

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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Look! Listen! – And Overcome!

“The True Temple of God”

Easter Morning

April 19, 2009

Pastor Jeff Crippen

Sermon Text: Revelation 11:1-12

OT Lesson: 2 Kings 1:1-16

Introduction

NKJ Revelation 11:15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" 16 And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned. 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."

The gospel of Jesus Christ – that book given to His Church to preach to all the nations – is a *bittersweet* book, as we have seen. And you see this bittersweet nature in this reaction to the sounding of the seventh trumpet.

- Those in heaven break out in praise to God and worship and thank Him.
- But the earth-dwellers, the nations – they are enraged that Christ has begun to reign.

The gospel is a battlefield wherever it goes. It really does divide mankind into the two most basic groups of humanity – those who love Christ and those who hate Him.

We have seen in this eleventh chapter of The Revelation that God assures His Church of His divine preservation. He has sealed His own, He has marked out

His Temple so that as His Church preaches the gospel to all the world, that Church is unstoppable.

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.

And we learned last time that when the Church's mission on earth is complete, Christ will, for a short while, permit the beast to overcome her and kill her so that all witness of the gospel on this earth is extinguished. The world parties on as it has never partied before – *it believes it has finally rid itself of the Lamb* –

NKJ Psalm 2:1 Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*, 3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us."

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.

But that party is short-lived and soon turns to terrified dismay as the Church, with the breath of life from God breathed into her, rises from the dead and all the world hears this voice from heaven –

“Come up here”

...and as her enemies watch, Christ's Church ascends into heaven once and for all. It is the great resurrection, and right on its heels follows the great Day of Judgment. Christ's people, therefore, need never fear nor doubt. Christian, you cannot die. You live, even if you die. *Especially* when you die.

Now, before we move on to the last half of this 11th chapter, we really need to cover verses 1-12 in a bit more detail than we have done to this point. First of all then, let's turn to this matter of the nature of the Temple that is measured off here in vss 1-2.

I. The True 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.

You remember then that there is an OT backdrop to this temple-measuring – Ezekiel chapter 40. And we said that chapters 40-48 of Ezekiel form that large section which describes a temple, the identify of which has been the subject of much thought and debate.

We cannot take the time to read those lengthy chapters right now, - I can only offer you my conclusions about that temple and a few of the reasons I make these conclusions –

“The temple (house) that Ezekiel sees in his vision is a vision of the true Church and is therefore the very same temple that John sees and measures here in Revelation 11.”

Now, let me give you some reasons for this conclusion –

1. Consider the verses immediately preceding Ezekiel’s temple vision –

NKJ Ezekiel 39:25 " Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name -- 26 'after they have borne their shame, and all their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me,

when they dwelt safely in their *own* land and no one made *them* afraid. 27 'When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, 28 'then they shall know that I *am* the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer. 29 'And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,' says the Lord GOD."

This Israel, this remnant is the Spirit-formed *house* of Israel. And immediately after these words of promise, of a foretelling of the New Covenant in Christ, Ezekiel sees this temple in vision.

2. Ezekiel’s temple is see *in a vision*, atop a very high mountain. This indicates to us that it is not a literal temple.

3. Specifically, this temple is *eternal*

NKJ Ezekiel 43:1 Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. 2 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice *was* like the sound of many waters;

and the earth shone with His glory. 3 *It was* like the appearance of the vision which I saw -- like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The visions *were* like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. 4 And the glory of the LORD came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. 5 The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple. 6 Then I heard *Him* speaking to me from the temple, while a man stood beside me. 7 And He said to me, "Son of man, *this is* the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy name, they nor their kings, by their harlotry or with the carcasses of their kings on their high places.

Compare this with an earlier promise in Ezekiel –

NKJ Ezekiel 37:24 " David My servant *shall be* king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. 25 "Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My

servant David *shall be* their prince forever. 26 "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. 27 "My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 28 "The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." ' "

And an even earlier statement of the New Covenant –

NKJ Ezekiel 36:24 "For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. 25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. 28 "Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

Now, I realize that chs 40-48 contain language that screams of literalness – a literal priesthood and literal sacrifices in this temple and so on – but it is my conclusion that all of those literal-sounding passages must be interpreted in light of these other portions which tell us that this is an eternal dwelling place of God. It is a place, a temple, where there is and will never again be – any sin.

II. This True Temple is the Church

John has been instructed to measure off the temple, and we concluded that this is a picture of assurance to Christ's Church of the Lord's protection of her while she preaches the gospel in a hostile world. And, of course, this image of the Church as the Temple of God is repeatedly set out for us in the rest of the New Testament –

NKJ John 2:19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?

NKJ 1 Corinthians 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

NKJ 2 Corinthians 6:16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among *them*. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

NKJ Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

NKJ Revelation 3:12 "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name.

These then are still further reasons that we conclude that the temple John measures is indeed the Church. And we will meet this true temple later in The Revelation –

NKJ Revelation 21:22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

III. Why the Symbol of 2 Witnesses?

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.

Here is the flow of the context then – Christ commissions John with the message to be preached – a message concerning all the nations – it is the gospel. Then, after the Church is marked off for God's protection, these

two witnesses come on the scene preaching for 1260 days. We have said, once more that this is a symbol of the ministry of the Church during this entire church age.

But what is the significance of the picture here – why two witnesses, and why are they characterized as they are?

1. They are the two olive trees and two lampstands of Zechariah 4.

Let's go back to that chapter and read it –

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."

Zerubbabel was of the kingly line of David. His days were the days of the return from the 70 year Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem. Both Zerubbabel the king and Joshua the high priest were encouraged in this work by Zechariah, and in this vision

the message of encouragement to them is the one we have seen –

“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts.

The vision is that of a golden lampstand with 7 lamps, furnished with an inexhaustible supply of oil from two olive trees on each side of it. The Olive Trees (which Revelation 11 identifies with the Two Witnesses) are said to be “*the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.*” That is to say, these two are God’s servants who are (literally) “sons of fresh oil” – equipped with an inexhaustible supply of power to build Jerusalem (and now, to build the New Jerusalem) – by the mighty Spirit of God.

Just as God’s king and priest were empowered by His Spirit to build that temple in Jerusalem in the face of hostile world opposition, and just as it began with very small beginnings that might tend to discourage the people, so John now tells us that Christ’s king-priests – His Church – will by His Spirit build His Kingdom/Temple by the powerful preaching of the gospel no matter how much opposition is set against those efforts.

NKJ Revelation 5:10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

The Spirit of Moses & Elijah

Verses 5-6 describe the two witnesses in terms drawn from the lives of Moses and Elijah. Elijah called down fire from heaven (2 Kings 1) and he "shut up the sky" for 3 ½ years. Moses, in the Exodus, turned water to blood and struck the earth with plagues. But this does not mean that these 2 witnesses are two individuals – Moses and Elijah raised and returned. The vision is telling us something greater –

"That the Spirit of the Lord who enabled and empowered Moses and Elijah against all enemies, empowers Christ's people now so that the spread of the gospel and the building of God's kingdom cannot be stopped."

In what ways does the Church see this "fire consuming enemies" and "water into blood" and "shutting up the heavens"? These were all ways in which the powerful Spirit of God put down opposition to God's people in the Old Era, and they are given here to us to remind us and to encourage us that the Word of Christ has that very same power to subdue His enemies, to humble false gods,

The calling down of fire from heaven to consume enemies in a literal sense, as Elijah did, seems to have been rejected by Christ in the gospel age –

NKJ Luke 9:51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, 52 and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because His face was *set* for the journey to Jerusalem. 54 And when His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. 56 "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save *them*." And they went to another village.

And yet the Spirit-empowered Word of God *is fire*. And further, by the mouth of *two witnesses*, a matter is confirmed. Those who wickedly reject Christ have the testimony of Christ's Church against them, and if they enter into final judgment in that condition, they will indeed be consumed by fire.

The point for us to grasp is this – that *nothing* can stop Christ from building His Church, that we have been given His authority to announce the gospel to the nations in this church age, and that this preaching of Christ’s word *is divinely powerful* – a fact we must never, never forget nor doubt.

IV. 42 Months and 1260 Days

The testimony of the two witnesses continues for 1260 days, a period of time which is the same as 42 months (vs 2) –

$$42 \times 30 = 1260$$

Let’s see why we conclude that both of these figures are symbolic ways of expressing the entire church age, from the cross to the return of Christ. They are not to be interpreted as a literal 3 ½ years, as the futurist school of interpretation does.

1. Revelation 12:6 & 14 –

NKJ Revelation 12:6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

NKJ Revelation 12:14 But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness

to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

As we will see when we come to chapter 12, we are once again transported back to the beginning of the church age – the birth of Christ. The tape has been rewound once more – recapitulation, you see.

And in this chapter, the time in which the dragon persecutes the woman and her children (vs 17) – that is, the church age – is identified as 1260 days or “a time (1) + and times (2) + and half a time (1/2)” = 3 ½ times/years.

The background for this imagery is found in the book of Daniel –

NKJ Daniel 9:24 "**Seventy weeks** are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy. 25 "Know therefore and understand, *That* from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, *There shall be **seven weeks and sixty-two weeks***; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times. 26 "And after the sixty-two weeks

Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. 27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for **one week**; **But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.** And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate."

Now, all we want to note for now is that the final 3 ½ “weeks” or “times” is left unaccounted for. And it is our conclusion that this is in fact the imagery that is being used in The Revelation for the entire Church Age. It is in the mis-interpretation of this passage from Daniel that the futurist/dispensationalist school of eschatology goes quite wrong – so wrong that it confuses the anti-Christ with Christ.

NOTE: We should probably take the time very soon to go through this section of Daniel 9 in some detail to help us better understand The Revelation. And this will not be the last time we will need to come back to the book of Daniel.

V. Sodom and Egypt 11:8-10

NKJ Revelation 11:8 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.

Once the Church’s mission is complete, God decrees that the beast from the abyss will be enabled to overcome and kill her. The Church will be – *dead* on this earth. The world that so hated and despised Christ and His Word will now be granted its wish – the ministry of the Gospel will be ended here.

NKJ Amos 8:11 " Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, "That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD. 12 They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, But shall not find *it*."

In contrast to the 3 ½ years image however, only 3 ½ days now pass until

the resurrection. Wild, evil glee will be shattered and give way to absolute terror as the enemies of Christ see Christ's Church revived and ascend into heaven, followed immediately by a great earthquake.

What then is this city and why is it referred to as Sodom and Egypt? Well, it is called a "great city" and it is identified as *where also their Lord was crucified.* This would, naturally lead us to conclude that the city is Jerusalem. However, Christ was actually crucified outside the city of Jerusalem and somehow it seems unlikely that the Church would be "killed" in such a literal, localized place as Jerusalem.

It is better to understand this passage as speaking of *the world* that is set against Christ. The "great city" in The Revelation is more properly identified as Babylon. Just as Gentile nations and cities (Egypt and Sodom) stood for unrighteousness and opposed the people of God, so the Jewish nation did the same (often referred to by the OT prophets, cf Isaiah 1, and by Christ as Sodom).

NKJ Revelation 14:8 And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

NKJ Revelation 16:19 Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.

The great city is, then, the world – as represented by Babylon. This underscores the message – *that God withdraws His Word from the world. The day has come when the preaching of the gospel in this world is no more. The beast, the world, Babylon – will have what they want. A Christless world devoid of any of God's Word and witness.*

A world that is ripe now for judgment.

Conclusion

The Revelation shows us things as they really are, rather than as they seem to be. And it is vital for every Christian to understand what Christ is showing us here if we are to persevere, not grow discouraged, and not be deceived. Consider –

1. Christ's Church in this world has Christ's authority and power to preach the gospel – the "little book."
2. Nothing can overcome this power. Nothing in this world or under this world can stop the light of the gospel

and the building of Christ's Church. Nothing.

3. There is going to come a Day when the mission of the Church in this world is over. Light and truth will be withdrawn.

4. Every Christian, every local church, and the Church as a whole – is in enemy territory in this world.

5. There is a beast from the abyss who desires to kill the Church – but he cannot because of the protection of that Church by Christ.

6. The world *hates* Christ murderously and is doing all it can to vanquish Him and His people from the world. No amount of tact or kindness on your part, Christian, will change this.

7. So great is this hatred and rage that when God permits the beast to finally overcome and kill the Church, so that it appears to the world that a final devilish victory has been won – *the world will celebrate, even sending gifts to one another in their rejoicing.*

8. The gospel of Christ is a word of life to those who are being saved, but to the wicked (vs 10) it is a word of terrible *torment*.

Therefore, we are not ignorant of these things, nor must we be surprised when

we meet this hatred from the world. Why do people mock and ridicule and marginalize the Church today? Why is it that when Christ's truth is spoken, opposition to it immediately rises up and those who speak it or even believe are scorned? Why?

“Because men and women and institutions who are opposed to Christ fear Him. They are tormented by His Word – it burns them like fire, it turns the water of their idolatrous rivers to blood, it reminds them that they are under God's curse and as such cannot expect His continued blessing of rains in their season.”

NKJ Jeremiah 23:28 "The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat?" says the LORD. 29 "*Is* not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer *that* breaks the rock in pieces?"

And so it is. The fire, the powerful hammer-force of God's Word brings life or death. To those who receive it, life. To those who oppose it – it is a tormenting fire. And that is why you can expect 2 things when you faithfully and without compromise speak God's Word and Truth to people

–

- They will be broken and repent,
or
- They will gnash their teeth and try to do all they can to silence that Word.

The Revelation tells us that one day, this world will have its wish. The final famine of God's Word will arrive. And then the judgment.