

## ***Look! Listen! - And Overcome!***

### **The Revelation of Jesus Christ**

**"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."**

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### ***Look! Listen! – And Overcome!***

**“The Resurrection of Christ’s Church”**

**Easter Morning**

**April 12, 2009**

**Pastor Jeff Crippen**

**Sermon Text: Revelation 11:1-12**

**OT Lesson: Ezekiel 40:1-6**

### **Introduction**

NKJ Revelation 11:11 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.

The Book of The Revelation seems, at first glance, to be a rather strange place to be in God’s Word on an Easter morning! Normally we would find ourselves in one of the Gospel accounts of the resurrection or in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians. However, as you are about to see – there are plenty of Easter texts in the Apocalypse and as it happens, we have

arrived at a very key one here in this 11<sup>th</sup> chapter – and so we remain in our study of this book this morning.

The book of Daniel was given to God’s people to teach and encourage them while they were in captivity in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar having laid siege to their city and carried them off. Here they were, far from home, taken away from family, in a place where their God was unknown and false gods were the order of the day. The people spoke a language they did not understand and a pagan king ruled over it all. God’s temple in Jerusalem had been ransacked and some of the holy vessels taken for it and placed in the temple of the Babylonian god.

How were the people of God to live in Babylon? Should they be zealots and rebel and fight? Were they to give in to despair and conclude that Bel and Marduk were, after all, greater than Yahweh? Was Yahweh a mere territorial god who “jurisdiction” did not include Babylon and who, therefore, was powerless to rescue in a pagan nation? And how were they to deal with threats of persecution for all

who would not bow down to the King's image?

Daniel answers every one of these questions – even with the mouth of Nebuchadnezzar himself -

NKJ Daniel 4:34 And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *is* from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

The message of Revelation is very much the same as that of Daniel to the people of God of Daniel's day. Babylon will be met and dealt with one final time – but for now, The Revelation tells Christ's Church that in this world we are in a kind of Babylonian captivity. We live in a world where it often appears that the pagan nations and their "gods" are in charge. Christ's people are hated by the world and must face persecution and even death as the cost of remaining faithful to Christ. But The

Revelation echoes the very same message of Daniel – *For His dominion is an everlasting dominion...all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing...He does according to His will.*" So we need not fear nor be doubtful. God reigns. He is bringing in His kingdom. Christ the King has already defeated the enemy, He is perfectly sovereign, and all is falling out according to every detail of His decree.

NKJ John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Now, this morning, we are going to deal with Rev 11:1-12 in a kind of overview manner and plan to move in for a closer look at some of the details next time. Here is our outline for this morning –

- I. John Measures the Temple 11:1-2
- II. The Testimony of the Two Witnesses 11:3-6
- III. The Beast Kills the Witnesses 11:7-10
- IV. The Resurrection 11:11-12

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## I. John Measures the Temple

11:1-2

NKJ Revelation 11:1 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.

[Let me note as we begin that I have been greatly helped in understanding this chapter by listening to a series of messages on The Revelation by Dr. Sinclair Ferguson - these are available in mp3 format on the web]

Now, as is true of virtually all of The Revelation, this account of John's measuring of the temple is loaded with an OT backdrop, namely, the 40<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ezekiel-

NKJ Ezekiel 40:1 In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth *day* of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was captured, on the very same day the hand of the LORD was upon me; and He took me there. 2 In the visions of God He took me into the land of Israel and set me on a very

high mountain; on it toward the south *was* something like the structure of a city. 3 He took me there, and behold, *there was* a man whose appearance *was* like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway. 4 And the man said to me, "Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you; for you *were* brought here so that I might show *them* to you. Declare to the house of Israel everything you see." 5 Now there was a wall all around the outside of the temple. In the man's hand was a measuring rod six cubits *long, each being a cubit and a handbreadth*; and he measured the width of the wall structure, one rod; and the height, one rod. 6 Then he went to the gateway which faced east; and he went up its stairs and measured the threshold of the gateway, *which was one rod wide*, and the other threshold *was one rod wide*.

Of course this is the beginning of that large section of Ezekiel (chs 40-48) that describe a temple – the identity of which has been the subject of much debate by Bible students. We will plan to deal with Ezekiel's temple in greater detail before we leave Revelation 11, but simply note for right now that John's measuring of the temple has Ezekiel's vision as its background and therefore if we are going to fully

understand John's measuring, we will have to go back to Ezekiel's vision.

What then is all of this measuring about? And what is this temple John is commanded to measure?

Well, recall that we find ourselves here in chapters 10 and 11 in an interlude between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet judgments. And that this interlude parallels another interlude that we have already seen that came between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seal judgments. As we have seen, in these interludes between judgments, *God is reassuring His Church that He has sealed His own people, that the devil cannot touch their souls, and that though they will experience suffering in this world, it is absolutely certain that Christ will bring every single one of His people safely home.*

And that is what this measuring is all about. It is, as Dr. Ferguson illustrated, a kind of divine "surveying" operation. Think of when you buy a piece of real estate and you receive the title deed to that property which proves your ownership. One of the things that the title will always include is *a detailed, legal description of that property* which description was produced by a surveying operation. The survey measured out that property, marking its boundaries so that the owner and everyone else knows for

certain "this land belongs to me and no one else can enter it without my permission."

Through this picture-vision of John measuring out this temple, God is declaring to us and reassuring us that this temple is HIS alone. No one can take it from Him, and furthermore, *no one can touch those who worship inside of this temple.*

What is this temple then? Is it the historic temple that was in Jerusalem? Well, if the Revelation were written in 90AD, as we suspect it was, then that temple had already been destroyed by the Romans. But even if John is writing while that temple still stood, the fact that this vision comes *as a vision*, and just as the temple Ezekiel saw measured was plainly not a literal, earthly temple, so we conclude that this temple John sees is not a literal building of stone in Jerusalem or anywhere else on this earth.

What is this temple then? We will look at other evidence for our conclusion later, but for now one single clue will suffice –

***"We conclude that this temple John measures is in fact the Church of Jesus Christ. It is not a literal building, but it is that true temple in which Christ dwells, of which Christ is the cornerstone and we are the***

***individual stones fitted together as a holy temple of the Lord.”***

What is the clue that we point to as evidence for this conclusion? It is this –

*that John is instructed NOT to include in his survey the court which is outside the temple – that has now been given to the nations to trample underfoot for 42 months.*

The temple in Jerusalem had an outside court – *the court of the Gentiles* – where God-fearing Gentiles could come, but past which they were not permitted, upon severe penalty. *This temple that John measures no longer has such a court. Why?*

***“Because the Gentiles are now inside the temple with the Jews, all having been circumcised of heart, the dividing wall having been broken down in Christ, and all made into one new people in Christ.”***

Note: There are obviously a number of other theories as to the specifics of John’s temple here. The widely held reformed view is that it is indeed the Church. One slightly different “take” is that the outer court not measured by John is the church on earth – *the church militant*, still undergoing suffering, while the temple proper that is measured by John is the church in

heaven – *the church triumphant*. But we would reject this explanation because the measuring John performs is parallel to the sealing of God’s people, not merely a protection from temporal suffering. This measuring, in other words, is given to ALL of Christ’s people.

***“Every Christian is Christ’s own possession, having been purchased by Him with His blood and righteousness. No one can ever take a single one out of Christ’s temple. All are secure no matter how great the devil and the beast rage against them.”***

## **II. The Testimony of the Two Witnesses 11:3-6**

NKJ Revelation 11:3 "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.

Now, this section has actually been “set up” for us back in chapter 10 where John was given the book and he ate it – it was bittersweet, you remember. He was commissioned there to preach concerning nations and peoples.

NKJ Revelation 10:11 And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."

And so John does. He preaches the message of the little book he had eaten – that book which was “the mystery of God” which had at first been preached by His servants the prophets (10:7) but which now has been *finished* – a book that was for all the nations, and a book that was bittersweet. This book then is obviously *the gospel*.

NKJ Hebrews 1:1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

NKJ Romans 16:25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to

my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began

And now, here at chapter 11, after the church is measured and marked as God’s own possession and therefore to be protected and preserved no matter what attacks the beast might launch, *two witnesses come upon the scene and they prophesy, they give testimony, and they do so in the spirit of Elijah and Moses*. Who are they?

***“These two witnesses are a picture of the Church maintaining her testimony to Christ from the time of the cross to the second coming of Christ. The Church preaches the gospel of Christ, and she cannot be silenced.”***

Now, what is the basis for this conclusion. It is as follows –

1. We have already mentioned the context. John is given the gospel to preach to all the nations as chapter 10 closes. The book is the gospel (10:7).

2. This testimony continues unstopably for “1260 days” and we will see next time that 1260 days or 3 ½ years, or time, times and half a time, or 42 months is a consistent symbol of the entire church age, from the cross to the second advent of Christ.

3. They are specifically identified with the vision given to Zechariah so long before –

NKJ Revelation 11:4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.

And that vision was this –

NKJ Zechariah 4:1 Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. 2 And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there *is* a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the *stand* seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. 3 "Two olive trees *are* by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." 4 So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What *are* these, my lord?" 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." 6 So he answered and said to me: "This *is* the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts. 7 'Who *are* you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel *you shall become* a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" ' " 8 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying: 9 "The

hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish *it*. Then you will know That the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. 10 For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth." 11 Then I answered and said to him, "What *are* these two olive trees -- at the right of the lampstand and at its left?" 12 And I further answered and said to him, "What *are these* two olive branches that *drip* into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden *oil* drains?" 13 Then he answered me and said, "Do you not know what these *are*?" And I said, "No, my lord." 14 So he said, "These *are* the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth."

That is to say, God's message to Zerubbabel and the Jews who had returned from Babylon was that the Lord's house would be built, but not by the might nor by the power of man, but by the Spirit of God, by His powerful Word. The Light of Christ shines unstoppably like a lamp that is plumbed up to an unstoppable supply of olive oil being produced by those 2 trees.

The two witnesses then are speaking the gospel by the power of the Spirit of

God which Spirit freshly and constantly supplies them and empowers their witness of Christ to a dark, perishing world. And thus the lesson of Zechariah becomes the lesson for the Church – *for US* –

***“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. The true temple – the Church – will be built and the gates of hell cannot stop it. It is a work of the powerful Spirit of God, not a work of man’s hands.”***

This is a vital, vital message for Christians of all ages to get firm hold on and to never, never forget. The church of John’s day might look at herself – here is John, exiled and set aside as nothing by the mighty Roman emperor – what is he and what is the church in contrast to Rome? But Christ insists that we must not look at things in this manner, because –

***“In this world, very little is as it appears.”***

It is the church at Smyrna that is strong, and the Laodiceans are weak.

The Church, then, continues and its message goes out unable to be stopped, though hated by the beast.

4. The two witnesses preach in the power of the Spirit of God, the same power that accompanied the preaching

of the OT prophets – specifically here, Elijah and Moses.

NKJ Luke 24:44 Then He said to them, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me."

The gospel preaching of the Church is consistent with, a fulfillment and “finishing” of Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets) –

NKJ Revelation 11:5 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.

It must not escape our notice that (1 Kings 11 cf Luke 4:25 and James 5:17) the period of time in which Elijah “shut up the sky” in a drought was – three and one-half years.

Here is a comment by Beale and Carson -



*“The word of God’s judgment can be spoken of as a fire in the mouths of the OT prophets. Notice especially Jeremiah 5:14: ‘Because you have spoken this word, behold, I have given my words in your mouth as fire...and it will consume them.’ The Messiah’s righteous judgment is spoken of in a similar way in Isaiah 11:4 – ‘He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.’ Similarly, in the OT God’s judgment is pictured as fire coming from His mouth and devouring. Elijah repeatedly called down fire that consumed King Ahaziah’s soldiers and led to the king’s death....Hence the word of the two witnesses becomes an instrument of judgment among those who reject it.”* Commentary on the NT Use of the OT, Beale/Carson.

These then are the major reasons we can conclude that the two witnesses are an image of the Church, and of her Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel throughout the entire church age. Here is tremendous encouragement to Christ’s church then as she speaks of Him in a world that hates Him.

### **III. The Beast Kills the Witnesses** **11:7-10**

NKJ Revelation 11:7 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.

*“When these have finished their testimony...”*. Here the church is encouraged by the absolute sovereignty of God. The believer is invincible until he is finished with the work God has given him.

***“The safest place for the Christian to be is in the realm of the will and mission of Christ for him. It may be right where the synagogue of Satan is, but he is invincible until his work is finished.”***

Not until the Christian, not until the Church is *finished with their testimony of Christ in a particular place, age, and time*, can the beast overcome them. The Church of the first century

needed this message, and we need to hear it today as evil increases. We must never become discouraged.

We will, once more, plan to zero in on the details of this chapter next time – why is Jerusalem here called “Sodom and Egypt”? for example. For now, simply understand that *it is only by God’s decree that the beast overcomes the saints and kills them.*

Now, what does it mean – this killing of the two witnesses? As is, it seems, so often in the case of The Revelation, there is an aspect of this thing now, that is, all down through the church age – and then perhaps some final aspect of it then – just before Christ returns. NOW, the beast overcomes individual believers and kills them. He even sometimes overcomes one local witness of the Church – we think, for example, of the intensity of the Spanish Inquisition in the 1500’s which essentially wiped out Protestantism and the Reformation from that country.

Or consider other epochs in the history of the church age – Germany or Switzerland for example – where the Reformation was so powerful – but today – these areas even eventually became seedbeds of unbelief and a weak, lifeless shell that is hardly even the Christian church. But the light of

the gospel blazes as long as Christ determines.

Does this mean that at some time in the future the witness of the gospel will end in this world? We would suggest that it will, but only for a very short time (cf 3 ½ days in vs 11).

We cannot move ahead without commenting upon the wicked, devilish glee expressed by the world when it appears to them that this “plague” of Christ’s Church and the light of His Word appears to be finally and completely obliterated from the earth. Just as the enemy must have partied when Christ was crucified, so it will be then. It is a kind of *anti-christmas* – as Christians celebrated the birth of Christ, so then the world will celebrate what looks to them as the final death of the body of Christ -

NKJ Revelation 11:10 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.

NOTE: The Word of God, empowered by His Spirit, *is a torment to the wicked.* Sweet to those who are Christ’s, but the stench of death to those who are perishing.

#### IV. The Resurrection 11:11-12

But Easter morning arrives once again

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NKJ Revelation 11:11 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.

Locally and temporally, down through the history of the present church age, this apparent destruction of the Church followed by the resurrection of the Church has played itself out, and it will do so until the day of that Great Resurrection at the final trumpet –

NKJ 1 Corinthians 15:50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed -- 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Immediately following this final resurrection, the Day of the Lord and the final judgment will fall –

NKJ Revelation 11:13 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.

NKJ Revelation 11:18 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 Church through the centuries has, many, many times, appeared to have been finished. Think, for example of the horrific persecution of the Church in China so that all you would have seen at certain times in that country would have been the empty shells of buildings that once were thriving churches. *“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city...and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them...”*. Or North

Korea, or Japan, or Russia – the Arab countries, and on and on we could go. Places where the beast has killed the saints and wicked men have assumed that the Word of Christ has been silenced once and for all.

But what has happened? What has always happened? *Resurrection*. Will you find thriving churches in China, in Korea, in Russia, in Arab countries – *yes!* Christ just keeps breathing His life into His church – by His might and by His Spirit, you see. He will build His church and hell will not prevail.

What do we face today as Christ's people in the realm of the beast? It is the very same thing. We are commissioned to preach Christ's gospel in a world that hates Christ. But we are measured and marked by God so that the beast cannot touch us until our mission is complete. We wield a Word that is divinely powerful for the destruction of the strongest enemy fortresses – and these are things we must never forget.

In many ways, and in many cities of our own nation, it increasingly appears that the beast overcomes the Church. The world and the devil are convinced that they can in fact rid themselves of Christ once and for all. And there have been times in history – and there will be times in the future – when all appearances confirm their conclusion.

You can hear the devilish glee all around us today as evil triumphs over and over in our courts and in our universities and even in churches where the gospel is denied.

Christ's Word to us is – *persevere to the end*.

NKJ Revelation 11:11 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.

Persevere to the end. Do not love your life – even to the death. Overcome the enemy by the Word of our testimony – the powerful gospel of Christ. Until that Day when we hear it ourselves –

***“Come up here.”***

On that Day, there will be the Easter of all Easters.