

# The Return of the “Lost” Ark

Revelation 11

## Beginning with the End in Mind

Continuing our series in the Book of Revelation, we have come to chapter 11, but I want to begin this morning with the end in mind, So our Scripture reading will be from Revelation chapter 11, beginning in verse 15:

<sup>15</sup> 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.”

As I have mentioned several times in this series, when we read the Revelation we are ultimately looking for portraits—for revelations—of Jesus Christ; and in all that has happened as the seven angels who are before the throne of God sounded their trumpets we have been moving toward this moment, which feels so familiar because we have heard it so many times in performances of Handel’s Messiah. But here it comes not as a hymn—not as a beautiful piece of choral music—but more as a shout. “There were loud voices in heaven...” John wrote—strident, emphatic voices—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 when did this happen? When did the kingdom of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ? We’ve seen it before. Daniel describes this in his vision of the beasts in chapter 7 of his prophecy, and make note of the part the beasts play in Daniel, it will become important in Revelation as we go forward. Daniel 7, verse 7:

<sup>7</sup> After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. Daniel 7:7 (ESV)

Then skipping down to verse 9 of Daniel 7:

<sup>13</sup> “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

This is nothing less than the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father. And at the time of His ascension, verse 14:

<sup>14</sup> ...to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13–14 (ESV)

Just as Jesus said in Matthew 28: 18:

<sup>18</sup> ...“**All authority in heaven and on earth** has been given to me.” Matthew 28:18 (ESV)

And as David wrote in Psalm 110:

<sup>1</sup> The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

<sup>2</sup> The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!

Psalm 110:1–2 (ESV)

So, the end of Revelation chapter 11 is living history. We do not await the rule of Christ. He rules. We do not await the day when he will be given a kingdom,

<sup>14</sup> ...to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13–14 (ESV)

No wonder then that as the seventh trumpet sounds, and the mystery of God is fulfilled,

<sup>16</sup> the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.”

<sup>19</sup> 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.

So, for the reading from God’s Word.

### Now, from the Beginning

Measurements are important! Years ago, I was putting in the base for a sign at a gas station in rural Manitoba. Having some experience with that sort of thing, I was very familiar with the rule, “Measure twice, cut one once,” so before we sunk the holes for the bases, I measured out the distance and marked it carefully by putting a peg into the ground at the center of the spot for each hole. We then augured, dropped in the reinforcing bar, and began to pour concrete. At a certain point in the process, when about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the concrete was in each hole, we moved the crane into place to lower the anchor bolts into the holes so that we could finish off the bases. The thing is, when we began to lower the anchor bolts, we quickly realized that somehow, the two holes were a foot farther apart than what they were supposed to be. Of course, by that time, with so much concrete in the ground already, there was nothing to be done but space the bolts a little farther apart, then return to the shop and face the music.

My boss (who happened to be my father-in-law), was not impressed to say the least. You could say that upon hearing the report, my measuring skills were themselves measured—maybe, “weighed in the balance”—and found wanting.

Of course, that Old Covenant expression refers to the time in Daniel 5<sup>i</sup> when Belshazzar, the Chaldean king was feasting with his friends using the “vessels of gold and of silver” that Nebuchadnezzar, his father, had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem. On that occasion, *his*

boss (who happened to be “the Most High God”) was not impressed, and a human hand appeared from nowhere, and wrote a message on the wall of the king’s palace. Translated, it read,

MENE, (MENE), God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; <sup>27</sup> TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; <sup>28</sup> PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” <sup>ii</sup>

In other words, the handwriting on the wall spoke of divine discernment—of the God who rules over all measuring and weighing—and of a judgment to be imposed by according to His will. And because God always keeps His promises, Daniel chapter 5, verses 30 and 31 tell us:

<sup>30</sup> That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. <sup>31</sup> And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old. Daniel 5:30–31 (ESV)

You see, measurements are important.

The prophet Amos had a similar experience when he saw the Lord standing beside a wall with a plumb line to measure His people. At that time, the Lord declared,

<sup>8</sup> ...“Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; <sup>9</sup> the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.” Amos 7:8–9 (ESV)

And in chapters 40 – 43 of the book of Ezekiel, the prophet, who had witnessed the departure of the Glory of God from the temple and the city in chapters 8 through 11, sees “a man whose appearance was like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand.” <sup>iii</sup> This so-called “man”, who is, at the very least, an angel, then proceeds to measure not only the temple, but the outer courts and the land around, and when it has been determined that all is perfectly ready, Ezekiel tells us in chapter 43, verses 2 – 4:

<sup>2</sup> And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. <sup>3</sup> And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. <sup>4</sup> As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east... Ezekiel 43:2–4 (ESV)

And there can be no question that we are meant to recall these incidents—the measuring of the temple, the land, and the people of God—when John tells us in Revelation 11, verse 1:

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there...”

In other words, there’s about to be a reckoning. God, through the prophet, is measuring the temple building and the altar here, but as those things stand for the people—“those who worship there”. And just as there was a sealing of the servants of God between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seal, there will be a division made between the true temple—the true worshippers; the church—and the false. This is analogous to when Jesus came into the city on

Palm Sunday, and immediately entered the temple to drive out all who bought and sold there, saying,

<sup>17</sup> ...“Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” Mark 11:17 (ESV)

Of course, that marketplace where Jesus overturned the tables had been set up in the Court of the Gentiles, effectively leaving no space for the nations to come and seek the living God, and in this measurement—this discernment—John is told:

<sup>2</sup> but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, **for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.**

As to how the measuring was to be accomplished, and the standard that was to be used... verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

The point here is the principle first stated in Deuteronomy 17, and then repeated under both covenants that “Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”<sup>iv</sup> Before final judgement may be brought against His Old Covenant people, these witnesses will testify to the reason. As to their identity, John continues:

<sup>4</sup> These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

The imagery comes from Zechariah, chapter 4, in which the prophet has a vision of two lampstands, connected to two olive trees in such a way that they are always supplied with oil and can burn continuously. When the prophet enquires, he is told,

<sup>6</sup> ...“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts...” Zechariah 4:6–7 (ESV)

So, in Zechariah, the Olive Trees and the Lampstands represent “the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”<sup>v</sup> As one commentator has written, then:

I take these witnesses to represent all the prophets of Israel. The Lord taught us that the guilt of the old covenant era was cumulative, “From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: truly I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.”<sup>vi</sup>

And some have noted the resemblance to key Old Covenant figures, like Moses and Elijah.

<sup>5</sup> And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. <sup>6</sup> They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

So, these two witnesses represent the Law and the Prophets, and their testimony, like that entrusted to John, is bittersweet, because it brings salvation to some, and condemnation to others. Paul spoke of it in Romans 3, saying,

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, **although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it**— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... Romans 3:21–22 (ESV)

And John, in his Gospel, chapter 3, verses 17 and 18 (the verses that do not get printed on signs and held up at the Superbowl):

<sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned...

Which we like. But then;

whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. John 3:17–18 (ESV)

That's why the witnesses, representing the Law and the Prophets, are clothed in sackcloth.

<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12–13 (ESV)

I think there is also a sense in which the two witnesses may represent the Word of God under both Covenants, proclaimed in Jerusalem by the apostles from the day of Pentecost until the destruction of the city in A.D. 70. This would fit with what comes next. Verses 7 and 8:

<sup>7</sup> And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, <sup>8</sup> and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

And of this beast, Douglas Wilson writes,

We now have the first mention of a beast in Revelation. In Scripture,

(as I mentioned in the reference to Daniel earlier)

beasts are persecuting political powers. In the popular mind, the beast and the antichrist are the same nefarious figure at the end of the world—but they are really quite distinct. A modern beast would be a figure like Stalin or Mao. A modern antichrist would be a false teacher...a mild liberal theologian who denies the incarnation. <sup>vii</sup>

So, this beast, who we will encounter again in chapter 13, rises from the abyss, and silences the witnesses who have been proclaiming the Word of God. Very specifically, they are killed

<sup>8</sup> and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt,

Note that the names Sodom and Egypt are only symbolic. The identification of the city is found in the final phrase,

**where their Lord was crucified.**

So, Jerusalem. The witnesses are silenced with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. But we have to move quickly now. Verse 9:

<sup>9</sup> For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, <sup>10</sup> and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.

Now, bear in mind, in the final years of the 60's A.D., The Church has been persecuted by Caesar Nero (interestingly for 42 months), and then Jerusalem, the birthplace of the church, earthly Mount Zion, where the temple of God had housed the covenant of God, was destroyed. If there was ever a time when it appeared to the people of the world as if the word of God had failed, that would have been it. But there's a twist in this tale.

<sup>11</sup> ...after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. <sup>12</sup> Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.

See, the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain, but He who sits in the heavens laughs—the Lord holds them in derision. The Word of God will be vindicated. It will not return to him without accomplishing the purpose for which it was sent out. He says in Psalm 2:

"I have set my King on Zion, my holy [mountain]." <sup>viii</sup>

<sup>13</sup> And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. <sup>14</sup> The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

And then, that glorious text that we have already considered this morning. The text that describes the beginning of the New Covenant era in which we live.

<sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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."

And then, just in case you missed it last time around.

<sup>19</sup> ...God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.

Contrary to certain popular beliefs, the real Ark of the Covenant was never lost. Jesus said, "This Cup is the New Covenant in my blood." That is, the blood that he offered once for all before the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary. Then.

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

So, when the nations rage, and all seems darkness and gloom. When it feels as though the earth has given way and the mountains have fallen into the heart of the sea (to borrow some decreation language from the Psalmist), nevertheless, "**The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ**, and he shall reign forever and ever." And this is right now. Our God reigns right now. His promise is sure. The ark of His Covenant—the New Covenant in Christ's blood—resides in the heavenly sanctuary. The mystery of God has been fulfilled. Jesus Christ has redeemed His people to God in one body, by the cross, and as the Apostle Paul declared in Ephesians chapter 2:

<sup>19</sup> ...you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:13–22 (ESV)

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<sup>i</sup> The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 5:1–31.  
<sup>ii</sup> The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 5:26–28.  
<sup>iii</sup> The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eze 40:3.  
<sup>iv</sup> The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Co 13:1.  
<sup>v</sup> The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Zec 4:14.  
<sup>vi</sup> Wilson, Douglas; When the Man Comes Around; Canon Press, Moscow ID 2019; p. 128  
<sup>vii</sup> Wilson, Douglas; When the Man Comes Around; Canon Press, Moscow ID 2019; p. 130  
<sup>viii</sup> The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 2:6.