

November 14 Lesson 11 (NIV)

GOD OF POWER

DEVOTIONAL READING: Revelation 11:11–19

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Revelation 11

REVELATION 11:15–19

¹⁵ The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

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

¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ The nations were angry,
and your wrath has come.
The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets
and your people who revere your name,
both great and small—
and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

¹⁹ 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.

KEY TEXT

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”—Revelation 11:15

CELEBRATING GOD

Unit 3: Visions of Praise

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON OUTLINE

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HOW TO SAY IT

apocalypticuh-*paw-kuh-lip-tik*.

cherubim*chair-uh-bim*.

DomitianDuh-*mish-un*.

HabakkukHuh-*back-kuk*.

IsaiahEye-*zay-uh*.

JerusalemJuh-*roo-suh-lem*.

MessiahMeh-*sigh-uh*.

Nero*Nee-row*.

Zephaniah Zef-uh-nye-uh.

Introduction

A. Hallelujah Chorus

The Introduction for lesson 9 mentioned the “Hallelujah Chorus” as sung by a flash mob. That’s intriguing in and of itself, but digging into the nature of the actual composition reveals some hidden treasures.

The “Hallelujah Chorus” is part of a much larger musical composition—an oratorio—titled *The Messiah*, by G. F. Händel (1685–1759). The composition as a whole falls into three main parts, which are further subdivided into some 16 scenes and 53 movements, depending on which arrangement is in view. A full performance can easily exceed two hours’ duration—something quite foreign to the short attention spans of twenty-first century culture!

By one count, the oratorio includes some 60 references to Scripture, depending on how duplicates are counted. This fact should intrigue the Christian and make *The Messiah* worthy of devotional consideration. Among the Scripture references are Revelation 5:12–13; 11:15; and 19:6, 16. The “Hallelujah Chorus” is the movement that draws on the latter two—passages under consideration in this week’s lesson and next’s, respectively.

B. Lesson Context

Revelation has been traditionally understood to have been received by the churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) during the last decade of the first century AD. This likely dates its reception during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (reigned AD 81–96). While scholars differ as to whether he persecuted Christians, it is widely accepted that one of his predecessors, Nero (reigned AD 54–68), instituted vast persecution of Christians across the empire. The audience of the apostle John (author of the book of Revelation) would have been familiar with such persecutions.

The key to understanding Revelation lies in recognizing the type of literature it is, known as “apocalyptic”; this type of writing can be found in other parts of Scripture (see the Lesson Context of lesson 10; compare and contrast Isaiah 13:10; 34:4; Daniel 8:9–10; Matthew 24:29–31; Mark 13:24–27; and Luke 21:25–28).

Apocalyptic literature features unveiling of a big-picture reality by a heavenly being (God or angels) to a human recipient. The reality that is revealed includes elements of both time (dealing with end-time salvation and judgment) and space (the reality of another, supernatural world).

In some instances, apocalyptic literature repeats a story several times with different details but the same ending. For example, the imagery of seals, trumpets, and bowls in Revelation depicts God’s righteous judgment on rebellious and sinful earth. The final act in each series is accompanied by extraordinary weather phenomena that culminates in the worship of God for his righteous acts.

The central part of Revelation concerns three sets of seven events initiated in Heaven: the opening of seals (Revelation 6:1–17; 8:1–5), the sounding of trumpets (8:6–9), and the pouring out of bowls of judgment (16:1–21). The results on earth are cataclysmic. Each set of events ends with a time of worship and adoration. Today’s lesson details the climax of the second of these three sets of events.

The immediate context for today’s passage is that of seven angels who were ready to sound seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6). The results of the first four of the seven soundings find parallels with the 10 plagues poured out on Egypt (see Exodus 7:14–11:10).

- The first signals a bloody, fiery hailstorm that destroys one-third of the earth (Revelation 8:7).
- The second leads to something like the appearance of a burning mountain’s being hurled into the sea; the sea turns to blood; sea creatures are killed; ships are destroyed (8:8–9).
- The third calls forth a fiery star from the heavens that pollutes many of the freshwater rivers and brings death (8:10–11).
- The fourth strikes parts of each of the great lights—the sun, moon, and stars (8:12).
- The fifth signals the opening of the Abyss, unleashing a hoard of locusts on humankind in the process (9:1–5).
- The sixth releases four mighty angels and their armies to kill one-third of sinful humanity (9:13–16).

These judgments, however intense, fail to stop the idolatry and sexual immorality in the world (see Revelation 9:20–21). Today’s text focuses on the seventh and final angel.

I. Declaration of Truth

(REVELATION 11:15)

A. Seventh Angel (v. 15a)

15a. The seventh angel sounded his trumpet,

Various forms of the number seven occur hundreds of times in the Bible. Its occurrences often signal completeness (examples: Genesis 2:2; 2 Kings 5:10; Revelation 15:1, 8). Trumpets are blown at accessions of kings to their thrones (example: 1 Kings 1:34–41). The two concepts seem to combine here (see next).

B. Loud Voices (v. 15b)

15b. and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

Following, or perhaps accompanying, the sound of the trumpet are unidentified heavenly *voices* making the grand pronouncement we see here. Loudness in this book characterizes worship (see Revelation 5:12; 7:10). Should not God’s victory be declared as loudly as possible?

What John saw speaks to the hope that the people of God have so longed to see: God has become the king over the whole earth. Old Testament prophets looked forward to a day when “the God of heaven” would “set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed ... and it will itself endure forever” (Daniel 2:44).

In John's vision, the day when "the Lord will be king over the whole earth" (Zechariah 14:9) was foreseen as certain. The sin that separated the human realm from the heavenly realm will no longer be an obstacle. John later pictured this kingdom as the unified city of New Jerusalem; those who continue to sin are not allowed to enter the city (see Revelation 22:14–15).

The finality of this collective kingdom becomes clear as the voices' proclaim that God *will reign for ever and ever*. Whereas *the kingdom of the world* is temporary and filled with sin, the reign of God will be eternal, featuring everlasting life for the faithful.

God's eternal reign is shared with the Lord's *Messiah*, his Christ; these are Hebrew and Greek words that mean the same thing: "anointed one." As the heavenly chorus praises the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb (Revelation 7:10; see lesson 10), so do the heavenly voices here.

II. Worship of God

(REVELATION 11:16–18)

A. Position of Elders (v. 16)

16. And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,

A previous scene of worship reappears as *the twenty-four elders fall on their faces* (compare Revelation 4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 19:4). More of what this implies is seen next.

B. Recognition of Power (v. 17)

17a. saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,

In their dramatic posture of worship and submission, the elders begin their *thanks* by addressing God in a certain way, using the respectful and reverential title *Lord God Almighty*. Each aspect of the designation bears significance; their collective effect is greater still.

The word translated *Lord* in and of itself can imply only a measure of respect, as with "sir" (examples: Matthew 13:27; 27:63). When combined with *God Almighty*, however, things change. The full, three-word use of this designation is found in the New Testament only in Revelation 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6 (see lesson 12); and 21:22. It serves to relay the expansive power of God in the world.

The ancient Greek version of the Old Testament is the source of this phrase, primarily the book of Amos (10 times). God alone is almighty! John's use of this title reflected his confidence that God's redemptive plan would come to fruition, even in the midst of tribulation and suffering.

17b. the One who is and who was,

The elders describe God's eternal nature. This same description is used by the author himself, the apostle John, in Revelation 1:4; by the Lord God in 1:8; and by the four living creatures in 4:8. This description reflects and expands on God's self-designation "I AM" of Exodus 3:14 (compare John 8:58). As the description speaks of God's eternal, unchangeable nature it implies his sovereignty.

17c. because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.

The elders' reasoning for giving thanks in Revelation 11:17a above is now stated. God's *power* is shown in its totality and fullness as his overthrow of evil results in an uncontested reign. God, by his actions, has answered the age-old question, "How long, Sovereign Lord?" (Revelation 6:10; see also Isaiah 6:11; Habakkuk 1:2). This part of John's prophetic vision will be the final move of God as he establishes "a new heaven and a new earth" (see Revelation 21; compare Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13).

C. Message of Judgment (v. 18)

18a. The nations were angry, and your wrath has come.

The elders continue their pronouncement as they now describe reactions to God's exercise of his power. The word translated *nations* occurs some two dozen times in this book—sometimes in a positive sense (example: Revelation 5:9) and sometimes in a negative sense, as here. Nations frequently jostle against one another (Psalm 2:1), and now their anger is a result of having to face God's *wrath* (see Revelation 6:15–17). His wrath poured out on them does not result in repentance—quite the opposite! The "great day of the Lord" (Zephaniah 1:14), long prophesied, is at hand.

18b. The time has come for judging the dead,

The time of judging the dead is when all who have lived and died throughout history will be resurrected to face judgment (see Daniel 12:2). A fuller account of this brief description of the final judgment is found in Revelation 20:12–13.

18c. and for rewarding your servants the prophets

The reward to be given to the righteous also finds expression in Matthew 5:12; 16:27; 1 Corinthians 3:10–15; 2 John 8; Revelation 22:12; and elsewhere.

One of two categories to be rewarded is God's *servants the prophets* (compare Revelation 10:7). This can include those servants of God who spoke about the future as well as those servants who preached the message of God (compare Psalm 40:9; Acts 8:5; 1 Corinthians 9:16–18; etc.). Prophets can be both *foretellers* and *forthtellers*. In both cases, the one proclaiming God's truth calls people to a faithful relationship with the Lord. The heart of this relationship is forsaking all other "gods" in remaining loyal to him alone (compare Galatians 4:8). Some in this group and the next experience martyrdom (Revelation 16:6; 18:24).

18d. and your people who revere your name, both great and small—

The second group to be rewarded are the *people* of God *who revere God's name*. They, like the prophets, were faithful—some even to the point of martyrdom in the service of the Lord. Some older translations call these reverential individuals "saints," drawing attention to the holiness of the body of Christ.

As if to stress the inclusive nature, *both great and small* are in view. Although 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 speaks of differing levels of reward, we should not separate these groups too much. Both are faithful to God, and they will be rewarded as such (see also Revelation 19:5).

18e. and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

The elders end their utterances by returning to the imagery of the angry mob, defeated and punished. Through a poetic use of parallelism, the elders describe God's visiting on *those who destroy the earth* the same thing in return.

We should be careful not to read twenty-first century concerns back into this statement. In this text, destroying the earth does not refer to environmental devastation, no matter how sinful such actions might be. The idea is in a broad context of biblical times. Jeremiah 51:25 uses the same wording in speaking of Babylon (compare 50:23). Sometimes Babylon is used figuratively (1 Peter 5:13; Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5), so it may refer to evil entities in general.

The type of destruction that awaits those who destroy the earth is not specified here. To understand what that involves, one can turn to Matthew 5:22; 10:28; 13:41–42; 25:41; Luke 3:17; Revelation 19:20–21; 20:10, 15; etc. The bottom line is that the fulfillment of God’s kingdom brings eternal retribution to those who oppose the people and purpose of God (see 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10).

III. Opening of Temple

(REVELATION 11:19)

A. Contents (v. 19a)

19a. Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.

The vision expands to reveal the *temple*, which is the large sanctuary of *God* in *heaven* and the center of worship there (see also Revelation 3:12; 7:15; 15:5–8; 21:22). When it *opened*, John glanced into the innermost part of the heavenly temple and caught a glimpse of the greatest treasure of the temple: *God’s ark of his covenant*.

For Israel, the ark was more than an ornate box containing various historical items (see Exodus 25:10–22). It symbolized God’s presence with his people and his covenant mercy.

The ark was topped with a statuary representation of “two cherubim” with outstretched wings, forming the “atonement cover” (Hebrews 9:5), where God’s presence could rule in mercy and covenant faithfulness. It was reserved for the Lord God alone and symbolized his presence with his people.

Instead of being seen only by the high priest once a year (Hebrews 9:7), the ark in Heaven fulfills its ultimate purpose. In this heavenly temple, God will rule his people, and his presence will be with them permanently (Revelation 21:3).

B. Weather (v. 19b)

19b. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm.

The opening of the temple is accompanied by severe phenomena. As with the breaking of the seventh seal, there is *lightning*, ... *thunder*, and *an earthquake* (see Revelation 8:5; compare 4:5).

Such imagery is characteristic of apocalyptic literature. It is intended to catch the reader’s attention, perhaps to show the seriousness of God’s judgment. Indeed, *a severe hailstorm* is often associated with such judgment (Exodus 9:22–27; Job 38:22–23; Psalm 78:48; Isaiah 28:17; Haggai 2:17; Revelation 8:7). Additionally, such imagery would draw the audience to compare John’s revelation with God’s dramatic revelation to Moses (see Exodus 19:16–19). The God who

revealed himself to Moses will, someday, reveal himself to all people as the judge and the one worthy of worship.

Conclusion

A. Eternal Worship

A certain church closed its doors after 30 years of ministry. Hundreds once worshipped there each week. But in recent years, that number had dwindled to about 30.

Maintaining the property had become too burdensome. The decision to close this church and sell the property was difficult but necessary. The discussions surrounding the decision were very emotional. Church members had fond memories of weddings, baptisms, and other special moments shared in that building.

Although the congregants decided to close the doors of its place of worship, they leaned into discerning how best to continue to worship God and serve his people. Closing the church building did not mean that worship would cease. Instead, the group began to worship in local parks and with other congregations. They used the money from the sale of the church property to fund mission opportunities around the city. The people's worship and service continued ... and that's the main thing.

Israel's center of worship, the temple, had been destroyed about 25 years before John wrote Revelation. But some 40 years before that destruction, the Jerusalem temple's importance had been superseded by Jesus' death and resurrection (Matthew 27:50–51; Hebrews 8:1–10:22). That resulted in a new understanding of "temple" (see 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21). John's vision saw an even better reality to come—that of God's heavenly temple where worship continues into eternity.

For the original audience that had experienced persecution, perhaps even being unable to worship communally, how encouraging this coming reality must have been! Today's passage invites us to anticipate a future where the kingdom of God is fully established everywhere, where injustice no longer prevails, and where we worship God for eternity.

B. Prayer

Lord, may we remember that you are everlasting and unchanging! You are worthy to receive every honor and praise. May we, like those in the book of Revelation, celebrate your reign forever and ever with an eternal "Hallelujah!" In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

There is a future
when God's reign in Heaven
will join his reign on earth.¹

¹