



Moses & Elíjah

The Revelation of Jesus Christ - Week 3

The Letters to the Churches

The Book of Revelation opens, after a short prologue, with seven letters to various churches in Asia. The purpose of these letters is to spiritually prepare the reader for the journey they are about to embark on. As such, over the seven weeks of this study, we will be beginning each class with a different letter, both as a devotional exercise, as well as to ensure we do not neglect this less-discussed part of the Apocalypse of St. John.



The background of the slide is a photograph of the ruins of the Temple of Asclepius in Pergamon, Turkey. The image shows several tall, fluted stone columns standing amidst a field of rubble and broken stone blocks. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall tone of the image is historical and somewhat somber, fitting the biblical text overlaid on it.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write,

These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”

Revelation 2:8–11 NKJV

Ruins of Pergamos

The Witness of the Church



This week, we will explore the second vision of the Revelation, the seven trumpets, which shows the effects of the fall and curse, and how even in the midst of the fallen world Christ calls His Church to be His witnesses, proclaiming the Gospel to all. As with the previous cycle, there is also a focus on the surety of God's promises and His ultimate victory, a theme throughout the entire book.

The Second Cycle

The second cycle of seven emphasizes that the message of Christ is to be proclaimed throughout the world throughout the trials of the last days.

1. The First Four Trumpet Blasts: Tribulations in Nature. (8:6-13)
2. The Fifth Trumpet Blast: Evil From the Abyss. (9:1-12)
3. The Sixth Trumpet Blast: Destruction Sweeps Over Mankind. (9:13-21)
4. Interlude: God's Word Still Proclaimed (10-11)
 - a. John is re-commissioned
 - b. The Saints Witness
6. The Seventh Trumpet Blast: The End and Rejoicing.

Cursed be the Earth

The first four trumpet blasts herald plagues upon all creation, once again illustrating the troubles of the Church Age, this time with an emphasis on the fallenness of creation.

- **Earth** - A recapitulation of the curse in Eden, but now more severe, with fire burning up man's sustenance.
- **The Sea** - Clearly an allusion to Exodus, but now even the seas become blood, again an escalation of a previous judgement.
- **Fresh Waters** - Again the third sign is the most difficult, with interpretations varying. What is clear is that every realm of creation is under wrath.
- **The Heavens** - Even the very heavens darken, it is clear here that all of creation is fundamentally disordered and dying.

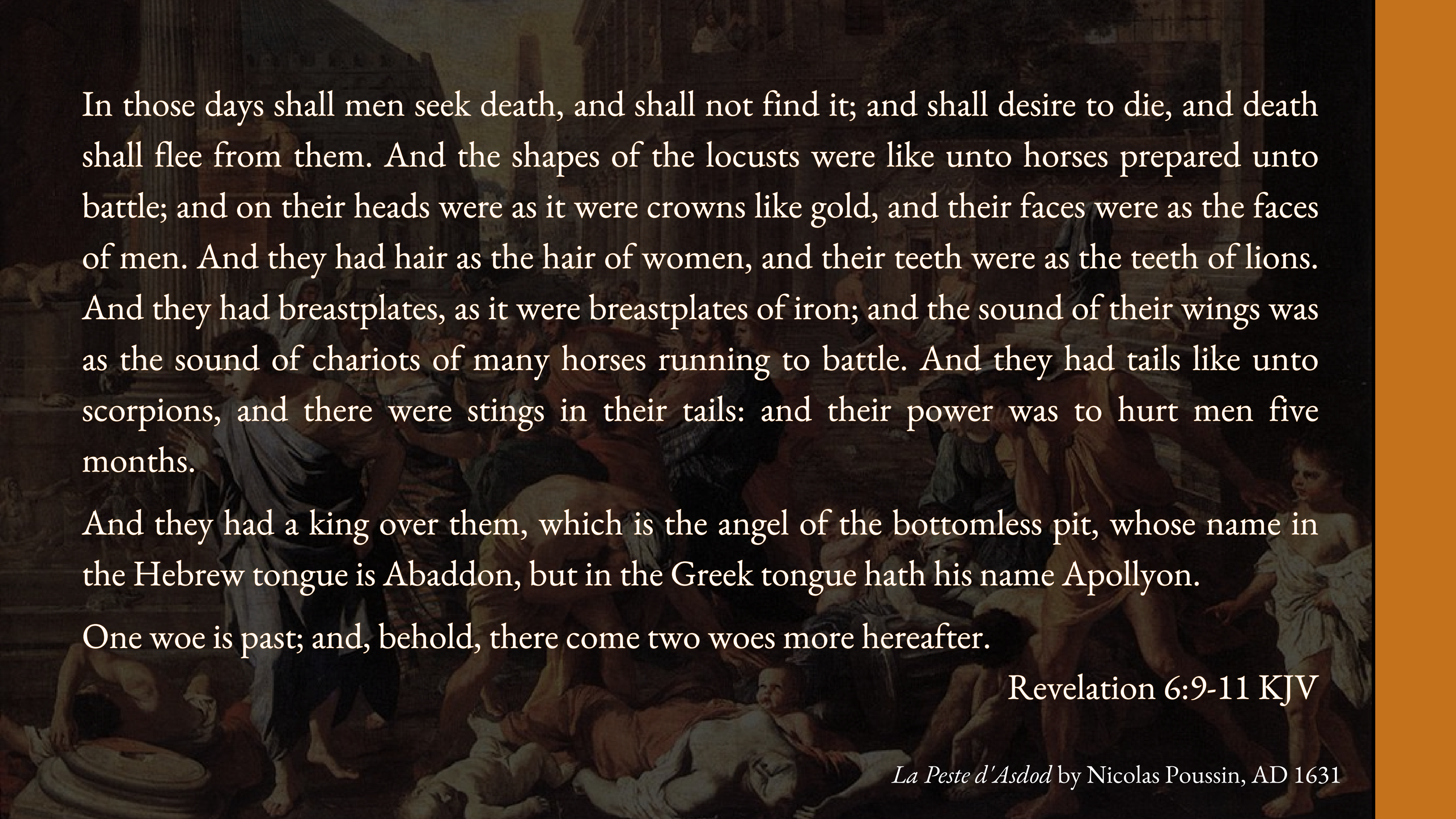


Left: *The Chernobyl Savior Icon* by Vladislav Goretsky
Right: *The Angel of Death* memorial at Chernobyl

The Hosts of Hell



The fifth and sixth trumpet each release hordes of demonic creatures to ravage the earth. These murderous beasts kill “by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths” (9:18 KJV). These creatures kill a third of those living, yet those who have been sealed by the Lord are protected from death. Like the previous four trumpet blasts, these herald trials arising in the created order, disordered nature and here diabolic oppression.



In those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

Revelation 6:9-11 KJV

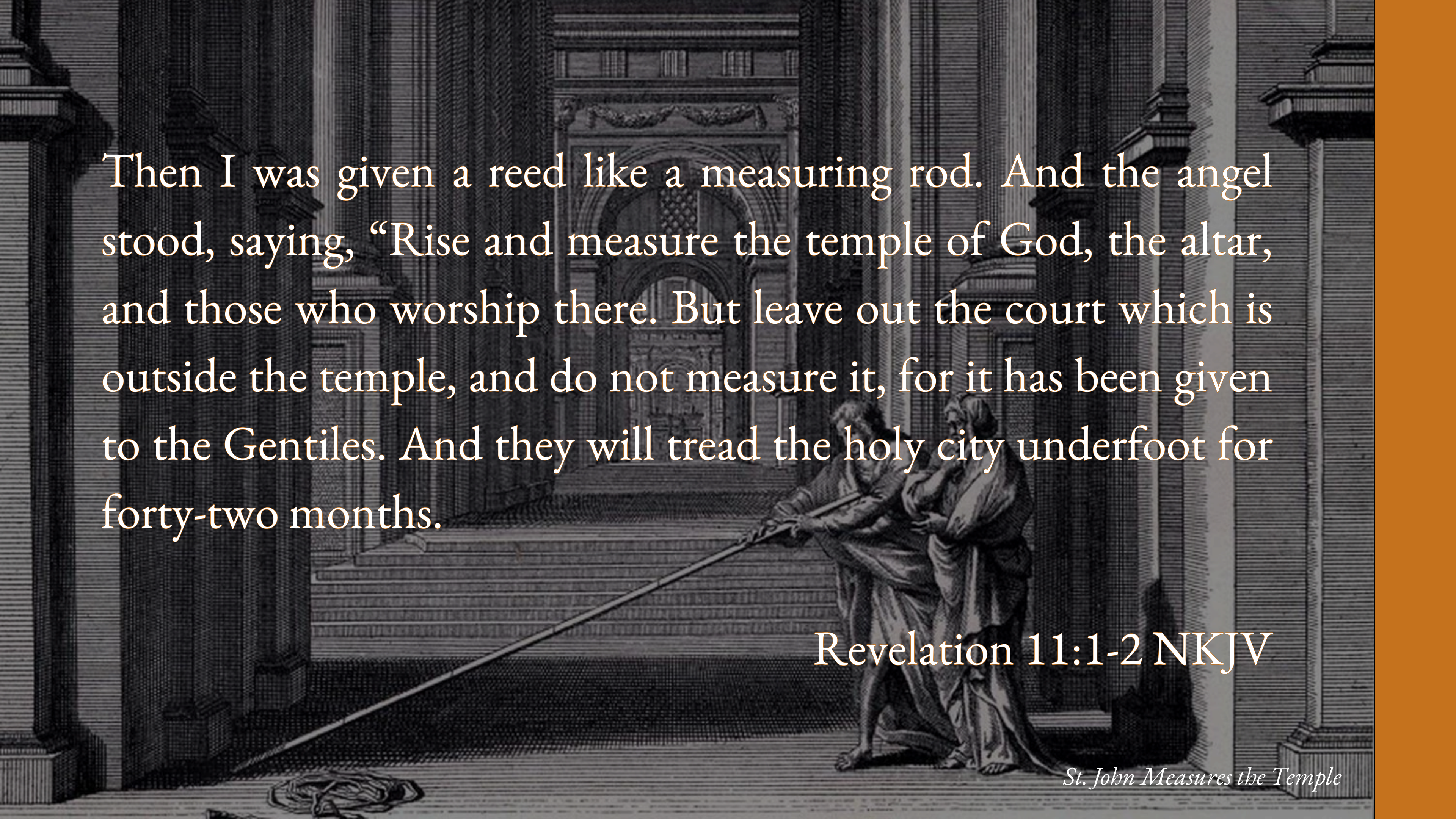
La Peste d'Asdod by Nicolas Poussin, AD 1631

Eschatological Missiology

We now reach the interlude of the second cycle. Here, the focus is on the witness and proclamation of the Church on earth. In Chapter 10, St. John is recommissioned as an evangelist, being told that he ““must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings” (v.11 NKJV).

Then, in Chapter 11, he is instructed to measure out the Temple (a recurring Biblical symbol for the surety of God’s promises) before he sees the life, martyrdom, and resurrection of two witnesses at the hands of an unbelieving world.

In both cases, the message is one of mission, that the Church in this age must witness to Christ by their word and blood. After all, “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14 NKJV).



Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

Revelation 11:1-2 NKJV

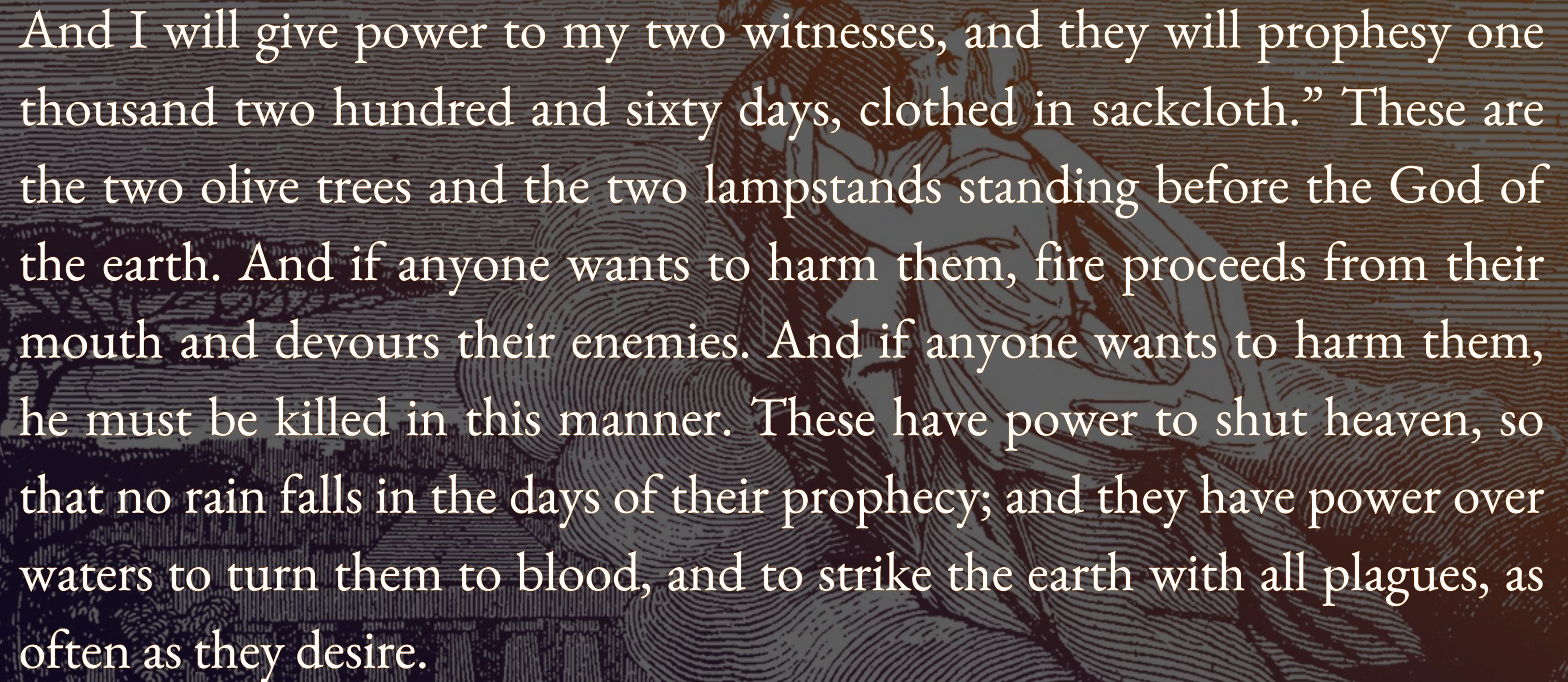
St. John Measures the Temple



The Two Witnesses

The image of the two witnesses (who are also two lampstands and two olive trees) repeats with modification the vision found in Zechariah 4. The identity of these witnesses is not given in the text, beyond the use of possessive pronouns marking them as God's. Most early commentators guessed they were Enoch and Elijah, as neither man had tasted death, though that is purely speculation. Moses and Elijah is the more likely pairing, drawing on their comments about Christ's coming exodus at Mt. Tabor, as well as the similarity between the power given to the witnesses and that given to Moses and Elijah during their earthly ministry.



The background of the slide features a detailed, dark-toned illustration. It depicts two figures, the Two Witnesses, standing before a large, ornate altar or table. One figure is seated, and the other stands beside them. The scene is set in a landscape with trees and a body of water in the distance. The overall style is reminiscent of a woodcut or engraving.

And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

Revelation 11:3-6 NKJV

The Assumption of the Two Witnesses

We are witness to these things

God's protective power covers the two witnesses, until they complete their mission. Brighton here paints the two figures as analogical, representing the witness of the Church Militant. Once she has completed her task of proclaiming the Gospel, the enemy will put her to death and desecrate her remains.

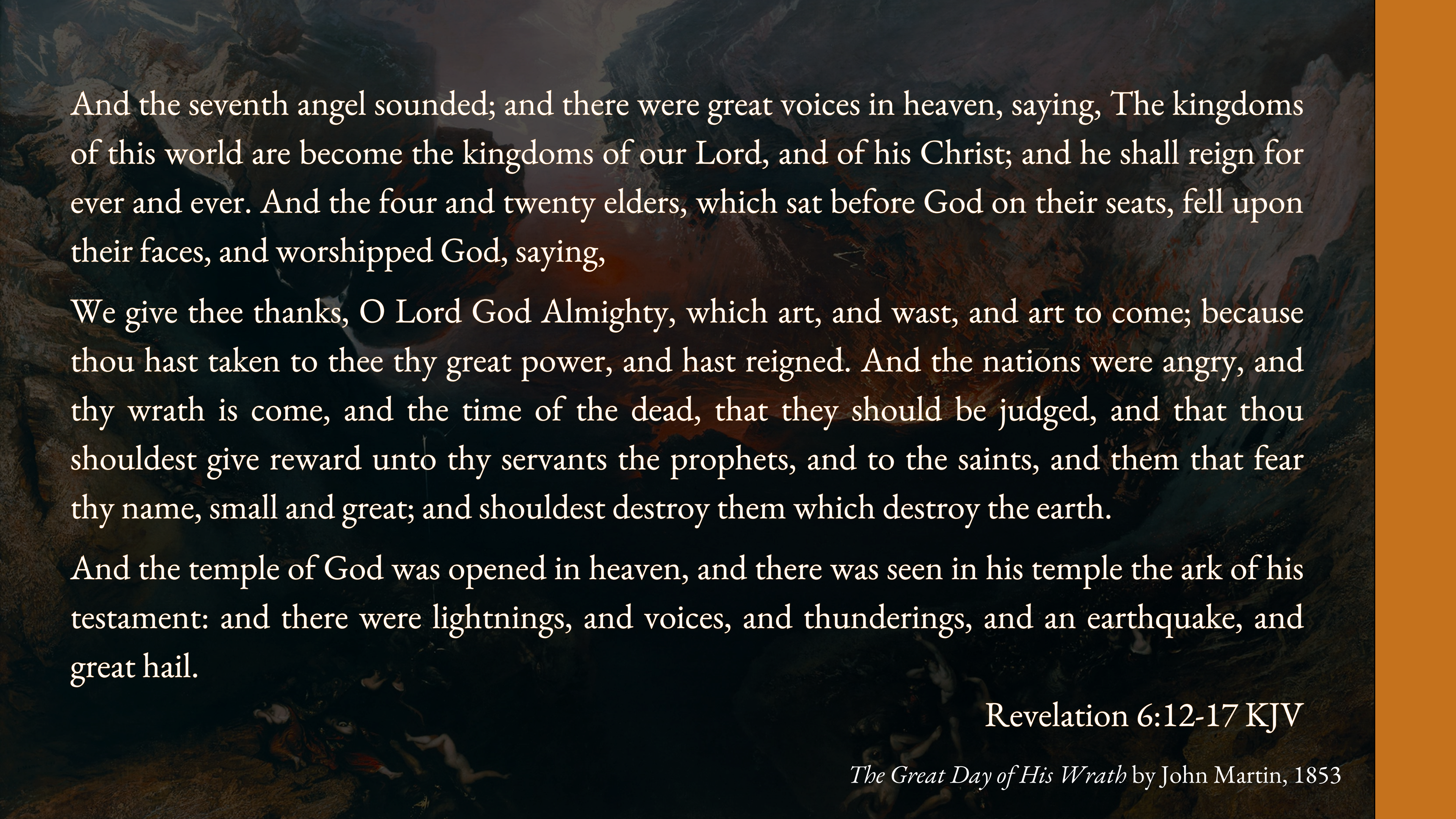
However, despite their silence, their unburied bodies stand as witness against the world, and the Church's influence is thus never extinguished completely. Further, death is not the end, and Christ will raise and glorify His witnesses (the Church) at the end of their ministry. This is a fractal pattern of the Church's ministry, repeated till the End.



The End (again)

And that end is fast approaching. Once again, the cycle ends with “lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail” as the world ends for the second time in the book (11:19 NKJV). Again, God saves His Church, but not in some rapturous escape, but according to His steadfast promises. Across the two cycles, we see Jesus urge us to bear witness to Him, to remain steadfast till then end, that we might share in His ultimate victory. Again, this is not a book about suffering or spectacle. It is a book about Jesus Christ.





And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying,

We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

Revelation 6:12-17 KJV

The Great Day of His Wrath by John Martin, 1853

Further Reading

- *The Concordia Commentary on Revelation* by Louis Brighton
- *The Book of Revelation* by G. K. Beale
- *A Theology of Revelation* by J. Scott Duvall
- *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*, edited by Steve Gregg
- *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* by Richard Bauckham
- *Visions of the Apocalypse* by Bruce Chilton
- *Revelation: Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary* by Mark Brighton
- *Christ and the Caesars* by Ethelbert Stauffer



Questions?