



THE REIGN OF SIN

The Victory of The Church Part 2

August 13, 2017

Revelation 11

The Two Witnesses

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, 2 but 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. 3 And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. 6 They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. 7 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, 8 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. 9 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, 10 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 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. 13 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.

14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

The Seventh Trumpet

15 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 he shall reign forever and ever." 16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying,

"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."

19 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.

The following is excerpts from two different commentaries on Revelation 11. They represent two different perspectives of the passage and ironically can exist together.

REVELATION 11:1–14

Two Witnesses

People find many books puzzling, but the Bible is often the most puzzling of all. People find many parts of the Bible puzzling, but Revelation is often seen as the most puzzling book of all. And people find Revelation puzzling, but the first half of chapter 11—the passage now before us—is, for many, the most puzzling part of all. (There are some other strong contenders for this dubious distinction, but chapter 11 can hold its own.) What is it about?

At one level it's clear what it's about. John is told to measure the temple. Then two 'witnesses' emerge, doing great and strange deeds before being killed, lying unburied, and then being raised to new **life** and exalted to **heaven**. The tone of voice of the passage is quite different from much of the surrounding material. Instead of the big-picture scenes of terrifying horsemen, man-eating locusts and all the rest, we seem to have a short story, albeit a very strange one, about two specific individuals, their work and their fate.

But what does it all *mean*? And how does it fit with the rest of the book? How does it take John's vision forward?

Not surprisingly, readers of Revelation have disagreed as to what it all means. But I am inclined to agree with those who have taken, broadly, the following line.

First, John's 'measuring of the temple' (which echoes similar prophetic actions in Ezekiel 40 and Zechariah 2) has nothing to do with the Jerusalem Temple, or with the heavenly temple/throne room of chapters 4 and 5. By the time John was writing—indeed, this was true from very early on in the Christian movement—the followers of Jesus had come to see themselves as the true temple, the place where God now lived through his powerful **spirit**. John is commanded to mark out this community so that, as in chapter 7, it may be protected against ultimate harm. However, there is another sense in which the community—seen here in terms of the 'outer court'—is to be left vulnerable. The pagan nations will trample it for three and a half years (a symbolic number, half of the 'seven' which stands for completeness, here broken down into 42 months or 1260 days). Just as Ezekiel's measuring of his visionary temple was a way of marking out the place where God was going to come to dwell, so John's marking out of this human temple, this community, is a way of signalling God's solemn intention to honour and bless this people with his presence.

But what is the task and role of this people? Throughout the book of Revelation, the call of God's people is to bear faithful witness to Jesus, even though it will mean suffering, and quite possibly a shameful death. The seven letters of chapters 2 and 3 continually promised special rewards to those who 'conquered'. This, as we saw, meant the people who, following Jesus who himself achieved victory through his death, were prepared to face martyrdom rather than

compromise. Now—this is the part which many find particularly difficult—it appears that the ‘two witnesses’ of verses 3–13 *are a symbol for the whole church in its prophetic witness, its faithful death, and its vindication by God.* The church as a whole is symbolized by the ‘lampstands’, as in 1:20. The church is to prophesy, ‘clothed in sackcloth’ as a sign of mourning for the wickedness of the world and the evil that it will bring on to itself.

Why two witnesses, then? Partly, I think, because John has two great biblical stories in mind as the backdrop. First, there is the story of Moses, who stood up to Pharaoh, the pagan king of Egypt, and demonstrated God’s power by the plagues which, as we have seen, are already echoed in chapters 8 and 9. Second, there is the story of Elijah, who stood up to Ahab, the paganizing king of Israel, and demonstrated God’s power by successfully praying for a drought and then by calling down fire from heaven. John doesn’t mean, though some have thought this, that Moses and Elijah would literally return to earth and carry out what chapter 11 says. That is to mistake the sort of writing this is. What John is saying is that the prophetic witness of the church, in the great tradition of Moses and Elijah, will perform powerful signs and thereby torment the surrounding unbelievers, but that the climax of their work will be their martyr-death at the hands of ‘the monster that comes up from the Abyss’.

We haven’t met this ‘monster’ yet. Nor have we yet discovered ‘the great city, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where their lord was crucified’. John will make all this clear in the several chapters that follow, where we learn that the ‘monster’ is the might of pagan empire, presently embodied by Rome, and that the ‘city’ is Rome itself, or maybe in this case the public world of the entire Roman empire. And the point—the point which John is determined his readers will grasp—is this. The God-given and God-protected vocation to bear faithful prophetic witness will not mean that one will be spared from suffering and death, but rather that this suffering and death itself, like that of the Jesus whom the church worships and follows, will be the ultimate prophetic sign through which the world will be brought to glorify God.

How does this work? For three and a half days (there we have the half-of-seven symbol again) the world will celebrate a victory over the church. But suddenly God will act in a new way. The vision of Ezekiel 37, of God’s breath coming into the dead corpses, will come into reality. And the vision of Daniel 7, of God’s people coming on a cloud to heaven, will also come to pass. The vindication of the church after its martyrdom will complete the prophetic witness.

The result will be that the world, looking on, will at last be converted. That is the meaning of the powerful language at the end of verse 13. Elsewhere, both in Revelation and other biblical books, the idea of people coming in fear and trembling to ‘glorify the God of heaven’ is an indication not of a temporary or grudging acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty, but of a true and penitent turning to God. *The martyr-witness of the church, in other words, will succeed where the plagues have failed.* This is how the nations will come to glorify their creator. This is how ‘the kingdom of the world’ will become the **kingdom** of ‘our Lord and his **Messiah**’—which is precisely the point that follows immediately in verse 15.

This most puzzling passage in this most puzzling book, then, turns out to be one of the most

important and central statements of what John wants to say to the churches to whom he is writing. The lamb has opened the seals on the scroll, and all kinds of terrifying things have happened as he has done so. The trumpets have blown; terrors of a different sort have come to pass; but now the scroll has been handed to John, and John prophesies in symbolic action (measuring the temple) and parabolic story (the two witnesses). And this is how the kingdom of God, already spoken of in chapters 4 and 5, is to become a reality on earth as in heaven.

We should not mistake the powerful impact of the symbolism in verse 13. When God judged Sodom and Gomorrah, he might have spared it if ten righteous persons were found there (Genesis 18:32). Now, however, only one-tenth of the wicked city is to fall, and nine-tenths is to be saved. When God was judging Israel through Elijah, only seven thousand were left who had not bowed the knee to the pagan god Baal. Now, however, it is only seven thousand who are killed, and the great majority are to be rescued. Suddenly, out of the smoke and fire of the earlier chapters, a vision is emerging: a vision of the creator God as the God of mercy, grieving over the rebellion and corruption of the world but determined to rescue and restore it, and doing so through the faithful death of the lamb and, now, through the faithful death of the lamb's prophetic followers. The way stands clear for the glorious celebration at the end of the chapter, which rounds off the first half of this very carefully structured book.

REVELATION 11:15–19

The Song of Triumph

Inscribed over the high altar in Westminster Abbey, one of the most famous churches in the world, is the King James Version translation of verse 15, which reads, 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.' It is an impressive text for an impressive location, looking down as it does not only on the altar and its magnificent surroundings but on the Cosmati pavement in front of it, where for a thousand years kings and queens have been crowned. The text is designed as a solemn reminder to these monarchs, and to their subjects, that their crowns are at best temporary and in any case borrowed. The sovereignty, the **kingdom**, belongs to the one true God and to his **Messiah**.

However, the Greek text which King James's translators were using was wrong. As virtually all other Greek manuscripts of the New Testament indicate, the word 'kingdom' should be singular, not plural. In any case, as the translators knew, it only occurs once in the verse; they put the second 'kingdoms' in italics, to show that they were adding it to help the sentence to make, in English, the sense it clearly made in the Greek.

My point in drawing attention to this curiosity is not simply the mild frustration that Westminster Abbey should have a wrong reading in such a prominent and powerful place. It is, rather, that it matters quite a lot that 'kingdom' here is singular. The vision which John is passing on is a cosmic, global vision, and the 'kingdom' which God has established through his Messiah is not simply a collection of kingdoms, ruling over this nation and that. It is his universal rule, scooping up 'the kingdom of the world' as a single entity and claiming it back as his own rightful

property.

This climactic and decisive moment could well have come, one might suppose, towards the very end of the book. Indeed, parts of chapter 19 resemble what we have here. But this reminds us that we are not dealing, in Revelation, with a single sequence of events, in which the seals come first, then the trumpets, then all the material in chapters 12–14, culminating in the bowls of wrath, and so on. What we are dealing with is several different angles of vision on the one single great reality: that through the awful turmoil and trouble of the world, God is establishing through Jesus a people who, following the lamb, are to bear witness to God’s kingdom through their own suffering, through which the world will be brought to **repentance** and **faith**, so that ultimately God will be king over all.

There are, no doubt, a thousand different ways to say this; John has chosen three or four. Here we have the climax of one of them, which also functions (because John is writing at several different levels at once) as the climax to the whole of the first half of the book. Verse 19, which finishes this passage, also prepares the way for the very different scene in chapters 12 and 13, where the story as it were begins all over again so that, from quite a new angle, we may see the same drama acted out, and with the same eventual result.

Revelation, like its main biblical prototype (the book of Daniel), is all about the kingdom of God—which is, in my experience, one of the most misunderstood themes in the whole Bible. Far too many Christians have understood ‘the kingdom’ simply in terms of ‘God’s kingdom in **heaven**’, meaning by that that God is in charge in a place called ‘heaven’ (as opposed to this messy place called ‘earth’, from which God wants to rescue us), and that the main aim of life is to ‘enter the kingdom of heaven’ in the sense of ‘going to heaven when you die’. Perhaps one of the many reasons why Revelation has been literally a closed book for so many, and for so much of the church, is that it powerfully and dramatically contradicts this popular view. God’s kingdom is *not* simply designed for ‘heaven’, because God is the creator of the whole world, and his entire purpose is to reclaim that whole world as his own and to set it on the way to become the place he always intended it to be, before human rebellion pulled it so disastrously off track. That, in fact, is the **message** of the four **gospels**, despite many generations of misunderstanding. This misunderstanding has come about partly because, when Matthew uses the phrase ‘kingdom of heaven’ (the other gospels mostly have ‘kingdom of God’), it has been easy for readers with ‘going to heaven’ in their minds to suppose that that was what Matthew, and hence Jesus, were talking about.

But here it is quite clear—and quite explicitly political in its implications. Those who designed the present altar and its surrounds in Westminster Abbey may have got the wrong text, but they had the right idea. This is not about a private spirituality in the present, or an escapist ‘**salvation**’ in the future. This is about the living God confronting the powers of the world with the news that he is now in charge, and that the mode of his rule is that which was established by ‘his Messiah’, the lamb. ‘Suffering love conquers all’ is the message, as powerful as it is unwelcome (unwelcome, sadly, all too often in the church, as well as in the world). History has, of course, proved the point. The time of the church’s greatest expansion was the first three

centuries, during which the Roman empire was doing its best, through torture and death, to stamp the movement out. ‘The blood of the martyrs’, said one of the great early teachers, ‘is the seed of the church.’ So it has proved again and again.

This, then, is the fulfilment of the Psalm which many early Christians saw as a great, central prophecy of Jesus himself. Psalm 2 speaks of the nations raging against God, and God acting by establishing his king on his holy hill of Zion. He then promises to give to this king, his ‘son’, the nations of the world as his inheritance. No more will Israel’s ‘inheritance’ be merely the land which God promised to Abraham, a small strip of territory in the Middle East, but rather the entire world and all its kingdoms. The Messiah, God’s son-king, will overthrow the nations as they rage and fight. Their best course, says the Psalmist, is to submit, to sue for peace.

In John’s vision, here in this chapter, *it has already happened*. Notice the difference between verse 17 and passages like 1:4. There John spoke of God as the one ‘Who Was, and Is, and Is To Come’. Here he simply describes God as ‘Who Is and Who Was’, *because the future has now arrived in the present*. The ‘is to come’ has become reality. The suffering witness of the martyr-church has faithfully demonstrated to the world that God is God, that Jesus is Lord and King, and the world has responded by glorifying the God of heaven.

What remains now is ‘to destroy the destroyers of earth’. This is the ultimate meaning of God’s judgment. So often that judgment is seen as negative, ‘destructive’, thwarting the things which humans really enjoy and want to do. This is one of the biggest lies there is. God’s judgment is the judgment of the creator on all that spoils his creation. His purposes, deep-rooted in the vision of chapters 4 and 5, are for his wonderful creation to be rescued from the forces of anti-matter, of anti-creation, of anti-life. It is time for death to die.

The song of the elders evokes another moment like that of 4:5 and 8:5, with lightning, thunder and the rest. These are the moments of transition, the moments when earth itself trembles at the power of the heavenly revelation. In addition, for the only time in the book, John says that as God’s **temple** in heaven was opened, revealing his throne room with its song of triumph, so ‘the ark of his **covenant**’ appeared inside. There had been much speculation in Jewish circles about whether the ark—the box containing the Ten Commandments and other key symbols of the ancient covenant—would be restored in the new temple. Here its appearance seems to signify that God has at last been true to his covenant promises. What he said he would do, he has now done. He has taken his power and begun to reign.¹

Preview: The Measuring of the Temple and the Two Witnesses (11:1–13)

Chapter 11 continues the same vision that began in 10:1. The symbolic action of eating the little scroll, A (10:8–11), is followed by the commission, B (10:11), and by the new prophetic action of measuring the temple, A’ (11:1–2). It concludes with the commission and fate of the

¹ Wright, T. (2011). *Revelation for Everyone* (pp. 96–106). London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox.

two witnesses, B' (11:3–13). The action has moved from heaven to earth. Up to the interlude, John had been a spectator in heaven of the drama which originated from heaven. With his new commission he is placed on earth, and with the command to measure the temple he becomes actively involved in one brief episode. He was given a measuring rod and commanded to **measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there**, but not the outer court, because it has been given over to **the nations** who will **trample over the holy city for forty-two months**.

Measuring the *sanctuary* rather than the **temple** (so RSV, but Greek, *naos*) is done either in order to rebuild it (e.g., Ezek. 40:3–5; 41:3), or in order to destroy it (e.g., Amos 7:7–9), or in order to protect and preserve it (Zech. 2:1–5). Here, obviously, only the last meaning applies, for a contrast is drawn between the sanctuary and the altar on one hand and the court outside the sanctuary on the other. The latter will be given over to the nations. From Wellhausen's time on, interpreters have suggested that John here used a Jewish prophetic oracle from the Zealot party which promised God's protection for Jerusalem's temple during the rebellion of A.D. 66–70. The difficulty with this suggestion becomes apparent when we ask, Why would John incorporate an oracle that was plainly contradicted by the subsequent events that led to the temple's destruction? Moreover, why would he use a prophetic prediction from the Zealots, who started the war against Rome with false messianic hopes and who caused grief to the church of Jerusalem because it would not participate in the war hysteria? Josephus clearly identified messianism as the cause for the war (*War* 6.312).

More realistic would be the hypothesis that these two verses are the oracle of a Jewish-Christian prophet at the time of the war against Rome. This Jewish-Christian prophet understood the **temple of God** metaphorically, as the Jewish-Christian community. The Qumran community, which denounced the temple in Jerusalem as being polluted and in need of an eschatological cleansing, also regarded itself as the temple of God. Thus, a metaphorical understanding of the temple of God was known in the first century, prior to John, and was also taken over by other New Testament writers (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21). In this Jewish-Christian oracle the temple of God (better: God's sanctuary) consists not of stones but of people who **worship** God by calling upon the name of Jesus (cf. Acts 2:21). God's temple, the Jewish-Christian community, will be protected even though God's judgment will fall on Jerusalem, the holy city. A tradition such as this may have been available to John. According to it, the **court outside the temple** sanctuary and the **holy city** (Jerusalem) are not to be "measured," that is, God will not protect them. Unrepentant, unbelieving Judaism will be **given over to the nations**. The Gentiles, Romans, will **trample over** Jerusalem for **forty-two months**. A parallel to this hypothetical oracle is found in Luke 21:24: "Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

How did John use this tradition? First, for him the **temple of God** is no longer Jewish Christianity but the Christian worldwide community.

Second, for him Jerusalem is no longer the **holy city**, but it is symbolic of the world hostile to

God and therefore equal to **Sodom and Egypt** (v. 8).

Third, just as the interlude of 7:1–8 speaks of the preservation of the church during the apocalyptic tribulations, so 11:1–2 conveys the same promise but with a new emphasis. The temple of God, the true worshipers in all countries and among all tongues and tribes, are promised protection *from* God’s wrath and preservation *in* the end-time tribulations which last but a short time, only **forty-two months**.

Fourth, in John’s reinterpretation **the holy city** has also become the symbol of the Christian community, like the temple of God, the altar, and the worshipers at the altar (cf. 5:10a). The holy city, the Christian community, will be trampled over by the nations for a limited time (cf. 13:5–7). John’s reinterpretation focuses on the apparent paradox that on one hand the community (the temple) will be protected (measured) and on the other hand the community (the holy city) will be trampled upon and experience suffering without protection. This point of view is determined by the cross of Christ. The crucified, defenseless one is the protected one and vice versa. The temple of God and the holy city, the faithful church on earth, will share his fate, his suffering and death, which are at the same time victory and preservation from eternal death.

Fifth, the newly commissioned John is commanded to **measure** the sanctuary, the altar and those who worship there. It is the prophet’s task to determine who belongs to God’s people and who does not (cf. 2:14–15; 2:20–23; 3:16). Therefore the measuring here symbolizes not only divine protection but also “prophetic action” that marks off the area that belongs to God. The instrument for his prophetic task is **given** to him. This measuring rod is none other than “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus” (1:2, 9; 19:10). The “area” to be marked off by John is God’s people who **worship** him. It is a rather small area in comparison to the vastness of space outside the sanctuary. Yet, however small the area may be in which God is worshiped, it is filled with dynamic witnesses (11:3–13).

Sixth, the measuring of the sanctuary is also a prophetic anticipation of the measuring of the new Jerusalem (21:15–21). The community, preserved by God, will appear as new creation, a perfect foursquare city, with no separate temple building, because “its sanctuary [Greek, *naos*] is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” And “nothing unclean shall enter” this city of perfect measurements, “nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood” shall be found in it (21:22, 27).

The suffering of the church lasts but **forty-two months**. This period of three and a half years has its origin in Daniel (7:25; 12:7). It was the time from the persecution and abomination by Antiochus Epiphanes (167 B.C.) to the rededication of the temple (164 B.C.). However, the number 42 also has a symbolic significance in that it is a messianic number. Three times fourteen equals forty-two. Fourteen is the sum of the letters of David in Hebrew (*daled* = 4; *waw* = 6; *daled* = 4; *dwd* = David; cf. Matt. 1:17). In this context the 42 months indicate the period of the messianic woes, to which the community will be subjected and in which it will be protected. This period is also the time of the church’s witness (11:3) and the time during which the beast can exercise his bloody authority (13:5). While the church’s future is assured, the *trampling* of the

church (cf. Dan. 8:13–14) will hardly bring cheap consolation to troubled Christians.

There is a striking difference between this interlude and 2 Thess. 2:1–12. There, Christians are indeed consoled, because the future manifestation of Antichrist, of “the man of lawlessness,” will not bring new oppression, persecution, and martyrdom. Rather, the Antichrist will appear as a false prophet with “wicked deception” who, through signs and wonders, will seek to lead astray “those who did not believe the truth.” For John, eschatology is not just the consolation of the orthodoxy of all who “love the truth,” but it is the call for a new vision in the face of the forthcoming “trampling” of the church by the pagans. In short, the purpose of Revelation is not consolation but a new vision.

Without a new introduction, this section expands and unfolds the commission of 10:11 and it also interprets aspects of the two symbolic actions. By eating the little scroll, John received a foretaste of the things to come. Now he will show us why the little scroll tasted not only sweet but bitter and why the community, in spite of divine protection, is subject to being trampled down by the nations (11:2). This is the most difficult section in Revelation. We can safely assume that John used and reinterpreted a Jewish-Christian tradition, but its original form is no longer accessible to us. Hence we must try to understand its meaning within John’s composition and be aware that not every detail of this picture may have an equivalency in meaning. The section has two parts: vv. 3–6 describe the two witnesses (“these are ...,” “these have ...,” vv. 4 and 6); and vv. 7–13 narrate their fate and its effects.

3–6—Once again a heavenly voice is heard, just as in 10:4, 8, 11. Here it is the voice of Christ who speaks of **my two witnesses**. He calls and empowers his witnesses. That there are **two** may express the law of Deut. 19:15 or the two functions of the church as priests and kings, pictured in the olive trees and the lampstands of v. 4. Moreover, these two priests-kings-witnesses are also prophets. They have the **power to prophesy**. “Prophesy” in Revelation means to bear witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ (1:2, 9). Hence the designations of witness and prophet are interchangeable in this section (cf. vv. 3 and 10). The exalted Christ himself is “the faithful witness” (1:5), who enacts God’s purpose for the end time, and the prophet John bears witness to the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1–2). The two witnesses of this section are prophets who announce God’s judgment and salvation even though the content of their message is not specified. What is specified is the duration of their witness, during 1,260 days, which equals 42 months (v. 2). This means that their prophetic witness takes place during the period of the church’s persecution, when the church, “the holy city,” is being trampled over by the nations. Finally, their appearance is specified. They are **clothed in sackcloth**, which pictures them as preachers of repentance in view of the impending doom (cf. Isa. 22:12; Jer. 4:8; Matt. 11:21). During the time of the church’s tribulation, Jesus Christ will raise up powerful prophetic witnesses that call for repentance.

Who are these two witnesses? **These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth.** Attempts to identify the two witnesses with historical persons such as Peter and Paul or James the Lord’s brother, and John the apostle or John the Baptist (as Elijah) and Jesus (as Moses), or Enoch and Elijah (cf. *1 Enoch* 90:31; *Coptic*

Apocalypse of Elijah), or Jeremiah and Elijah (thus Victorinus of Pettau), or Moses and Elijah (Deut. 18:15, 18; Mal. 3:2–3) are doomed to failure. John clearly shows that he employs symbolic language. It is the symbols that communicate his message if we recognize their connections and relationships within John's book. The olive trees and the lampstands are symbols of the witnessing, royal, priestly, prophetic church during the time of the church's trials before the end. These symbols are a reinterpretation of Zech. 4:2–3; 6:11–13. In Zechariah, the two olive trees referred to *the king*, Zerubbabel, and to *the high priest*, Joshua. For John, the two olive trees represent priesthood and kingship which God has given to the church. "He made *us* a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (1:6; 5:10; 20:6). In Zechariah the two olive trees stand on the right and the left of the single lampstand which is the temple menorah. John reinterpreted the text of Zechariah. The one lampstand of Zechariah now becomes two, so that the **two olive trees** are the **two lampstands**. This identification recalls the churches as lampstands in the inaugural vision (1:12, 20; 2:5). In short, John clearly indicated that the "two witnesses" are not two individual persons but symbols representing the Christian community. Moreover, as lampstands, the community is empowered with the Holy Spirit for its prophetic witness (4:5; 5:6). "Not by might, nor by power, but *by my Spirit*, says the Lord of hosts," according to Zech. 4:6. As olive trees and lampstands the community fulfills the functions of kings and priests in the power of the Spirit (1:6; 5:10). The number **two**, like the number seven, symbolizes the whole community and recalls the principle of two witnesses (Deut. 19:15) as well as two functions of the church, priesthood and kingship.

The witnesses are under God's special protection, so that no one can **harm** them. This recalls the prophetic action of 11:1, the sealing of 7:1–8, and the protection of 9:4. It *may* also recall the promise of Luke 10:19, where the same Greek verb occurs that is translated here with to "harm" and where the context speaks of disciples being sent "two by two" (Luke 10:1). The community, pictured as Spirit-empowered, royal and priestly prophetic witnesses, not only stands under divine protection but also is empowered like Elijah and Moses of old. The passage from Zechariah finds its fulfillment, not in two Messiahs as in Qumran (1QS 9:11), but in the church's dynamic witness. The **fire that pours from their mouth** recalls Elijah's destruction of the messengers of their idolatrous king (2 Kings 1:2–17, modified in the light of Jer. 5:14; cf. also Sir. 48:1–3). The **power to shut the sky** refers to the drought, through Elijah's word, of 1 Kings 17:1 (cf. Luke 4:25; note its reference to time, absent in 1 Kings). The **power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague** recalls Moses' miracles in Egypt and points forward to the plagues of the bowl cycle (Exod. 7:14–19, etc.; Revelation 16). The Spirit-endowed community of the end time is the successor to Moses' rod and to Elijah's mantle. John pictured the church's powerful witnesses according to the pattern of correspondence between primal time and final time. As in old times Elijah and Moses heaped plagues upon their godless opponents, so during the end time will the witnesses of God do. During the final struggle between the church and the world there will be a powerful call to repentance. Just as the plagues of the first six trumpets come in response to the church's prayers (8:2–5; cf. 5:8) and just as cosmic upheavals followed the cry of the martyrs (6:10), so the prophetic witness of the community and of its dynamic preachers will call forth the eschatological law of retribution: "if any one would harm them ... he is doomed to be killed" (v.

5).

7–13—The Fate of the Two Witnesses: The style changes from description (“these are ...,” “these have ...,” vv. 4 and 6) to narration. A time limit is set for their prophetic witness. **When they have finished** (Greek, *teleō*) **their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them.** Abruptly the major opponent of the church in the last days is introduced. Demonic powers from **the bottomless pit** had already appeared in 9:1. But there ironically they functioned as executors of God’s wrath and therefore they could not harm the faithful (9:4). Now the eschatological antagonist makes his first appearance. His activity will be elaborated later. Through the presence of the beast in the interlude, John connected the first section (4:1–11:19) with the second and third sections. The **beast** from the bottomless pit corresponds to the beast that rises out of the sea (13:1; cf. 17:8), modeled after Dan. 7:3, 7–8. It is the anti-image of the Lamb that carries the mark of his slaughter. The fate of the prophetic witnesses parallels that of their Lord.

Against them the beast **will make war ... and conquer them and kill them** (cf. Dan. 7:21). Again we can see that the two witnesses are not two individuals but symbols of the Christian community and its preaching. One can hardly **make war** against only two persons. The witnesses represent the church and its prophetic preachers. The word “witness” (Greek, *martyrs*) begins to approach the meaning of martyr. Again John links the interlude with the following section (cf. 12:17; 13:7) in which the theme of the church’s eschatological struggle and apparent defeat is further developed. But the interlude also points back. The fate of **my two witnesses** (11:13) corresponds to the fate of Antipas, whom the exalted Christ called “my” faithful witness (2:13). The end-time trials of the church are prefigured and anticipated in the pressures experienced in John’s present (cf. 2:3, 9, 13, 19; 3:8, 10). The question arises of whether John sought to convey that the whole church of his day with all its members will suffer martyrdom. Hardly. Even though the impression of total martyrdom could be gotten from 11:7, there are other pictures that clearly show that martyrdom is not the fate of all the faithful contemporaries of John (2:24–25; 3:3–5, 10–11, 18–20). John’s point here is that the martyrs are the church’s foremost witnesses and therefore they are the church’s representatives. Dynamic prophets, preachers, and witnesses will experience not only protection but also death and resurrection, like their Lord. Their witness leads to the apparent triumph of evil, just as it did on Calvary’s hill. Whoever bears witness as God’s prophet has to deal with the satanic opponents of God’s purpose and perhaps suffer visible bodily defeat. Though God equips his prophets, he does not exclude them from suffering, death, and execution. There is no room in John’s book for ecclesial triumphalism which characterized much of the post-Constantinian history of the church.

8—The **dead bodies** of the witnesses lie **in the street of the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified**—a picture of utter degradation. To lie unburied is the height of indignity and impiety toward the dead (cf. Tob. 1:18–20; 2:3–7). The **great city** in which they lie unburied for **three days and a half** is, first, historic Jerusalem, **where their Lord was crucified.** Also the reference to the number of its inhabitants in v. 13 (70,000, of which one-tenth, 7,000, were killed) points to Jerusalem rather than to Rome. Moreover, in Isa. 1:9–10; 3:9 and Ezek. 16:46–50 Jerusalem’s inhabitants are

compared to Sodom. However, in Revelation, **the great city** always refers to Babylon/Rome (14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:2, 10, 16, 18–19; 21:24). Therefore the great city in Revelation is, second, not a geographic location but a symbolic place. Its essential characteristic lies in the allegorical label of **Sodom and Egypt**. Sodom was the city of fornication that rejected the commandments of God and was therefore rejected by God (Isa. 1:16; Jer. 23:24). Egypt was the place of the oppression of the people of God. In short, Jerusalem, Babylon, and Rome, together with the fornicating, idolatrous, and oppressive world, are fused by John into one single entity, **the great city**. The presupposition of this fusion is that for John the historic Jerusalem has ceased to be the holy city (cf. 11:2; 20:9; 21:2, 10–23). But the beast from the abyss who brought death to Christ’s witnesses is not limited to Jerusalem, for it operates through Babylon/Rome, as we shall see. The “great city” is every city that embodies self-sufficiency in place of dependence on the creator, achievement in place of repentance, oppression in place of faith, the beast in place of the Lamb, and murder in place of witness to God.

Therefore **men from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations gaze at their dead bodies for three days and a half**, refusing permission for their burial. Instead of **bodies** (plural), the Greek text has the singular in vv. 8 and 9 (Greek, *ptōma*). It views the witnesses as one corporate entity. Clearly, the “great city” consists of the people of the world, that is, **of those who dwell on earth** (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 10:11; 13:7–8; etc.). From John’s point of view they are idolaters, fornicators, and oppressors of God’s elect. Not only do they refuse burial for the two witnesses but they **rejoice** over their death, **make merry**, and **exchange presents** as was customary on happy occasions in antiquity. In the Fourth Gospel, we hear that people will “rejoice” at Jesus’ death (John 16:20). The Lord’s fate is extended to his witnesses.

But after the three and a half days a great reversal takes place. Into the two witnesses a **breath of life from God entered** (cf. Ezekiel 37) and the rejoicing of the idolaters turned into **great fear**. The **three and a half days** correspond to the 42 months, or 1,260 days, of 11:2–3 and Dan. 7:25; 12:7. They also correspond to the resurrection of Jesus “after” three days (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34), indicating a brief span of time. Their resurrection and ascension **in a cloud** take place before the eyes of the world that opposed God. Our author distinguishes between “the first resurrection” of the faithful (20:4–6) and the resurrection of the rest of humanity (20:11–15). The resurrection/ascension of the witnesses in 11:12 introduces the notion of the “*first* resurrection” which is unfolded in 20:4–6. *John never tells all at once* but presents different aspects in succeeding cycles. Here he shows the apocalyptic reversal of the fate of the witnesses, raised and exalted from death and disgrace to new life (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16–17: “The dead in Christ will rise *first* ... and we will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”). Then he turns to the reaction of humanity that had been hostile to God’s witnesses. Thereby he connected the interlude with the preceding six trumpet visions and with their climax through the seventh trumpet. On one hand, the resurrection of the witnesses unleashes **a great earthquake** in which **a tenth of the city**, that is, **seven thousand people**, perish (cf. 8:7, 9, 10, 12; 9:5, 15). But on the other hand something new occurs. While the plagues of 6:12–17; 8:7–9:19 did not lead to repentance (cf. 9:20–21), the reversal of the fate of the prophetic witnesses, their resurrection/exaltation, does make an impact. The **rest were** not only **terrified** but they **gave glory to the God of heaven**. That means that nine-tenths of

humanity, or of the citizens of the Roman empire, turn to God and give him glory! Frequently, interpreters argue that the reaction of the world in 11:13 does not imply repentance and turning away from their idolatry but merely the fear of unbelieving humanity in the face of the unambiguous manifestation of God's power. However, John's statement that they **gave glory to God** may not be watered down. To give glory to God is the proper response to the gospel (14:7). Furthermore, to give glory to God anticipates 15:3–4 and 21:24, and it certainly precludes the damnation of those who render glory to God. In short, with 11:13c John leads us beyond the vision of 6:15–16 and 9:20–21. God's triumph in the resurrection of his faithful witnesses brings about the salvation of **the rest** of humanity. In conclusion, the interlude introduced us to the dialectic of the church's existence, to its witness and its opposition, to its protection and vulnerability, to its success (for a time) and its defeat (for a time), to its death and triumph. God is full of surprises. Through his tiny faithful church, with the measurements of the sanctuary only, he saves nine-tenths of the city in ways beyond the city's present imagination (11:1–2, 13).

The Announcement of the Third Woe (11:14)

The second woe has passed (cf. 8:13; 9:12); **behold, the third woe is soon to come.** Some interpreters are puzzled by the position of this **second woe**. Why was it not placed after 9:19? The answer is quite simple. The three woes are a literary device that serve as horizontal connections between the cycles of visions. The cycles describe different aspects of the same endtime period. The second woe connects the plagues of the trumpet visions (8:7–9:21) with the activity of the beast from the bottomless pit (11:7–10) as well as with the bitter taste of the small scroll (10:9–11). We should note that the events of the second woe are twofold. On one hand they are directed against the godless world (8:7–9:21); on the other hand they are directed against the faithful church, its prophetic preachers and martyrs. Likewise the onslaught of the demonic powers is twofold. They plague not only godless humanity, but in the beast's action they seek to destroy the church.

The announcement of **the third woe** connects the trumpet visions and the interlude with the following chapters. One would expect that the third woe would occur through the seventh trumpet (11:15–19). But, surprise! The seventh trumpet, like the seventh seal, does not contain *plagues*. Instead, it introduces the theme of *judgment*, of God's wrath "destroying the destroyers of the earth" (11:18). The theme of judgment, present in the sixth seal (6:16–17) but absent in the trumpet cycle thus far, will be elaborated in chaps. 12–20. The bowl visions of chap. 16 complete "the wrath of God" (15:1), and therefore they complete "the third woe," anticipated in 11:18.

The oath of the angel in 10:6–7, that "there shall be no more delay," finds its fulfillment. "The mystery of God," which is his and the Lamb's eschatological reign over the world, is to be "fulfilled" in "the days of the trumpet call" by the seventh angel. Therefore the seventh trumpet announces the accomplished final judgment (11:18) and the final salvation (11:15–17, 18c). It describes the same final end events in new variations and from the perspective of the consummation of the kingdom of God. The seventh trumpet call therefore corresponds to the visions of 4:9–11; 7:1–8:1; 11:11–13; 15:2–4; 19:1–22:5. Each of John's cycles climaxes in the triumph of God in judgment and salvation. Just as the opening of the seventh seal (8:1) did not

result in further destruction, so likewise the sound of the seventh trumpet did not unleash new plagues. Yet in contrast to the silence of the seventh seal, we now hear **loud voices in heaven** proclaiming the reign of God and of his Messiah on earth.

15—The proclamation in heaven of salvation on earth (v. 15) is followed by a thanksgiving (vv. 16–18) and concluded with a theophany (v. 19). The **loud voices in heaven** (cf. 19:1) are the voices of the redeemed people of God together with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. They proclaim the final salvation. **The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ** (cf. Ps. 2:2), **and he shall reign for ever and ever**. The millennium commences (20:4–6). The manifestation of the eschatological reign of God constitutes salvation with cosmic dimensions. The worship in heaven, interrupted by seals and trumpets, resumes. As in 7:9–12, so here a heavenly liturgy in two parts proclaims salvation and responds in thanksgiving to it. The struggle of God’s people on earth has ended in their victory (11:11–13), which is the consequence of God’s triumph (11:15). The Messiah who has the power to open the seals by virtue of his death and exaltation reigns in unity with God forever (cf. 21:22–22:4).

16–18—Thanksgiving: As in 7:11, so here **the twenty-four elders**, the heavenly representatives of the one people of God, **who sit on their thrones before God** (cf. 4:4) **fell on their faces and worshiped God** (cf. 4:10). In chap. 4 they praise the creator. Here they give thanks that God has established his reign with finality over his creation. He did not surrender it to demonic forces and rebellious nations. Thus the vision of the heavenly worship of chap. 4 finds its conclusion in the heavenly liturgy of thanksgiving of the seventh trumpet vision. **“We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast.”** No longer is God the One “who is to come” (as in 1:4, 8; 4:8)—he has come. God is not the immutable, changeless, eternally static being that guarantees the world’s status quo. At the end of time he will do a new thing. He will come and establish his kingdom with finality. In this vision of the end, he *has* come and therefore it can no longer be said of God that “he is to come.” By taking his **great power**, which was his from the beginning, and putting it into operation against his rebellious creatures, God has come and **begun to reign**. His coming signals the final judgment of the **nations** who raged against him and his people (Ps. 2:1–5; Rev. 11:1–13). Their rage will be further developed in chaps. 13; 17; and 19–20, and then we will hear that God himself will declare war on them. **The time for the dead to be judged** links the seventh trumpet with 20:11–15 as well as with 11:11–13 and 20:4–6. The judgment of the **destroyers of the earth** includes not just godless people but also Death and Hades (20:14) and the satanic trinity (16:13; 19:19–20:10) as well as Babylon (chaps. 17–18). Note the *A-B-A'* structure of v. 18. Two references to God’s judgments (A and A') enclose the main point, the thanksgiving **for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great**. To **reward** does not mean to recompense for merits achieved but to fulfill the promise of salvation to his faithful servants. Salvation in this letter is not a gift that can no longer be lost, according to the slogan, “Once saved, always saved.” Rather, salvation, received in baptism (cf. 1:5–6), must be proved in life and conduct, in tribulations, the rejecting of idolatry, and in faithful perseverance unto the end. The **servants** of God that are rewarded in the end are not just the **prophets** (cf. 10:7; 11:10; Amos 3:7), but they include the **saints** and the God-fearers who “gave glory to the God of

heaven” (11:13c), **both small and great**. This inclusive meaning of **servants** of God, referring to the whole people of God, also occurs in 19:5. Their *reward* is their participation in the first resurrection and the millennial reign with Christ, as we shall see (20:4–6).

19—The events initiated by the seventh trumpet conclude with a scene that contains elements of Old Testament theophanies. **God’s temple in heaven** (6:9; 8:3) **was opened** so that the Holy of Holies becomes visible and **the ark of his covenant**, the symbol of God’s presence and faithfulness toward his people, **was seen**. According to a Jewish tradition, the ark was hidden by Jeremiah or by an angel prior to the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C., and it will remain hidden until the final salvation has come (2 Macc. 2:5–8; 2 Bar. 6:7–9). Now the heavenly counterpart of the hidden earthly ark becomes visible to Gentile and Jewish believers for whom the earthly ark had always been inaccessible. This disclosure of God’s heavenly temple is accompanied by **flashes of lightning** (cf. Exod. 19:16ff.; Hab. 3:3ff.), **loud voices** (cf. Ps. 47:5–6), **thunder** (Ps. 104:7), **an earthquake** (Pss. 46:6; 68:8), and **heavy hail** (Isa. 30:30; Ps. 18:13). A series of theophany motifs was found also in the introduction of the throne room vision (4:5; of course, without the earthquake and hail). It occurs again as introduction and as conclusion of the trumpet cycle (8:5; 11:19); and we will encounter it once more as the high point of the seventh bowl vision (16:18). In short, the series of theophany motifs is a literary device that aids the structure of Revelation 4–16 and signals the importance of the eschatological events and their heavenly origin. On each occasion the theophany motifs are connected with the throne of God and/or the temple of God.²

God’s decree ensures His presence with His people and their effective witness, which leads to their apparent defeat and culminates in judgment of their oppressors (11:1–13)

Rev. 11:1–13 shows that the church is sealed for bearing an enduring and loyal witness to the gospel, which begins to lay a basis for the final judgment of those rejecting their testimony. The emphasis of ch. 10 on recommissioning John for his prophetic calling now shifts to a focus on the prophetic message he was commissioned to deliver. The message is that of judgment upon those who reject the persevering witness of Christians and who persecute them. This message, secondarily included in the introduction of ch. 10, now becomes the focus. The judgment is the first explicit answer to the saints’ prayer for vindication and retribution against their antagonists (in development of 6:9–11 and 8:3–5). This explicitly expresses what the trumpets imply. The events portrayed in 11:1–13 occur during the same time as the first six trumpets.

1–2 The beginning of the prophetic message is an acted-out parable of measuring a temple. John is given a reed and commanded to **measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it**. However, he is not to measure **the court which is outside the temple ... for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months**. Though this is not explicit, it is the commissioning angel of ch. 10 who continues to speak to John in 11:1ff. These verses are complex, and require careful comment on several

² Krodol, G. A. (1989). *Revelation* (pp. 217–232). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

points.

Differing interpretations of this passage

There are at least five broad interpretations of this passage:

The dispensational futurist, along with some modified futurist views, projects this into the time of tribulation immediately preceding Christ's final parousia. Typically, the temple and altar refer to a literal restored temple in the literal "holy city" of Jerusalem. **Those who worship in it** are a remnant of believing ethnic Jews. Unbelieving Jews are in **the court which is outside the temple** (henceforth referred to as the "outer court") and thus unprotected. The "measuring" of the temple, altar, and remnant indicates that they will be physically protected by God. Gentiles will enter the outer court, persecute the remnant, and overrun a literal Jerusalem during a literal forty-two month period.

The preterist view is virtually identical in its literal approach by also viewing the temple, altar, and outer court as the actual cultic complex in Jerusalem. However, according to this view, the portrayal depicts events occurring before and during the literal destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD.

A modified futurist view understands the descriptions figuratively. The images of the sanctuary, the altar, and the worshipers refer figuratively to those within ethnic Israel whose salvation is secured at the end of history by the "measuring." The outer court and holy city refer to Jewish unbelievers whose salvation will not be secured.

Another position is similar but does not relegate the scenario to the future and understands the outer court as the professing but apostate church throughout history, which will be deceived and align itself with unbelieving persecutors of the true, spiritual Israel.

A final view, which we think is best, also understands the text figuratively but interprets the outer court as the physical expression of the true, spiritual Israel, which is susceptible to harm. This view is linguistically allowable because the language of "casting outside" (the text of v. 2 reading literally "the court outside the temple, cast it out [Greek *ekbale*] and do not measure it") can also refer to God's true people who are rejected and persecuted by the unbelieving world (cf. Matt. 21:39; Mark 12:8; Luke 4:29; 20:15; John 9:34–35; Acts 7:58). The significance of the measuring means that their salvation is secured, despite physical harm. This is a further development of the "sealing" of 7:2–8. In the OT generally, "measuring" was metaphorical for a decree of protection (e.g., 2 Sam. 8:2; Isa. 28:16–17; Jer. 31:38–40; Zech. 1:16) or of judgment (e.g., 2 Sam. 8:2; 2 Kgs. 21:13; Lam. 2:8; Amos 7:7–9).

The "measuring" is best understood against the background of the prophecy of the temple in Ezekiel 40–48. There, the sure establishment and subsequent protection of the temple are metaphorically pictured by an angel measuring various features of the temple complex (in the Greek text of Ezekiel, virtually identical Greek words for "measure" are used: the verb occurs

about 30 times and the noun about 30 times). In Rev. 21:15–17 an angel, in dependence on the same Ezekiel text, uses a “measuring rod” (as in 11:1) to measure the city, its gates and its wall. There, the measuring of the city and its parts portrays the security of its inhabitants against the harm and contamination of unclean and deceptive people (so 21:27). Jewish and Gentile Christians will compose this temple community (as is evident from 3:12; 21:12–14 [the apostles representing the church from every nation]; 21:24–26; 22:2). What is figuratively established by the measuring in Ezekiel and Revelation 21 is the infallible promise of God’s future presence, which will dwell forever in the midst of a purified community.

In Revelation 11, the “measuring” connotes God’s presence, which is guaranteed to be with the temple community living on earth before the Lord’s return. This means that the faith of God’s people will be upheld by His presence, since without His living presence there can be no living faith. In ch. 11, this means that the promise of God’s eschatological presence begins with the establishment of the Christian community. Even before the church age began, God made a decree which secured the salvation of all people who would become genuine members of the church (see further on the meaning of the sealing in 7:3).

If the literal view of the temple, altar, and city were correct (the first two views described above), then John would be distinguishing believing Jews (in the sanctuary) from the nation of unbelieving Jews (the outer court). But one difficulty with this is that no distinction between believing ethnic Jews and unbelieving ethnic Jews clearly occurs anywhere else in the book. With regard to the fourth view, it is unlikely that the outer court would represent pseudo-believers (either Jews or the apostate church), because the following context of ch. 11 yields no hint of apostates or compromisers but only contrasts true witnesses with those who persecute them. Another theological objection to the futuristic literalist view is that a future literal temple with an altar would mean the revival of the OT sacrificial system, whereas Heb. 10:1–12 affirms that Christ’s sacrifice typologically fulfilled and abolished that system forever. The response that such future sacrifices will be mere memorials of Christ’s sacrifice is unconvincing. The fact that the temple prophesied in Ezekiel 40–48 includes a sacrificial system must be reinterpreted in the light of Heb. 10:1–12.

Consequently, some form of the last view described above is most plausible. The outer court of the Jerusalem temple did not have a completely negative function. This outermost portion of the Herodian temple was designed for “God-fearing” Gentiles. But, as noted above, it is the eschatological temple of Ezekiel 40–48 which is the focus here. In this case, the contrast would be between the innermost sanctuary and the outer court, which was intended for the Israelite worshipers. If John has the context of Ezekiel in mind, then it is unlikely that he is now affirming that, contrary to Ezekiel’s expectation, part of the real end-time temple will be inhabited by unbelievers and idolaters. Rather, the bodies of those whose souls are a part of the invisible temple will undergo degrees of suffering. However, their souls will not be contaminated with idolatrous influences, so that they remain believers. Christ’s work is now the dominant interpretative lens through which to understand OT expectations. In Rev. 11:1–2, the temple of the church is being patterned after the cross of Christ, who is the true temple. Just as Christ suffered, so the church will suffer and appear defeated. Nevertheless, through it all, God’s

tabernacling presence will abide with believers and protect them from any contamination leading to eternal death. God's abiding presence also guarantees them ultimate victory.

In 11:1, the focus is now on the whole covenant community dwelling in a spiritual temple in which God's presence dwells (so also 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21–22; 1 Pet. 2:5). What Ezekiel prophesied has begun to find its real, true fulfillment on a spiritual level, which will be consummated in fuller form physically and spiritually in a new creation (see on Rev. 21:1–22:5). Christians, who are identified with Christ, are also presently identified with the temple. Without exception, “temple” (Greek *naos*) elsewhere in Revelation refers not to a literal or historical temple, but either to the heavenly temple of the present (7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5–6, 8; 16:1, 17) or to the temple of God's presence dominating the new age of the future (3:12; 21:22). This usage points to the same identification in 11:1–2: the people of God who are members of God's temple in heaven are referred to in their existence on earth as being in “the temple of God.” Already in John 2:19–22, Christ identified His resurrection body as the true temple, and this is developed in Rev. 21:22 (likewise Mark 12:10–11 and parallels). There John says he “saw no temple” in the new Jerusalem “for the Lord God ... and the Lamb are its temple.” There is no reason to limit this identification to the new, future Jerusalem, since the identification began to be made when Christ was resurrected, and the resurrected Christ is the central feature of the heavenly temple scene in 1:12–20.

The “altar” refers to the way God's people now worship in the community. In line with 6:9–10, the altar connotes the sacrificial calling, which entails suffering for their faithful witness (as affirmed by 6:3–9; see on 6:9–10). In fact, the Greek word here for “altar” (*thysiastrion*) can be translated as “the place of sacrifice.” The picture of Christians portrayed as worshiping in a spiritual temple as priests at an altar is similar to 1 Pet. 2:5 (believers as “living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices”). Indeed, Rev. 1:6 and 5:10 (on which see) allude to the same OT text (Exod. 19:6) as 1 Pet. 2:5 in identifying Christians as priests (cf. Heb. 13:9–16, where believers have an altar, i.e., Christ, through which they offer up sacrifices to God).

If the temple signifies the church dwelling in the midst of Christ's and God's presence, the outer court (which is part of the temple) must therefore represent the church in its exposure and vulnerability to the world system in which it lives. The “holy city,” which is to be trodden underfoot (v. 2), is equated with the outer court. In Revelation, the “holy city” refers either to the future heavenly city (3:12; 21:2, 10) or to its earthly manifestation in the form of the church (20:9: “they ... surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city”). As Revelation develops, we shall see how the world system is ruled by demonic forces. Yet believers must live within it and remain physically unprotected in the midst of persecution. They will suffer as they maintain faithful witness to Christ in the midst of a pagan society, but they will be kept spiritually safe. Note that both parts of the temple (inner and outer court) belong to God, and the period of trampling down of the outer court (and the holy city) will cease, at which point all creation will be restored under the rulership of Christ.

What, then, is the significance of the **forty-two months**? If the picture here of the “temple”

and the “altar” is symbolic, then so is the time period. The reference is to the time of tribulation prophesied by Daniel (7:25; 12:7, 11–12) either as a “time, times and half a time” (three and a half years or forty-two months) or as one thousand, three hundred and thirty-five days (the equivalent). For Daniel, this lay far off in the future, but for John it has begun, starting with the resurrection of Christ and continuing until His return (see on Rev. 1:1, 7). The reason for the exact number of “forty-two” here and in 13:5 is likely to recall the same time of Elijah’s ministry of judgment (Luke 4:25; Jas. 5:17; see on 11:6) and Israel’s entire time of wilderness wandering after the Exodus, which encompassed a total of forty-two encampments (so Num. 33:5–49). This is reinforced by possibly reckoning forty-two years for the Israelites’ total sojourn in the wilderness, since it appears they were in the wilderness for two years before incurring the penalty of remaining there for forty years until the death of the first generation. Remember that the trumpet plagues take us back to God’s judgments on Egypt, by which His people were released into the wilderness. In 11:6–8; 12:6, 14, the community of faith is pictured as battling against a spiritual Egypt, or as being protected in the wilderness. The uses in 12:6 and 12:14 confirm that 11:1–2 alludes to an attack on the community of faith throughout the church age. In 12:6, the messianic community (= the “woman”) is protected from the dragon’s onslaught during the three and a half years by taking refuge in “the wilderness where she had a *place* prepared by God.” The picture of 12:14 is virtually identical. This “place” in which Christians are kept safe from the devil is likely none other than the invisible sanctuary of God (see 12:6, 14), since that is to be the object of attack during the three and a half years in Daniel, and since that is the idea in Rev. 11:1–2 and 12:5–6.

Rev. 12:5–6 shows that the three and a half year period was inaugurated at Christ’s resurrection, since the “woman” (the covenant community”) flees directly on the heels of the resurrection, and that time of fleeing commences the three and a half years (there is no hidden long time gap between v. 5 and v. 6, as contended by some futurists). This three and one half year time will be consummated at Christ’s final coming (see on 12:5–6; cf. 14:14–20). 11:2 indicates that the period is the time of the treading under foot of the holy city. V. 8 implies that this treading under foot and, therefore, the three and a half years, was set in motion when “the Lord was crucified” in Jerusalem, especially since the ultimate basis for the trampling—the persecution of the church—is Christ’s death. This period was inaugurated at Christ’s resurrection, and will be consummated at His final coming. Another reason that a three and a half year period is chosen to represent the church’s witness is that it is the approximate duration of Christ’s ministry. *The pattern of the narration of the witnesses’ career in 11:3–12 is intended as a replica of Christ’s: proclamation and signs resulting in Satanic opposition, persecution (John 15:20) and violent death in the city where Christ was crucified, followed by the world looking on their victim (Rev. 1:7), the world’s rejoicing (cf. John 16:20), and then resurrection and vindication by ascension in a cloud.* The prophetic precedents of Moses and Elijah point to this pattern and are alluded to in vv. 3–13 in order to fill out the pattern in more detail.

The last clause of 11:2, **and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months**, further explains the preceding clause (the significance of the **and**) concerning the casting out of the outer court. In confirmation of our above analysis of the outer court, this further explanation of v. 2b means that the outer court should similarly be identified in a positive manner as the holy

city. Therefore, the outer court is a part of the temple (the community of faith in which God dwells). As such it is the earthly expression of it. That the outer court is considered an essential part of the temple complex is suggested by the assumption in v. 2 that it was formerly under the protection of the temple walls but is now to be cast outside that protection. The “nations” who “trample” are persecutors who are not part of the true covenant community, as is clear from the way this text alludes to Isa. 63:18 (“Thy holy people possessed Thy sanctuary for a little while, our adversaries have trodden it down”) and Dan. 8:13 (“while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled”). That the “city” is measured in 21:15–17 shows its close identification with the prophesied Ezekiel 40–48 temple and, therefore, its identification with the temple in 11:1–2. Believers on earth are members and representatives of the heavenly Jerusalem. This identification of the holy city is confirmed from observing that the dragon and beast persecute the woman (= the earliest NT covenant community) and the saints throughout the church age for precisely the same time period of “three and a half years” (see on 11:3; 12:6, 14; 13:5). This background for the understanding of “trampling” and of the “city” shows that those metaphorically trampled are not being deceived or becoming apostates but represent the true community of faith undergoing persecution. In Revelation, the persecutors include both unbelieving Gentiles and Jews.

That all five descriptions (“measuring,” “temple,” “altar,” “outer court,” and “holy city”) in 11:1–2 are likely figurative and applicable to the believing community has precedent in 3:12, where five similar images are figuratively applied to overcomers: pillar, temple, God’s name, the name of the city of Jerusalem, and Christ’s new name. The names of God and of Christ on the believer indicate that believers dwell in the tabernacling presence of God and Christ, who are the true temple (see again 21:22), with which believers are also identified (as “pillars”).

3 Vv. 3–6 explain the primary purpose of the “measuring” of vv. 1–2. That is, God’s establishment of His tabernacling presence among His end-time community is aimed at ensuring the effectiveness of the community’s prophetic witness. The believers are to be prophets like the great prophets of the OT (like Moses and Elijah, so vv. 4–6). Though God’s people will suffer, He will **grant authority** to stand against the enemy. The future tenses (**I will grant authority, they will prophesy**) probably highlight divine determination instead of future time, context being the ultimate determiner of the meaning. The **two witnesses** mentioned here who prophesy are not individuals, but rather represent the corporate church in its capacity as faithful prophetic witness to Christ. We can give a number of reasons for this:

They are referred to as “two lampstands” in v. 4, which should be identified as the churches (see 1:12–2:5). The OT had prophesied that the entire eschatological community of God’s people would receive the Spirit’s gift of prophecy (Joel 2:28–32), and the early Christian community understood that this prophecy had begun fulfillment in their midst (Acts 2:17–21).

In v. 7, it states that the beast will make war on the two witnesses. This alludes to Dan. 7:21, where not an individual but the nation as the covenant community is attacked.

In vv. 9–13, it states that the whole world will see the apparent defeat of these witnesses—a statement only understandable if they are understood as the corporate worldwide church (it is unlikely that the technologies of worldwide communication, by which two individual people could be seen by all throughout the world, were in mind).

The witnesses prophesy for three and a half years (v. 3), the same amount of time that the holy city (the church) is trampled underfoot (v. 2) and the woman of 12:6 (also representing the church) and those dwelling in heaven (13:6) are oppressed.

Often elsewhere in the book, the entire community of believers is stated as the source of the testifying when “testimony” is given to Jesus (6:9; 12:11, 17; 19:10; 20:4).

The powers of both Moses and Elijah are attributed to *both* witnesses equally and not divided between them. They are identical prophetic twins.

But why two witnesses? The OT required two witnesses to establish an offense against the law (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15). Jesus also used the same principle (Matt. 18:16; Luke 10:1–24, where there are thirty-five—or thirty-six in some manuscripts—groups of two witnesses; John 8:17). So also did Paul (2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19). God sent two angels to testify to the truth of the resurrection (Luke 24:4) and to the fact that Jesus would return (Acts 1:10–11). Above all, only two of the seven churches in chs. 2–3 escaped Christ’s accusations of unfaithfulness (Smyrna and Philadelphia). That these two churches as representative of the faithful church are in mind is apparent from the identification of the “prophetic witnesses” here as “lampstands.” Thus there is pictured here the faithful remnant church who witnesses.

Further, the words “witness” (Greek *martyros*) in v. 3 and “testimony” (Greek *martyria*) in v. 7 are legal terms. At least six of the nine uses of “testimony” in Revelation refer to a witness rejected by the world, which results in legal consequences for those rejecting it (1:9; 6:9; 12:11, 17; 20:4). Like Elijah and his NT counterpart John the Baptist (2 Kgs. 1:8; Mark 1:6), the witnesses are clothed in sackcloth, emphasizing their mourning over the world’s sins, which are about to be legally judged. The OT legal background of “two witnesses” noted above and the evidence of the following verses bear out the emphasis on mourning because of judgment. The stress on judgment is apparent from the witnesses’ judicial relationship to their persecutors (especially vv. 5–6), and from the observation that their prophetic task is not to be viewed as a hopeful evangelistic campaign, as 11:13 bears out (on which see further).

4 Vv. 5–6 show that judgment is inaugurated through the witnesses themselves. But the identification of the witnesses is defined in more detail in v. 4 before the inaugurated verdict is portrayed in vv. 5–6. Even as the lampstands stood in God’s presence in the tabernacle and the temple, so the witnesses **stand before the Lord of the earth**, emphasizing that, in spite of their position on earth, they stand spiritually in God’s presence and in His heavenly courtroom. Though the prophetic witnesses live in a world of danger, they are never far from their Lord’s sovereign presence, and nothing can separate them from their secure relationship with Him. The lamps on the lampstand in Zech. 4:2–6 are interpreted as representing God’s presence or Spirit, which was to empower Israel (= the “lampstand”) to finish rebuilding the temple, despite

resistance (cf. Zech. 4:6–9). Just as lampstands were a part of Solomon’s temple, so the church is part of God’s new temple. Accordingly, new Israel, the church, as a “lampstand,” is part of God’s spiritual temple on earth, and is to draw its power from the Spirit, the divine presence, before God’s throne in its drive to stand against the resistance of the world. Indeed, the “seven lamps of fire” in 4:5 “burn” in the heavenly temple, and they are most likely set on the lampstands. Thus, the Spirit empowers the lampstands, the church. This continues the theme from vv. 1–3 of God’s establishment of His presence among His end-time community as His sanctuary, which is aimed at ensuring the effectiveness of its prophetic witness.

That the witnesses are called olive trees as well as lampstands comes from the vision of Zechariah, who saw two witnesses like olive trees standing before the lampstand (Zech. 4:12–14). The olive trees provided the oil to light the lamps. As in Revelation, Zechariah’s two witnesses (in context representing Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the king) are described as standing in the presence of the Lord of the earth (Zech. 4:14). God would provide His fruitful Spirit (the oil) and cause it to issue forth from the priest and king (the olive trees) to lead the process of successfully completing the temple.

The establishment and preservation of the true temple despite opposition has been introduced in Rev. 11:1–2, and Zech. 4:14 is a climax to a section concerning the very same topic. Just as the priest and king are in Zechariah the key vessels used by the Spirit for the establishment of the temple against opposition, so here the two witnesses are likewise empowered by the Spirit to perform the same role in relation to 11:1–2. Zechariah speaks of the two witnesses, the king and the priest, who reestablish a literal temple, whereas John sees two witnesses helping to build the heavenly temple. In contrast with Zechariah, the two witnesses are not individuals but represent the church universal. Indeed the dual kingly-priestly role of the corporate church has already been explicitly affirmed (1:6; 5:10) and will be again (20:6). The broader context of Zechariah 4 shows the richness of the connection to the present context. First, in Zech. 1:16–17 and 2:1–5, an angel “measures” Jerusalem to signify that it will surely be re-established in order that God’s house “will be built in it” (1:16), and that God “will be the glory in her midst” (2:5; cf. the measuring of the temple in Rev. 11:1–2). But, second, Satan, together with the world powers, opposed the reestablishment of God’s temple in Jerusalem (Zech. 3:1–2; 4:7), as the beast and the world oppose the witnesses (Rev. 11:5–10).

5 The purpose and effects of the “measuring” are explained further. The souls of the witnesses cannot be harmed, because they are protected by the invisible sanctuary within which they dwell: **And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth, and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed.** Therefore, the powers given to them in vv. 5–6 do not so much demonstrate outwardly their prophetic legitimation as indicate God’s spiritual protection of them. They may undergo bodily, economic, political, or social harm, but their eternal covenantal status with God will not be affected. Though they may suffer and even die, they will invincibly and successfully carry out the spiritual mission for which they have been “measured” and commissioned. The fire that **proceeds out of their mouth** is not to be taken literally but signifies the pronouncing of God’s judgment on the world’s sins, even as Christ’s similar judgment is pictured symbolically as a

sword “proceeding out of His mouth” (1:16; 19:15 [cf. likewise 2:12, 16], which allude to Isa. 11:4 and 49:2, according to which the Messiah’s mouth will be like a sword in judgment). Note God’s words to Jeremiah: “I am making My words in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it will consume them” (Jer. 5:14). The prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the need for repentance became a tool of judgment when the nation rejected the exhortation, and so it will be with the witnesses. Our interpretation of 9:17–18 (on which see) supports and is consistent with a figurative interpretation of the fire metaphor in 11:5. 9:17–18 also provides precedent for this fire metaphor being applied to an inaugurated, non-consummative judgment, which is likely the case here also.

Elijah called down fire on his enemies (2 Kgs. 1:10–12). The subtle allusion to Elijah here anticipates the explicit reference to him in the next verse. Moses’ prophetic office was also demonstrated by his ability to call down fire from heaven to judge the ungodly. The manner of judgment is now further explained: **if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed**. This is a continued allusion to Deut. 19:15–19, first referred to in v. 3 as establishing the need for two witnesses in relation to the violation of God’s law. Not only were two witnesses required in order for a just verdict, but the punishment often was to be patterned after the crime itself: “then you shall do to him just as he intended to do to his brother” (Deut. 19:19). Those who sin are to be punished by the same means they used against the victim, thus practicing the OT principle of “an eye for an eye,” which recurs throughout Revelation (11:18; 13:10; 16:6; 18:5–7).

6 The penal effect of the witnesses’ prophetic announcement of judgment is inaugurated during the period of their testimony. Not all the witnesses die from persecution, though they suffer. They inflict spiritual punishments by means of their continuing witness during persecution. Their authority is patterned after the same prophetic authority by which Elijah and Moses carried out their punitive tasks against their antagonists. The witnesses are the fulfillment of the OT-Jewish expectation that the prophets Moses and Elijah were to come again before the end of history to restore Israel and to judge the ungodly. Indeed, in Mark 9:4–7 Moses and Elijah, as the two witnesses legally needed, appear on the mountain to bear witness that Jesus is the Son of God. The allusion to the two prophets may imply that the witnesses testify to that toward which the law (represented by Moses) and the prophets (represented by Elijah) ultimately pointed. The comparison to them here, especially in light of their connection to Israel’s restoration, indicates that the church is the fulfillment of the latter-day restoration of Israel prophesied throughout the OT.

The specific reference here is first to Elijah’s power to withhold rain from the earth (1 Kings 17–18): **These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying**. The second reference is to Moses’ ability to turn water into blood (Exod. 7:17–25): **and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood**. The same kind of power is carried over into this verse, except the focus is no longer on either individual prophets or kings, and the power is not expressed in literal drought or in literal water turning into blood. Now the whole prophetic community of the church executes afflictions against the

antagonistic idolaters and reprobates who persecute them.

The first five verses of ch. 11 have been rich in symbolism—angels measuring, the temple, olive trees, lampstands, and fire coming out of mouths. Likewise v. 6 is symbolic; the ceasing of the regular order of the course of nature in the heavens is likely not literal but refers to all those divinely-ordained events intended to remind the persecutors that their idolatry is folly, that they are separated from the living God and that they are already experiencing an initial form of judgment.

The three and a half year period of the witnesses' ministry corresponds to the same time period of Elijah's ministry of judgment by drought (1 Kgs. 18:1; Luke 4:25; Jas. 5:17). It is interesting to note that in Luke 9:51–56 the disciples want to copy Elijah by calling down fire upon some Samaritan villagers. Jesus rebukes them, but in the next chapter sends out thirty-five (thirty-six in some manuscripts) groups of two (legal) witnesses to declare the judgment of God as well as His mercy through the proclamation of the gospel. Likewise, the two witnesses in John's vision here declare the judgment of God not by calling down literal fire, a practice no longer suitable in the gospel age, but by declaring the gospel and the consequences of disobeying it. The church's prophetic declaration of God's truth concerning the gospel, including the message of final judgment, unleashes torments toward those ultimately impenitent (just as were the kings whom Moses and Elijah confronted). The torments anticipate the last judgment and harden the reprobate in their sinful stance, making them ever more ripe for the punishment of the great day. These are torments which primarily affect the spiritual realm of a person, especially plaguing their conscience. This is evident from 11:10, where the earth-dwellers rejoice because of the death of the prophets who "tormented" them. This means the earlier effect of their ministry caused the hardened ungodly to be dismayed over their desperate plight. Perhaps Felix is an example of the kind of torment suffered by the unrighteous when they reject the gospel message: Paul "was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come," and Felix sent Paul away because of fear and resentment of the truth (Acts 24:25).

The plagues the witnesses bring are closely related to the trumpet plagues, which in turn are rooted in the plagues of Exodus. In both cases, the judgments are described as "plagues" (compare 8:12 ["smitten" is literally "struck by plague"]; 9:20; and 11:6). These judgments are directed against "earth-dwellers" (8:13 and 11:10) by those whose mouths are authorized or given power to pronounce judgment (9:13 and 11:6). Both include famine (8:7 [on our interpretation of that verse] and 11:6), killing (9:15 and 11:5), and harming (9:10 and 11:5). Fire comes from the mouths of executioners (9:17–18 and 11:5), water becomes blood (8:8 and 11:6), there are effects from heaven (8:10 and 11:6), and unbelievers are "tormented" (9:5–6 and 11:10). Each section—the narratives of the first six trumpets and of the witnesses—concludes with a final effect in which a specific percentage of unbelievers are killed and those remaining continue unmoved in their unrepentant stance (so 9:20 and 11:13, in both of which the phrase "the rest" occurs).

That the ungodly suffering judgment here are the same group as those suffering under the trumpet woes is evident from 10:11, where John is told to "prophesy *again*" to people throughout

the world. The parallel wording of “the witness they had maintained” in 6:9 and “they should finish the testimony” in 11:7 suggests that both passages have in view the same idea of believers who persevere in their testimony to the end and are persecuted for it. The saints in heaven requesting judgment against persecutors (so 6:10–11) are told now that the “witness that they had maintained” (6:9) and for which they suffered is itself the instrument of the initial judgment of the oppressors. The judgment of vv. 5–6, therefore, is the first *explicit* answer to the saints’ prayer of 6:9–11 and 8:3–5 for vindication and retribution against their antagonists, which the trumpet judgments imply. We concluded previously that the trumpet and seal judgments represent two visions describing the same set of events. Now it becomes clear that this section, placed as a “parenthesis” or interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets, retells the story of the trumpet and seal judgments from yet another perspective, in this case one emphasizing what happens to the church during the period between Christ’s resurrection and His return.

7 The introductory phrase **and when they have finished their testimony** shows that what follows in vv. 7b–13 is to occur at the end of history. At this time, the church will have completed its role of bearing witness to Christ before the world, and will appear defeated (so Matt. 24:9–22). V. 7 shows that the “measuring” of vv. 1–2 is for the purpose of and guarantees the successful completion of the church’s witnessing task. In 6:9, 11, during the seals vision, John was shown that a time will come when the full number of the saints to be killed on account of their testimony is completed, and this verse describes the same series of events, thus reinforcing the fact that the two witnesses represent the corporate church. Both texts portray saints being killed by an antagonistic world because of their witness-bearing. The role of witness is to be completed at an appointed time in redemptive history. This is a further connection tying the witnesses of ch. 11 with the witnesses’ prayer for vindication in 6:9–11. When their witness is completed, the faithful believers will be killed. Though they are about to be defeated in the eyes of the world (vv. 7–10), their demise will lead to the world’s final defeat (vv. 11–13). This consummate judgment of earthly persecutors is the full answer to the saints’ petition in 6:9–11.

Christ speaks to John in the same words (**the beast that comes out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them**) as the angel did to Daniel when he told him that the fourth and final beast ascending from the abyss would make war on God’s people and overcome them. Since Dan. 7:21 thus refers to an attack on the Israelite saints, here also the beast makes war, not on two individuals, but on the community of the new faithful Israel, the church. The same event will be described again in 20:7–10, where the beast makes final war against the saints and the beloved city (both phrases representing the church as a whole).

The phrase **the beast that comes up out of the abyss** does not mean that the beast is active only at the end of the age, but rather that at the end of the age his activity will come out manifestly into the open. That is, his spirit has stood behind the earthly persecutors during the course of history, but at the end he manifests himself openly in order finally to defeat the church (which is the precise thought of 1 John 2:18 and 4:3, also based on the same Danielic expectation). The beast in Daniel 7 represents an evil king and kingdom which persecute the saints, and so likewise the persecuting activity in Rev. 11:7 begins to take place through antagonistic earthly authorities. The same series of events (the final onslaught of the beast

followed by his own demise) is described in 17:8, where the beast comes out of the abyss only to go to his destruction, and again in 20:7: “when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison.”

8 This introduces the aftermath of the witnesses’ death. The picture here (**their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city**) probably indicates not a literal and complete extermination but that the true church will seem defeated in its role of witness, will appear small and insignificant, and will be treated with indignity. Though parts of the church’s voice throughout history may be temporarily silenced (as in parts of the world even today), a universal silence will fall on the church at the very end of history. And just as small groups of believers continued to exist through earlier local and temporary silencings, so a small remnant of witnesses remain in the future scenario of vv. 8ff. The continued existence of a small church is pointed to by other parallels in the book which refer to a small community of believers undergoing persecution in the period immediately preceding the final judgment (so 20:7ff.; 17:8; so also Matt. 24:15–22, 37–39). In fact, the parallels in Revelation and the Gospels indicate that if God did not defeat the church’s persecutors at this point, the church would actually be wiped out entirely. **The great city** where the bodies lie is best identified as the ungodly world, not the earthly city of Jerusalem (see further below). Without exception, the remaining uses of “the great city” in Revelation are identified with Babylon, not Jerusalem (16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21). In the OT prophets, Babylon was associated typically with the region in which God’s people lived as aliens in exile under ungodly regimes.

The **great city** is compared here to **Sodom** (because of its wickedness) and to **Egypt** (because it persecuted the saints). The city is to be understood **spiritually**, as these references indicate. This means that the city is not located in any one geographical place but is to be understood as any ungodly spiritual realm existing on earth. The last clause, **where also their Lord was crucified**, continues the spiritual description of the city begun by the identification with Sodom and Egypt. This non-literal interpretation is borne out by observing that the word “where” (Greek *hopou*) elsewhere in Revelation never introduces literal but always symbolic, spiritual geography (e.g., the “wilderness” in 12:6, 14, “heads” and “mountains” in 17:9, and the “lake of fire and brimstone” in 20:10). In this light, the world-city is also spiritually like Jerusalem, which had become like other ungodly nations, and even worse, by killing Christ. In John’s time, the reference to “the great city” would be primarily to Rome and any of its allies, since it was the center of the ungodly empire which persecuted God’s people at that time.

9 The universal, negative identification of the city argued for in v. 8 is indicated further by the worldwide reference to unbelievers once in v. 9a and twice in v. 10. These are the citizens of the ungodly city, those who walk its global street. The universal formula (**the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations**) shows that the sardonic onlookers are those who live throughout the earth. The picture of those who **look at their dead bodies** continues the hyperbole of v. 8a that the church will seem defeated in its role of witness, appearing small and insignificant. The word “body” is actually in the singular in both v. 8 and v. 9a, though it is plural in v. 9b (the earth-dwellers **will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb**). The likely reason for the singular is to connote the corporate nature of the witnesses. They are one “body” of Christ

who witness, but they are also many witnesses scattered throughout the earth, as is evident elsewhere in the book. A similar phenomenon occurs in 12:4–5, 13, 17, where the Christ child and those who “hold to the testimony of Jesus” are both identified as the offspring of the woman (see further on those verses). The three and a half day period during which they observe the bodies evokes the period Christ was in the tomb (though He lay in His tomb for only three days). Therefore, just as the three and a half year duration of Jesus’ ministry is the same as the course of the witnesses’ ministry (11:2–3), so also the time of His apparent defeat at the end of His ministry is similar to the conclusion of the witnesses’ period of testimony. The short half week of **three and a half days** is also a contrast to the long yearly half week of three and a half years (11:3; 12:14; 13:5). The contrast is meant to emphasize that the antichrist’s victory is brief and insignificant in comparison to the victorious testimony of the witnesses.

10 The beginning and end of v. 10 refer to those throughout the world who look on the witnesses’ corpses as **those who dwell on the earth**. This is a technical phrase repeated throughout the book for unbelievers who suffer under incipient divine judgment because they persecute God’s people (3:10; 6:10; 8:13, etc.). The phrase refers exclusively to idolaters in chs. 13–17 (so 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6–9; 17:2, 8; cf. also 8:13 with 9:20). Idolaters are called “earth-dwellers” because they are people who ultimately trust in some aspect of the world and not in God (see discussion of the phrase in 6:17). The earth-dwellers **rejoice ... and make merry; and ... send gifts to one another** when the witnesses are defeated, because part of the witnesses’ message is that rejection of Christ amounts to idolatry and will be punished by judgment (Acts 17:30–31; 1 Thess. 1:8–10), a message that **tormented those who dwell on the earth**.

11 God restores the witnesses to Himself after their apparent defeat at the end of the church age: **And after the three and a half days the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet**. The wording here is taken directly from Ezek. 37:5, 10, where the breath represents God’s Spirit and where the picture of physical resurrection signifies spiritual resurrection (especially in the light of Ezek. 36:26–27). Probably the spiritual resurrection of Israel comes to represent here the spiritual resurrection of the church (Ezekiel himself likely would have thought implicitly that spiritual resurrection inevitably leads to a final physical resurrection). This resurrection vindicates the authenticity of the witnesses’ testimony. God now also vindicates the remaining community of believers by destroying their oppressors (so 20:7–10, which not coincidentally is based on Ezekiel 38). At the least, the ascent of the witnesses affirms a final, decisive deliverance and vindication of God’s people at the end of time. Indeed, if the two witnesses symbolize persons and their actions are symbolic (e.g., sending fire from their mouth, shutting up the sky, etc.), then both their martyrdom and their ascent into heaven are probably symbolic. Ezek. 37:10–13 refers to restored Israel as “an exceedingly great army ... the whole house of Israel ... My people.” Since Ezekiel prophesies the restoration of a *faithful nation* back to God, John sees the fulfillment in *all the faithful of the church*, and not merely in two faithful individuals. As a result, **great fear fell upon those who were beholding them**. This is not a genuine fear of God but is like the Egyptians’ fear when they beheld the unexpected plagues and the Israelites’ deliverance through the afflictions (Exod. 15:16; Ps. 105:38). Such a strong echo of the exodus would not be out of place here, since the plagues

performed through Moses have been alluded to in 11:6, and the Exodus plague background stands behind much of the narration of the trumpets in chs. 9–10.

12 The description of the witnesses' deliverance continues: **And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up into heaven in the cloud.** *If* this verse indicates a literal physical "rapture" (a taking of the witnesses out of the world), such an event would occur immediately before the final judgment (with no "tribulation" or "millennium" to follow), because the very next event (see v. 15) is the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the end of history. In this case, the vision would simply reveal that God's last act before consummating the destruction of the world and bringing about the return of His Son would be the taking up of the church. However, the wording is so closely parallel to 4:1 (where John beholds a door standing open in heaven and hears a voice saying, "Come up here"), that this similarity points to a different meaning than a physical rapture. There, the angelic voice commands John to come up to heaven. Both this verse (representing John's recommissioning) and John's original commissioning in 1:9–11 (as well as John's additional experiences as recorded in 17:1–3 and 21:9–10) are based on Ezekiel's repeated "raptures" in the Spirit (Ezek. 1:28–2:2; 3:12–14, 23–24; 11:1–5; 43:5), where the Spirit lifted the prophet up and carried him away in a spiritual, not physical sense (though 11:1–5 could be debated, but it likely refers to the invisible spiritual dimension). Ezekiel was not physically raptured, but received visionary experiences, much as Paul did when, according to 2 Cor. 12:1–4, he ascended to the third heaven. One further parallel between chs. 4 and 11 is the preceding description in 11:11, the "breath [i.e. Spirit] of life from God came into them," which is comparable with the end of 4:2a, "I was in the Spirit," which refers to the Spirit conducting John into the invisible spiritual realm (the Spirit functions the same way in relation to John in 1:9; 17:3; and 21:10!). The heaven which the witnesses enter in 11:12, therefore, is an invisible dimension of reality not seen with the eyes of this world. This is a spiritual, not physical, transport, since all the other uses of the Spirit coming on people in Revelation (see just above) refer to a spiritual transport into an unseen dimension.

The reason for identifying John's rapture with that of the witnesses is partly also that the third, repeated prophetic commission in ch. 10 is applied generally to the witnesses in ch. 11. The cloud in which they ascend and from which **they heard a loud voice from heaven** speaking in 11:12 is to be identified with the cloud of 10:1, in which the angelic Christ descended from heaven and appeared to John and from which "he cried out with a loud voice" (10:3). Both John (10:11) and the witnesses (11:3, 10, 18) exercise a prophetic commission in announcing judgment to "many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (10:11).

The "cloud" in the Bible refers to the presence of God (or Christ) with His people (Exod. 13:21–22; Num. 14:14; Deut. 1:33; Ps. 78:14; Isa. 4:5; Ezek. 1:4; Dan. 7:13; Matt. 17:5; 24:30; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34–35; Acts 1:9). The significance of the church going up to heaven in a cloud, therefore, is primarily the church's vindication and acceptance by God. The world has rejected the witnesses' message of prophetic judgment and salvation (vv. 4–10). But at this time, just as Christ was vindicated by resurrection and ascending on a cloud (Acts 1:9–11), Christ will finally vindicate His people similarly to demonstrate to all that they were true prophets (that the

voice is Christ's is implied by the parallel with 1:10–11 and 4:1–2). The persecutors perceive this divine seal of prophetic approval and are plagued by fear, because they have now realized that the prophets' announcement of judgment was not empty but will come to pass. Exactly in what way God vindicates the witnesses before the world is not clear in the text itself (though we have argued that the text is focusing on the spiritual facet of resurrection). But the point of the narrative is not the precise form of vindication, but the revelation that the witnesses are God's true representatives, who speak on His behalf.

13 The judgment of which the witnesses spoke commences immediately after the wicked see the vindication of those they had misjudged. The judgment is described in the form of a **great earthquake**. This phrase is virtually identical to those in 6:12 and 16:18, which are the only other occurrences of the word combination and which both describe the last judgment. If we have been correct in saying that the events of 11:11–13 transpire at the conclusion of world history, then the parallels with chs. 6 and 16 confirm this. Just as the “great earthquake” in 6:12 marked the beginning of the last judgment, which was consummated by the following seventh seal, so the **great earthquake** of 11:13 indicates the initial phase of the same final judgment, which is consummated by the following seventh trumpet. The wording comes from Ezek. 38:19, where the “great earthquake” refers to the final judgment of Gog at the end of history when it attempts to exterminate restored Israel. The reference to Ezekiel 38 is natural, since it comes directly after Ezekiel 37, which explains Israel's restoration through the picture of resurrection. There is a direct parallel to the restoration of the two witnesses representing the church, which is restored Israel (Rev. 11:11–12), and the subsequent earthquake destroying the latter-day persecutors of the church. The allusion to Ezek. 38:19 associates v. 13 with the final denouement, since that appears to be the obvious interpretation of Ezek. 38:19–23 and how John uses Ezekiel 38–39 in 19:17 and 20:8–9.

The partial effect of the earthquake indicates that this is but the beginning of the last judgment: **a tenth of the city fell; and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake**. Both numbers are likely figurative; if the two witnesses are identified with the seven thousand faithful associated with Elijah, an “eye for an eye” retribution may be symbolically signified. As to the rest, they were **terrified and gave glory** to God. This could mean a mass repentance, for “giving glory to God” elsewhere in Revelation always refers to sincere worship. Yet the word **terrified** (Greek *emphobos*) is never used in Scripture of fear of the Lord, but simply refers to the human emotion of fear. The ministry of the witnesses (the church) is patterned after Christ's own ministry. At Christ's resurrection, there was an earthquake, an angel descended from heaven and the guards shook like dead men. Here, at the vindication of the righteous, there is also an earthquake, an angelic voice speaks from heaven, and those who observe it are terrified. “Giving glory to God” in the OT sometimes describes the response of unbelievers who, like the guards at the empty tomb, are forced to acknowledge God's reality rather than willingly submitting to it (Josh. 7:19; 1 Sam. 6:5). The phrase may go back to Nebuchadnezzar's giving praise and honor to God in Dan. 2:46–47 and 4:37 since he represents Babylon, the forerunner of the end-time Babylon of v. 13. Yet at the same time that Nebuchadnezzar honored God (Dan. 2:46–47), he carried on worshiping idols (Dan. 3:1). While Rev. 11:13 could be taken to refer to repentance or non-repentance, the fact is there is no indication elsewhere in Revelation, and particularly in the

parallel visions of seals, bowls, and trumpets, of a last-minute mass conversion of the lost, so on balance it is better to see a reference here to a fear-induced acknowledgment of God's reality, rather than to an expression of saving faith.

The **tenth of the city** which fell and the **seven thousand** killed suggest that God was beginning to judge a significant portion of ungodly humanity, and the rest were soon to follow suit. In this respect, the judgment of the **seven thousand** so terrified the survivors that their only possible response was to accept their own imminent judgment and to acknowledge God as true sovereign in that judgment, as in 6:16–17 (as implied in Phil. 2:10–11; cf. Isa. 45:23–24). The context of judgment beginning at 8:6 up through 11:12, together with the OT background, favors an identification of the survivors as unbelievers suffering judgment. In fact, any sort of conversion would seem to be ruled out because v. 13a portrays the beginning of the last judgment rather than the repentance of the majority of “earth-dwellers.” Furthermore, the fact that vv. 11 and 12 emphasize God's vindication of the whole church at the end of the age implies that those not vindicated in vv. 11–13 are not part of God's people. In addition, the primary purpose of the prophets' witness in vv. 3–6 appears to be not to induce repentance but to “torment” (so v. 10). They are God's agents executing the beginning of His judgment on recalcitrant humanity (see on 11:5–6). This is not to deny, of course, that some will respond in repentance.

The earthquake imagery of v. 13a, therefore, marks the beginning of the final punishment, which is consummated by the earthquake imagery of the last judgment in 11:19. The fact that the seventh trumpet, which includes a description of the last judgment (11:18), follows on the heels of 11:13 confirms this conclusion, especially since the earthquake imagery of 11:19 is the climax of the seventh trumpet itself.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON 11:1–13

On the implications of divergent interpretations of Revelation. Vastly different interpretations exist regarding the identity of the temple and the outer court in vv. 1–2. These divergences illustrate how dramatically opposite conclusions can be drawn from a text in Revelation, depending on one's interpretive framework. In thinking through these differences, what implications emerge for understanding God's plan for the church in history and for Israel in history? What are the implications for our understanding of the historical timeframe Revelation refers to?

On the temple as a unifying theme in Scripture. The concept of the temple (representing God's presence) is one of the central themes of the Bible (see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004] for a fuller perspective on this subject). On the basis of the interpretation of the unifying theme of the temple as given in the commentary, how do you see the interrelationship of Ezekiel 40–48; Rev. 11:1–2; and Revelation 21–22?

On the church's suffering and hope. Consider this statement from the commentary: “The pattern of the narration of the witnesses' career in 11:3–12 is intended as a replica of Christ's: proclamation and signs resulting in Satanic opposition, persecution (John 15:20) and violent death in the city where Christ was

crucified, followed by the world looking on their victim (Rev. 1:7), the world's rejoicing (cf. John 16:20), and then resurrection and vindication by ascension in a cloud." In what way do vv. 3–12 give us a basis for a theology of suffering? In doing so, how do they give us also a basis for hope in the midst of suffering?

On dependence on the Holy Spirit. The commentary presents the two witnesses (representing the church) as standing in God's presence even while suffering. They draw their strength from the Spirit. The oil from the olive trees and the light from the lamp flow through them, empowering their witness to the unbelieving world. This paints a picture of the church's need for utter dependence on the Holy Spirit. To what degree are we personally dependent on the Spirit? In what measure are our churches dependent? How do we express this dependence? What is the role of personal and corporate prayer? One thing is for sure: when the time of testing or opposition comes, the degree of our dependence will be revealed.

On the wickedness of the nations and the judgment of God. According to the commentary, this chapter paints a picture of a severely persecuted church apparently falling prey to the attacks of its enemies especially in the time immediately before the return of Christ. This seems a discouraging message, but is there a silver lining to it when seen from God's perspective? Revelation compares the church to Israel making its way through the wilderness on its way to the promised heavenly land. According to Gen. 15:16, Israel could not possess the Promised Land until the "iniquity of the Amorite" was complete. Is there a parallel to this thought here? That is, the very hour when wickedness is complete releases both the judgment of God upon the lost and the entrance of the church into its eternal inheritance.

The seventh trumpet: God establishes the consummated kingdom and executes the consummated judgment (11:14–19)

14 The literary and theological parenthesis of 10:1–11:13 has ended. Therefore, v. 14 begins where 9:21 ended: **The second woe is past (9:13–21); behold, the third woe is coming quickly.** As in 9:12, the chronological language does not concern the *order of history* represented in the three woe visions, but refers only to the *order of visions* (see further on 9:12; 4:1). This means that the second vision of woe has been completed and the third is imminent. The nature of this visionary chronology explains why a description of the last judgment both in the conclusion of the parenthesis in 11:11–13 and again in the conclusion of the seventh seal in 11:18–19 is not inconsistent.

It is sometimes thought that vv. 15–19 do not make up the seventh trumpet (or third woe), but introduce it and are anticipations of it. No action is portrayed by the blowing of the seventh trumpet, but only songs declaring a series of actions that are not specifically described. Some think that chs. 12–14 lead up to the seven bowls of ch. 16, which constitute the third woe. Some think chs. 12–14 themselves describe the third woe, and still others view all of chs. 12–21 as the content. In contrast to the above views, we see 11:15–19 as an explanation of the consummation of history, since 10:7 has announced that when the seventh trumpet sounds, God's accomplishment of His plan for history "is finished" (see on 10:7). It is reasonable to assume that 11:15–19 is the third woe, since the announcement has been made in 8:13 that the following three woes will all be equivalent respectively to the last three trumpets. If 11:15–19 is the seventh trumpet, then 8:13 has clearly said that it is also the third woe. The songs of the section

depict actions of judgment and redemption and are not merely an anticipation of such actions. The descriptions are not detailed because they began in 6:12–17, and John knows that more descriptions of the same events will come later. A song can depict the content of a woe or trumpet as well as a vision can (e.g., 5:8–10 is a hymn narrating past events). Still, some think that vv. 15–19 cannot be the woe of the seventh trumpet because there is so much emphasis on the establishment of the kingdom instead of the severity of judgment. But the emphasis of this section lies not only on the kingdom but also on the woe of the final judgment (vv. 18–19), which demonstrates that the consummated, eternal kingdom of God has finally appeared on earth.

15 The third woe is the seventh trumpet, both of which are described in vv. 15–19. The proclamation here is that **the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ**. This can be said because the enemies of God’s kingdom have all been defeated and judged (so 11:18). God now takes for Himself the rule which formerly He permitted Satan to have over the world. The seventh trumpet of 11:15–19, like the seventh seal and seventh bowl, narrates the very end of history. The consummated fulfillment of the long-awaited messianic kingdom prophesied in the OT has finally come to pass (12:10 makes the same point). The past tenses in this verse appear to be a projection into the future, when the kingdom has been established and the heavenly host offers praise in response. In this case, the past tenses are actual descriptions of past actions, but from the perspective of the future.

It is not clear whether it is the Lord or Christ who **will reign forever and ever**. It may well be that the singular includes both God and Christ together. The picture here is the same as that shown to Daniel, where the evil kingdoms of the world are defeated and handed over by the Ancient of Days to the authority of the Son of man, who then reigns forever. That the eventual transference of power (from the rule of evil to the rule of God) pictured in Daniel 7 is in mind is already indirectly apparent from v. 7. There allusion was made to Dan. 7:3, 21 concerning the antagonistic world kingdom which will persecute the saints, which Dan. 7:13–14, 18, 22, 27 says will be replaced by the reign of the Son of man and the saints.

16–17 The **twenty-four elders** around God’s throne **fell on their faces and worshiped God** in response to the heavenly proclamation of v. 15 (see on 4:4 for identification of the elders). That they are praising Him for the completed form of His kingdom is apparent from v. 18, where all the enemies of God have suffered their final defeat and judgment. The praise of the elders is similar to that of the heavenly multitude in 19:6, and refers to the same period at the end of time. God has been addressed three times in Revelation as the One who is and who was and who is to come (1:4, 8; 4:8), but in v. 17 there is a significant variation of this: God is still addressed as the One who is and who was, but instead of referring to Him as the One who is to come, He is now addressed as the One who has taken up His **great power** and **begun to reign**. Though this final consummation of the kingdom had not yet occurred when John received the vision, it had happened from the perspective of those offering the heavenly praise. This change in time perspective enforces the thought that this section is narrating the actual establishment of the future kingdom and the final judgment as the content of the seventh trumpet. This is a rule in which God not merely controls events of the world, but has defeated the spiritual and physical

powers which held “the kingdom of the world” in its sway (so v. 15). The consummate nature of the kingdom is also discerned from the emphasis on God’s reign more than on Christ’s. This suggests a parallel with 1 Cor. 15:25–28, where God’s rule is emphasized over Christ’s because the consummation of the latter’s rule has been reached.

18 It is best to see this verse as taking the reader back a step in the eschatological program to the time immediately preceding the establishment of the eternal kingdom mentioned in vv. 15–17. Nevertheless, it describes the first expression of God’s beginning end-time reign. The wicked nations are pictured as **enraged** against God and His people. God judges them wrathfully in response to their sinful outrage. The final judgment is expressed by the clause **Thy wrath came**. This is apparent from noticing that every other use of “wrath” (Greek *orgē*) in the book concerns the time of the final, great outpouring of wrath at the end of history (see 6:16, 17; 14:10–11; 16:19; 19:15). The following phrase **and the time came for the dead to be judged** confirms without doubt that this passage is a description of the last judgment. The end of v. 18 expands on the nature of the judgment. This is the same judgment of the dead as is referred to in 20:12–13, only here the reason that the dead unbelievers are to be judged is given: God will **destroy** the oppressors because they are **those who destroy the earth** (i.e., His people). The use of the same verb in describing both God’s judgment and the oppression of the godless is to emphasize once again the OT principle of the punishment fitting the crime.

The judgment on unbelievers here is patterned on the judgment of Babylon as prophesied by Jeremiah: “Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, who destroy the whole earth” (Jer. 51:25). Babylon is a type of the eschatological world community, which will be judged at the end. This ties v. 18 in with Babylon, the great city, which is destroyed in 11:13. God’s people are referred to here as being **bond-servants ... and ... the saints and ... those who fear [God], the small and the great**. That this is a fulfillment of the saints’ petition in 6:9–11 is evident from the parallel of 18:24–19:5, where, in an undeniable reference to the final judgment, God is to be praised by His *bond-servants, those who fear him, and the small and the great* (19:5) because He “judged the great harlot [Babylon] who *was corrupting the earth ... and He ... avenged the blood of His bond-servants* on her” (19:2, which develops both 6:10 and 11:18). All this shows again how the visions of Revelation describe the same set of events from different perspectives, rather than presenting a chronological listing of events.

The reward of the faithful is sandwiched literarily between the statements about judgment in order to indicate that part of their reward is the satisfaction arising from the knowledge that God has vindicated them by judging their persecutors. Again, this is linked to the prayer for retribution by the witnesses in 6:9–11. Whereas the trumpet woes and the parenthesis of 10:1–11:13 have shown how God has begun to answer that prayer in the midst of history, now He gives the climactic answer to it. The **reward** is given to **Thy bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Thy name**. These are probably three ways of describing the same group, because the entire church is identified in 11:3 with the two prophetic witnesses (which is consistent with Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:16–21). Compare also 19:10, where the angel forbids John to worship him and identifies himself simply as a fellow servant of all those who hold to the testimony of Jesus, for “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of

prophecy”—to testify or be a witness to Jesus is in some way to be a prophet. The **reward** is the saints’ deliverance, their reception of a position of reign with Christ and the accompanying blessings (cf. 22:12).

19 Another note of the final judgment is struck, commencing with the phrase, **And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened**. The portrayal of the seventh trumpet closes in v. 19 with the mention of **flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake**, which in Revelation are always indicators of the final judgment (4:5; 8:5; 16:18). Recall that the trumpet plagues are modeled on the plagues of Exodus. The seventh trumpet may be built around a segment from the Song of Moses in Exod. 15:13–18. There God is praised for redeeming His people by guiding them *to His holy habitation* (corresponding here to His **temple ... in heaven**). When the “nations” heard about this deliverance, they became “enraged” (Exod. 15:14 LXX), but, in spite of this, God brought His people into His “dwelling” and “sanctuary” (15:17). After this, the declaration is made that “the Lord shall reign forever and ever” (15:18; see the verbatim parallel in Rev. 11:15). Such an allusive reference would be an appropriate way to conclude the series of trumpets, since the first six have been modeled on the Exodus plagues leading up to Exodus 15.

It is fitting that the trumpets should be concluded with a reminder of the pattern displayed in both the entrance of the Israelites into the Promised Land at Jericho and the entrance of the saints into the eternal kingdom. The seven trumpet plagues are followed by an earthquake and the victory of God’s people. Likewise at Jericho, trumpets were blown on six successive days, and then on the seventh and last day the trumpet blasts brought the wall down. The appearance of **the ark of His covenant** along with the trumpet also points back to Jericho, where the ark followed the trumpets, declaring both God’s judgment and His victory. The ark represents not just God’s judgment, but is also the place of forgiveness and of God’s presence with His people. The OT did not expect a literal reappearance of the ark, but rather looked forward to a reappearance of God’s presence in Israel’s midst (as clarified by Jer. 3:14–17), which was what the ark originally represented. This is the idea in Rev. 11:19, which is expanded on in 21:3, 22, where the establishment of the end-time temple is interpreted as God’s special revelatory presence in the midst of His people. At the consummation, God dwells with His people in a more complete and intense manner than previously, as indicated by the observation that the curtain separating the ark from the rest of the temple and people in the OT is now gone in 11:19, the heavenly ark being in full view. Therefore, the ark in 11:19, in the light of its multiple OT backgrounds, is a suitable symbol to indicate the simultaneous judgment and reward of the Last Day. And so the full answer to the saints’ petition for vindication in 6:9–11 is revealed in 11:15–19.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON 11:14–19

The nature of our reward. The commentary speaks about the reward of the faithful in relation to v. 18. How often do we as Christians think about eternal life and heaven in terms of reward? What is the nature of our reward? Is the downfall of our persecutors the greatest reward we can look for? Should we look for that downfall as an end in itself? Does it not merely serve another purpose in terms of the revelation of

God's glory in the manifestation of His fulfilled rule over all creation?

Forgiveness and justice. Consider the following statement in the commentary: "The ark represents not just God's judgment, but is also the place of forgiveness and of God's presence with His people." We live in a culture which too often emphasizes forgiveness at the expense of justice, but in doing so have we lost a true understanding of both? Would you agree that the question of how God can be both forgiving and just is only truly understood through the cross? Why is this true?³

³ Beale, G. K., & Campbell, D. H. (2015). *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (pp. 213–240). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.