

CHAPTER 11

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Chapter 11 can be divided into two major sections. The first section, verses 1 through 14, gives a great deal of information concerning the “temple of God.” It also concludes the sixth trumpet. The second division, verses 15 through 19, is the sounding of the seventh trumpet.

Several symbols are used in the first section of chapter 11 including: (1) “temple,” (2) “holy city,” (3) “two witnesses,” (4) “two olive trees,” (5) “two candlesticks,” and (6) “two prophets;” all of which have the same basic meaning. They represent those people who are faithful to God – the church.

Once we understand this, it then becomes possible to see that chapter 11 gives a complete history of the church from its beginning until the time of its ascension to heaven to dwell with God eternally (v. 12). Certainly, not every detail concerning the church is given, but the major points are clearly outlined. They are as follows:

- v. 3 -- God gives his people the power needed in order to spread the gospel during this Christian dispensation.
- v. 5-6 -- God provided protection for his people in order that the gospel might be spread throughout the world.
- v. 7-10-- Once the gospel was spread throughout the

world, forces would arise upon this earth that would almost destroy the church for a certain period of time.

v. 11 -- After this period of time, God again breathed life into his people and the church once again became strong.

v. 12 -- At God's appointed time, the church will be called to heaven to dwell with him eternally.

v. 13 -- Those forces that have persecuted the church will be destroyed, and great fear will fall upon those people at Christ's second coming.

THE TWO WITNESSES

Verse 1. And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

John is given a reed, which is some type of measuring device, and told to measure the temple of God. This temple must represent the church. Christians are spoken of as being the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16), and, of course, Christians make up the church. John was also instructed to measure "them that worship therein," which would be all those individual Christians who make up the complete church. Therefore, John is being instructed to measure the church, as well as each individual person who dwells in the church.

The next question to answer would be this: What does it mean to "measure" the church? First, notice that no measurements are ever given, so it is not the actual measurements that are important, but the fact that it can be measured. This shows that exact measurements can be taken, and this, in turn, indicates that it is possible to tell exactly who is in the church and who is not. Obviously, the dividing line between those inside the church and those outside is God's Word. The gospel, God's Word, is used to define the boundaries of his church. Those who are obedient to the gospel are in the church; all others are

outside. This enables us to conclude that the “reed like unto a rod,” which is used to measure the temple, represents the gospel.

The gospel is the exact measurement of the church. It defines the exact boundaries of the church. Not only does it measure the entire church, it measures each individual therein. Only those individuals who have obeyed the gospel and are continuing to do the appointed works are Christians.

As mentioned above, the measurements of the temple, or holy city (v. 2), are not given. But if you desire to know the measurements of this holy city, all you have to do is read 21:15-17. (See comments on that passage.)

In Revelation the altar is a symbol of man’s ability to communicate and make atonement for his sins directly to God through prayer. In 8:3, a golden altar is pictured before the Throne of God and is used for offering up the prayers of saints. In the Old Testament, the altar was used to offer sacrifices to God to make atonement for the sins of the people (Lev. 4:20). In the church today, we do not have a literal altar to offer sacrifices for our sins, but we do have something that accomplishes the same thing and more; that is prayer. Through prayer we commune with God and receive forgiveness of our sins. To measure the altar means to determine its size, or in this case, who can use it. Only those people who are in a covenant relationship with God can commune with him through prayer (1Pet. 3:12). Only the prayers of the saints will be offered upon God’s altar (8:3). It has been measured.

Verse 2. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

John received instructions not to include the court of the temple in his measurements. This shows that only the true church is to be included. Even though the court is in close proximity, it is not part of the true church. It may not be possible to determine exactly who is represented by the

court of the temple, but since it is so close to the true church, it may represent the dwelling place of those who profess to be Christians and are close to the truth, but have never been obedient to God's law. They have never actually entered into the true church. This situation exists throughout the world today. Many profess to know God; however, they have never been completely obedient to his commands. Therefore, they are not part of God's church although they are close to the truth and even claim the title "Christian."

The court could also represent the dwelling place of unfaithful members of the church. These people are also close to the church; in fact, they have once been a part of it.

It makes little or no difference which of these interpretations we choose because the court represents the location of all of these people, both those who are close to the truth but have never been completely obedient to it, and those who were once faithful members but have fallen away. They are all outside the true church.

The main point in this passage is the fact that the people in the court will tread the holy city under foot. The holy city is another way of referring to the church. Throughout Revelation, the temple and the holy city are two different symbols used to refer to the same thing – the church of our Lord. (For more information about the symbolic "holy city," see comments on 21:2.) The ones who are in the court will trample down or walk on those who are in the true church. This is another way of saying that they consider the church to have little or no value. It is something to be trodden under foot – maybe even destroyed. This situation exists in the world today. Many are close to the truth, but have no regard for the true church at all. They trample it by their degrading and slanderous remarks and sometimes even persecutions. Many would even prefer that the true church be nonexistent. This type of activity is to continue for a period of forty-two months, which is symbolically speaking of the entire Christian age. Throughout the ages, men have sought to tread down, weaken, and even destroy the church, and this passage

explains that this will continue until Christ's second coming. (For more on the use of the symbolic "forty-two months," see the introduction to chapter 12.)

Verse 3. And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

There are many different proposals as to the identity of the "two witnesses" such as: Moses and Elijah;¹ the Old Testament and the New Testament;² and apostles Peter and Paul.³ Coffman says these two witnesses are "definitely and undeniably, God's word, and God's church."⁴ If we are searching for a literal "two" witnesses, then we agree that Coffman must have the correct answer because of the context of this passage. The subject of chapter 10 is the "little book open," which is the Bible, and verses 1-2 describe the temple, which is the church. Also, 22:17 says, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come." In this instance, the two who are bidding people to come to Christ are the Spirit, which operates through the Word, and the Bride, which is the church.

Although this seems to be a plausible explanation, we believe that a slightly different approach should be used to determine the meaning of the "two witnesses." It is our conviction that the "two witnesses" is a descriptive term referring to the church. This is very close to the interpretation presented by Coffman because the church must use the Word of God in order to "witness," or teach the world about Christ. God's Word and his church are inseparable. To be a member of the church means to be obedient to the Word. Therefore, we do not believe it is necessary to divide the Word and the church into two separate witnesses for Christ.

The church is the witness for Christ today. Many times in the church today, we avoid using terms that are used extensively by other religious organizations. This is true with the term "witness." We are reluctant to use this term because we do not want to be identified with false religion. Granted, many religious organizations do not use this term

according to its biblical meaning; nevertheless, the term is biblical. In 20:4, we see as a part of that vision “the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus.” Therefore, we know that Christians are referred to as witnesses of Jesus. Jesus also spoke of himself as “the faithful and true witness” in 1:5 and 3:14. This indicates he had been faithful in carrying out God’s will. If we as Christians carry out the will of our Lord, we are his faithful witnesses. In 1Jn. 5:10a, we read, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself:” Christ is the faithful and true witness, and he dwells in Christians today. As we attempt to live for Christ, we are witnesses for him.

Verse 3 also states that the two witnesses “shall prophesy.” In verse 10, these two witnesses are referred to as two prophets. In 10:11, John was told that he “must prophesy again before many peoples.” God’s children are the ones who prophesy by using and teaching God’s Word, the Bible. God’s people, the church, are his witnesses to all the earth. One other reason for interpreting the “two witnesses” as a symbolic representation of the church is because the church is the subject of this vision. In verse 1, John was told to measure the temple, which is the church, and verse 2 further describes the church by referring to it as the “holy city.” The subject of this vision does not change with verse 3; it only further describes those who make up the church by calling them “witnesses.”

If the witnesses of Christ are Christians who make up the church, then why are they described as “two” witnesses? The answer again lies with the use of numbers in Revelation as symbolic descriptions instead of literal numeric values. The number “2” is used to show strength, and this is exactly what is stated in verse 3. These witnesses are being given power from God. Summers says, “There was a symbolic significance in the fact that Jesus sent His disciples forth two by two. Two witnesses confirmed the truth, and their testimony which otherwise would have been weak was made strong. Always this number meant augmented strength, redoubled energy, confirmed power.”⁵

These two witnesses are also called two candlesticks in

verse 4. We know from 1:20 that the seven candlesticks represent the seven churches. We also recognize that the number “7” is used in that verse to indicate the complete divine church of Christ throughout the ages. It is not limited to the seven churches to which this letter was specifically addressed. (See comments on 1:20.) This same type of symbolism is used here with the number “2.” It indicates strength. It describes the church as strong witnesses for Christ. The church on the earth has received power from on high through the Word, and all Christians should be strong witnesses for Christ as we prophesy or teach that Word throughout the world.

Verse 4. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

This is a continuation of the description of the two witnesses. They are called two olive trees and two candlesticks. The number “2” is again used to show the great power or strength possessed by these witnesses.

Romans 11 gives a vivid description of the church by using the olive tree as a symbol. God’s chosen people under the old law, the children of Israel, are described as the good olive tree. The Gentiles, who were not a part of God’s people under the old law, are described as a wild olive tree. When Christ established his new law, it was for all men, not just a chosen few. When the Gentiles, or the wild olive tree, are obedient to the new Law of Christ, they are said to be grafted into the good olive tree. They become a part of God’s chosen people, the church. Therefore, it becomes easy to understand that the witnesses for Christ are a part of the good olive tree spoken of in Romans 11.

The two candlesticks also refer to the church. (For additional information, see comments on v. 3.) This should enable us to understand that the subject of this vision is the church. In verses 1 and 2, it is described as the “temple” and the “holy city.” Verses 3 and 4 further describe the church as “witnesses,” “olive trees,” and “candlesticks.” In each case there are two, which indicates they have received power from God. They are standing before God, which

again shows that these symbols must represent the church because 7:15 states that Christians are before the Throne of God, serving him day and night in his temple.

Verse 5. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.

God's protection for his church is shown in this verse. God will not allow man to destroy his kingdom. Heb. 12:28 says that we have received a kingdom which cannot be moved. Therefore, man does not have the power to destroy it. God's kingdom will last forever.

It should be pointed out that there appears to be a conflict between verses 5 and 7. Verse 7 says that the beast will be able to overcome and kill them, but this happens after they have "finished their testimony." Here we have a situation where God would not allow anything to happen to his church until the gospel had spread throughout the world. After this took place, the church would die out for a period of time, only to rise again. But, in verse 5 God says he will protect his church, and even destroy its enemies if necessary, in order to provide an atmosphere conducive to the existence of his church. (Also see 12:16.)

Verse 6. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.

These witnesses, those who make up the church, have great power upon this earth. According to verse 3, this power comes directly from God. We must be careful to remember that we are dealing with symbolic language. Causing the rain to stop falling upon the earth; turning water to blood, and causing all types of plagues must be symbolic of the powers that Christians possess through the teaching of the Word. These acts of power serve to remind us of the power of God that Elijah and Moses possessed as they faithfully served him. If we serve him today and

prophesy or teach his Word, we possess the tremendous power in that Word.

The smiting of the earth with all plagues should be emphasized since two entire chapters, 15 and 16, are devoted to the seven last plagues. These plagues are directed against non-Christians through the teaching of God's Word. (For more information, see 16:2.)

Verse 7. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

In order to properly understand verse 7, we must take a look at the sequence of events in chapter 11.

- v. 3--The witnesses are given power to prophesy.
- v. 5--With God's help, they will be able to overcome their enemies.
- v. 7--When they finish their testimony, the beast will overcome and kill them.
- v. 10--People will rejoice over their death.
- v. 11 --The Spirit of life from God will enter into them, and they will live again.
- v. 12--They will ascend up to heaven.

The above verses give a complete history of the church from the time of Christ until its ascension to heaven at his second coming. Therefore, the phrase "when they shall have finished their testimony" must take us up to a particular moment in the history of the church, not to the end of time because, later, they are to "stand upon their feet." The most likely interpretation of this would be the spreading of the gospel throughout the world during the first century, and after this was completed or "finished," the beast overcame the church and destroyed it for a period of time. This interpretation also agrees with the interpretation of the beasts of chapter 13 as representing those forces of civil government and the apostate church, which joined forces to destroy the church during the Dark Ages. (See

13:6-7, 15.)

It would not be practical to go into a full interpretation of the beast at this point because the entire thirteenth chapter will be devoted to that subject. Therefore, to get the full meaning of verse 7, it might first be necessary to have a basic understanding of chapter 13. One other important point about the beast is that he is said to arise out of the “bottomless pit,” indicating that these forces of evil which will overcome and destroy the church are from the devil. This also agrees perfectly with the interpretation of the beast that John saw “ascend out of the bottomless pit” in 17:8. This was the apostate church, or the great city, which was responsible for “killing” the church during the Dark Ages.

To understand the full meaning of these symbols, all of these passages must be carefully considered. It is not within the scope of this book to include such a study, but we strongly suggest you make these comparisons after you have completed a study of all these related passages. We are confident it will be worthwhile and will greatly increase your understanding of how these symbols and visions are related.

Therefore, verse 7 is a figurative description of one major event in the history of the church. The gospel was spread throughout the world, and after this was completed, the forces of the devil, manifested in the powers of the Roman civil government and the apostate church, made war against the true church and overcame it. This sent the world into the Dark Ages when people were not permitted to read the Bible. They were forced to worship according to man’s laws, which were contrary to the laws of God.

Verse 8. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

The bodies of these witnesses (the church) are described as lying in the street of the great city. This agrees exactly with the interpretation of verse 7 since the great city is used in Revelation to symbolize the apostate church. (See 16:9;

17:18; 18:2.) The true church, which was overcome by the apostate church, is figuratively described as lying in the street of the great city (the apostate church). This is where the church was killed, and the people of that city are the ones who rejoiced over the church's death (v. 10). The great city is described as a "spiritual" Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem. Many commentators miss the point by interpreting this as a description of the literal, earthly city of Jerusalem. This is a description of that great city, the apostate church, by using Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem as symbols. Just as there were all types of physical immorality in Sodom, there are all types of spiritual immorality in the great city (the apostate church). When one forsakes the true God to worship another god or man, he commits spiritual fornication. The people of the great city, the apostate church, are spiritually immoral, just as the people of Sodom were guilty of physical immorality. (See 17:18; then 17:4.) The great city is also described as spiritual Egypt. Egypt was the great persecutor of God's people in the Old Testament, just as the great city was the great persecutor of the church during the Christian age. (See 13:12,15-17; 17:18; then 17:6.) Throughout the Dark Ages, the apostate church was responsible for the spiritual death of many people, and in many cases even their physical death if they did not worship as directed. It was responsible for the death of the true church for a period of time, but the church would rise again according to verse 11.

The great city is also described as the place where our Lord was crucified. Christ was crucified physically in Jerusalem, but he was crucified spiritually in the "great city" (the apostate church). When the witnesses or the true church were killed, Christ was crucified again. To fall away from the true church is to crucify the Son of God afresh (Heb. 6:6). This "great city" had fallen away from the true teachings of the gospel and were successful in destroying those who were following Christ. They had "spiritually" crucified Jesus again.

Verse 8 has given us a vivid description of the "great city" that was responsible for the death of the true church

after the first century. The great city is also the beast that ascended out of the bottomless pit and overcame the church (v. 7). The dead bodies of the witnesses lay in the street of the great city until the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they came to life again (v. 11).

Verse 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.

The phrase “people and kindreds and tongues and nations” refers to the vast number of people who are a part of the great city. These people would not allow the bodies of the witnesses (the church) to be put in the grave. They desired to keep them in sight where they could gloat over their death. This is obviously not literal. They must have accomplished this by constantly reminding the people that nothing spiritual existed except the apostate church. They were proud to have destroyed the true teachings of God. The apostate church has always claimed to be righteous and worship the true God, yet they worship according to man’s ways instead of God’s. To have the truth taught by the true church would definitely have an adverse affect upon the apostate church. Therefore, they were extremely happy that the true church was killed. They kept the bodies of these witnesses in front of the people to remind them that they had been killed. This caused people to remain in subjection to man’s spiritual laws rather than God’s. There was great rejoicing because of the death of the true church.

The bodies of these witnesses were kept out of the grave for a period of 3½ days. The number “3½” is descriptive, indicating a time of great despair and confusion. “Days” are probably used here to indicate a shorter period of time than 3½ years or 1,260 days, which was used earlier in the chapter to represent the entire gospel age. We should not try to make calculations as to a literal amount of time referred to by these numbers, but we should view them as a description of things that are to take place during that period of time. The Dark Ages was definitely a time of

extreme despair and confusion concerning spiritual matters because the church was, for all practical purposes, nonexistent.

Verse 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.

The two witnesses are referred to in verse 10 as the two prophets. This again points to the fact that the two witnesses represent those who teach the Word of God because the term “prophet” refers to one who proclaims the Word sent from God. (See 10:11.) Therefore, these two prophets represent Christians who teach the Word of God with power. To be a witness for God is to prophesy or teach his Word. This teaching of God’s Word is exactly what tormented the people of the earth. To those who do not believe God’s Word, or do not want to follow it, the teaching of the truth torments them. It condemns their way of life and shows them to be eternally lost if they continue following the ways of Satan. This is why the people of the earth are described as rejoicing, making merry, and sending gifts to one another. They no longer had to listen to the teaching of the truth because the beast had made war against the church and had overcome it for a period of time.

Verse 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.

In our interpretation of chapter 11 as describing the history of the church throughout the gospel age, we have no problem equating verse 11 with the restoration of the church, which took place in the latter 1700s and early 1800s. This is when men such as James O’Kelley, Barton W. Stone, Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, and others began to teach that the Bible should be used as the only authority for determining how man should worship God. By doing this, they began to preach the same gospel

that was preached by Christ and the apostles in the first century. This, in turn, brought the church back to life, or as it is described in this verse, the two prophets “stood upon their feet.” By using the Bible as our only creed, we can obey the same plan of salvation that made people members of the Lord’s church in the first century. Therefore, we are members of the same church, the Lord’s church, which was established on the day of Pentecost. The church is again alive and spreading throughout the world today.

Verse 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.

In chapter 11, major events concerning the church throughout the Christian dispensation are clearly outlined. First, God gave the church power to prophesy in this world. Second, the gospel spread throughout the known world during the first century. Third, forces from the devil, such as the civil authorities and the apostate church, made war against the church and killed it. Fourth, during the restoration movement, men began to teach the same pure gospel that was taught in the first century, and the church came to life again. Now, as explained in this verse, the next major event that will affect the church is its ascension to heaven. We should point out that no timetable is given. We have no way of knowing how much time will pass between the time the church was restored to life and its ascension to heaven. We do know that verse 12 takes us up to the end of time or the second coming of Christ. It also, along with verse 13, takes us to the end of the sixth trumpet. Since the trumpets deal with spiritual matters, nothing could fit the ending of this sixth trumpet any better than the ascension of God’s spiritual kingdom, the church, to heaven and the destruction of all things that claim to be spiritual, but are not.

Verse 12 also reinforces the interpretation of the “two witnesses” as representing the church because 1Cor. 15:24 says that the kingdom (the church) is what Christ will deliver up to God at the end of time.

Verse 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.

The “same hour” places the events of verse 13 in the same time frame as that of verse 12. These events take place near or at the second coming of Christ. We know this because 10:6-7 states that there should be time no longer when the seventh angel shall begin to sound. Similarities of verses 12 and 13 and 6:12-16, which is the sixth seal, should be noted. The sixth seal described the end of all physical things of this earth, and these two verses, which bring to a close the events of the sixth trumpet, describe the end of all things that are considered spiritual in nature. In verse 12 the spiritual kingdom of God, his church, is called up to heaven. In verse 13 the great city that was spiritual in nature, yet not according to God’s plan, is destroyed.

In verse 13, a great earthquake causes the tenth part of the city to fall; slays seven thousand men, and causes the remainder of men to be frightened and give glory to God. Admittedly, the specific symbols of this verse are hard to understand; however, as stated above, the overall picture seems to be quite clear. The earthquake represents an event that will shake the earth and frighten men as never before in the history of the world. No event fits this description as well as the second coming of Christ. At that time, all men who have opposed God will be frightened and glorify God as never before. Also, in this earthquake, as a more accurate translation puts it, there were slain seven thousand names of men. The number of divine completeness is “7,” and “1000” represents ultimate completeness. The meaning seemingly intended here is that all men who claim to be divine or spiritual in nature, but actually oppose God, or do not follow God’s ways, will be slain. This means that God will put down all earthly powers and authority that claim to be spiritual in nature. At that time, all men will recognize that God is the only divine being, and that all of our

worship should be directed toward him – not toward men who may claim to be divine. The problem is: for them it will be too late.

One other question remains: What is meant by the tenth part of the city? The destruction of the great city, Babylon, is described several times in Revelation in different ways, but each time it describes total destruction. Consider the following passages:

18:21 – “Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.”

18:2 – “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit...”

16:19 – “And the great city was divided into three parts...”

14:8 – “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

11:13 – “A great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell...”

The number “10” is used to signify human completeness. Therefore, if the tenth part of the city fell, it would no longer be complete. It would be fragmented. It would be completely destroyed.

Verse 14. The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

Two of the three “woes” that were introduced in 8:13 have now passed. These woes are inflicted upon men who follow the ways of the devil, but Christians are exempt from their torments. (See 9:4.) The same is true with the third woe that follows. It pictures the final destruction in hell of those who oppose God and refuse to follow his ways.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET: JUDGMENT

Verse 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.

The sounding of the seventh angel takes us into the time of the final judgment. This should be clear enough from verses such as 10:6-7, which state “that there should be time no longer” when the seventh angel begins to sound, but “the mystery of God should be finished.” Also verse 18 defines this seventh trumpet as “the time of the dead that they should be judged.”

It should be noted that the ASV translates the word “kingdom,” in singular form. “The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord” indicates that the church has been delivered up to God. And 1Cor. 15:24 says, “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.” When this time of the seventh angel arrives, all things of this world will come to an end. Christ will deliver the kingdom up to God, and he will reign forever and ever. Heb. 1:3 shows that Christ is on the Throne of God, reigning in heaven today. When this seventh angel sounds, the things of this world will be no more, and the church will be taken to heaven to dwell with God eternally.

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

These twenty-four elders must be the same as those mentioned in 4:4. In this verse they fall upon their faces and worship God, which supports the idea that they represent the spiritual things of God. As the spiritual kingdom of this world is delivered up to God to live with him eternally, the spiritual beings that surround the throne immediately fall down and worship God because of this great event.

Verse 17. Saying, We give thee thanks, 0 Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

The twenty-four elders continue to praise God because the church has ascended to heaven. The key to verse 17 is the fact that the phrase “and art to come” is not in the actual text. This verse is similar to 1:8 and 4:8, which state that Christ is the one who is, who was, and who is to come. Then why is the phrase “art to come” left out of this verse? The answer is this: In the time of this seventh angel, he has already come the second time. Therefore, at this time he will be the one “who is” and “who was.” Notice it also says that he “hast reigned.” Christ is now reigning on his throne in heaven, and we are reigning with him. When the time of the seventh trumpet arrives, the reign of the church here on earth will come to an end, and it will be taken to heaven.

Another important point in verse 17 is that Christ was able to reign because he took unto himself his great power. When did he take this power? According to Rom 1:4, he was “declared to be the Son of God with power,... by the resurrection from the dead.” Also, Eph. 1:19-20 speaks of the mighty power of God “which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand.” Eph. 1:22 says that God “put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.” Christ received all power and began his reign over the church when he was resurrected from the dead and ascended to his throne in heaven.

Therefore, the idea being expressed in verse 17 is that the twenty-four elders are giving thanks unto Christ because he came to earth, died, and was resurrected; thereby, receiving great power and reigning over the church. Because he did this, he completed God’s plan for man and provided forgiveness of sins for all who are obedient to his will. Without this supreme sacrifice by our Lord, man could never have been reconciled unto God. This is why the twenty-four elders are giving thanks unto him. He made that sacrifice and reigned over the church. Therefore, in the

time of this seventh trumpet, the kingdom will be delivered up to God, and we will live with him forever and ever.

Verse 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.

This emphasizes the fact that the seventh angel takes us into the time of Judgment. At this time, God will judge the living and the dead. He will reward those who have been faithful to him and destroy all who have opposed him. "Destroy the earth" would be better translated as those who "corrupt the earth." This includes all those who have followed, or encouraged others to follow, the ways of Satan.

We might emphasize that the next event which will take place after the church ascends to heaven at the second coming of Christ (v. 12) will be Judgment. There will be no literal period of one thousand years for man to live in bliss upon this earth. When Christ comes the second time, man's eternity will be sealed. There will be no second chance. Those who have been obedient will live eternally with God, and those who have not will dwell eternally in the devil's hell.

Verse 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 temple of God always refers to God's dwelling place. After Judgment, the eternal dwelling place of God will be opened in heaven, and those who have been faithful to him will dwell there eternally.

The ark of his testament is again symbolic of the inner sanctuary of God. Under the old law, the ark of the covenant was kept in the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God. When all of this is opened and visible, God's plan

for man will be completed, and we will be in our final eternal state.

The lightnings, voices, thunderings, earthquake, and great hail indicate the final conclusion of all things. They conclude this series of seven trumpets, just as this same type of language concludes the series of seven seals in 8:5 and the series of seven plagues in 16:18-21. This should help us understand the structure of the series of seals, trumpets and plagues. They all cover the same period of time, the gospel age, but describe different events that will take place throughout that age. Notice also that 15:8 says no man is able to enter into the temple of God until the seven plagues of the seven angels are fulfilled. This places the plagues in the same time frame as the first six trumpets because the temple of God is opened in the time of the seventh trumpet. At this time, man will be able to enter that temple, our final dwelling place, and dwell eternally with God.

¹William Barclay, *The Revelation of John, Vol 2* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 70.

²V E. Howard and J. L. Hines, *Study of Revelation* (Texarkana, Tex.: Central Printers and Publishers, 1967), p. 78.

³James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 240.

⁴Ibid., p. 239.

⁵Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press 1951), p. 21.