for the age to come in this age it is going to be persecuted. God’s preservation of his church does not guarantee physical, financial, or familial safety. We see this throughout church history. We see this today and it brings us to tears. Children, I’ve said this before, but let me encourage you to pray for the persecuted church every night before you go to bed because there are Christian children in the world who may not be going to bed in safety.

The Conquered Yet Resurrected Witnesses (11:3–13)

We see the church is persecuted yet preserved in the symbol of *the conquered yet resurrected witnesses*. Look at verses 3–13.

Who are these witnesses? We've already seen in Revelation that Jesus is *the faithful witness* (1:5) and therefore that Christians are called his witnesses (2:13). We've already seen that we are to bear witness (1:2, 9).

How are these witnesses described? Think in Old Testament terms. They are described like Moses, who turned water into blood (11:6; Ex. 7:20); they are described like Elijah, who shut the heavens (11:6; 1 Kgs. 17:1); they are described like Jeremiah, out of whose mouth symbolically the fire of judgment proceeded (11:5; Jer. 5:14); and they are described like Jonah and later John the Baptist, who wore **sackcloth** (11:3; Jonah 3:5).

Why are there two witnesses? In the Old Testament law what was the minimum number of witnesses you needed to establish testimony in a legal proceeding? "Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established" (Deut. 19:15). So when Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the gospel, how did he do so? He sent them two by two, didn't he? (Luke 10:1) And these two witnesses are strangely described according to Zechariah's prophecy of a lampstand and olive trees that symbolized the kingly figure of Zerubbabel and the priestly figure of Joshua (11:4; Zech. 4).

So here are two prophets who are described as kings and priests. And who are we according to Revelation 5:10? We are kings and priests. John is describing the church as prophets, priests, and kings. In fact, these two witnesses are called “the saints” in 13:7.

So here is the church. What is the church doing in this vision? The church prophesies (11:3, 5, 6, 7), that is, preaches. Note that. Here is an application for us. What are we to be known for as a church? Preaching and testifying about Jesus. It’s because of our message that the world hates us according to these verses. It’s because of this message that so many Christians have given into worldly temptation and have used methods that dilute the message.

What is the message that is prophesied by the church? Remember the end of chapter 10: words of judgment against the world. It’s described here as **fire pour[ing] from their mouth and consum[ing] their foes** (11:5). There is a judgment coming. Are we telling people that? Or are we afraid of offending? “The world needs to know the love of God.” But it cannot understand his great love until it understands his great wrath.

And because of its preaching the prophetic church is persecuted and conquered—temporarily: **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** (11:7). This is Satan! He hates the church because of the church’s message.

And notice how this temporary death is described in verses 8 and following: **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 (11:8).**

While church preached and endured for three-and-half years, the world will prevail for just three and a half days: **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 (11:9).** And note the response of the world: **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 (11:10).**

The church seems to be conquered, but it will be resurrected: **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. 12 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 (11:11–12).**

When will this be? I believe the clearest way to understand this is to see it as describing the ups and downs of the church throughout history and not the final resurrection. I say this because in the vision, we’re still not at the second coming of Jesus. And verse 14 goes on to say, **The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.** And even verse 13 hints at the fact that when God brings judgment, he only does so in a limited way, allowing the persecuting world time to repent yet again: **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. This turns the imagery from the days of the prophets on its head. Usually, one tenth was used to describe a remnant and seven thousand was the number of those the Lord preserved from the destruction of Ahab. But here it's a tenth of the city destroyed and seven thousand killed. God is extremely patient with his rebellious world.

We finally get to the second coming of Jesus, the end of human history as we know it, in verse 15 and following. Here is the conclusion of the trumpets of chapters 8–9; here is the same event described at the end of chapter 6 and the beginning of chapter 8: **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 she shall reign forever and ever”** (11:15). And we read again in verse 19 like we've read before in previous chapters: **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.**

Conclusion

The question is which side will you be on at that coming? Will you be a persecutor or one of the persecuted? Will you be one who wants to save your life

now only to lose it at the end or are you willing to lose your life now to gain eternal life in the end? Will you be one listening to this song in torment, or will you be a singer in triumph:

**“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and who was,
for you have taken your great power
and begun to reign.
18 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.” (11:17–18)**