

October 8, 2023 by Steve Brandon



He Shall Reign Forever

Revelation 11:15-19

1. The Loud Voices (verse 15)
2. The Worshiping Elders (verses 16-18)
3. The Opened Temple (verse 19)

In the 1740's Charles Jennens assembled a bunch of Bible verses together all around the theme of the Messiah. Sometime during July of 1741, he sent this compilation of Bible verses to George Frideric Handel and encouraged him to compose some music to match the words. Jennens wrote to a friend about the verses he put together: "I hope [Handel] will lay out his whole Genius & Skill upon it, that the Composition may excel all his former Compositions, as the Subject excels every other subject. The Subject is Messiah." On August 22, 1741, Handel began to put his whole Genius and Skill upon composing a composition for these Bible verses. For 24 days, Handel secluded himself in his London home and wrote music with hardly a stop in his work. It is said that he was so engrossed in his work that he hardly ate or slept during these 24 days.

What Jennens had hoped for came to pass. "The composition [exceeded] all his former compositions." What he produced is arguably the most significant and most well-known of all of his works: Handel's Messiah. So well-known is this work, that it is still performed all over the world, 350 years after its original composition. Because of the subject matter, it is especially performed at Christmas time. In fact, in Rockford (with the exception of the Covid years), it has been performed every year for more than 75 years. As a pastor, I have encouraged you all to attend their performances. They always take place during the Saturday and Sunday after Thanksgiving. This year, that's Saturday, November 25 and Sunday, November 26. Over the years, Yvonne and I have attended a handful of the performances, and hope to do so again this year.

Listening to such music is a cultural experience. The piece is played all over the planet! Now, it's difficult listening, because it's classical music, and it lasts for over two hours! But to be familiar with the music is to be familiar with some of the most famous music of Western culture. Listening to such music can be a worship experience, as every single word that is sung is a direct quote from the Bible.

The music has three parts. The first part focuses on the prophecies from the Old Testament of the coming Messiah. The second part takes you through the suffering, death and resurrection, ascension and glorification of Jesus. The third and final part of the Messiah covers the promised victory that we have in Jesus when sin is finally defeated. If you are familiar enough with the music to embrace the words and reflect upon the story that the words tell, it can be very worshipful for you.

Now the first performance of Handel's "Messiah" took place at the New Music Hall in Dublin, Ireland on April 13, 1742. It was a grand event, attended by more than 500 people, among whom was King George II of Great Britain and Ireland. At that first performance, when the "Hallelujah Chorus" began, King George II rose to his feet and everyone else in attendance followed suit! It has become a tradition to this day, that when the "Hallelujah Chorus" plays, all in the audience stand!

We don't know why King George II stood during this song. Some say that he was tired and was merely stretching his legs, taking his "Seventh Inning Stretch." Others say, and I'm more likely to believe this, that he was so moved by the majestic music, and the triumphal words attached to the of the Lord God omnipotent reigning. When the kingdom of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, of the Messiah being pronounced King of kings and Lord of lords, and reigning forever and ever and ever and ever and ever, that King George II could not help himself, but to stand at the triumphal culmination of history!

If you are familiar with this music, these words ring in your mind.

And he shall reign for ever and ever
For ever, for ever, for ever, for ever.

King of kings (for ever and ever)
And Lord of lords (Hallelujah, Hallelujah)
And he shall reign for ever and ever

King of kings and Lord of lords
King of kings and Lord of lords

And he shall reign for ever and ever
For ever and ever (King of kings)
And ever and ever (Lord of lords)

Hallelujah!
Hallelujah!
Hallelujah!
Hallelujah!

Hallelujah!

The music is magnificent! I don't think that King George II was just stretching his legs, as Handel, himself, recognized the powerful moment that this music would be when he wrote it. Legend has it that as he completed writing the "Hallelujah Chorus," a servant entered the room to find him weeping with emotion. When Handel was asked why he was crying, he said, "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, as the great God Himself."

Well, this is what we get to see this morning as we come to the Bible. We get to see "all heaven" before us, as the great God Himself. So, if you haven't done so already, I invite you to open in your Bibles to Revelation, chapter 11. We are going to begin reading in verse 15.

Revelation 11:15-19

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." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, 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. 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." 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 context in the book of Revelation is seen in verse 15, which signifies this as "the seventh trumpet." Now, if you have been with us in the book of Revelation, you know that the backbone of the book of Revelation comes in the seals, trumpets and bowls. Further, you know that there are seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. So far in the book of Revelation, we have seen the seven seals. We have seen six of the trumpets blow. But now, in verse 15, we see the seventh trumpet being blown.

Now, normally, when the seals were opened, there was some sort of judgement that came upon the earth like wars and famine and death. The same is true with the trumpets. When they were blown, there was catastrophe upon the earth. A third of the earth burned up, a third of the sea creatures dying, and a third of the heavenly lights being dimmed. But when you get to the seventh seal, nothing much happens regarding judgment because, the seventh seal is what brings on the trumpets. Likewise, when you see the seventh angel blowing his trumpet, nothing much happens regarding judgment because the seventh trumpet is what brings on the bowls, which we will see in chapter 16. Nevertheless, when the seventh trumpet blows, we see the final victory.

Revelation 11:15

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."

It is from this verse that I get the title of my message this morning: "He Shall Reign Forever" because, this is the big idea of the passage. You see it in verse 15, "He shall reign forever and ever." You see it in verse 17, "You have taken your great power and have begun to reign." As we dig into the text, I first want to look at Verse 15.

1. The Loud Voices (verse 15)

Revelation 11:15

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."

John doesn't tell us whose voices these are. They merely come from someplace. They could have been the elders, or they could have been the angels. Except, this is apocalyptic literature. These voices don't need to come from any heavenly being! They may have just been voices that John heard. The only thing we know about these voices is that they were "loud."

What a contrast with the way that the trumpets began. Do you remember Revelation 8:1, "When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." The silence was representative of the solemnity of the moment. Judgment was soon to be poured out upon the earth. Then, the trumpets were given to the seven angels in verse 2. "Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them" (Revelation 8:2).

And as the trumpets were blown, and as the judgments took place, it seemingly gets worse and worse, from killing a third of the sea creatures (Revelation 8:9) to a third of mankind (Revelation 9:15). But then comes the end, when God finally takes control of the world, becomes the king, and reigns forever and ever.

Revelation 11:15

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.

The judgment of the seals, trumpets and bowls are the ways in which God takes control of our world, destroying his enemies, so that finally he can rule and reign. In our family Bible reading, we have just come to the end of 1 Samuel. Saul has been killed by the Philistines. It is time for David to come and take his reign. How does David take his reign? By destroying all of his enemies. By destroying those who would resist his being king. At the end of 2 Samuel, when the kingdom is transferred to Solomon, how does Solomon take his reign? He destroys all of his enemies.

This is what the book of Revelation is all about! It's the story of God destroying all of his enemies so that he can reign upon the earth as the unmatched king! This is what the judgments that come in the seals, trumpets, and bowls are all about. So that his reign upon the earth can be established, and everyone who loves the Lord Jesus Christ can look at this day with fond affection. We long for the day when our Lord will rule and reign! This is why the cry of Revelation is, "Come Lord Jesus." The longing of every believer

in Jesus Christ is this: That he would come and rule and reign, not only in our hearts, but also in the world for all to see! Is this your longing? Do you pray, as Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom Come! Thy will be done!"? (Matthew 6:10). This is the answer to that prayer! When the kingdom of God comes in its finality.

Now, what is most striking about this passage is the location of this passage in the book of Revelation. It comes in the middle of the book of Revelation. Revelation has 22 chapters. Chapter 11 is half-way through the book. We see the final victory, half-way through! By the way, this is also true of the "Hallelujah Chorus." it comes at the end of part 2, with part 3 still to come. I think that this ought to help you in understanding the book of Revelation and that it's not strictly chronological with the seals, followed by the trumpets, followed by the bowls. Rather, there is some overlap in time. Not that each seal matches up with each trumpet and bowl, but they all push us toward the end of time when God establishes his reign upon the earth. We will even see this again.

In Revelation 18, Babylon is finally destroyed, once and for all. In chapter 19, we see the final Hallelujahs,

Revelation 19:1-8

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants

Once more they cried out, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever."

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great."

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Handel's Messiah ties Revelation 19 with Revelation 11 as one event! Because, that's much the way that Revelation works. It's not a linear story. It's a story that often repeats. Showing over and over of how God will someday rule the earth! His rule, when it comes, will be forever and ever.

Revelation 1:15

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.

Forever and ever is a long time! It is beyond our understanding. John Newton tried.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

When God has reigned for ten thousand years, the length of his reign has not decreased even one day. This is the message of Revelation: Who do you want to worship? Do you want to worship a president who reigns for four years? Do you want to worship a dictator who reigns for his lifetime? Or, do you want to worship the King of kings and Lord of lords, who reigns forever?

This is what Revelation teaches us: Jesus will win! He will reign forever! Are you going to be on his side? Or are you going to fall by the way of the seals, trumpets or bowl judgments? There is much talk today about being on the "right side of history." That is, living today with the cultural attitudes of the next generation. But if you really want to be on the "right side of history," then line up with the one who is going to rule and reign forever. Bow the knee to Jesus. Trust in him!

2. The Worshiping Elders (verses 16-18)

Revelation 11:16

And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God,

We have seen these elders before. In Revelation 4 and 5, we saw them around the throne, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads (Revelation 4:4). We read "the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Revelation 4:10-11).

In Revelation 5, we see much the same thing. "The elders fell down and worshiped" (Revelation 5:14). In Revelation 7, we see the same. "And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen'" (Revelation 7:11-12). Here in Revelation 11, we again see the elders worshiping the Lord. It's almost as if these beings serve no other purpose than to worship God. The other two times that we will see these elders in Revelation, they will be in the presence of God, worshiping him (Revelation 14:3; 19:4).

Verse 17 tells us the words that they use in their worship.

Revelation 11:17-18

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and who was,
for you have taken your great power
and begun to reign.
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.

The elders begin with a word of thanks to the Lord God Almighty, and they identify him as the one "who is and who was." Does this sound strange to your ears? When the Revelation describes God like this, it is usually threefold, focusing on God's past and present and future.

- Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come (Revelation 1:4).
- "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8).
- "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8).

But here, God is recognized as him "who is and who was," leaving out, "who is to come," because in Revelation 11, he came! At this point in the future, these 24 elders will point out that the Lord has come and began his reign. This is why these elders give thanks to God.

Revelation 11:17

for you have taken your great power
and begun to reign.

This has been the longing of all the saints for all time, that God would come and rule and reign! "Thy kingdom come!" "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down" (Isaiah 64:1). "Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down" (Psalm 144:5). This is the cry of the martyrs in Revelation 6:10. "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" The promise of the Scripture is that he will come and do this.

- He will shatter kings on the day of his wrath (Psalm 110:5).
- His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him (Daniel 7:27).
- Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end (Isaiah 9:4).
- The LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore (Micah 4:7).

Now, at this point in history, the longing of the saints has been satisfied. God is on the throne and has "begun to reign."

In Psalm 110, Jesus is seen as seated at the right hand, waiting until his enemies would be subdued. Psalm 110:1 The LORD said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, Until I make your enemies your footstool."

But now, in Revelation 11, this time has come. and the elders acknowledge it, and give thanks to God for doing so. In verse 18, we see the whole story:

Revelation 11:18

The nations raged,
but your wrath came

This is an allusion to Psalm 2. I mentioned this Psalm last week, because this is what we see the world doing to the two witnesses. They raged against them. But God was patient, and God had the last laugh.

Psalm 2:1-4

Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,
"Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us."

He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision"

The promise of the victory then comes.

Psalm 2:5-6,9

Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
"As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."

You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel

In Psalm 2, that was all promise of the coming kingdom. But now, in Revelation 11, John sees it all fulfilled!

Revelation 11:18

The nations raged,
but your wrath came,

You opened the seals. You blew the trumpets. Even though the bowls are yet to come in Revelation. They show up in Revelation 16. Here in Revelation 11:18, they have already come. The bowls are practically synonymous with the wrath of God. Listen to Revelation 16:1. "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." But here in Revelation 11, it is done!

Revelation 11:18

The nations raged,
but your wrath came,

The elders continue in verse 18,

Revelation 11:18

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.

This is the reality of the future: There will be a time of judgment. God will reward his servants. God will destroy the wicked. Note here how the servants of God are described: The prophets and saints. That is, the leaders of God's people, and all of God's people. The servants of God are also described as Those who fear your name. Fundamentally, this is what it means to be saved! To fear the LORD, and to realize that he is the one you need to give account do.

Jesus said, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). This is the application of my message this morning: Fear God! He is coming to rule and reign forever and ever. Be on his side of the battle. He is going to win! You will either be on his side, or you will be destroyed.

This is the eternal gospel: "Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Revelation 14:6-7).

3. The Opened Temple (verse 19)

Revelation 11:19

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.

At the beginning of chapter 11, John was told to "measure the temple of God" (verse 1). Last week, we asked the question, "What temple is this?" Was it Solomon's temple? Was it Zerubbabel's temple? Was it Herod's temple? Was it a temple that will be built soon? Perhaps it was none of these. Perhaps it was the "heavenly temple" that John saw at the beginning of the chapter. Perhaps this "heavenly temple" was the original temple that Moses was shown when he was going to build his. "For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain" (Hebrews 8:5). At any rate, John sees this temple that is opened!

The temple signifies access to God! That's the idea here of God reigning forever. Not only is God ruling and reigning in heaven, but his saints have access to him! This will be for eternity. The great promise of eternity is Revelation 21:3: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'"

This whole idea of the temple being open is the culmination of history. It's the idea that God's people will be with him. In the temple, John saw the ark of the covenant.

Revelation 11:19

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.

The ark was symbolic of how we are made right with God. It was the place of the yearly sacrifice, when the high priest would enter once a year to make atonement for the people. This one sacrifice we read about in Leviticus 16 is a symbol of the sacrifice of Jesus. This one sacrifice, for all time, for all who would believe. His single sacrifice for us.

Hebrews 9:24 says "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf." Maybe that's the symbol here of the Ark. It's Jesus coming in with the Ark, having a sacrifice right there within the temple signifying that we are made right with God. Not only can we enter his temple, but through the Ark and through the sacrifice there we can be made right with God.

Then we see all these things around that John saw.

Revelation 11:19

...There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

It sounds so much like the throne room scene in Revelation chapter 4. "From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God" (Revelation 4:5). Before the throne of God, that's what John sees! He saw it in Revelation 4 seeing what heaven is like, and now at the throne room scene, this is what he sees God to be like. In some sense, that's what God is like. Perhaps forever an unapproachable light.

Revelation 11 teaches us that God will reign forever and ever and ever and ever. We get a glimpse of what it will be like when history that eternal state. We will see this more and more as we work our way through Revelation.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 8, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.
