

Praise for God's Eternal Reign

Bible Background • Revelation 11

Printed Text • Revelation 11:15–19 | Devotional Reading • Revelation 1:9-17

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will DEFINE the nature of God's reign for eternity; REFLECT on how God's eternal reign affects our faith; and ENGAGE in activities that reflect the sovereignty of God in healthy, powerful, and transforming ways.

In Focus

There was a lot of buzz in the halls; the merger had been publicly announced, and the company's new owner was visiting each of the recently acquired subsidiaries. Today, he was in town to meet the staff at this site.

Phil tried to concentrate on the report he was writing on a looming deadline, but he had to stop. An announcement came instructing everyone to go to the large multipurpose room for a question-and-answer session.

At the front of the room, Phil saw the division vice president looking both grim and relieved. Grim because financial pressures had made the company vulnerable to the takeover, but relieved because the new owning company had a track record of adding resources to help its acquisitions grow.

For his part, Phil liked where he worked; the job fulfilled him professionally and offered time to continue his outside interests, like volunteering at his church's food pantry and singing with the choir. He had left his previous job because it didn't respect his need to devote time to serve the Lord through these activities. But this new company had a reputation for honoring its employees' work-life balance—a directive from the top. When the new owner entered the room, the vice president stood and applauded, leading the group of employees to do likewise. It was a new day at the company, and Phil smiled with hope that it would be a better one.

When have things worried you, but then turned out for the better?

Keep In Mind

"The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever." (from Revelation 11:15, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Sounded (v. 15) *salpizo* (Gk.)—Blast, specifically, blowing a trumpet

B. Destroy (v. 18) *diaptheiro* (Gk.)—To thoroughly destroy, corrupt, or contaminate

Say It Correctly

Terrestrial. tuh-RESS-tree-al.

Enoch. EE-nok.

KJV

Revelation 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

16 And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,

17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O LORD God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

NLT

Revelation 11:15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: "The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever."

16 The twenty-four elders sitting on their thrones before God fell with their faces to the ground and worshiped him.

17 And they said, "We give thanks to you, Lord God, the Almighty, the one who is and who always was, for now you have assumed your great power and have begun to reign.

18 The nations were filled with wrath, but now the time of your wrath has come. It is time to judge the dead and reward your servants the prophets, as well as your holy people, and all who fear your name, from the least to the greatest. It is time to destroy all who have caused destruction on the earth."

19 Then, in heaven, the Temple of God was opened and the Ark of his covenant could be seen inside the Temple. Lightning flashed, thunder crashed and roared, and there was an earthquake and a terrible hailstorm.

The People, Places, and Times

The Trumpet. In this section of Revelation 11, an angel sounds a trumpet and the ongoing worship around the throne enters a different phase. The sounding of the trumpet first represents God's judgment (Revelation 8:6–13). In ancient times, the trumpet would sound to call the Israelites to order and draw their attention to what may be happening at the Temple. There is even a Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23–25). The blowing of the trumpet is a signal to draw attention to God. First, His holiness, His victory, His liberty, and His guidance are all acknowledged by the trumpet. Then, of course any time there is an acknowledgment of God, there must be praise!

What are some of the things that we see or hear, that immediately call us to worship?

Background

While many traditions have encouraged a reaction of fear of this book, its actual purpose is not to elicit fear, but rather to incite an unadulterated and unhindered worship to Almighty God. The Book of Revelation largely tells the drama of the completion of God's plan played out in three separate acts: Act I featuring seals being opened, Act II featuring trumpets heralding the arrival of God's eternal kingdom, and Act III featuring bowls of judgment on those who reject God. Each act contains songs celebrating the action. Revelation 11 describes the action ending Act II, the blowing of the seventh trumpet. In verse 16 we see the four and twenty elders giving worship to God, their consecrated purpose. Not only is their position notable for seniority and designation, but the level of their praise is so intent that it sets a high standard for anyone endeavoring to attain position within the contemporary terrestrial church. Leadership is not about the robes, titles, or positions. Leadership is ultimately about worship and providing an example of complete devotion to God.

At-A-Glance

1. The Worship (Revelation 11:15–18)
2. The Wonder (v. 19)

In Depth

1. The Worship (Revelation 11:15–18)

Who are these four and twenty elders? How were they selected for their choice roles in the holiest arena, serving solely to honor, worship and adore God? This is the beauty of the Revelation. While scholars and skeptics alike may dither about the individual identities of each being that is presented here, the point is not who they are, but who God is. Whether beast, elder, or angel, their purpose is to acknowledge God, exemplifying what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Their worship begins with thanksgiving. They honor the eternal God, and they submit themselves as subject to God's judgment. They also recognize that the wicked works of this world may seem to have success for a time, but they confirm that God has the final say. This worship is not only intense, it is thorough.

Why do the elders praise God for dealing out deadly judgments?

2. The Wonder (v. 19)

In our time, extremes in weather are usually measured for their disruption to the normal flow of activities. The idea of great lightnings, thunder, earthquakes, and hail can be frightening, inconvenient, and might even ultimately prove disastrous to human or financial collateral. Yet, this worship of God precedes an eruption of what appears to be harsh weather. This is not, however, the purpose.

By recognizing God as almighty, eternal, and all powerful, the elders actually have invoked God to demonstrate His authority over all creation. Who can make lightning but God? Who can move the earth and the sky, and wring from them all their treasures? Echoing scenes from the Psalms (Psalm 96–98), John's report covers any questions on whether God is confined to heaven or restricted on earth. He is neither. He alone is God!

When have you seen evidence of God's miraculous power in your life?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why do the elders give thanks to God at this moment (Revelation 11:17)?
2. Who will be rewarded? Who will be destroyed (v. 18)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What are some examples of the angel's trumpet today, things that draw our attention back to God (Revelation 11:15)?
2. Why did the reveal of the Ark of the Covenant spark such an explosive reaction from the elements of nature (v. 19)?

Liberating Lesson

With so many people trying to fight systemic racism, generational poverty, and mass incarceration, it can be discouraging to see little progress being made. Worry and helplessness can distract us from the good news that in the end, God will bring ultimate justice. Despite what may make noise and distract us from time to time, we can be sure that only God will reign in the end. Better to start our worship now rather than to wait.

Application for Activation

We know that the powers of evil will attempt to subvert the work of God's kingdom, waging a losing battle against Him. However, we also know that only God through Christ can bring eternal peace. Believers await a time at the end of this age when evil will no longer exist, and the faithfulness of Christ's followers will be rewarded. Until that day, we must work to make God's will be done on earth as it is in His heavenly kingdom.

Begin by seeking new ways and reasons to worship God. He has proven Himself worthy in the past, and continues to do so today. If we are truly committed to exercising a lifestyle of praise and adoration to God, this world had better watch out for the worshipers!

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Revelation 11:15–19

The book of Revelation, written by John, is a prophecy—a biblical message given to God’s chosen messenger as a warning or comforting in time of crisis—sent to seven churches in the ancient Roman province of Asia. John begins by telling the church how it ought to live. He tells each church the special reward believers will receive for living holy. Each reward is pulled from the final vision of the marriage of heaven and earth.

John has a vision of God’s Heavenly throne room. He describes it with imagery from various Old Testament prophets, which believers of John’s day would have recognized and understood immediately. God is surrounded with creatures and elders and they are giving honor and allegiance to the one true creator God who is Holy. The cycles of seven (seals, trumpets, and bowls) depict God’s kingdom and justice coming here on earth as in heaven. The Lamb begins to open the scroll’s first four seals and John sees four horsemen, an image from the book of Zechariah symbolizing times of war, famine, and death. Later, John sees an angel with a signet ring coming to place a mark of protection on God’s servants who are enduring all this hardship and he hears the number of those who are sealed: 144,000 is the military census, like the one in the book of Numbers.

At another point, an angel brings John a scroll. John is told to eat the scroll, then proclaim its message to the nations just as Ezekiel was (Ezekiel 3:3). Then John sees God’s Temple and the martyrs by the altar and is told to measure and set them apart. It’s an image of protection taken from Zechariah (Zechariah 2).

Directly before today’s passage, God appoints two witnesses as prophetic representatives to the nations. John calls them lampstands, clear symbols for the churches. Then suddenly a beast appears and conquers the witnesses, killing them. God brings them back to life and vindicates the witnesses before their persecutors. The end result is that many among the nations finally give glory to the Creator God in the day of the Lord.

15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

When the seventh and final trumpet is sounded (i.e. played), all the heavenly host, angels and redeemed human spirits, join to magnify God. God had changed the entire trajectory of the enemy’s plan. He is victorious over the enemy, and the voices in Heaven are loud about it. We are not certain who these “great voices in heaven” are or represent, perhaps angels or martyrs or other creatures. What is clear is their announcement.

The time has finally come for Jesus Christ to take the Kingdom. These words are now familiar to many as the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*. This announcement is given with great expectation because we see the completeness of full possession of His authority later in John’s vision (Revelation 20). That possession, though it will be fully realized later, has begun now. We are currently living in the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

16 And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, 17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O LORD God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power and hast reigned.

From the time Jesus took the seven-sealed scroll until this very moment, every step of the way we have seen the expanding consequences. Through all of this, all of the circumstances that are happening, there has been captivating heavenly engagement and intensified enthusiasm. Now, when the seventh trumpet sounds, all that exist in Heaven and all creation breaks out with resounding praises, songs of victory.

The twenty four elders had been seated. They no longer could contain themselves with what had been revealed. In reverence and humility they rise from their seats and fall upon their faces. When Jesus took the seven-sealed scroll, the elders fell down and gave thanks and praises to God (Revelation 5), but now here it was to a much greater level. They do not simply "fall" (Gk. *pipto*, **PEEP**toe), but fall "to their faces." They humble themselves more sincerely. They do not just bow, they laid themselves on the ground. They praise the God who was and is and is to come, meaning He is forever the same (cf. Hebrews 13:8). The elders recognize and acknowledge God's right to rule and stand supreme over all the world. What a glorious day when our only king is King Jesus!

18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

Here we see all the lands in the world are angry. All will not be joyful, welcoming this sight, for there will be those who will be greeted with God's "wrath" (Gk. *orge*, oar-**GAY**). Wrath is retribution or punishment for an offense or a crime. In the Bible, this wrath can be justified or not, a feeling felt by God or by people (Ephesians 5:6; James 1:20). John is careful with his language reporting his vision, and only uses *orge* to describe God's wrath. Notably, though, the anger of the nations is described with a similar term. While the nations (and the dragon, Revelation 12:17) feel wrathful (Gk. *orgizo*, or-**GEED**-zo), only God has the power and authority to act on His justified wrath.

The wicked are about to get their due justice from God. It is a long time coming, but they are finally about to be judged by God. On the other hand, God is also passing out rewards to His people, His true servants who have been faithful to Him.

People sometimes become angry when others are being rewarded and they are not. We need never question if God is being fair with His judgments, however. The rewards (Gk. *misthos*, meece-**THOCE**) that God is dispensing are the fair wages of work done, whether good or bad. God does not play favorites. He ensures that actions are followed up with their natural, just consequences. He ensures that "small and great" alike have their equal time before the Judge. He sees those that "destroy" (Gk. *diaphtheiro*, dee-aff-theh-**EER**-oh) and enacts the same destruction on them. This is an intensified verb; simply *phtheiro* means "to destroy," but the addition of *dia-* makes it mean "to thoroughly destroy."

19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple in the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

The Tabernacle and the Temple of the Jews were copies of the actual Temple in Heaven (Exodus 25:40; Hebrews 8:5), which John now sees in his vision. Both the earthly and the heavenly Temple symbolize God's presence, and the Ark is at the very center of that symbol. As the Jews knew the Temple, God's presence was insulated from unholy mortals by many layers of architecture. Gentiles could only go into the Temple so far; women could only go a little farther. Laymen could not enter the actual Temple building, which only certain priests could do. A priest was allowed in the Holy Place

only for certain purposes, and only once a year was anyone allowed into the Holy of Holies. On that day, only the high priest would do, and even then only after he had been rigorously purified. Now, the Temple and even the Holy of Holies are kept are opened, abolishing the divides between God and man, and between the heavenly realm and earthly realm.

The thunder and lightning are reminiscent of when God's presence was on Mt. Sinai, as He communicated His Law to Moses (Exodus 19:16–19). God's kingdom has come (Revelation 11:15), so God is coming to uphold His Law, which is good for the righteous but deadly for the unrighteous. The storms, earthquake, and hail show God's power, which He uses to bless His people and punish His enemies. God used these very tools in the past, when He sent an earthquake to open the prison bars of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:26), and when He sent a plague of hail on Egypt (Exodus 9:18). Open communication between heaven and earth as John sees it here will be disruptive, but there was a time when fellowship between heaven and earth was perfect. You can see this from God communing with man as early as the Garden of Eden, and many times as He talked and instructed the prophets of old. For example, He walked with Enoch (Genesis 5:21–24), He instructed Noah (Genesis 6:13–15), and God spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:2–6,13–15).

However, because of sin, that perfect fellowship was broken, separating us from the perfect relationship with God (Genesis 3:8–11). Disobedience and sin caused us to be separated from God. But thank God for the Lamb of God, the second Adam who has redeemed us and brought us back into perfect worship between God and humanity (John 1:12). Those of us who have come into right fellowship with God can rejoice and be glad. We can celebrate and be joyous because we can worship God. We have been given a choice to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. Once we receive Him, we are put in perfect relationship with Him. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Clap Your Hands, All You Peoples
(Psalm 47)

TUESDAY

An Everlasting Kingdom
(Daniel 4:34–37)

WEDNESDAY

Glory to God Now and Forever
(Jude 1:20–25)

THURSDAY

The Lord is King Forever
(Psalm 10:12–18)

FRIDAY

God's Faithful Witnesses
(Revelation 11:3–10)

SATURDAY

The Lord is Robed in Majesty
(Psalm 93)

SUNDAY

A Crescendo of Praise
(Revelation 11:11–19)