

Praise for God's Eternal Reign

Revelation 11:15-19

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 Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.”

¹⁶ Then the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God,
¹⁷ singing,

“We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.

¹⁸ The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

¹⁹ Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Theme Statement

God overpowers all God's enemies, establishes the eternal kingdom, and brings new life to all creation forever.

Because this is true, we may praise, serve, and sacrifice with courage and confidence.

Exploring the Word

The visions of Revelation help answer three questions from the beginning of our entire study: Who is God? What has God done for us? Will we be faithful in life and worship? Revelation 11 focuses on these questions in dramatic fashion. Some biblical scholars see Revelation 11:15-19 as the high point of the entire book.

The glorious vision of God's ultimate victory is set against the terrifying vision at the beginning of chapter 11. Here we have devastation, a beast from a bottomless pit, and the death and degradation of Christ's witnesses. This dramatic chapter drives home the main point that the Christian life centers on Jesus Christ and that through Christ God will save and redeem all creation. But the faithful will be called to witness and suffer as they witness to Christ.

Revelation 11:15 Proclamation of final salvation

The various visions throughout Revelation circle around the themes of warning, comfort, and God's triumph again and again. This book is not a linear timeline or a set of predictions. It is a dramatic sermon holding multiple visions of warning, judgment, and the good news of salvation. Each vision adds a new perspective, building on the last. In chapter 11 this new perspective is the turning of God's enemies toward God and glorifying God (v. 13).

The loud voices of all the redeemed and of the angels proclaim that the Messiah (Christ) now reigns with God forever. This is a cosmic victory, God's final victory over sin

and evil. Important to note: The kingdom of the world is now fully the kingdom of the Lord. The world is not destroyed but is claimed and made whole, forever. No wonder Handel used this beautiful verse in the “Hallelujah Chorus” of his oratorio *Messiah*.

Revelation 11:16-18 Destroying the destroyers

These verses are the song of the elders praising God for this final salvation. The elders are those who have sacrificed and died for the faith: prophets, saints, and the small and the great (v. 18). Their presence in this celebration reminds us that the suffering witness of Christians has been long, hard, and deadly. John’s vision makes it clear that such suffering was not in vain. As Christ’s suffering and death saved the world, Christian witness to Christ also serves God’s message of salvation. As Christ rejected violence (Matthew 26:52), Christians also reject it and instead witness to Christ.

Verse 17 gives us a clue as to the finality of this cosmic victory. Commentators note that God is the one being addressed with “you . . . who are and who were.” There is no longer a mention of the one “who is to come.” God has come. The future has arrived! No wonder the elders fall on their faces in praise and thanksgiving. Verse 18 makes the point of this finality, saying that the nations’ rage has already happened. Now is the time for God’s wrath, judgment, and reward.

God’s judgment is upon “those who destroy the earth”: godless people; the violent, evil empire of Rome (also called “Babylon”); and death. In contrast to these destructive forces, it is those who glorify God who are rewarded: the God-fearers, prophets, and saints (v. 18). Surprisingly, alongside these are those who have turned and glorified God as a result of the resurrection of the “two witnesses”

and the earthquake described earlier (vv. 3-13). This conversion of nine-tenths of the godless (v. 13) is astounding and something new in John’s recounting of his visions. The conversion of the nonbelievers underscores God’s determination to save, not destroy, all creation. The recently converted pagans become part of the rewarded people of God. The “reward” is not based on merit points achieved during earthly life but is God’s gift of eternal salvation for all who honor and glorify God.

Revelation 11:19 A sight to behold

This verse is a *theophany*: an event in which God is revealed or made known. The heavenly temple of God is opened. This is the only place in Revelation that this happens. The long-lost ark is revealed. It signifies the very presence of God and the covenant promises that God made so long ago to Israel and the whole creation. The vision of the ark certifies that God is keeping those promises now. God is triumphant and has saved the creation. The natural fireworks and earthquake are signs of God’s power and reign.

The Word Today

Music, singing, and praise of God are powerful. Singing unifies and focuses mind and heart on the message of God’s promises, especially the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. It points us beyond ourselves and gives us new perspective and hope. It places us in a faith community of fellow singers and believers. We are given a community that is there to support us, accompany us, comfort us, and rejoice with us. Whether we are listening to a powerful musical performance or singing in a small choir, we can experience such fellowship, inspiration, meaning, and joy.

The power of singing was experienced not so very long ago in the small, predominantly Lutheran, Baltic country of Estonia. In the mid-1980s Estonia, oppressed by the then Soviet Union, sought freedom through a nonviolent, singing revolution. With a long history of choral music festivals dating back to 1869, Estonians knew how to sing hymns, folk songs, and national songs very well. In June of 1988, they protested Soviet occupation and oppression. They banded together, about 100,000 strong, and sang every night for five nights in a row. This was risky since the threat of arrest, Soviet tanks, and worse was present. Still, they did not relent, found strength in their own identity, held hands, and sang. Of course, their oppressors did not give up either, but the Estonians, along with other Baltic countries like Latvia and Lithuania, continued to resist Soviet occupation. In 1991 the Soviet Union had its own political upheaval, and that, combined with growing support (even among Soviet citizens living in Estonia) for Estonian freedom, led to independence.

Estonia's experience is dramatic history related to what we read in our text from Revelation. It also echoes the 1960s nonviolent civil rights movement in the United States, when hymn-singing and steadfast Christian faith helped win the day. During this time, such hymns as "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and "Amazing Grace" took on new power and meaning. Powerful singing gave strength and vision to those who endured arrest, beatings, abuse, and the risk of death as they nonviolently protested. Like the chorus of martyrs and heavenly hosts described in Revelation, singing the faith has great power. It helps us remember who we are and to whom we belong. It celebrates the hope of God's coming kingdom, giving strength and endurance. It can even lead to transformation of friend and foe alike.

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. What sense do you make of the phrase "Nothing good lasts forever"?

Exploring the Word

1. Read Revelation 10:5-7 and 11:15. How does 11:15 explain "the mystery of God" in 10:7?
2. What do we learn from the song of the elders in Revelation 11:16-17?
3. In Revelation 11:10, 12-13, and 18, who are the destroyers of the earth? Who are those who are rewarded?
4. What is the sight to behold in Revelation 11:18-19, and what does it tell us about God and God's purposes for the earth? How does Romans 8:18-25 support Revelation 11:18-19?

The Word Today

1. Mark your level of agreement with the statements below, using the letters indicated:

The future of earth is uncertain (U).

Salvation depends on the lives we have lived (S).

Agree

Disagree

2. Check all that apply below. The news of God's eternal reign fills me with these things:

___ trust and courage

___ hope

___ skepticism

___ willingness to suffer
for the faith

___ fear

___ other: _____

3. How do the stories of Estonia's Singing Revolution and the civil rights movement encourage you to sing and act in faith?

Closing Prayer

Eternal God, we praise you for your gift of the coming kingdom and the promise of the salvation of all creation. Inspire us to sing and serve in the face of oppression and evil, trusting your transforming power in our lives and our world. Amen.

Further Study

Psalm 2; Romans 8:18-25

Daily Readings

M. Psalm 47

F. Revelation 11:3-10

T. Daniel 4:34-37

S. Psalm 93

W. Jude 20-25

S. Revelation 11:11-19

T. Psalm 10:12-18

Memorization

Revelation 11:15

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

Rejoicing in Heaven

Revelation 19:1-8

¹ After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,

“Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power to our God,

² for his judgments are true and just;

he has judged the great whore

who corrupted the earth with her fornication,

and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

³ Once more they said,

“Hallelujah!

The smoke goes up from her forever and ever.”

⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying,

“Amen. Hallelujah!”

⁵ And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

and all who fear him,

small and great.”

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out,

“Hallelujah!