

# HERE FOR A REASON

SERIES: WAKE UP



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Revelation 11  
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## *Revelation 11*

When I was in my early twenties, I was in two harrowing traffic accidents on Highway 17 within two weeks of each other. Either could have killed me, but I walked away from each of them without a scratch. Ever since then, I've had the sense that I'm supposed to be here—that I'm here for a reason, at least for now.

Perhaps something similar has happened to you, and you feel the same way. Do you too have the sense that you're supposed to be here—that you're here for a reason? If so, Revelation 11 confirms your suspicions.

In Revelation 5, the Lamb, who is Jesus, took the scroll, which contains God's plan for healing the world, from the hand of God. The seven seals of the scroll have now been opened (Revelation 6:1-8:1). The opening of the seventh seal triggered the sounding of six trumpets so far (Revelation 8:2-10:11). After the sounding of the sixth trumpet, the scroll, now defined as the little scroll and now open in the hand of an angel, reappeared.

The angel gave John, the author of Revelation, the scroll and commanded him to eat it, and when he did so, it was bittersweet. This has to do with the bittersweet plan of God to rescue the world. It's bittersweet because it involves both tribulation and salvation for believers.

Beginning with Revelation 11, the contents of the scroll are revealed, though with the opening of the seals of the scroll, which included the sounding of six trumpets, we've been given a sneak peek, so to speak. Much of what follows in Revelation is similar to what has gone before, especially when we get to the pouring out of the seven bowls in Revelation 16.

Are you ready for the seventh and final trumpet?

## What to measure and what not to measure

### Revelation 11:1-2:

**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, 2 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.**

In the book of Revelation, John has already seen what he has been instructed to measure: the heavenly temple, the heavenly altar, and heavenly worshipers. What he sees in verse 1 represents the church of Jesus Christ as a heavenly entity. The other reference to the temple in Revelation 11 is to the heavenly temple (Revelation 11:19).<sup>1</sup> With the coming of the Holy Spirit, God's people have become his temple, the place of his dwelling (Revelation 13:6, 21:3).

The instruction to measure the temple, which draws on imagery from Ezekiel 40-42 and Zechariah 2:1-4, means that God protects his church, his people, from spiritual harm: their place in heaven is secure (Zechariah 2:4). We have already seen in the book of Revelation that God protects his people in such a way (Revelation 3:10, 7:3-4).

If the temple, altar, and worshipers represent the church as a heavenly entity, then the court outside the temple and the holy city represent the church as an earthly entity, even as it comprises the heavenly temple and city. The church is protected from spiritual harm but not from earthly harm, especially at the hands of persecutors, "the nations" that are opposed to God. For John's readers, the nations were the Romans, who trampled them, so to speak.

The length of time, forty-two months, amounts to three and a half years, equaling half of seven years, with seven being the number of perfection. Forty-two months represent the period between the first and final coming of Christ. On the one hand, the experience of believers on earth is imperfect. On the other hand, their imperfect experience is finite: it isn't forever.

## Bittersweet

Based on Revelation 11:1-2, we would conclude that our experience on earth as believers is bittersweet,

just like John's experience when he ate the little scroll, which contained God's plan for healing the world (Revelation 10:10).

It's comforting to know that whatever happens to us on earth doesn't threaten our place in heaven. It may not be as comforting to know that our place in heaven does not mean that we are protected from harm on earth. Here, our experience of life is far from perfect. Have you ever felt trampled upon? Here, our experience is bittersweet. The book of Revelation reflects the reality of our experience.

When we bring our medical and teaching teams overseas, the experience is always bittersweet. On the one hand, we see tremendous suffering, including suffering among believers. We meet those who have been persecuted for their faith: kicked out of their families and communities, even beaten. On the other hand, we see tremendous joy among suffering believers, especially among believers who are suffering for the Gospel.

Even if God does not promise to protect us from earthly harm, he has protected us from death, at least up to this point. After all, I'm writing this and you're reading it. What then are we here for?

## Two witnesses

### Revelation 11:3-6:

**And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 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. 6 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.**

The two witnesses represent the people of God in the world. In both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, at least two witnesses were often required (Deuteronomy 17:6, Matthew 18:16, 2 Corinthians 13:1). The duration of the ministry of the witnesses, 1,260 days, is the same as the forty-two months of Revelation 11:2. The time includes now, and all the time from the

first coming of Christ to the final coming Christ, when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of God. They prophesy, which means they speak for God. Likewise, John was commanded to prophesy again when he ate the little scroll (Revelation 10:11). John's new prophecy begins with words about these two witnesses. The sackcloth, which was worn when one was in mourning, means that the two witnesses are mourning for the broken state of the world.

The witnesses are also two olive trees and two lampstands.<sup>2</sup> The imagery is taken from Zechariah 4, where it was applied to the king, Zerubbabel, and the priest, Joshua, whom God charged with rebuilding the temple. John has already told his readers that they are “a kingdom and priests,” so they are to see themselves in the olive trees and the lampstands (Revelation 1:6, 5:10). Also, John has already applied the lampstand imagery to the churches: “the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20). As a lampstand, or as a collection of lampstands, the church is the light of the world (Matthew 5:14).

The two witnesses not only echo Zerubbabel and Joshua in verses 3-4, but they also echo Elijah and Moses in verses 5-6. In Elijah's day, fire consumed the enemies of God, and God judged a king by withholding rain (1 Kings 17:1, 2 Kings 2:9-16). One of the ten plagues against Egypt in Moses' day involved turning the Nile into blood (Exodus 7:17-24). God protected Moses and Elijah, and he protects the church today for what he calls it to do. Again, we shouldn't take the imagery literally, as if God's witnesses in the first-century churches breathed fire or turned water into blood, any more than we do the same. As for the future, who knows?

## Put on your sackcloth

What are we here for? One of the things we're here for is to speak for God as his witnesses, especially to make Christ known. But we are to do so clothed in sackcloth, so to speak, mourning for a broken world and even for our own brokenness. God protects us precisely for this purpose: to make Christ known while mourning for a world that is broken because it has rejected him.

Sadly, the sackcloth is sometimes missing from the church's witness today, which is all the more reason for us to put it on. We must speak truthfully, yes, but also humbly and lovingly, knowing that we are saved by grace and allowing that grace to soften our hearts.

God protects us from death, at least for now.

## Killed and shamed

### Revelation 11:7-10:

**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, 8 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. 9 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, 10 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.**

The witnesses are protected from spiritual harm, and they're even protected from death—but only to a point. They are protected from death so that they can make Christ known. Only after they finish their testimony are they killed. We'll have to wait until Revelation 13 to learn more about the beast that kills the witnesses. For now, it's enough to observe that it rises from the bottomless pit, which, being the abode of Satan, is the antithesis of heaven (Revelation 9:1-2, 11).

The “great city” elsewhere in Revelation is Babylon, which itself symbolizes Rome (Revelation 16:9). Moreover, the great city is corrupt like Sodom and oppressive like Egypt. Furthermore, the great city is also identified with Jerusalem, inasmuch as the Lord was crucified there. Babylon, Rome, Sodom, Egypt, Jerusalem—the great city is all of these.

The great city is any city that opposes God: it is the world in opposition to God. That means the Silicon Valley is also the great city, and we have the privilege, as it says on our website, of “following Jesus together in the Silicon Valley.” The prevalence of “the great city” means that a new city is needed, a truly great city, the new Jerusalem, which will come out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:2).

Some who are opposed to God—from “the peoples and tribes and languages and nations” whom Jesus wants to purchase for God—shame the two witnesses by keeping them from being buried. Their bodies are exposed for three and a half days, which is an even shorter version of the imperfect forty-two months and 1,260 days, each of which amounts to three and a half

years. The time that their bodies are exposed (three and a half days) is the apocalyptic equivalent of the time that Jesus' body was in the tomb (three days).

Those who dwell on the earth—that is, those who are opposed to God—celebrate because they are rid of the witnesses who tormented them by confronting them with the truth. In the Greco-Roman world, presents were exchanged at times of celebration.

## Until we're finished

God protects us from death for his purposes until his purposes for us on this earth are through. The same was true for Jesus:

— “So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come” (John 7:30).

— “These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come” (John 8:20).

One day, Jesus' hour came. One day, our day will come as well. One day, our testimony will be finished. Until then, we're here because God wants us here. In the immortal words of baseball legend Yogi Berra, “It ain't over till it's over.”

It turns out that when I walked away from the two traffic accidents that easily could have taken my life, much of my life was before me. I hadn't become a pastor yet. I hadn't gotten married yet. I hadn't had children yet. My hour had not yet come. I take it that God's purposes for me weren't finished.

One of the things I know I'm here for is to speak for God, to be a witness: to make Christ known. First of all, I'm here to make Christ known to my children. Being an older father, I have prayed that I would be here for as long as they need me, and this text helps me trust that God knows how long that is and that he knows best. I don't need to walk them down the aisle. I don't need to see my grandchildren. For that matter, I don't need to have grandchildren. I need to be here for my children as long as God deems my presence in their lives necessary.

As of now, I have not finished my testimony, and neither have you. God protects us from death, at least for now, so that we may bear witness. He also empowers us, while we're alive, to bear witness.

## Breath of life

### Revelation 11:11-14:

**But 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. 12 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. 13 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. 14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.**

The beast kills the two witnesses and their enemies shame them, but God isn't finished with them: God brings them back to life! Although they were slain, they stand up, which reminds us of an earlier vision, when we “saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Revelation 5:6). The resurrection of Jesus constitutes “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”—that is, the resurrection of Jesus was the first of many resurrections to follow (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Earlier, people who gazed on the dead bodies of the two witnesses rejoiced; now great fear falls on those who witness their resurrection. Do they fear more torture? Will their fear lead to judgment or repentance?

In Revelation 4:1, John heard a voice commanding him, “Come up here,” to heaven, where he received the visions he's been recording. Now John listens as the two witnesses hear the same thing. John's ministry and the ministry of the two witnesses—and the ministry of the church today—are one and the same: to bear witness, to live and speak the truth, to make Christ known. The transportation of the witnesses on a cloud, accompanied by a great earthquake, serves as divine vindication (2 Kings 2:11, Daniel 7:13, Matthew 27:51-54, Mark 14:62, Acts 1:9).

Perhaps this section envisions some future resurrection of a group of believers, or even two individuals in particular, but inasmuch as the scene is drawn from Ezekiel 37, which depicts the coming of the Holy Spirit, we need not take this literally for our purposes in the present. When the breath of life that is the Holy Spirit came upon the early believers in Christ in Acts 2, three thousand people came to Christ.

Today, when someone believes in Christ, he or she is born again by the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit for God's purposes. The spiritual resurrection of the believer anticipates his or her actual resurrection when the kingdom of God comes in full.

A tenth of the city, which represents the world in opposition to God, falls, and seven thousand die. In contrast to the prophesy of Isaiah and Amos, which called for a tenth to be saved, here only a tenth falls (Isaiah 6:13, Amos 5:3). In contrast to Elijah's day, when only seven thousand were left, only seven thousand die (1 Kings 19:18).

What happens to the rest, the vast majority? They give glory to the God of heaven: they repent and believe.<sup>3</sup> Up to this point, despite the judgments of God in the opening of the seals and the sounding of the trumpets, no one is reported as turning to God. On the contrary, men and women refused to do so (Revelation 6:15-17, 9:20-21).

Whereas the “rest” refused to repent in Revelation 9:20-21, here the “rest” worship God, and they do so because of the two witnesses, their triumph over death, and God's vindication of them.

The great city, the Silicon Valley, hasn't fallen yet, and we're still here, following Jesus together in Silicon Valley.

## Witness needed

In this section, it's worth noting the significance of our witness. Although God seeks to reach the world by allowing it to experience the consequences for rebellion against him, he also seeks to reach the world by sending us into it as his witnesses. Consequences alone don't seem to win the world. What's needed is God-protected, Spirit-empowered, sackcloth-wearing, truth-speaking witness of followers of the Lamb. Beginning March 3, we will begin a six-week Lent series that will help us make Christ known.

It seemed to me on our recent overseas missions strip that our team was a witness simply in view of its composition. We had fourteen team members. The youngest was fourteen, and the oldest was seventy-four. Five churches were represented. Some of the members had never even met each other. The ethnic spread included Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Caribbean, and European. Some taught pastors. Some taught women. Some taught children. Some taught doctors and nurses. Some treated patients. If Jesus wants to gather

“the peoples and tribes and languages and nations” that are depicted in Revelation 11 as being opposed to God, then it seemed to me that he had a hand in assembling the team.

The sounding of the fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpets constitute three “woes” (Revelation 8:13, 9:12). The seventh and final trumpet, signaling the third and final woe, is about to sound.

## The seventh trumpet

### Revelation 11:15-18:

**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.” 16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 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. 18 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.”**

With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, we get what we’ve been waiting for in the book of Revelation. We’ve been waiting for the kingdom of the world to become the kingdom of God. You might remember these verses from “The Halleluiah Chorus” in Handel’s *The Messiah*. Now, those who belong to the kingdom of the world have either been converted or vanquished.<sup>4</sup>

That we’re only halfway through the book illustrates that it is recapitulative—that is, John circles back and revisits same events from different angles.

The news prompts the twenty-four elders to break forth into worship again. Notice what’s different this time. Previously, God has been identified as the one “who is and who was and who is to come” (Revelation 1:4, 8). When John visited the throne room of God in heaven in Revelation 4, he heard the four living creatures worship God by saying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come” (Revelation 4:8). Now, the elders identify God as the one “who is

and who was.” What happened to “to come”? There is no “to come,” because God has come! He has taken his great power and begun to reign.

God reigns now, of course. Jesus is Lord of the world now, of course. But as the writer of Hebrews puts it, “we do not yet see everything in subjection” to Jesus, because God for now is allowing evil a place for his own sublime purposes (Hebrews 2:8). For now, evil is being subjugated. Revelation 11:15 anticipates the day when it will be vanquished.

## The nations rage

The nations—those opposed to the rule of God—rage, because their time is up. Finally, the fullness of God’s wrath is seen as coming against the wrathful. This is good news, of course, for if God does not judge those who are opposed to his loving, sacrificial rule, which comes through the shed blood of the Lamb and the suffering of his followers, then might makes right.

Revelation 19:18 fulfills Psalm 2, where the nations and the kings of the earth are seen as raging against the reign of God and against his Anointed—that is, his earthly king, who turns out to be Christ: “Let us burst their bonds apart, / and cast away their cords from us.” The psalmist says of God:

Then he will speak to them in his wrath,  
and terrify them in his fury, saying,  
“As for me, I have set my King  
on Zion, my holy hill.”

Finally, the twenty-four elders envision the final judgment, when believers in Christ—defined as servants, prophets, holy ones, and those who fear God’s name—will be rewarded with the fullness of life in the new creation. At the same time, those who are opposed to God, defined as “the destroyers of the earth,” will be destroyed. In that those who are opposed to God are defined this way, they corrupt the earth with their opposition to his loving rule (Genesis 6:11-13, 17; Revelation 19:2). John gives us another vision of the same event in Revelation 20:11-15.<sup>5</sup>

As God uses us to bring “the rest” to Christ, however many that is, his kingdom comes. Again, we see the impact of our witness. It not only contributes to bringing people to Christ, but it also contributes to the vanquishing of evil and the establishment of the kingdom of God. One day, our prayers will be fully

answered: “Your kingdom come, / your will be done, / on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

## God is faithful

### Revelation 11:19:

**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,[a] peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.**

The opening of the heavenly temple serves as a transition to a new scene, beginning in Revelation 12:1. The ark of the covenant, inside the Most Holy Place in the earthly temple, symbolized God's throne on earth. Its appearance in the heavenly temple emphasizes that God has been faithful to his covenant promises and that he reigns—in heaven and on earth.

## A modest suggestion

Scholar N.T. Wright sums up Revelation 11:

*What we are dealing with is several different angles of vision on the one single great reality: that through the awful turmoil and trouble of the world, God is establishing through Jesus a people who, following the lamb, are to bear witness to God's kingdom through their own suffering, through which the world will be brought to repentance and faith, so that ultimately God will be king over all.”<sup>6</sup>*

Let me offer a modest suggestion for making Christ known in Silicon Valley. People stay away from the church here in droves. It is one of the most “unchurched” areas of the country. The fact that some of us devote our Sunday mornings to coming to a church says something—it is itself a witness—and it gives us a unique opportunity that believers in more “churched” parts of the country don't have. We stand out.

The fact that you go to a church on a Sunday morning is bound to leak out among some of those you live among: neighbors, coworkers, classmates, whomever. So, here's a possible scenario:

Someone discovers that you go to a church on Sunday mornings. He or she might ask you what kind of church. So, what kind of church are we? I like to say that we're followers of Jesus. What about the “Bible” in the

name? Oh, we study the Scriptures so that we can follow Jesus and love people better. Pretty simple. Now you've described what you do with your Sunday mornings.

Once you've finished, simply ask a question. And this is where it gets a little risky. Ask something like, “What do you think?” or maybe, “Are you interested?” See where it goes.

Some people, when they find out that I used to be a journalist, ask me if I miss journalism. I miss some aspects. One thing I miss is a natural day-to-day context for being with unbelievers, which created unforced openings for sharing Christ with them. The problem with my current workplace is that all my co-workers already believe!

When I was in college and when I was a journalist, a few people came to Christ—not many, but a few. In any event your job isn't to convert anyone; that's the Holy Spirit's job. Your job is to take advantage of the opportunities the Spirit creates for you. As was the case with the two witnesses, so it is with us: God has granted us authority to speak for him and we have power to speak for him.

## Who knows?

Many years ago, when I was working as a journalist, I went out to lunch with a co-worker. He heard me talk about some women whom I knew. Both of us were single at the time.

“Where do you meet women?” he asked.

“Most of the women I know I've met at church,” I answered.

Long pause.

“Hmm. I never thought of that.”

If I had taken my advice then that I'm giving you now, I would have then asked a follow-up question: “Are you interested?”

Who knows where it would have gone?

May I ask the same question to any of you who have not yet committed your life to Christ but may wonder what it's all about. Are you interested?

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Likewise every other reference to the temple in Revelation is not to the earthly temple in Jerusalem, which by John's day had been destroyed, but to the heavenly temple (Revelation 7:12, 11:19, 14:17, 16:17).
- <sup>2</sup> Notice how it's impossible to take this literally. How can two people also be two olive trees? How can they be two olive trees and two lampstands? They can't.
- <sup>3</sup> The language elsewhere in Revelation conveys conversion (Revelation 14:7, 16:9, 15:4).
- <sup>4</sup> The voices proclaim that "he shall reign forever and ever." Are they speaking of "our Lord" or of "his Christ"? Probably both—in that they reign together as one.
- <sup>5</sup> The apostle Paul also speaks of the last trumpet: "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).
- <sup>6</sup> N.T. Wright, *Revelation for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 103.