

Lesson 26

When we ended last week, we were discussing verse 8 of Chapter 11. As we discussed at length last week, the great city in verse 8 is, as we would have expected, the great city of Rome. Yes, Rome was a great city, but Rome was also a wicked city. And what we see next in verses 9-10 is Rome's reaction when she thinks that she has at last destroyed the church, which is what **seems** to have happened in verse 7. But, as we will see very soon, all is not what it seems!

Revelation 11:9-10

9 And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. 10 And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

Verses 9 and 10 paint a vivid portrait of the wicked world celebrating the death of the two witnesses, refusing to bury the bodies but rather rejoicing over them.

Evil men had once celebrated the death of Jesus, no doubt thinking that they had at last overcome him, and that they had finally enjoyed the last word — and yet look at what happened just a few days later — Jesus rose from the dead. The evil celebrants here in verses 9-10 are about to relive that history. Things are not what they seem! What looked like a great defeat in verse 7 turns out not to have been a defeat at all!

As we have seen before, “the people and kindreds and tongues and nations” in verse 9 are the Romans. How long does Rome gloat over the dead bodies of the two witnesses? **Three and a half days.**

What does that mean? We know what that means! We have seen that symbol before. It's a broken seven! It means the world's celebration is premature and temporary. It means their celebration will not last long. Why? Because this apparent defeat is not a defeat of the church at all, just as Jesus' apparent defeat on that cross was not a defeat of Jesus at all, but rather was the defeat of the world and of Satan, the prince of this world. **Things are not what they seem!**

Why three and a half **days** rather than three and a half **years**? The main reason is that the use of "days" stresses how temporary this apparent defeat will be and how quickly God will rescue and vindicate his people. But another reason may be to remind us of a similar time period — not a **symbolic** three and a half days, but a **literal** three days.

***Matthew 12:40** — For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

Chapter 11 is a reminder to the church that a servant is not above his master. If Christ experienced death to gain the victory, then the church should also expect to follow that same path. That is the path of every Christian. When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.

***Luke 9:23-24** — If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*

In verse 10, we see those who hate the church celebrating and rejoicing at the church's apparent demise. They treat the death of the church like a holiday — rejoicing, making merry, and even exchanging gifts! **Why?**

Why was the world so happy when it thought it was rid of the church? Verse 10 tells us: "because these two prophets **tormented** them that dwelt on the earth."

You mean the church had been tormenting people? **How? The church had been tormenting people by telling them the truth!**

***John 3:19-20** — And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For*

every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

The truth is a torment to those who live in darkness, and that certainly included the Romans. The Roman historian Tacitus called Christianity a disease!

The church will always be a torment to this world while the church is fulfilling its great commission to proclaim the truth. Yes, for those who hear and obey, the truth will set them free. But for many others, the truth will just be a continual torment — a continual reminder that, while they may be right with the world, they are not right with God. Remember the reaction to Stephen's proclamation of truth in Acts 7?

Acts 7:54 — When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

We should expect no better. The world is full of the same sort of people Isaiah described:

Isaiah 5:20-21 — Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

And such people do not want to be told that everything they believe is wrong. They do not want to hear that what they think is good is in fact evil, and that what they think is light is in fact darkness. **In short, they do not want to be told that all is not what it seems!** That message is a torment to them, and they will strike out against those who cause that torment.

Are we a torment to those living in sin today? Do we set before them an example of righteous living that is a torment to them?

Causing torment for someone is certainly not our goal — we would prefer that all repent. **But torment to some is the inevitable result of preaching the truth.** There will always be some who do not repent, and they are very likely to strike back at us. Remember that Stephen caused people to gnash their teeth on him! When was the last time we did that?

Remember — the church is not only the **light** of the world, the church is also the **salt** of the world — and salt can cause torment when it meets an open

wound. People living in sin have an open wound, unless they have become so hardened that they have no recognition at all of their condition.

We need to pause for a moment and ask a sobering question: **If the events of verse 7 happened today, would the world even know we were gone?** Remember Jesus' message to the church at Sardis.

Revelation 3:1 — I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Would the world have cared one way or the other if the church at Sardis had ceased to exist? We don't ever want to be in that condition. Our goal should be to live in such a way that the world's reaction to our apparent demise would be the same reaction we see in verse 10! **I want the wicked to throw a party when I take my exit!**

The situation looks bleak in verse 10 — but that's all about to change. Those who are celebrating and exchanging gifts in verse 10 will be in great fear in verse 11! **Why? Because things are not what they seem!**

Revelation 11:11-14

11 And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. 12 And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. 13 And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14 The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

The situation looked very bad for the church back in verse 7. In that verse, the beast from the bottomless pit had killed the two witnesses, who depicted the royal priesthood, which is the church. In verse 8, their dead bodies had lain in the street of the great city, which is Rome. In verse 9-10, the people of the earth had rejoiced over the dead bodies of the two witnesses.

But then we get to verse 11. And you know what? **For the people of God there is always a verse 11!** No matter how bleak the situation may seem, for the faithful people of God there is always a verse 11!

It looked like the church was finished. It looked like God's plan had gone off the rails just after it got started. It looked like Satan had won, and Rome, Satan's powerful tool, had triumphed. It looked like the eternal kingdom had lasted only a few decades. But you know what? **Things are not what they seem!**

What we see in verse 11 is that after three and a half days God raises the church from the dead. The two witnesses start breathing again, and they get back on their feet. **Where is the world's celebration now?** Just one verse ago, the world was making merry and exchanging gifts! What are they doing now? Verse 11 tells us — they are in great fear. My how the situation has changed!

And that's not all that has changed. Notice how the verb tenses have changed in verse 11. In verses 9-10, we read, "And they ... **shall** see their dead bodies ... and **shall** not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth **shall** rejoice over them." But in verse 11, we read, "They **stood** upon their feet." So certain is this course of events that John speaks of near future events as though they were past events.

The persecution of the church by Rome was temporary — we saw that depicted earlier by a symbolic three and a half years (a broken seven). The apparent defeat of the church is even more temporary — it is depicted here, not by three and half **years**, but by three and a half **days**.

In verse 12 and in the sight of their enemies, the two witnesses ascend into heaven at the command of a great voice from heaven. Verse 12 shows us the complete vindication of the church.

Few people saw Christ ascend into heaven, but this figurative ascension of the church occurs in full view of God's enemies. All the world now knows that the church is under God's protection.

And God is moving them to safety — which must have caused the greatest fear of all. **Just like in an old Western movie, God is looking at Rome and**

telling the church to step out of the way! Why did the church need to be moved to safety? What was about to happen? Rome was about to find out!

We should pause for a moment and talk about the **vindication** of the church. We see that happening here **figuratively** with regard to the church and Rome, but one day that will happen **literally**. One day those on God's side will **literally** ascend into the heavens to meet Christ in the air, while those opposed to God will remain on earth to see it **literally** destroyed.

That last great day will be many things — but one thing it will be is a **great day of vindication**. We live in a day in which faithful Christians are portrayed as the enemy of all that is good and loving.

- We oppose abortion, and so we are told we hate women.
- We oppose gay “marriage,” and so we are told we are unloving.
- We oppose fornication, and so we are told we are judgmental and hypocritical.
- We oppose evolution, and so we are told we are anti-intellectual and anti-science.

The world is full of people who say that darkness is light and who say that good is evil. **Will they remain forever in that condition? Will they never recognize their error?** No. One day, unless they repent and obey the gospel, they will watch as the church leaves this planet and leaves them behind to face what is coming next. On that day, when they bend their knee to Christ, they will at last understand that that which they called evil was in fact good and that which they called darkness was in fact light. **On that day the church will be vindicated!**

Now back to our text, and back to the first century: What happens in verse 13? At the same **hour** (again, we see our time frame; things are happening quickly), there is a great earthquake. Earthquakes are a common figure for judgment in the Bible, and this earthquake is no exception. A judgment is coming for those who rejoiced at the apparent defeat of the church.

Verse 13 tells us that a tenth of the city falls and seven thousand men are killed by the earthquake. As we have seen with the prior judgments in this book, only a fraction is affected. Even this judgment is not yet final. More is still on the way.

Why a tenth and why seven thousand? The destruction of a tenth is an image of decimation (which literally means to take one in ten). The use of seven thou-

sand likely foreshadows the perfect and complete judgment that is coming and that will not allow for repentance.

What about those who are not killed? Verse 13 tells us they were terrified and gave glory to God. Does this mean that finally someone was led to repentance? Did God's message finally get through to them? Can the judgment of Rome be called off as the judgment of Nineveh was called off in the days of Jonah? No.

This apparent repentance is not a real repentance. Things are not what they seem. How do we know that? Perhaps the best way is that we can just keep reading — the judgment of Rome is not called off! We are about to read all about it! Yes, we know that a few repented, but the great majority of Romans did not.

So what are we seeing in verse 13? **What we see here is not repentance, but rather is rationality!** Verse 13 doesn't tell us that they are Christians — rather what verse 13 tells us is that they are not fools! In verse 13, we see people who fear God and who give glory to God out of fear, and they were right to fear God! All verse 13 tells us that these people had **finally awakened**, not that they had **finally repented**.

What did Nebuchadnezzar say after he saw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego come out of that fiery furnace unhurt?

Daniel 3:29 — Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.

What was Nebuchadnezzar's motivation in making that decree? Was it a love of God, or was it shock and awe at what he had just seen? I think it was the latter, and we see the same motivation and the same response here in verse 13. Those who remain alive now recognize that God is going to win, and they want to be on the winning side.

Those left alive in verse 13 are not Christians. How do we know that for sure? For the simple reason that they remain on this earth. The church figuratively ascended into heaven in verse 12; the survivors in verse 13 did not. In this book, the faithful are pictured as being in heaven with God, while the wicked are repeatedly referred to as those who dwell upon the earth.

Those called the enemies of God in verse 12 remain the enemies of God in verse 13 — the difference is that now that are *astonished* enemies who are probably wondering for the first time whether they chose the winning side! Their fate remains unchanged. We are not told that they repented in any way from their murders, thefts, sorceries, and idolatries. Just a few verses earlier they were exchanging gifts to celebrate the apparent demise of the Lord's church!

There are many atheists in **this** world — but you know what? **There are no atheists in the next world.** The Psalmist tells us that it is the fool who says in his heart there is no God (Psalm 14:1). There are many such fools in this world — **but there are no such fools in the next world.** No atheist or agnostic will remain so forever! Someday all atheists will believe, and someday all agnostics will care. Someday all fools will be wise when it comes to whether there is a God. Sadly, for most, that realization will come too late.

Nikita Khrushchev once gave a speech in which he said that the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin “flew into space, but didn't see any God there.” If Yuri had really wanted to see God from his tiny space capsule out in space, all he needed to do was open the door! Nikita and Yuri are believers today, as is the recently departed Stephen Hawking. I don't know if there are any atheists in foxholes, but I do know there are no atheists in hell (only *former* atheists). We are seeing that same sort of realization here in verse 13.

Let's take a moment to review where we are: The message John is told to relay is that the church will undergo severe hardship and may at times appear to be defeated. But John's message also tells us that God is on the church's side and all will be well in the end. The church's final victory is assured.

So far, John has relayed this message in two ways: First, the city of God will be trampled under foot for three and a half years, but the church will be sustained and protected. Second, two witnesses will prophecy for three and a half years, and then be killed by the beast, but that apparent defeat is only temporary. After three and a half days they come back to life and ascend to heaven in front of all their enemies.

In Chapters 12 and 13 this message will be told again in two different ways: First, in Chapter 12, a woman will be forced to flee into the wilderness for three and a half years, yet she will find there a place of nourishment and protection. Second, in Chapter 13, a beast will overcome God's people, and yet his authority will last for only three and a half years.

As we study this book, I know that sometimes it seems I repeat myself a lot. The reason for that is that God is repeating himself a lot! The central message of this book is being told again and again through many different images and symbols.

What is that central message? God loves the church! Things may appear bleak, but the church will be victorious! God's enemies will not win, but rather they will be judged and punished! Yes, the church will follow Christ through suffering and death, but that pathway of faithfulness unto death is the pathway to a crown of righteousness! No kingdom of this world is more beautiful or more powerful than the eternal kingdom of God, and God's kingdom will sweep away all of the kingdoms of this earth, starting with Rome!

What happens next? Verse 14 tells us: "the third woe cometh quickly!" That third woe of Revelation 8:13 is the seventh trumpet. And the inspired text tells us it is coming **quickly**. The time frame that we saw in the very first verse of this book has not changed and will not change — we will see it repeated again at the end of the book.

Revelation 11:15

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.

Finally in verse 15 the seventh trumpet sounds. The first four trumpets sounded in Chapter 8. At the end of Chapter 8, the lone eagle announced the final three trumpets, and the first of those final three, trumpets 5 and 6, sounded in Chapter 9. From the beginning of Chapter 10 through verse 14 of Chapter 11 we have been in an interlude that was intended to provide comfort and assurance to the suffering saints. Now in verse 15 that interlude is over, and the seventh trumpet has just sounded.

From Revelation 10, we know that it was at this time that the mystery of God was finished.

Revelation 10:7 — *But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.*

When did that happen? We discussed that question at length in our lesson on Chapter 10. What we are looking at here with the sounding of the seventh trumpet is the end of Rome as far as God was concerned. Yes, Rome continued on beyond this point, but God was finished with Rome. Rome had served a role in God's plan, but now that role was over. With the death of Domitian, there were no more Old Testament prophecies left to be fulfilled by Rome, and so the time had come for Rome to be judged and sentenced. That view of verse 15 fits perfectly with verse 14 — “behold, the third woe cometh **quickly!**”

A great silence followed the opening of the seventh **seal** in Chapter 8. Not so with the seventh **trumpet**. The sounding of the seventh trumpet is followed by great (or loud) voices in heaven.

Most commentators think that the seventh **seal** contained (or unleashed or revealed) both the seven trumpets and the seven bowls that followed, and that the seventh **trumpet** contained the seven bowls of wrath that will soon follow in the text. **I agree with that view because of Revelation 10:7.** That verse tells us that the seventh trumpet would mark the end of Rome, and that is what we will see with the seven bowls of wrath. So it seems to me from Revelation 10:7 that this seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 must contain the seven bowls of wrath.

That view of the seventh trumpet is also supported by what the great voices say in verse 15: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” That cry is a cry of victory! Rome has been swept away by the eternal kingdom of God just as Daniel had prophesied in Daniel 2:44!

We see in verse 15 something we have seen before in this book — a statement pointing to a public manifestation of something that was already true but that was not yet apparent to everyone. Now it is apparent to everyone. Verse 15 does not mark the beginning of Christ's kingdom or the beginning of Christ's authority or reign over anyone. Instead, verse 15 shows us a public reaffirmation of that kingdom and of that authority and reign through the church's victory over a great enemy of God's people.

Some premillennialists will tell you that Jesus is not reigning as king today, but that is not what the Bible says.

Revelation 1:5 — *And from Jesus Christ, who is [NOT WILL BE] the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.*

Ephesians 1:20-22 — *Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him [NOT WILL SIT HIM] at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put [NOT WILL PUT] all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church*

1 Peter 3:22 — *Who is gone into heaven, and is [NOT WILL BE] on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made [NOT WILL BE MADE] subject unto him.*

1 Timothy 6:14-15 — *That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is [NOT WILL BE] the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.*

1 Corinthians 15:25 — *For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.*

What does that verse from 1 Corinthians tell us? It tells us that Jesus is **presently** reigning. Why? Because death remains an enemy. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, and 1 Corinthians 15:25 tells us that Christ will reign as King until that last enemy is destroyed. The premillennialist tells us that Christ won't begin to reign until **after** death is destroyed — the Bible tells us that the opposite is true.

Oh, but some will say, the world is in such a mess! How could Jesus be reigning as King when the world is in such a mess? Here's a question for them: Was the world in a mess at the time of the flood? Yes, and God was reigning then as king.

Psalm 29:10 — *The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever.*

What that verse tells us is that God was *reigning* while the sky was *raining*! The world has been in a mess since the fall, but that is not God's doing, that is sin's doing. God is reigning as King to get the world out of that mess, and Christ reigns as King to redeem the faithful from that mess.

What does verse 15 mean when it says that “the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord.” In the Greek text, the word “kingdoms” appears only once — literally, the text reads “the kingdoms of the world did become of our Lord and of His Christ,” meaning the kingdoms of the world became those of God.

As we have discussed, Rome was composed of many different kingdoms. What verse 15 tells us is that God took them back. Why? Because they were his all along. In verse 15, Rome is made to realize something that King Nebuchadnezzar was made to realize centuries earlier.

Daniel 4:32 — *And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*

But how can the kingdoms of this world already belong to God if verse 15 says that they ***are become*** the kingdoms of God? This verse is the clearest example yet of how this book uses verb tenses to make us look in a **new way** at something that has been true all along.

Yes, Rome already belonged to God — but Rome was wicked, and so God judged Rome and took back the kingdom that had been entrusted to Rome. That Roman kingdom had played an important role in God's plan, but as we have already discussed — that role was now over, and so God is taking that kingdom back. It was God's all along, but we are seeing a new manifestation of that ownership, which is why the verse uses the phrase “are become” to describe it.

We see the same thing at the end of the verse — Jesus “shall reign” for ever and ever. The reign of Christ did not begin here in verse 15. Jesus has been reigning all throughout these events.

Revelation 1:5-6 — *And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

Jesus has been reigning all along, and the church has been reigning with him. Verse 15 is not the beginning of that reign. Instead, verse 15 is a public reaffirmation of that reign. If anyone doubted the truth of Revelation 1:5-6, they should doubt no longer now that King Jesus has overcome the mighty Roman empire!

And one more point: Although the church is the promised eternal kingdom of Christ, Christ does not reign *just* over the church. Christ reigns as king over the entire universe. In that sense, the entire universe is Christ's kingdom. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, which means that Jesus is King and Lord of everyone and everything. All are subject to the rule of Christ.

Revelation 11:16-19

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.

The last time we saw the twenty-four elders was back in Chapter 7. We first saw them in Chapter 4. In that chapter we saw that the twenty-four elders represented something that is royal, something that is pure, something that is priestly, and something that includes all of God's people, with no one left out. With those clues, there could be no doubt as to their identity — the twenty-four elders represent the church! They are the royal priesthood.

What we see in verse 16 is the church worshipping God in response to all that God has just done for the church with regard to Rome. We haven't seen all of the details yet, but it all happened when the seventh trumpet sounded. And the church is worshipping and thanking God, which is just what we would expect the church to be doing.

The reign of God in verse 17 is the reign of God over Rome. Rome thought that no one reigned over it, but Rome was very badly mistaken. Rome's attitude was that of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:30 — "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" And we remember what happened to him. Much worse had just happened to Rome. Both Nebuchadnezzar and Rome had been reminded of the truth of Daniel 4:32 — "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

Verse 18 tells us "the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come." Rome did not like having God rule over it. Just the suggestion of that was enough to make Rome angry, but here we are seeing much more than just a suggestion. In fact, verse 18 tell us that God's wrath is come. We are about to see the bowls of God's wrath poured out on top of Rome. The time for repentance is over; the time for judgment is here. Rome can shake its fist all day at God, but that will not change one thing about the judgment that is coming against them.

This part of verse 18 is modeled after the beautiful second Psalm.

Psalm 2:1-4 — Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,

against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

This scene also reminds me of Isaiah 52.

Isaiah 52:15 — *The kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.*

God is in charge of the nations of this world, and God takes them out when he sees fit. Remember Psalm 110.

Psalm 110:5-6 — *The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.*

The world today is filled with raging nations. The world today is filled with people who imagine a vain thing. We can take comfort today in the same fact that provided comfort to the Psalmist: God reigns! And God is laughing at those raging nations and those vain imaginations!