

CHRIST SHALL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER

Revelation 8:6-11:19

Key Verse: 11:15

“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.’”
(ESV)

Some scholars say that today’s passage is the hardest to understand in the entire Bible. Compared to the previous passage, God’s judgments are more specifically targeted toward wicked people and are more devastating. To our surprise, as we saw in the fifth and seventh seals, God’s judgments are carried out as the answer to the prayers of his people. Believers participate in God’s work through prayer, and our prayers matter to God. Yet, sometimes, when we pray, we feel that we are just speaking into the air. As we live godly lives, we are persecuted verbally, emotionally and sometimes bodily. Then we pray for God’s vindication, like David did: “May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever” (Ps 69:23). When the answer does not come right away, we easily become discouraged and give up. Jesus encouraged us to “always pray,” and never give up by telling the story of the persistent widow. Then Jesus said, “Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Lk 18:1-8) This tells us that Jesus always answers our prayers. It may not be in the way we expect, but it will be according to his own will and purpose. And he wants to find us praying in faith when he returns. So we should not give up prayer no matter what happens in the world, especially in this time of trial. Today’s passage shows us how God answers our prayers far beyond what we ask or imagine. Let’s see what God does in answer to our prayers.

First, God’s judgment on idolaters and the wicked (8:6-9:21). In this passage seven angels sound seven trumpets to proclaim God’s judgment and victory (6). In 8:6-9:21 we find the first six of these. When the first angel sounded his trumpet, hail and fire mixed with blood was hurled to the earth. A third of the earth was burned up. This massive destruction included the ruin of crops, timber and grass, leading

to severe famine. The second trumpet reveals a great mountain burning with fire, thrown into the sea, turning a third of it to blood, and destroying a third of its creatures and ships (8-9). This may refer to volcanic eruptions that start under the sea and bring terrible havoc. At the third trumpet, fire falls from heaven as a blazing star named "Wormwood" embitters and poisons a third of the rivers and the springs (sources of drinking water, 10-11). Many people died. Obviously the water shortages threatened the survival of all remaining life on earth.

The first three trumpets deal directly with the earth. People today are concerned about saving the environment, and we should be good stewards of God's creation. But to some people, the earth is their source of security instead of God; the earth is their idol. They even call out, "Mother Earth save us!" They will have a rude awakening when God judges their idol, the earth, and its wicked people. God always judges idolatry. This reminds us of God's plagues against the Egyptian gods (Ex 9:24). God punished hardhearted idolaters. At the same time, God protected his people (Ex 9:26; 10:23b; 11:7). This prophetically foreshadowed God's final judgment of all the earth. The purpose of his judgment is to display his power, so that his name might be proclaimed in all the earth (Ex 9:16; Ro 9:17).

At the fourth trumpet, the focus of divine judgment shifts from the earth to the heavens. When chaos and devastation fill the earth, many will look to the heavens for answers, like atheist Carl Sagan. He claimed, "We are children of the stars," as though some mysterious connection with celestial bodies would save mankind. It seems attractive, but it comes from evolutionary theory. It is an irrational illusion. In truth, there will be no answer in the heavenly bodies. A third of the sun, moon and stars will be struck, so that a third of them turn dark. A third of the day will be without light, as will a third of the night (12). Without light, how can plants, animals and humans survive? There will be no energy to power the food cycle. Temperatures will plunge drastically all over the world. It will be unbearable, but things are going to get worse. As John watched, he heard an eagle flying in midair, calling out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!" (13)

The fifth trumpet lets loose a judgment unlike any other thus far. John saw a star fall from the sky to the earth, probably referring to Satan (Isa 14:12; Lk 10:18). He was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss--the prison for demons. Satan used this key to allow demons to come out and afflict the earth (9:1-2). Out of the smoke

came creatures called locusts which had the deadly sting of scorpions (3). When locusts sweep through the land, all green plant life disappears. But these locusts were different. They were not allowed to harm grass, plants or trees, but only people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads (4). These people had no protection from God because they were not redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. The locusts tormented unbelieving people relentlessly for five months, but were not allowed to kill them (5). During those days people will seek death but not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them (6). Verses 7-10 describe the locusts in detail. They display Satan's awful supernatural power. Their king is Abaddon (Hebrew) or Apollyon (Greek), which means Destroyer (11). Sometimes Satan looks very attractive, like an angel of light (2Co 11:14). But in fact he is the Destroyer.

The fifth trumpet coincided with the first woe. In verse 12, the Greek word for "behold" appears. It indicates that the two woes remaining to come are even more dreadful than what has already happened. The sixth trumpet coincides with the second woe. John heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God (13). The voice released four destructive angels who carry out God's judgment to kill a third of mankind (14-15). The four angels released an army of 200 million mounted troops; it was a demon army (16). The horses and riders in the demon army are described in verses 17-19. They had breastplates of fiery red, dark blue and yellow. Their heads were like lions and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. Their tails were like snakes that inflicted injury. A third of mankind was killed by their plagues. This demon army was ultimately under the sovereign rule of God.

We may ask "Why does God judge so harshly?" We can find the reason in verses 20-21: "The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, the idols of silver, bronze, stone and wood--idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts." God judges them because they were worshiping demons and material things instead of God their Creator. Worshiping demons is a very serious matter. Some people in America openly identify as Satan worshipers. They deny God and promote human free will and sinful behavior that leads to lawlessness: murder, rape, robbery, arson, and the persecution of Christians. They destroy the image of God in themselves and others. They are rebellious, defiant and wicked. They are

God's enemies. There are many other man-made idols as well: money, power, science, technology, philosophy, and more. These idols cannot save people. Those who worship them provoke God to anger. God does not punish them right away. God is gracious, patient, kind, compassionate and merciful. Yet he cannot tolerate evil eternally. He gives them many chances to repent. But they do not; in fact, they determine not to repent and to stand against God's truth. They think they can rule over the world with their evil power. However, God will not allow it. God is almighty, holy, righteous and just. His judgment against evil will be unstoppable and thorough, and it is inevitable.

Second, God works through witnesses in the midst of judgment (10:1-11:14). This section is an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets. This interlude dramatizes God's patient delay in inflicting his full and final wrath. It assures God's people in the midst of horrible divine judgment, and reminds them that God controls all these events as the Sovereign Ruler. God's people have been troubled by some questions throughout history: "Why do the wicked go unpunished? Why does God not stop all the corruption and chaos? Why does he allow his people to suffer? When will divine justice prevail?" We find the answers to these questions in this passage.

Chapter 10 describes the opening event in this interlude, preparing for the final trumpet blast. Through it, John was authorized to prophesy about the final judgment. He saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. Like God on his throne, this angel is surrounded by a rainbow (4:3). Like the Son of Man, he comes with a cloud and his face shines like the sun (1:7,16). His legs, like pillars of fire, remind us of the glory of God's presence in the wilderness (Ex 13:21-22). His voice, like the roaring of a lion, could belong to the Lion of Judah (5:5). So some scholars think this refers to Jesus. But this may be simply another mighty angel like the one who delivered this message to John (1:1). When he shouted, the voice of seven thunders spoke (3). John was told to keep secret what they had said (4). Then the angel made an oath before the Creator God, the Supreme Authority, that there would be no more delay. God will soon accomplish his judgment and vindicate his suffering people (5-7).

John was told to take the little scroll from the angel and to eat it (8-9). It was sweet as honey in his mouth, but turned his stomach sour (10). This was John's symbolic commissioning as a prophet to peoples, nations, languages and kings (11).

The scroll was sour because John would prophesy bitter judgment and continued suffering for God's people. It was sweet because it was God's true and living word. The prophet Jeremiah experienced this mysterious paradox. When he prophesied words of God's judgment on Judah, he shed many tears with a bitter heart (Jer 13:17). Yet he also said, "When your words came and I ate them, they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name the LORD God Almighty" (Jer 15:16).

After God renews John's prophetic commission, we see how God protects his suffering people and vindicates them. John was told to go and measure the temple of God and its altar and the worshipers (11:1). This echoes the measuring of the temple in Ezekiel 40-48, which portrays the security of its inhabitants against harm and contamination. In verse 1, the temple of God is symbolic of the church. It is not a building, but people (3:12). Measuring signifies God's protection and his ownership of believers. This implies that their salvation is secure, even though they may suffer physical harm. Jesus promised, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand" (Jn 10:28). God will protect his people in the time of judgment. John was told not to measure the outer court because it had been given to the Gentiles who will trample on it for 42 months (2). This is a figurative way of describing the domain of ungodly rulers. In that domain, believers will suffer opposition and persecution for a limited time. During that period God appoints two witnesses to preach the gospel to the unbelieving world (3). This will be the last chance for the unbelieving world to be saved from their sins.

Who are the two witnesses? Some people say that they are two actual prophets who will appear at the end of history. To others, they represent the church. In either case, they are God's chosen servants who preach the gospel for 1,260 days, which is 42 months--the period of the domain of ungodly rulers (3). They are clothed in sackcloth. Wearing sackcloth symbolizes mourning over sin and judgment, and the message of repentance. Preaching the gospel in such times would cost their lives and requires unusual courage. How could they do so? Verse 4 says, "They are 'the two olive trees' and the two lampstands, and 'they stand before the Lord of the earth.'" The "two olive trees" signify the Holy Spirit (Zech 4:11). The two lampstands may refer to faithful churches, like Smyrna and Philadelphia, who were exemplary in witnessing to Christ in a hostile world. It was impossible for the witnesses to testify with mere human strength. They would be empowered by the Holy Spirit. They "stand before the Lord of the earth." Though

the witnesses live in a world of danger, they are never far from the Lord's presence, and nothing can separate them from the Lord. They will be protected from harm and empowered to do miraculous signs like Elijah and Moses (5-6). In this way, they would carry out their specific mission to the end.

Why did God raise these witnesses in such terrible times? It is because God loves people even though he does not tolerate sin. God does not want anyone to perish (2Pe 3:9). Ezekiel described God's heart well in 33:11, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?" When the wicked people of Nineveh turned from their evil ways, God was pleased and relented (Jnh 3:10). The prophet Jonah was very unhappy because God was so gracious, compassionate and willing to forgive wicked people (Jnh 4:2). God is pleased when we testify about Jesus, even to wicked people.

After they finish their testimony, a beast comes up from the Abyss. This beast refers to Satan, who is manifested through an evil king and kingdom. This beast will attack them, and overpower and kill them (7). Their souls went immediately to heaven. But their bodies were left in the public square of the great city Jerusalem--a figurative reference to ungodly cities, like Sodom and Egypt (8). People from every tribe, language and nation treated their bodies with indignation. In addition, they gloated over the witnesses, and celebrated their deaths by sending each other gifts. It was because they felt tormented by the message of repentance (9-10). When they killed the witnesses, they thought it was the end of them and no one would bother them anymore. But after three and a half days the breath of life from God entered the witnesses. Suddenly, they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who had celebrated their death (11). The victory celebration of the wicked gave way to shock and fear. Before their very eyes, God took the witnesses up to heaven (12). God reveals that he is living and will not be mocked. God never abandons his servants. At that very hour a severe earthquake struck, and a tenth of the city collapsed, killing seven thousand people. The survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven (13). This is an unusual expression in the book of Revelation. In 9:20-21; 16:10,21, when God judged the wicked they did not change at all. But this time, some survivors responded positively, even repenting (14:7; 15:4; 16:9). They were the fruit of the witnesses. This marks the end of the sixth trumpet--the second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon (14).

Third, God's final victory in establishing his everlasting kingdom (11:15-19). Unlike the first six trumpets, the seventh trumpet does not herald judgment but God's final victory. The mystery of God will be accomplished in fulfillment of his salvation plan (10:7). This takes place when Jesus comes again. Let's read verse 15: "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever'" (ESV). This expression is like a two-line poem. The first line proclaims the transfer of the kingship of the world. Though there are many nations, cultures and languages, the whole world is under the dominion of Satan. Jesus called him "the prince of this world" (Jn 12:31). He was a usurper. But at the sound of the seventh trumpet the kingdom publicly returns to our Lord as all enemies of God are defeated and judged. The second line, "and he shall reign forever and ever," proclaims the eternal rule of his divine kingship over the world. His kingship will never be interrupted by enemies. This had been predicted by the prophets and will be fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Daniel 2:44 says, "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever." When Jesus' birth was announced, the angel said, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Lk 1:32-33).

Why is the kingdom of Christ and his everlasting reign such good news? For the people of any nation, what kind of ruler they have is extremely important. If there is a good ruler, people enjoy prosperity and peace. But if there is a bad ruler, their lives can be ruined. For example, Venezuela used to be a most popular destination for people from Europe because of its good climate, natural resources, and abundant food, when it was ruled by a good leader. But ever since Hugo Chavez and Mr. Maduro took charge, the nation has degenerated terribly. It is now marked by extreme poverty and a high crime rate and has become a most dangerous place to live. In the last few years, over four million people have left the nation. Tragically, many of them are Venezuelan women who migrated to Spain, where they were forced into a life of prostitution to support their families back in Venezuela.¹ Why did this happen? It is because the leaders are selfish, greedy, corrupt and wicked. People suffer unbearably under their reign. Thankfully, God has raised his servants

¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/women-and-girls/venezuelas-crisis-fuelling-prostitution-sex-trafficking-costa/>

who preach the gospel and raise disciples, and a great revival movement has swept the nation. Still, they long for a leader who will reign with justice and righteousness for the good of the people.

The problem is that there is no perfect king. King David was the best king in Israel's history. However, he committed a terrible sin against God which brought great pain to his people. Furthermore, he could not live forever, but died. Christ is different. Though Christ is the Almighty, Creator God, he humbled himself and came into this world as a servant. He cared for people one by one with great love and mercy. He never used his almighty power for his own glory, but only to serve needy people. Christ could have crushed his enemies completely. Rather, he gave his life as a ransom by dying on the cross for our sins. Then God raised him from the dead and exalted him as King of kings. Christ conquered the power of sin, death and the devil forever. Now he rules over us as our Shepherd forever. Thank you, Jesus Christ, our everlasting Shepherd King!

At the announcement of Christ's reign, the twenty-four elders fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign" (16-17). Christ would judge the defiant and wicked nations (18a). Christ also judges the unbelieving dead (Jn 5:28-29). And he rewards his faithful people who revere his name (18b). He also destroys those who destroy the earth (18c). Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm (19). This is the most holy place in heaven, where God dwells. In this way God displayed his glory to John.

As we see the seven trumpets we learn that God judges all idolaters and the wicked, as the answer to our prayers. In times of crisis, we pray for God's help to overcome immediate challenges: to keep safe, for the healing of our loved ones, to keep our jobs, to get our degrees. It is hard to see what God is doing according to his great plan. We should know that the ultimate purpose of God's judgments is not just the destruction of evil things, but to establish the kingdom of Christ, who shall reign for ever and ever. With this hope, let's not give up or be discouraged, but keep praying, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!"