



Pilgrim Home Baptist Church

NT 2022 Q4 • FAITHFUL WITNESSES TO A FAITHFUL GOD • REVELATION 11:1-19 •
11/13/2022

MAIN POINT

God calls believers to be His witnesses and to know that victory is ultimately His.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever been ridiculed for your Christian beliefs? Explain.

Why do you think so many unbelievers today take pleasure in mocking Christians?

The church can expect the world to deride and oppose its faithful witness to God's truth. But we can also expect God to be faithful to His promises—and in the end, to be victorious. Revelation 11 continues the message of encouragement begun in chapter 10. We are told that God's eternal plan will be completed. Because we can be confident in His purposes, we should keep on faithfully proclaiming the gospel. We can know that in the end, God will vindicate those who serve Him and Jesus will reign forever.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Prior to chapter 10, six trumpets sounded, introducing a limited but terrible time of tribulation. An interlude in 10:1–11:14 precedes the blowing of the seventh trumpet. During this interlude, John was told to eat the "little book" (10:9-10) and was given further instructions in 11:1-2, as we will see in this week's study. John was then given a vision of the two witnesses in 11:3-14. The seventh trumpet sounds in 11:15, revealing Christ's eternal reign.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ REVELATION 11:1-6.

What is John commanded to do, and why? Who is counted and who is not counted? What contrast do you think is intended?

What mission is given to the “two witnesses”? What protection will be given to them?

Some understand the witnesses to be two literal people. Others suggest that they are either symbolic of the witnessing church and/or the persecuted church. Regardless, they provide a model for us. Even in the midst of persecution, God calls believers to stand up and be His witnesses. We must be empowered witnesses to the world, ready to pay any cost to accomplish God’s purposes.

What do we learn in these verses about God’s sovereign power?

No one can harm the witnesses until God allows their martyrdom in verse 7. God’s judgments on the world will also not harm His people (7:3). This tells us that God is sovereign not only over nature, but also over our enemies’ attempts to harm us.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ REVELATION 11:7-10.

What do these verses indicate would happen to the two faithful witnesses?

Why does the world rejoice at the death of the two witnesses? Do you see the same kind of spirit in the world today?

Should every Christian expect to be persecuted? Why or why not?

When God calls us to be His witnesses, we never know what such obedience will cost us. God’s people who proclaim His Word in hostile places cannot always expect deliverance. The church must be prepared for suffering, even martyrdom, if that becomes the price of our witness to those who do not wish to hear the gospel.

Identify a key phrase in verse 7 to indicate the timing of the two witnesses’ death.

What do you think is significant about this timing?

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ REVELATION 11:11-14.

What happens after three and a half days?

What results from the death and resurrection of the two witnesses?

The period of three and a half days should not be seen as representative of the time between Jesus' death and resurrection. Instead, many Jews taught that the spirit hovered over the body for three days. Waiting three and a half days would confirm that the witnesses were truly dead. The power of their resurrection is amplified by the certainty of their deaths. We can know that even if we suffer and die for our faith, the message of the gospel endures. In the end, God will vindicate His servants in the sight of the very ones who ridiculed them. Some who ridicule our message now may repent later.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ REVELATION 11:15-19.

How does the scene change in verse 15? What do the loud voices say about the world in verse 15?

There are a few possible explanations for the phrase, "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ." First, the past tense use of "has become" indicates certainty that this will be fulfilled. This certainty is so strong that the future is spoken of as the past. Second, what is true in heaven will come true on the earth. Third, the perspective of time in heaven is different from the world. From the standpoint of heaven, "every creature" in the universe blesses God and the Lamb in Revelation 5:13, long before "every knee will bow...and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11) at the final judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

What can we expect from God as a result of our faithful witness (v. 18)? What rewards do you already experience in your life as a result of your faith in Christ?

Earthly rulers have temporary power, and evil in this world is temporary. God's authority and power are eternal, and His victory will be everlasting. Those who are faithful to tell the world about Him can be confident they will receive vindication from God and ultimate security in Christ.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can you witness this week to those who don't know Jesus?

What price are you willing to pay for the sake of the gospel?

How does the assurance that God reigns over the world impact your daily life?

PRAYER

As you lead your group in prayer, thank God for His Word, for His call, and for His promise to be with us as we live for Him.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 11:1-19

11:1-2 The mention of a measuring reed like a rod and the command to go and measure God's sanctuary and the altar calls to mind Ezek 40:3,5. The phrase count those who worship there appears to speak of God's people, while the courtyard outside the sanctuary was the court of the Gentiles (the nations). It is not necessary for the second temple to have still been standing in Jerusalem for John to see a vision of the sanctuary and its court. It is possible that he saw a rebuilt end-times temple in Jerusalem since that seems to be assumed by 2Th 2:4. The statement that the Gentiles will trample the holy city (Jerusalem) echoes Jesus' statement about "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk 21:24) just before the second coming of Christ.

11:3-4 The 1,260 days, in which two unnamed witnesses... prophesy for the Lord, is in stark contrast to the "42 months" of 11:2 and 13:5. Since no one can harm the witnesses until "they finish their testimony" (11:7), and since they die in Jerusalem—apparently having ministered there—this period of 1,260 days cannot be the same three-and-one-half-year period as the reign of the beast (13:5). The 1,260 days precede the beast's reign, because part of his rise to worldwide prominence is based on killing the two witnesses (11:7). These witnesses are dressed in sackcloth, the garb of mourning and repentance (Joel 1:13; Jnh 3:5-6). The two olive trees and the two lampstands are imagery from Zechariah 4, where the two figures appear to be Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, and the task at hand was the rebuilding of the temple. Perhaps John used this imagery to recall the crucial spiritual principle articulated in that chapter: "Not by strength or by might, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of Hosts" (Zech 4:6).

11:5-6 Besides being invulnerable to physical harm, the ministry of the two witnesses echoes the great miracles of the ministries of Elijah and Moses (who had appeared together on the Mount of Transfiguration; Mt 17:3). Fire that consumes their enemies looks back to Elijah's ministry in 2Ki 1:10-12. No rain during the days of their prophecy (which is three-and-one-half years long; v. 3) echoes the three-year drought that Elijah prophesied (1Ki 17:1; 18:1). Power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every plague recalls Moses' ministry in Egypt (Ex 7-11).

11:7 The beast, the great antichrist figure prophesied elsewhere (Dan 7:20-21,25; 2Th 2:9-11; 1Jn 2:18), and the satanically-inspired world ruler in Revelation 13 and 17, now makes his initial appearance. His origin is said to be the abyss, from which the demonic locusts came (9:1-10), and where Satan will be imprisoned (20:1-3). It is only because their three-and-one-half-year period of ministry is completed that the beast is able to make war with the two witnesses and kill them. The irony of using the word conquer to speak of the death of the witnesses is that, while it may seem that the beast is victorious (vv. 7-10), these witnesses, as martyrs, come back to life (vv. 11-12).

11:8-10 The great city is the usual way of referring to Babylon the Great in Revelation (Revelation 17:18; 18:10), as well as Sodom (infamous for its sexual immorality) and Egypt (where God's people had been slaves). This depicts the wickedness of Jerusalem's inhabitants at this time. The brutal death of the two witnesses, the sacrilege of not giving them a proper burial, and the glee of the non-elect "earth dwellers" at their deaths, demonstrate that wickedness. That the witnesses are also called prophets in the context of their death at the hands of the beast places them in the category of other prophets who had died for their faith and who are honored in Revelation (v. 18; 16:6; 18:20,24).

11:11-12 The phrase after 3 1/2 days is intended to be compared with Jesus being resurrected on the third day (1Co 15:4). The breath of life probably echoes the spiritual resuscitation of Israel pictured in the "valley of dry bones" in Ezek 37:5,10 and sets the stage for the widespread conversion of Israel in Rev 11:13. Great fear can be a positive thing since "the fear of the Lord" is the beginning of wisdom (Pr 1:7). The phrase come up here is understood by some interpreters to speak of the rapture of the church at the middle of the tribulation, though this passage refers to only two people.

11:13 Everything changes in one moment, from rejoicing at the death of the two witnesses (vv. 7-10) to shock at their resurrection, then hanging on for dear life in the devastation of a violent earthquake. In the midst of the widespread damage and death, fear turns into faith with many who saw the resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses. The proper response to the "eternal gospel" to be preached to everyone still alive on the earth in 14:6-7 is to "fear God and give Him glory." Since this takes place in Jerusalem, where most people present would be Jewish, this could be the fulfillment of Paul's prophecy that "all Israel will be saved" (Rm 11:25). Others view this as nothing more than a "foxhole conversion," in which there is a momentary acknowledgment of the Lord but no authentic faith.

11:14 The second woe of the three predicted in 8:13 has now passed. Since the third woe is coming quickly, it apparently is closely related to the seventh trumpet (vv. 15-19).

11:15-19 The sense of finality in the wording of the seventh... trumpet has caused some interpreters to think this is the point of the second coming of Christ and that the following chapters double back and retrace the same ground from a different perspective. In a full-blown "recapitulation" view, it is held that the seals, trumpets, and bowls all speak of the same judgments from different perspectives. Such an approach is not necessary, however, since the seventh trumpet overarches the seven bowls of wrath, with the seventh bowl telescoping all the way to the preparation for the second coming of Christ. This perspective is supported by the fact that the phenomena (lightning, rumblings, thunder, an earthquake, and severe hail) ready to be poured out on the earth related to the seventh trumpet (v. 19) are not actually poured out until the seventh bowl (16:18,21).

11:15 The phrase the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah can be understood as (1) the earthly reign of Christ (20:4-6) has already begun at this point, and chapters 12-19 is a déjà vu of the first half of the book, until the narrative arrives at another description of "the kingdom of our Lord over this world," in 20:4-6; (2) the past tense "has become" speaks of certainty so strong that the future is spoken of in the past tense (i.e., "will certainly become"); (3) what is already true in heaven will come true on earth ("Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Mt 6:10); or (4) the timeless perspective of heaven is different from that of this world (e.g., from the standpoint of heaven, "every creature" in the universe blesses God and the Lamb in Rev 5:13, long before "every knee should bow... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" [Php 2:10-11] at the final judgment [Rev 20:11-15]). Any of the last three explanations is more likely than the first.

11:16-18 "Lord God...who is and who was" means the One who not only exists but has existed eternally. You... have begun to reign may mean that (1) the kingdom of God already exists in this world in some sense (1:9), or (2) God's power to reign in heaven is about to come to earth in the wake of His climactic wrath being displayed in the pouring out of the bowls of wrath (15:1-19:5), immediately after the prelude to that section (chaps. 12-14). The time...for the dead to be judged...to give the reward to God's people (2Co 5:10), and to destroy those who destroy the earth (probably the "earth dwellers") comes after Christ's return (20:11-15).

11:19 The ark of the covenant had been in the "holy of holies" in the tabernacle (Ex 40:3) and the temple (1Ki 6:19), which was destroyed by the invading Babylonian army (2Ch 36:19). Now it is seen in the heavenly "holy of holies."