

Study 23: Revelation 11:12-19

12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

- This verse is referring back to the two witnesses introduced in chapter 11. They had been killed by the beast that came from the abyss. But then they were revived by the breath of life and were now alive again to the terror of their adversaries.
- I still believe that this is a veiled reference to Jesus' death, resurrection and, in verse 12, ascension. Jesus' ascended to heaven while his enemies plotted how they were going to explain His missing body. The work and will of God go on while men conspire and plot against God. All such planning is futile.
- My assumption is that Revelation is written with veiled images so that those who understand can avoid persecution and trouble. This "story" of the two witnesses is reminding the reader of Jesus' victory over sin and death. The message of Revelation continues to be one of God's triumphant power.
- Heaven speaks with a loud voice. There is no way that heaven's will won't be accomplished. Nothing can stand in the way of God achieving His purpose.
- Jesus wasn't on earth any longer than the Father willed. When His time was finished, the order was issued for Him to come home. It is the same for you and me. We will be called to heaven one day and there will be no resisting the call.

13 At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

- Heaven's will often has implications for creation and nature. Once again, this verse reminds me of Jesus' death.

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:50-54).

- Anyone familiar with this story would have recognized the reference in verse 13. Jesus' resurrection was also accompanied by an earthquake.

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it (Matthew 28:1-2).

- There is a connection between the spirit world and nature. Storms, earthquakes and other natural phenomena are triggered by spiritual activity. That is why Jesus could speak to the wind and waves and they calmed down.
- If God has such control over the forces of nature and creation, then why are we so afraid? What are you afraid of and why?
- Revelation is not the only book that shows us how turbulent it can be as we serve the Lord and live in this world. Consider what David wrote:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah (Psalm 46:1-7).

- The message throughout the Bible is that upheaval and unexpected turmoil will occur, but God is with us! God is our fortress, refuge and strength. The fear generated by Revelation and the focus on its cataclysmic, apocalyptic symbolism are unwarranted.

14 The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

- It seems that God has numbered our woes and sorrow. None will occur that he hasn't ordained and that He doesn't oversee by His might and power.

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 Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

- Finally, we reach the seventh angel sounding its trumpet. The result again is a lot of noise produced by voices in heaven. It is impossible to escape what heaven is saying and doing. You may grow deaf to its sounds, but that doesn't mean that heaven has stopped broadcasting!
- This trumpet, unlike the others, ushers in a triumphant expression of God's rule. Notice that heaven announces not that God rules in heaven, but that He rules on the

earth! Through the death of Jesus, the kingdom of this world is now the kingdom of God.

- One of the things necessary to change a kingdom is to bring in a new king. That King is Jesus! This is the message of Revelation. The focus was not and should not be the antichrist, plagues or churches. The focus is Jesus! He reigns!

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

- If heaven worships because of the truth that is proclaimed, how much more should we worship. We are the recipients of such a glorious kingdom. All authority comes from God's authority. These elders sit on thrones, but they recognize the source of their power and position: it is the Lamb of God. So they worship.
- Are you worshipping as a response to heaven's noise?

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.

- The elders gave thanks that God ruled and reigned. I too am thankful that One so merciful, kind and gracious is at the controls of everything! Reading Revelation should result in praise and thanks, not gloom and doom!

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 saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great-- and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

- The earth is the focus of God's attention and action. Here we see the nations, God's servants, and those who destroy the earth. While we constantly see pictures of heaven, our attention is always brought back to where it is all worked out, and that is here on earth.
- There are some servants of God who are great and some who are "small." Yet God will reward them all.
- God is concerned for the earth, its inhabitants, and all created things. He does and will reward His servants who reverence Him, but punishes those who destroy His creation on earth.
- The nations were angry. I think of the psalmist's words:

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven

laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:1-12).

- Themes that are introduced throughout the Bible are repeated in Revelation, which serves as a kind of summary point for these major themes. God's rule is a consistent theme that runs throughout the Bible and is the main point, I would say, of the Revelation message.
- He rules in the churches as shown in the first four chapters. He rules all the earth is the message after that.
- Someone once said, "What is started in Genesis is concluded in Revelation," meaning that Revelation does sum things up. God is moving the earth toward ultimate judgment. Those so-called kings who do not see their authority and position as from God, resist God and His righteous demands. They will be swallowed up if they do not repent and turn to Him.
- "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." That is also the message of Revelation.

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 great hailstorm.

- We know that what existed on earth was a shadow or type of what exists in heaven.

It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will

appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Hebrews 9:23-28).

- Is there an actual ark of the covenant in heaven? No. But that symbol would be continued because we are familiar with it and what it stands for. Remember, Revelation is a book of symbols and symbols are a means of communicating a story or lessons. These symbols are for our benefit and education.
- I am always seeking the presence of God, as I should, but His presence can be a frightening experience as symbolized by the lightning, thunder and earthquakes mentioned in verse 19. That reminds me of another passage:

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him (Exodus 19:16-19).

- One more related passage can be found in Hebrews:

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:18-29).

- What is God shaking in your life?