

J O H N B E V E R E

**T H E
K I N G
I S
C O M I N G**

A 6-WEEK SERMON SERIES

Lesson 1: Why We Must Teach the Second Coming of Jesus

Purpose of the Lesson

To establish the Second Coming of Jesus Christ as a foundational biblical doctrine, address common objections and confusion, and demonstrate why teaching on the end times produces holy living, spiritual clarity, and kingdom-focused urgency, not fear or passivity.

Common Terms Associated with the End Times

- The Last Days
- Antichrist
- False Prophet
- Tribulation
- Rapture
- Second Coming
- Millennial Reign of Christ
- New Heavens and New Earth

Definition of Eschatology

Eschatology is the study of the biblical teachings concerning the return of Jesus Christ and the events that follow. While the word itself is theological, the doctrine is deeply biblical and central to Scripture.

Why Is the Second Coming Often Avoided?

Common Objections

“It’s too controversial.”

“Too many interpretations cause division.”

“People have set dates and been wrong.”

“Doesn’t God alone know how it will unfold?”

“What difference does talking about it actually make?”

The Result of Avoidance

A major biblical doctrine is neglected

Believers are left unprepared rather than discerning

Scripture is selectively taught rather than faithfully proclaimed

But before we dive in...

Why should we discuss such a controversial subject?

Wouldn’t it be best to just leave this topic alone?

Many generations of believers thought the King would return in their lifetime, so what makes our day any different?

What if the end of the Age should occur in our lifetime, isn't it going to just play out in some mysterious way, one in which only the Lord God knows?

So how does discussing it affect anything or change the outcome?

*Doesn't the **ambiguity** of it all just create uncertainty, tension, and unnecessary division among believers?*

Let's look at some amazing realities in Scripture regarding prophecy and the End Times:

Revelation 1:3 (NLT)

God blesses the one who **reads** the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who **listen** to its message and **obey** what it says, for the time is near.

There is a called out specific blessing connected with *reading, listening to, and obeying* the prophetic Word of God!

- This promise isn't articulated or written so specifically in any other book of the Bible.

Why?

- Could one reason be the foreknowledge of God; *He foresaw End Time teaching would be avoided, and even mocked, more so than any other doctrine in our time?*

Peter writes:

2 Peter 3:3-4 (NLT)

Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created."

What is so critical to understand is that these mockers will specifically make light of any aspect of the Second Coming of Jesus!

Peter begins this warning with the words **"Most importantly."**

- The Greek word *prōton* is defined as, "Emphatically meaning first of all, before all."

Why does Peter single out the Return of Jesus over the numerous other truths spoken of in the Word of God?

- **Examples:** the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, praying in tongues, women in ministry, laying on of hands.
- We've seen these truths questioned or people contending that they've passed and no longer apply to today.

Why does Peter single out the Second Coming by attaching 'most importantly' to it?

- *Could it be because it's **a major foundational teaching** of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our great adversary, the devil, knows the powerful potential of accurately studying and pondering it, and therefore seeks to discredit it?*

Consider these facts.

- The return of Jesus is the 2nd most frequently mentioned topic in the entire Bible.
- It is mentioned 318 times in the New Testament alone!
- Only 4 books in the New Testament don't discuss the return of Jesus, which mean 23 do! *(3 of those 4 books are single chapter letters to individuals: Philemon, 2 John & 3 John. The only multichapter book void of mentioning the Second Coming is Galatians!)*
- 1 out of 30 verses in the New Testament make mention of some aspect of the return of Jesus.
- Other than the doctrine of Salvation, it was the most frequent topic written on by the early church fathers.
- Luke and Matthew take practically two entire chapters, and Mark takes one chapter to expound on Jesus' Second Coming.
- The entire last book in the Bible is dedicated exclusively to end time events.

If all this isn't enough, here is the most outstanding fact: The season of His Second Coming is the most written about time period in Scripture.

- Think of this: in all human history, no other time is discussed more.

Let's get personal:

1. *Have you ignored, or even mocked in your own thoughts, one of the most discussed topics of the New Testament?*
2. *Have you thought, this is not for me, there is too much ambiguity?*
3. *What practical changes can you make in your approach to Prophetic Scriptures?*

In the light of the facts shared, let's ask the big overarching question.

If God, who is perfect in wisdom, gives this much attention in the Holy Scriptures to the Second Coming of Jesus, what should be the fruit of us reading, teaching, and discussing End Time events?

Slothfulness and contention or godly living and passion to advance the kingdom?

- I think we can agree that He would never emphasize that which makes us live contrary to His will.

Any of the former crazy behaviors spawned by eschatology were fostered by it either being taught or heard incorrectly.

SET YOUR HEART now that the fruit of this message will see godlier behavior in you and a more focused kingdom mission.

What can we learn by going back to the first coming of Jesus?

Just like His soon approaching Second Coming, Jesus' first arrival was a **foretold event** that also created controversy.

Many, including faith leaders, foresaw the Messiah's coming quite differently than what actually transpired.

How did they do this?

- They anticipated a Conquering King who would free Israel from Roman tyranny and usher in the golden age of their Kingdom.
 - To make matters more complex, they had scriptures to back their beliefs.
 - For example, Isaiah's famous writings that a Child would be born, a Son given, and the government would rest upon His shoulder and of His kingdom there would be no end (see Isaiah 9:6-7).
 - This was just one prophetic promise of many that shaped their view.

In those days, not too different than ours, there were factions of religious groups in Israel.

- The Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Scribes, to name just a few.

Sadly, many leaders were adversarial to the Creator Who came as a humble Servant.

- Though they professed loyalty to Almighty God and the writings of the Law and Prophets, their hearts were proud, corrupt, and unteachable, thus blinding them to the arrival of the lowly King.

At the same time, there were others who did anticipate the time and whereabouts of His arrival.

How did they know, while most didn't?

- The simple answer lies in their sensitivity to the Spirit of God and attention given to the writings of the Old Testament, especially the Prophets.

- Their hunger for God created in them [an awareness of the times](#).

The advantage from having sensitivity to God's Spirit and giving attention to God's Word/Prophets

They knew what to do, whether it was waiting, speaking or a required specific action.

Let's consider a few examples:

[The Essenes \(Faith Leaders\)](#)

When King Herod asked the faith leaders of the whereabouts of Messiah's birth, they were able to tell him exactly what city.

How did they know?

- It was their knowledge of the prophet Micah's words that He'd be born in Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2).
- We can safely speculate; these leaders who Herod consulted were not corrupt like those who resisted Jesus years later.
- These consultants were more than likely members of the Essenes who were more like Simeon, the man we are about to discuss.

[Simeon](#)

When Jesus was a baby, He was brought to the Temple for His dedication.

- A young couple, Mary and Joseph, walked into the temple with their 33-day old baby. Numerous other young parents had done so on a regular basis, so nothing was out of the ordinary.
- There, at the temple, among many others, a man (Simeon) suddenly and decisively approaches this young unknown couple. He takes their baby in his arms and proclaims, "The Messiah!"

What prompted this man? How did he recognize God manifested in the flesh as a one-month-old baby?

In our answer lies the key, which is easy to miss, to understanding prophetic events.

Luke 2:25 tells us Simeon was:

...*righteous* and *devout* and was *eagerly waiting* for the Messiah to come.

There are **3 characteristics** of this man listed revealing our answer.

First, he was *righteous*.

- It's the Greek word *dikaíos*. It's defined as one who "conforms in his actions to his constitutionally just character."
- Simply put, one who possess this quality, not only professes loyalty to the Lord God, but lives accordingly.
- Simeon was holy—he sanctified the Lord in his heart and lived in a way that honored Him as supreme.

Second, he was *devout*.

- It's the Greek word *eulabés*. The Complete Word Study Dictionary states of this word, "The fundamental meaning of *eulabés* is one who had taken seriously God's promises and God's Word."
- Simeon didn't avoid or shrug off the prophetic words of God but read, listened to, meditated on, and most importantly, prayed about them.
- He didn't have the attitude, *When Messiah comes, He will just do it, why should I give any attention to this matter.*
- This Greek word *eulabés* pertains "to being reverent toward God." In essence, it describes one who lives in the holy fear of God. Simeon held firmly to this virtue, and it enlightened him with insight that others who lacked it didn't possess (see Prov 8:13-14).

The third, he was *eagerly waiting* for the Lord's appearing.

- If someone takes God's Word seriously, pursues godliness, and possesses the insight of holy fear, he or she will be *eagerly waiting* – wholeheartedly anticipating – the arrival of Messiah, especially in the season of His coming.

We are told,

Psalm 111:10 (ESV)

The fear of the Lord is **the beginning of wisdom**; all those who practice it have **a good understanding**.

The fear of the Lord is foundational—it's the beginning or the starting place of wisdom and understanding.

- We see the virtue of holy fear opens us to the awareness of what God is doing.
- Wisdom, which includes instruction, insight, knowledge and understanding, is vital to understanding prophecy. Without it, we interpret statements incorrectly and make foolish decisions.
- People who pursue the fear of the Lord, true humility, and holiness will have a passion for God's Word, which includes prophecy.

Psalm 25:9,12,14 (NKJV)

The **humble** He teaches His way. Who *is* the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses. The secret of the Lord *is* with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.

Continuing with Simeon, we read:

Luke 2:25-33 (NLT)

The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day **the Spirit led him to the Temple**. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him.

How could this stranger know what Mary kept to herself and pondered in her heart?

- Only God could reveal to a man such wonderful insight and knowledge!

Anna the Prophetess

Before Mary and Joseph left the Temple, a woman named Anna approached them and gave thanks to the Lord.

We are told:

Luke 2:38 (NLT)

She talked about the child to everyone who had been **waiting expectantly** for God to rescue Jerusalem.

Notice, she didn't speak to all in the temple, but those who were like Simeon and herself, they were **eagerly looking** for the coming Messiah.

Simeon, Anna, and the informants to Herod (who many believe, but we don't have solid proof, were part of the Essenes) were similar to another group of seekers of a different generation...

The Sons of Issachar**1 Chronicles 12:32 (NKJV)**

...the sons of Issachar who had **understanding of the times**, to know what Israel ought to do.

A similar principle applies with the Essenes, Simeon, Anna, and the sons of Issachar:

Those who understand the times are the ones who *know what to do*, whether it entails watching, waiting, speaking, or a required action.

Not once, but twice we run into a remarkable promise from John’s Apocalyptic book.

Revelation 22:7 (NLT)

“Look, I am coming soon! Blessed are those who *obey* the words of prophecy written in this book.”

These words are directly from the mouth of Jesus.

- Notice the words “*obey* the words of prophecy.”
- There’s **action to be taken** with numerous prophetic words in the Bible.
- The sons of Issachar behavior aligned with Jesus’ command; they were not only *perceptive*, but *obedient* to the wisdom of God according to the season they were living in—they knew *what to do*.
- Herod’s informants, Simeon, Anna, and those who eagerly listened to her prophetic words were all among those who aligned their beliefs and actions with the wisdom of God.

*****EMPHASIZE THIS POINT*****

The men and women who feared God, took His Word seriously and pursued godly living, anticipated Jesus’ first coming. They got it right; they were not misled; they knew what to do!

- On the other hand, the Pharisees, Sadducees, Experts in the Law, and Scribes were a different story.

Let’s recall Peter’s warning of “Most importantly”:

2 Peter 3:3 (NLT)

Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, “What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created.”

Could the reason for his strong emphasis for our day be to warn us to not fall into the trap of taking lightly what should be taken seriously?

Closing Thought

There’s a benefit and a purpose to studying the Second Coming of Jesus.

It’s vital that we live righteously, study God’s Word, especially the prophetic Scriptures, and eagerly wait for the Lord’s return!

By doing these things, we will be:

- *Infused with fresh passion and energy to live on mission and with purpose.*
- *Motivated to make our lives count, both now and for eternity.*
- *Empowered to endure hardship and to never give up.*
- *Equipped to live ready and expectant for the Lord's return.*

If we do this, we will be positioned to say and do what will keep us in alignment to the divine will of God in these final days.

Next in our study, we'll discuss God's bigger picture and how the Second Coming is a pivotal part in God's Master plan.

Lesson 2: *The Divine Master Plan*

Purpose of the Lesson

To provide an understanding of “the big picture”—God’s overall plan and how the Second Coming of Jesus is a pivotal part of the consummation of this plan.

Let’s Begin

To fully understand the Second Coming, we need to understand God’s Divine Master Plan for humanity—which provides us with prophetic vision.

Paul wrote:

Romans 8:29-30 (NLT)

He chose them to become *like his Son*, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.

<< **Note:** You can change this story if needed. >>

To understand the importance of the “big picture”, I want to use my brother-in-law’s 1966 Chevelle as an example.

Today’s automobiles no longer use carburetors; they were replaced in the 1990’s by fuel injection systems. Let’s assume you have no idea Dale is building a 40-year-old car. Your sole observation is restricted to his tedious and time-consuming process of assembling a carburetor; including sanding and polishing every part, even the bolts and nuts that hold it together.

You’d question: *why all the hard work for something of no value; what’s the use?*

Dale, on the other hand sees a shiny and well running ’66 Chevelle. If you were assigned to rebuild this carburetor, you wouldn’t be motivated to endure the arduous task, whereas he would eagerly continue to completion.

The sole difference: he sees the overall project – the masterplan – you only see one aspect of it.

The same is true for the Second Coming.

- If we only look at Jesus’ return through the perspective of a single event, rather than seeing it through the eyes of God’s glorious masterplan, we’ll lack the eager expectation that enables us to stay diligent in our obedience to the end. We are vulnerable – easily prey for distractions, discouragement, or deceptions.

God drew up this masterplan for His kingdom before time began.

Isaiah 46:9-10 (ESV)

I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and *I will accomplish all my purpose.*”

God Almighty has a masterplan that was formulated before time began, and in this regard, He declares: “I will accomplish all My purpose.”

- This explains why Jesus is referred to as, “**the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world**” (Rev. 13:8 NKJV).
- This revealing statement tells us that God knew before He created our seen world that mankind would mess up and be in need a Redeemer.

But if God knew mankind would need a Redeemer before creating humans, and even more important, knowing the pain and suffering that would be involved, both on His end and our end, why go through the trouble?

- Why not come up with a different plan altogether?

This question causes us to dig deeper, to look further into the heart of His masterplan.

What is at the heart of God’s plan?

- It was all initiated from a strong desire in God’s heart to **have a family**; a family that would inherit all He has, share in His glory, and govern throughout eternity with Him.
- This is His desire, will, and purpose; one in which He will not recant from, nor can it ever be altered by anyone, whether it’s an individual or a vast number of enemies.

John, the Apostle, writes:

1 John 3:1 (AMPC)

SEE WHAT [an incredible] quality of love the Father has given (shown, bestowed on) us, that we should [be permitted to] be named *and* called *and* counted the children of God! And so we are!

This glorious Creator has chosen to adopt us!

- Yes, we who are less than specs in a vast universe are the focus of His affection.

Allow me to illustrate.

Let’s imagine a global ruler – a King who is the wealthiest, wisest, and most noble in all the world; one who cannot be defeated. He travels to one of His territories in the outer realm and during the visit decides to tour one of the most impoverished communities, a slum. In the process, he beholds an utterly poor and helpless young man (or woman) and is moved with empathy and compassion. Suddenly, to the surprise of his attendants and soldiers, he chooses

to take this deprived homeless young person into his family, and not just adopt this destitute soul, but chooses to make him (or her) heir to all he owns.

A shocking move? It's almost unimaginable.

This is merely a very weak example of what God has done for us.

However, [the gap of our present state and who we actually are](#) is monumental.

1 John 3:2 (NLT)

Beloved, [now we are children of God](#); and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, [we shall be like Him](#).

Now consider what we just read: [we will be like Him!](#)

- Are you grasping this? Are you in awe?

Paul confirms by writing,

Colossians 3:4 (NLT)

When Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in [all his glory](#).

[All His glory](#)—not a small spec of it, nor even some of it, rather in “all His glory.”

We will be one with Him; He in us and we in Him.

- In the same context, Daniel also writes, “Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and...shine like the stars forever” (Dan. 12:3).
- Our sun is a star; it's no different than the other stars. Jesus will forever have preeminence, we will forever worship Him, yet we have been welcomed as joint heirs with Him; to share in His glory.

I hope the Holy Spirit is giving you a greater glimpse into the magnitude of what He's bestowed upon His children.

Let's get back to God's WHY for his Master Plan:

God desired sons and daughters who would freely choose to love and obey Him. So, before this entrustment could be given to those He would adopt into His family; [a test of loyalty would be required](#). He would not author the temptations of unfaithfulness, for He could never do such a thing. Rather He would permit Satan and his hosts, those who had already revolted against Him, to be the proving instruments.

It began in the garden called Eden, where there were two highlighted trees.

The Tree of Life.

- The Tree of Life represented absolute trust in God's wisdom.

- To partake of this tree acknowledged nothing good could be found outside of God's will.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

- The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represented the choice of determining 'what's best for me' independent from the counsel of God's will.
- To partake was forbidden, it would bring separation between God and mankind.

Briefly Explain the Fall

- The Lord God knew in advance that the father and mother of all human beings would betray Him. They would disobey and choose independence from the counsel of His will. In doing so they would be separated from Life Himself and enslave themselves to the ruler of darkness. They would choose a corrupt nature of sin and death, no longer able to live in God's presence. This nature would pass on to all of Adam's descendants – all of mankind.

Yet God's love is so profound that even though humanity chose to rebel and commit high treason against their Creator, He still desired human beings to be adopted as family members.

Explain the Plan of Redemption

- So God decided to take on a human body and pay the price with His own life to purchase us back to Himself – back to freedom. He couldn't do it as God Almighty, because He gave the earth to mankind. For Him to come and directly rescue us would be a violation of His Word, and God cannot lie.
- This is why Jesus had to be born of a virgin, a woman who had never known a man sexually, impregnated by God's Spirit. This would make Him free from the nature of sin that was passed on from generation to generation from Adam's rebellion. It would make Him 100% man, being born of a woman, but also 100% God, being Fathered by the Holy Spirit. Even though He was equal with God, the plan was for Him to walk this earth as a Man with a sin-free divine nature filled with God's Spirit. His faithfulness would be tested in every aspect, yet not once would He fail in disobedience.

What did Jesus suffer?

- Jesus was betrayed by Judas and abandoned by His disciples.
- He was taken to Annas' house (father-in-law of the high priest), where He was tied up and verbally and physically assaulted.
- Once they were finished, Jesus was transferred to the temple to stand before the High Priest, Caiaphas, as well as other leading priests. There he was blindfolded, beaten, spit at, and slandered repeatedly.
- Next, He stood trial before the Roman Governor, Pontus Pilate, who sent Jesus to Herod because he was a Galilean. Many of the chief priests followed Him, insulting and falsely accusing him along the way.
- When Jesus arrived to stand before Herod, Herod's soldiers would begin a fresh round of verbal and physical assaults, even dressing Jesus in a mock royal robe.

- Jesus was then sent back to Pontus Pilate where He would undergo the greatest brutality yet.
- The captain called for the entire regiment of soldiers to come and participate in the brutal torture. They stripped Jesus naked, most likely reopening previous wounds, put a mock robe on Him, wove together a ring of thorns, each at least an inch long and so sharp and strong, similar to nails. They pressed the crown into His scalp causing severe lacerations. Blood poured down Jesus' face while they put a bogus scepter in His hand, a reed, and proceeded to taunt and unmercifully beat Him. They spit on Him, ripped out His beard, vehemently thrashed Him with their fists, the reed and other instruments of torture until they were exhausted.
- **Rick Renner:** "Historical records describe a victim's back as being so mutilated after a Roman scourging that his spine could actually be exposed."
- The total approximate time of brutal torture, in four different locations, lasted close to 10 hours!

Isaiah wrote:

Isaiah 52:14 (NLT)

Many were amazed when they saw him. His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human, and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man.

Isaiah 50:6 (GNB)

"I bared my back to those who beat me. I did not stop them when they insulted me, when they pulled out the hairs of my beard and spat in my face."

Jesus would be so physically abused, for so many hours, by different regiments of warriors, that by the time He headed for the crucifixion, He would no longer appear as a human being: a horrifying dreadful sight to all bystanders.

But there was still more to suffer: The Crucifixion!

- Jesus would carry the crossbeam, which weighed approximately 100 pounds.
- Huge nails were driven through His hands.
- The crucifixion lasted 6 long hours. He slowly bled out in agonizing pain, suffering the most gruesome death a human being could experience in that day.

Emphasize: One that can't be properly comprehended without awareness of what our Creator willingly faced and endured to bring us back to Himself.

Why would Jesus undergo such agony and sacrifice to rescue us when we were totally at fault, when we betrayed Him?

- Jesus didn't do this for Himself, He did it for you and me.

We read of Him:

Hebrews 12:2 (NLT)

Because of **the joy** awaiting him, he endured the cross.

Jesus saw something that kept Him going.

- It was the prophetic vision of a faithful bride!
- He foresaw beautiful intimate companionship, deep love and trust between He and His bride in the ages to come!
- He saw the wedding and the celebration of our lives being united as one.
- He saw us reigning together for the rest of eternity.

Jesus loves you so deeply that He was willing to be beaten to the point of no longer being recognized as a human being. Then He died for you.

The Invitation to Us.

Jesus would be the forerunner of a breed of people who would give their allegiance, trust, and obedience to Him.

Jesus' devotion to us would be affirmed by His suffering for us and our dedication to Him would be affirmed in our suffering for Him.

Look at what Paul wrote:

Romans 8:17 (AMPC)

We are...heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ [sharing His inheritance with Him]; only **we must share His suffering** if we are to share His glory.

Why suffering? And why did He have to suffer so severely? Why couldn't He plan this out differently? If He is God, why couldn't He have devised a pain free salvation, for both Himself and us?

Example: The suffering you and Lisa shared during your marriage, especially the earlier years, and the bonding that resulted from it.

Trauma Bonding:

One scientific journal writes:

The research suggests that, despite its unpleasantness, pain may actually have positive social consequences, acting as a sort of "social glue" that fosters cohesion and solidarity within groups: "Our findings show that pain is a particularly powerful ingredient in producing bonding and cooperation between those who share painful experiences," says psychological scientist and lead researcher Brock Bastian of the University of New South Wales in Australia. "The findings

shed light on why camaraderie may develop between soldiers or others who share difficult and painful experiences." (Science Daily)

***Studies show a **mother's bond** to her baby is greater than a father's, simply because of the suffering the mother endured with her child.

How do we develop a closer bond with Jesus?

Through suffering—not of things Jesus redeemed us from, like sickness and poverty—the suffering He endured.

When we suffer in obeying God, the result is a deeper bond of love.

Paul wrote:

Philippians 3:10 (NLT)

I want to know Christ...**I want to suffer with him**, sharing in his death.

Did we read this correctly?

- Paul said he wants to suffer with Christ, even share in His death.
- For what purpose does Paul want to suffer with Jesus?
- The answer is to know Him more deeply – to have a stronger connection with Him.

Hear his words out of the Amplified Bible:

Philippians 3:10 (AMPC)

[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him...and that **I may so share His sufferings** as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death.

Why did Paul want to “share” in Christ’s sufferings?

Why do Peter and John, after being threatened and beaten (flogged) by the very same leaders and soldiers that unmercifully beat Jesus, come away so happy?

We read:

Acts 5:40-41 (NKJV)

So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to **suffer** shame for His name.

Were they aware that the more they suffered in their obedience to God, the more they would bond with our Lord?

Again, Paul writes:

Philippians 1:29 (NKJV)

For to you *it has been granted* on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also **to suffer** for His sake.

To the person who doesn't see God's wisdom in this, Paul's statement seems absurd.

- What does he mean "*granted*?"
- It wasn't masochism on these early church leaders' part, rather they sought the greatest prize – being closely bonded with our Lord Jesus?

Peter writes:

1 Peter 4:1-2 (AMPC)

SO, SINCE Christ suffered in the flesh for us, for you, *arm yourselves* with the same thought and purpose [patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God]. For whoever has suffered in the flesh [having the mind of Christ] is done with [intentional] sin [has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God], so that he can no longer spend the rest of his natural life living by [his] human appetites and desires, but [he lives] for what God wills.

Handling suffering correctly matures us in Christlike character.

- We are to be *armed*; this means we are mentally prepared to suffer adversity, hardship, or persecution in our obedience to God's Word.

Regarding Jesus, He didn't bring obedience to the earth, He had to learn it.

Hebrews 5:7-8 (NLT)

While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears...Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he **suffered**.

What is the suffering He endured?

- Jesus was tempted in every way to compromise the will of God, yet He never disobeyed (see Heb. 4:15).

True Biblical suffering is simply this.

- We live in a fallen world; one that opposes the truth of God – the ways of His Kingdom. A true believer chooses to obey God's Word in the face of any resistant force.
- It could come from a temptation, a trial, or persecution for our faith. The fruit is we will live "no longer for human passions (*whether our own or others*) but for the will of God."

Closing Thoughts

Stop and ponder the wonder of God's masterplan. Jesus chose to suffer from a world that hates Him. In doing so He would pay the price needed to free His bride from sin and death...

- but also, in the process would **bond deeply** with her. She in turn would deeply bond with Him through what she'd face in a very perverse and cruel world.
- This strong bond would intensify the desire He would have to be reunited with her and she with Him.
- The Second Coming isn't just an event, **it is the uniting of two lovers**, a Groom and bride to be, who deeply long for each other.

I'll close with a great promise, one that's a mystery to so many. Yet what we've discussed unlocks its truth.

The depth of this statement is elusive without the understanding of true Biblical suffering:

2 Timothy 2:12 (NLT)

If we endure hardship, we will reign with him.

Within this statement lies the climax of God's masterplan and creates a greater anticipation of His soon return and wonderful anticipation of the Ages to come.

We've just reviewed God's master plan, but there's more! Hidden within an ancient Jewish practice are secrets that will make the Scriptures—especially those relating to the Second Coming—come alive. You'll be blown away by the mystery that has been hidden in plain sight all along!

Lesson 3: *The Ancient Jewish Wedding*

Purpose of the Lesson

To demonstrate how God embedded the plan of Christ's union with the Church into the ancient Jewish wedding long before Jesus' incarnation. This lesson shows how each wedding custom reveals **what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do** for His Bride, providing essential insight into end-time prophecy and the return of the King.

Let's Begin

Matthew 22:2 (NKJV)

The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who **arranged a marriage** for his son.

Key Points:

- God did not improvise redemption.
- Before the world was created, He planned a wedding.
- Every ancient Jewish wedding was a prophetic shadow of what Jesus would ultimately do for His bride—the Church.

To understand Jesus' return, we must view the New Testament through the lens of an **ancient Jewish wedding**.

THE PROCESS OF AN ANCIENT JEWISH WEDDING

- Briefly summarize each of the steps to an ancient Jewish Wedding
- Afterward, you'll make the Biblical connections.

The Bride Was Chosen by the Father

Key Points:

- In ancient Jewish culture, the father chose the bride for his son.
- The process began not with romance—but with covenant.

The Ketubah (Marriage Contract):

- From *katav* — “to write”
- Presented by the groom (often with his father present)
- Included the terms of the covenant and the bride price (mohar)

The Bride Price (Mohar)

Why a price was paid:

- The bride leaving her family meant a loss of contribution
- The mohar compensated the family

Biblical examples:

- Isaac's bride: ten camels of gifts
- Jacob: fourteen years of labor
- David: a costly and bloody price (1 Samuel 18:24)

Once agreed:

- Gifts were exchanged
- The covenant moved forward

The Cup of Wine – Covenant Sealed

Key Points:

- The groom offered a cup of wine
- The bride's acceptance sealed the covenant
- From that moment forward, they would not see each other again until the wedding day

Betrothal – Already Married, Not Yet Together

Key Points:

- Betrothal is not an engagement. It's a commitment.
- It was legally binding
- Separation required divorce (Matthew 1:19 – Joseph and Mary)

They were married except for:

1. Living together
2. Physical consummation
3. Seeing each other

The Groom Prepares a Place

Key Points:

- The groom returned to his father's house
- Built a bridal chamber
- Waited for his father's approval

Important detail:

- The timing was known generally—but not the exact moment
- Only the father determined when it was ready

The Bride Prepares Herself

Primary responsibilities:

- Faithfulness and purity
- Constant readiness

The Mikveh:

- Ritual immersion
- Public declaration of separation from the old life

Practical preparations:

1. Wedding garments
2. Packed belongings
3. Oil lamp filled and ready

The Bridegroom Comes for His Bride

The Arrival:

- Torchlight procession at night
- Shouts in the streets
- Sound of the shofar
- A deliberate surprise

Why at night:

- Families were home
- Arrival remained secret until the moment

Response:

- Bridesmaids lit their lamps
- Joined the procession
- Witnessed the bride being “caught away”

The Bridal Chamber and the Wedding Feast

The Huppah (Bridal Chamber)

Scriptural connection:

- **Isaiah 26:20–21 (NKJV)** “Come, my people, enter your chambers...”

Inside the chamber:

- The groom unveiled the bride
- The marriage was consummated

The Friend of the Bridegroom:

- Waited outside
- Announced the consummation
- Seven-day wedding feast began

After seven days:

- The groom presented his unveiled bride publicly

THE NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTIONS (THIS IS ABOUT JESUS)

****Get into the emotions of God here... a lovesick Groom. An eagerly expecting bride. An everlasting love story.*

We just outlined the steps and stages of an ancient Jewish Wedding.

How let's look at how these steps and stages connect to what the New Testament says.

I'm telling you, when I grasped this revelation, it changes the way I view the scriptures.

God Chose the Bride

John 15:16 (NKJV)

"You did not choose Me, but **I chose you...**"

Ephesians 1:4 (NKJV)

"He **chose** us in Him **before** the foundation of the world..."

Jesus Prepares a Place

John 14:1-3 (NLT)

"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. **There is more than enough room in my Father's home.** If this were not so, would I have told you that **I am going to prepare a place for you?** When everything is ready, **I will come and get you,** so that you will always be with me where I am."

Notice Jesus' words:

- “My Father’s house”
- “There is more than enough room”
- “I am going to prepare a place for you”
- “I will come and get you”

Key Point:

- This was unmistakable wedding language to Jewish ears.

The Bride Price

1 Corinthians 6:20 (NLT)

“God bought you with a high price.”

Acts 20:28

“Purchased with His own blood.”

The Cup of Wine

Luke 22:18

“I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come.”

This is a covenant moment—just like the ketubah.

The Betrothal

2 Corinthians 11:2 (NKJV)

“I have **betrothed** you to **one husband...**”

James 4:4 (NLT)

“Friendship with the world is **adultery.**”

Why this matters:

- Betrothal makes unfaithfulness adultery
- The Father paid a high price for His Son’s bride

A Glorious Bride

Ephesians 5:25–27 (NLT)

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, **washed** by the **cleansing** of God’s word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church **without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish**. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

Notice the words:

1. Washed
2. Sanctified
3. Without spot or wrinkle

Ephesians 5:31–32 (NKJV)

“This is a great mystery... concerning Christ and the church.”

The Mikveh – Washed by the Word

NKJV:

- “Cleansed by the washing of water by the word.”

CJB:

- “Immersion in the mikveh, so to speak.”

The Word keeps the bride pure while she waits.

Closing Thought – “Are You Ready?”

Key Points:

- Jesus is not returning for a distracted bride
- Not a divided bride
- Not an unfaithful bride
- He is returning for a bride who is watching, waiting, and ready.

Emphasize:

- What once felt mysterious now feels intimate.
- This isn’t about fear—it’s about love.
- Not panic—but preparation.
- The wedding is planned.
- The price has been paid.
- The place is being prepared.

The only question left:

Will the bride be ready when the Father says, "Go get her"?

Lesson 4: The Season of His Return

Purpose of the Lesson

To reveal that God has intentionally made the **season of Jesus' return discernible through Scripture**, inviting believers to seek understanding rather than remain passive or fearful. This lesson equips pastors and leaders to teach how biblical prophecy illuminates the times we are living in—without speculation—so the Church can walk in wisdom, readiness, and holy urgency.

Let's Begin

Whether we are aware of it or not, whether we've suppressed it or not—there's a deep knowing in our hearts that Jesus' arrival is near, it's the season.

Can this be confirmed in Scripture? Yes indeed!

Just like the Jews had the prophetic Scriptures to know and understand the season of Jesus' first coming, we also have the prophetic Scriptures to know and understand the season of His second coming.

Let's do some digging!

We Are Not in the Dark

1 Thessalonians 5:4 (NLT)

You aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief.

In the days of Jesus' first coming, those who walked with God knew the approximate time and place of His birth and death.

- The Essene's predicted it, not only to the year, but to the week.
- How did they know? They gave prayerful attention to the words of the prophets, especial the Angel Gabriel's message to Daniel.
- The prophecy's timeline was specific and turned out to be right on the mark.

Now we turn our discussion to the Second Coming of Jesus.

What about us, are we able to nail down the day, the month, or the year of Jesus' return?

- The answer is 'emphatically no!'

Jesus states:

Mark 13:32 (NKJV)

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

No different from the groom in the Ancient Jewish Wedding, even so with our Groom, Jesus.

- Only God knows the exact day.
- **Pause and ponder the amazing reality of this:** God put it in the hearts of the Jewish people thousands of years ago to conduct their weddings in a way that would reflect how Jesus would return for His bride.

Only God the Father knows the moment Jesus will return.

What about the season? The generation? What does Jesus, His Apostles, the Prophets, and the Scriptures say regarding this?

This we are expected to know!

Let's begin with Jesus.

- The disciples were admiring the Temple complex, commenting on the stunning beauty of the buildings. Jesus seizes the moment to inform them of the approaching devastating destruction and went as far as to say that not one stone will be left upon another.
- He's foretelling Titus and Rome coming forty years later and utterly destroying the Temple and Jerusalem.

His disciples then ask three questions:

1. When will the temple be destroyed?
2. What will be the sign of Your coming?
3. What will be the sign of the end of the age?

Due to the nature of their questions, we consequently have two different time periods being addressed:

1. 32 to 135 AD
2. 1967 to unknown AD

Our discussion will focus on the second time frame—1967 to Unknown AD.

But first, let's look at Jesus' concluding words concerning the devastation of 70 AD:

Luke 21:24 (NLT)

They will be killed by the sword or sent away as captives to all the nations of the world. And Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles until **the period of the Gentiles** comes to an end.

The major blow of dismantling Israel's population occurred when Titus' army destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD.

- However, strongholds still lingered in Israel that Rome dismantled over the next 65 years.
- The final blow occurred with the defeat of the Jews last leader of that era, Bar Kokhba, in 135 AD. This was the siege and fall of Betar, the final Jewish stronghold.
- The numerous Roman campaigns led to nearly the full depopulation of the Jews from Israel, with many killed, masses deported into slavery, and the remaining forced to flee.
- Eventually, the Jewish people could be found in practically every nation of the world.

Jesus foretells that after this Jerusalem would be **'trampled down by the Gentiles.'**

- He simply means the city would be under Gentile rule until the time for Israel to return.
- The Romans, Byzantines, Arab Caliphates, Crusaders, Mamluks, Ottoman Empire, and finally Great Britain shared the Gentile rulership of the Holy City and Land for the next eighteen centuries.

The Rebirth of Jerusalem/Israel

However, on **May 14, 1948**, a remarkable event occurred: Israel was born in one day.

This was foretold by the prophet Isaiah. We read:

Isaiah 66:8 (NKJV)

Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? *Or* shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, She gave birth to her children.

It was miraculous.

- A nation of people exiled all over the world, to practically every nation, for over 1,800 years, stayed intact.
- They kept their lineage pure, their customs alive and today, they're speaking Hebrew!
- No nation has ever done this in the history of mankind! The odds are astronomical; only with God's involvement could this have been accomplished.

Isaiah again prophesied:

Isaiah 11:11-13 (NLT)

In that day the Lord will reach out his hand *a second time* to **bring back the remnant** of his people...He will raise a flag among the nations and assemble the exiles of Israel. He will gather the scattered people of Judah *from the ends of the earth*.

Take notice of Isaiah's words: *a second time!*

- This raises the question, when was the *first time*?
- Some think it's when God brought Israel out of Egypt to the Promise Land. But it couldn't be, for Isaiah specifically says a 'remnant,' which is a small surviving group. In the Egyptian exodus, the entire nation was brought out, not a remnant.
- The *first time* could only refer to the return from Babylon, because most of the people were killed by King Nebuchadnezzar's army. Before Babylonian captivity, the prophets repeatedly warned that only a small segment would survive their onslaught, thus confirming the ***first time***.

When is the ***second time***?

- It could only be the return of the Jewish people in the 20th Century.
- Isaiah is clear, in the ***second time***, the remnant is not coming back from one place, Babylon, rather ***from the ends of the earth***.
- This began in the 20th Century, from nations all over the globe, and is still happening to this day.

Note:

- Even though Jews were returning in the 1940's and 50's, and the UN recognized Israel as a nation, the Holy City of Jerusalem was still under Gentile control.
- It wasn't until the brief Six-Day War that took place June 5-10, 1967, that this would change. Israel's decisive victory over five aligned Arab nations led to the recovery of the Old City of Jerusalem, which up to that time was under Jordanian control.
- Jesus' words were fulfilled, the period of the Gentiles had come to an end.

Jesus then stated:

Luke 21:25-27 (NLT)

"And there will be strange signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth, for the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and great glory."

Jerusalem, as well as the land of Israel, are now governed by the Jewish people, the first time in over 1,800 years.

- It's crystal clear: Jesus is now discussing the time period of 1967 and forward.

There are some who think everything He says in this discourse dealt only with first century events, but these three verses show clearly this is not the case.

Jesus speaks of the signs – birth pangs (see Matthew 24:8).

- This analogy is important to mention. Just as a woman's birth contractions become increasingly more frequent and intense, even so the signs in the sun, moon, stars, earthquakes, tsunamis, plagues, pestilence, famines, and others Jesus speaks of have done the same.

- They will become even more frequent and intense as we approach His Return.
- Then we come to the climax: *His coming in great glory*, and *every eye* will see Him.

The Apostle John wrote:

Revelation 1:7 (NKJV)

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and *every eye will see Him*, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

It will be both a glorious and terrifying Day. But we'll dive into this in another lesson.

Let's continue to explore how we can know the season of the Lord's Second Coming.

The Parable of the Fig Tree

To continue our quest to know the season of Jesus' return, let's look at the Parable of the Fig Tree:

Luke 21:28-33 (NLT)

"So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!" **Then he gave them this illustration:** "Notice the *fig tree*, or *any other tree*. When the leaves come out, you know without being told that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that the Kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear."

Carefully examine His illustration: "Notice the fig tree, or any other tree."

- The NKJV states, "and all the trees."

Why does He choose a fig tree, and, even more interestingly, why does He mention the other trees?

It's not common knowledge in the West, but at the end of World War 1, several nations were formed after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Below are a few, the dates they were founded, and trees that represent these nations:

1. Saudi Arabia (1932) Date Palm Tree
2. Lebanon (1943) Cedar Tree
3. Syria (1945) Olive Tree
4. Jordan (1946) Mount Tabor Oak Tree

5. Israel (1948) Fig Tree

***Upfront I need to clarify an important point.

- Israel voted to name the olive tree as their national tree, however, often the Lord speaks of Israel as a fig tree (see Hos. 9:10; Jer. 8:13 & Jer. 24).

In looking at the fig tree, along with the other trees, Israel and the other four nations listed in the Middle East Region, we will get an indication of the season.

It's remarkable their budding occurred in the same time frame, especially when we view through the lens of a 2,000-year period.

- Jesus says once this happens, we would know the time of summer is near, and in this case, summer would represent His return.

Jesus said:

Luke 21:32-33 (NLT)

"I tell you the truth, this **generation** will not pass from the scene until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear."

There is so much in these statements!

However, let's first consider an eye-opening fact:

- In examining Jesus' full discourse, along with the books of Daniel and Revelation, we discover a significant detail that separates our generation from all others.
- **The man of lawlessness**, the global leader who will embody Satan, will at one point make a covenant with Israel and violate it 3.5 years later by entering their Temple and proclaim that, **'he is god'** (see Mark 13:14 & Daniel 9:27).
- A Jewish nation must exist for this to happen. No other generation in 1,800 years has been able to say this. It's only been since 1967 that we can say Jerusalem is under Jewish leadership.

Now to Jesus' statements above.

First, **"I tell you the truth."**

- Everything He has said to His disciples for three years has come to pass. He's never told a single lie or made a deceptive statement; they knew this, but He still chooses to preface His statement with these words! But if that's not enough, He doubles down on this by declaring His words to be surer than the existence of heaven and earth! Therefore, we can safely say, our generation will not pass, until He's returned.

What is a generation?

- We see various timespans representing a generation in Scripture.
- It can be 40 or 70 years, and in the Patriarchs era, it could be argued it's 100 years.

- Nelson's Bible Dictionary defines it as: ***"A body of people who live at the same time in a given period of history."***

Important to Note: If the starting point of the budding is 1967 (when Gentile rule over Jerusalem ceased), we can add 100 years and safely conclude He should return any time before 2067.

We should plan and work as if He is not returning for over 200 years (because we are commanded to "do business till" He returns).

However, we should *live* as if He's returning today.

- This knowledge should create a greater sense of urgency to be engaged in what He's called you to do in His kingdom advancement.

Now, let's see what the Apostles and Prophets shared about the season of Jesus' Second Coming.

A Day with the Lord is 1000 Years!

Psalm 90:4 (NLT)

For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past.

Have you ever moved forward on something important with only one source of information?

Was it wisdom to do so? Did you consider the possibility of misinterpretation or a possible error of your single source?

Instead of seeking a second confirmation, you proceed with the lone report. Afterward you find out it was inaccurate information! How did you feel?

We have a source, Jesus' discourse on the signs and fig tree. We know His words are perfectly accurate but suppose we're misreading what the fig tree represents?

Even though our interpretation seems sound, wouldn't it be nice to have a second confirmation?

- We do have other confirmations.

Let's begin by stating that many of the early Jewish and church fathers taught mankind's dominion on the earth would last **7,000 years**.

It correlates with the 7-days of creation found in Genesis.

They saw this time span broken up into 4 ages:

1. The Age of Creation: 2,000 years
2. The Age of the Law: 2,000 years
3. The Age of Grace: 2,000 years
4. The Kingdom Age: 1,000 years

It makes sense:

- On the 4th day God Created the sun, and roughly 4,000 years after Adam, Jesus was born. Interestingly, He is referred to as **“the Sun of righteousness” (Malachi 4:2)**.
- Another indicator would be that God rested on the 7th day of creation, and the Kingdom Age, the 7th Millennium, is also known as *The Age of Rest*.

The span of the ages is delineated by key indicators.

- From Adam to Abraham is roughly 2,000 years.
- From Abraham to Jesus approximately 2,000 years.
- From Jesus until now is right at 2,000 years.
- The final 1,000 years would apply to Jesus’ reign of great peace on this earth (see Rev. 20:2-7). We are informed, **“He shall deliver you in six troubles, yes, in seven no evil shall touch you” (Job 5:19 NKJV)**, this is an amazing correlation.

Peter writes:

2 Peter 3:2-4 (NLT)

I want you to remember what the holy prophets said long ago and what our Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles. **Most importantly**, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, **“What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again?”** From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created.”

So much here to unpack.

First, notice **‘Most importantly.’**

- Peter has just emphasized remembering the prophets and the Lord’s teachings and commands.
- Yet, what he labels *most important*, is the warning of ‘professing believers’ making light of Jesus’ Second Coming in our day.
- How do we know that these ‘scoffers’ profess faith?
 - First, they refer to the world as being created, rather than evolving.
 - Second, if you read Peter’s entire letter in context, along with Jude’s companion letter, both write that these people will profess to be saved, but alarmingly teach, “God’s marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives” (see 2 Peter 2 & Jude 4). They will not just pervert the teachings of Scripture but will live in a way that denies the power of the gospel.

- They will have the language of the New Testament yet live no differently than an unsaved person. They'll follow their fleshly instincts, rather than exhibiting the fruit of being filled with God's Spirit.

Peter continues:

2 Peter 3:5-7 (NLT)

They deliberately forget that God made the heavens long ago by the word of his command, and he brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water. Then he used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. And by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the day of judgment when ungodly people will be destroyed.

In essence, they *forget* this is the same God, Who by just a Word out of His mouth, created the entire universe and destroyed the world with a flood.

- These deluded people think just because no similar acts have occurred in their miniscule time on earth (compared to the history of mankind) that God isn't doing mighty wonders any longer.

Then Peter says:

2 Peter 3:8 (NLT)

But *you must not forget* this *one thing*, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day.

See the connection?

- I'll shorten his statements to make it more easily recognizable: **"They deliberately forget...but you must not forget this one thing."**
- What *one thing* is it that we 'must not' forget?
- One day with the Lord is a 1,000 of our years!

We see a critical indicator here, what they 'forget' and what we 'must not forget' is the exact same thing: *God is sure to do what He says, but in His timeline, not ours.*

- It's surer than the sunrise in the morning.
- It shows the importance of knowing the revealed seasons and timings of God.

With this knowledge, we now go to the prophet Hosea.

- It's important to know the context before we read.
- Hosea is speaking to the Jewish nation, but in doing so, we get a glimpse of the church's time period:

Hosea 5:14-15 (NLT)

"I will be like a lion to Israel, like a strong young lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces! I will carry them off, and no one will be left to rescue them. Then *I will return to my place* until they admit their guilt and turn to me. For as soon as trouble comes, they will earnestly search for me."

There are two major times that God permitted Israel and Judah to be torn into pieces:

1. The first was **the Babylonian invasion**. If you search the Scriptures, you'll find out the Chaldeans were ruthless with the Jewish people, including women, children, and babies. A small remnant survived and were taken to Babylon, but most were brutally slaughtered.
2. The other occasion was **Titus' conquest of the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD** culminating with Rome's utter depopulation of Israel over the next few decades.

The question is, which incident is God addressing through the prophet Hosea?

- The simple answer: it's definitely the Roman devastation spanning from 70-132 AD.
- There is a key statement in the above verses: "**I will return to my place.**"

To 'return' means you have to leave a specific location, go somewhere and then go back to the specific location your started from.

- Jesus left 'His place' with the Father approximately 2,000 years ago and *returned* to His place 33-years later. Shortly afterward Israel was 'torn into pieces' by Rome.

Continuing:

Hosea 6:1-2 (NKJV)

Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. *After two days* He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.

Israel as a nation eventually cries out, "Come let us return to the Lord."

When will this happen?

- After two days!
- Remember what Peter said we must not forget: A day with the Lord is 1,000 years.
- Hosea is saying "**After 2,000 years.**"

We have the timing!

What happens during these 2,000 years?

- In a general sense the Jewish people are blinded to the redemption available to mankind.

- God focuses on the Gentiles during this period. This is The Age of Grace – the Church age - in which the Gentiles (and most definitely some Jewish people) come to salvation.

Both Paul and James give us more insight. Starting with Paul:

Romans 11:25-26 (NLT)

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until *the fullness of the Gentiles* has come in. And so *all Israel will be saved*.

This was a mystery to the early Jewish church.

- **Think About It:** It took a vivid heavenly vision to get Peter to go to Cornelius' house – the Roman Centurion. Once there, Peter didn't give the people the opportunity to receive Jesus, probably because he was leery of being in a Gentile home.
- So, God caused His Spirit to fall on them without Peter's initiation (see Acts 10:44).

Peter was now fully persuaded the Gentiles could be saved and filled with God's Spirit. But most of the other Jewish leaders of the early church were not pleased with his actions. They call an emergency meeting, had a heated debate and the lead Apostle, James, concludes by speaking prophetically.

James declared:

Acts 15:13-15 (NLT)

"Brothers, listen to me. Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles *to take from them* a people for himself. And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted.

Take note of his words '*to take from them,*' which speak of the harvest of the Gentiles occurring over a period of time.

- He most likely didn't realize the time would last 2,000 years.

In examining Paul's and James' words together, we understand once the 'full number' of Gentiles come to salvation, then God will turn back His focus on Israel, which will be Daniel's final week – the 70th week of years.

Their eyes will be opened to the reality that they truly did crucify their Messiah, and according to Paul, Hosea, and Zechariah (see Zec. 12:10-11), all Israel will repent and turn to the Lord.

Let's read Hosea's words again with this knowledge:

Hosea 6:1-2 (NKJV)

Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.

Let's interpret his words in the light of what we've learned. (The very thing *we are not to forget!*)

- After 2,000 years God will revive Israel, it will occur within Daniel's final week (the seven-year Tribulation).
- After that, He will raise up His people to live in His sight!
- The third thousandth year is the kingdom age, when Jesus Christ will rule and reign the nations of the world for 1,000 years. During this time Satan and his demonic hordes will be locked up and not able to wreak havoc among the nations (see Rev. 20:1-4).

The main point: *we have a timeline.*

- God allowed Israel to be torn by Rome in 70 AD, almost 2,000 years ago.
- Then we are told after 2 days – 2,000 years – He would once again revive Israel.
- In adding the numbers, we come to the year 2070 AD.

Now let's recall what we discussed with **Jesus' fig tree parable:**

- Jesus said that generation would not pass until all was fulfilled.
- If a generation is **100 years**, we arrived at 2067 (100 years after Jerusalem was reacquired by the Jewish people).
- With Hosea's as a second confirmation, we arrive again at the same timeframe. However, recall, a generation could be anywhere from 40 years to 100 years. So Jesus' time span would be from 2007 to 2067. Of course, we're already well past 2007, but we're in the window – the season.

The same is true for Hosea's words.

- Jesus returned to 'His place' (Hosea 5:15) in 32 AD.
- If we add 2 days – 2,000 years – we come to 2032 AD!
- Hosea's window is 2032-2067 AD. Both come out to roughly the same season!

Here is what we can confidently declare: *we're in the season, the generation, of His return.*

How can we be perfectly sure?

Hosea's next words are:

Hosea 6:3 (NLT)

His going forth is established as the morning.

Does the sun rise at the appointed time every morning?

- The season of Jesus' going forth is as sure as the timing of the rising sun.

- We don't know the day or hour, but we know the season.

Hosea's words confirm our interpretation of Jesus' words to be accurate.

Do we have other confirmations?

When God brought Israel out of Egypt, which is a type of the World, He gave a glimpse to Moses of something significant:

Exodus 19:10-11 (NKJV)

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them *today* and *tomorrow*, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the *third day*. For on the *third day* the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai *in the sight of all the people*."

The people were to wash their clothes from the filth of Egypt.

- They were to do this for 2 days, prophetically representing 2,000 years.
- Again, we see it was the 3rd day – the 3rd thousandth year, that Lord manifested Himself *in the sight of all the people*. Once again, correlating to the 1,000 reign of Christ.
- An interesting note: it was at *the beginning* of the 3rd day that He appeared (see Exodus 19:16-20), reflecting the beginning of the 3rd thousand year after Jesus' first coming.

Closing Thoughts

We are truly living in days of prophetic fulfillment—and we have a timeline to both prove and understanding the season we are in!

The question still looms, is Jesus' Second Coming and the catching away of His bride the same event? Will there even be a catching away, and if so, when will it take place? We'll explore this in the next lesson! You don't want to miss it!

Lesson 5: The Catching Away!

Purpose of the Lesson

To provide clear, Scripture-based understanding of the Church's future gathering to Jesus Christ, dispelling confusion and fear surrounding the "catching away." This lesson explains the biblical foundation for this event occurring before the Tribulation, strengthening the Church's confidence in God's Word and calling believers to live prepared for the Lord's return.

Let's Begin

Now we get to one of the most misunderstood and debated topics in the Bible: *The Rapture*—or, as I'll refer to it, "The Catching Away".

Let's dive in, beginning with Paul's words:

1 Corinthians 15:51 (NLT)

But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but **we will all be transformed!** It will happen in **a moment**, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown.

Let's now discuss the great and joyful hope of our miraculous transformation which will occur at the return of Jesus.

3 Types of Transformation (3 Parts of Salvation)

1. **Spirit Transformation**—at the moment of conversation, we become new creations and our spirit is born again.
2. **Soul Transformation**—our souls are being "saved" through a process of renewing the mind (sanctification) where our mind, will, and emotions are "being" saved.
3. **Body Transformation**—this is the final part of our salvation where we will no longer know death and decay.

In this lesson, we'll focus on the last part of salvation: "**Body Transformation.**"

This is the one all true believers crave, our new bodies. Paul writes:

2 Corinthians 5:2-3 (NLT)

We grow weary in our present bodies, and **we long to put on our heavenly bodies** like new clothing. For **we will put on heavenly bodies**; we will not be spirits without bodies.

Receiving our heavenly bodies will be the final transformation.

- In his letter to the Corinth Church, Paul calls it a 'wonderful secret;' other translations call it 'a mystery.'

- This is not something that is spooky, rather it is something that was hidden from God's people until after the Holy Spirit came upon the church.
- Jesus referred to the disciple's inability to understand certain truths by stating, "There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:12-13).

For this specific mystery of our opening verse, what truth was previously hidden?

- Simply that there is a generation of us who will not die, but our living mortal bodies will be instantaneously and miraculously transformed into immortal bodies.
- This will not only happen with us who are alive, but also those who died in Christ and their bodies are in the ground.
- It's no different than Jesus' mortal body three days after His death was transformed into a heavenly body.
- Currently, Jesus is the only One in heaven or on earth with this body, but upon His return we will all be blessed with one that's similar.

Describe Our Transformed Bodies

Even though Paul refers to it as a heavenly body, its fully capable of functioning with humans in mortal bodies.

- Jesus, after being raised from the dead, interacted with others without standing out freakishly.
- He walked unrecognized with two disciples on the road to Emmaus.
- Mary mistook Him for a gardener.
- The disciples, at first glance, perceived Him as an ordinary man on the seashore; a short while later, He ate a fish breakfast with them.
- He possessed flesh and bone that seemed no different than any other human. Jesus encouraged His men to, "**Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do**" (Luke 24:38-39).
- At the same time, He could instantaneously appear and disappear, walk through locked doors, and even float up into the sky.
- **Jesus in His Glory:** when John saw Him on the Island of Patmos, His face shone like the sun in all its brilliance, His eyes were like laser beams, and His voice thundered as the roaring ocean! When He returns to earth the strongest of humans will cower and tremble with utter fear at His appearance.

In reviewing these examples, its evident this 'heavenly body' can take on different forms yet remain the same body.

- The good news: "**we will someday be like the heavenly man**" (1 Cor 15:49).

Again, our transformation will happen **instantly**.

- Paul says in a '**moment**.'

- The Greek word is, *átomos*; we get our word ‘atom’ from it. When referring to time, “it means an indivisible point of time, an instant, a moment.”
- According to **quantum physics**, the marker for the ‘indivisible point of time’ is called Planck time and is 10^{-43} seconds. When we get to this point it’s impossible to shorten time any further.

How does this process transpire?

Paul writes:

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 (NLT)

We tell you this directly from the Lord...the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. So *encourage* each other with these words.

Let’s begin with the final statement, “**encourage one another with these words,**” not *frighten* or even *warn* one another!

- The root word also carries the meaning ‘*comfort*.’
- Our speaking of the return of Jesus should bring comfort and courage to devoted followers of Jesus, not fear.

The next statement to highlight is the phrase: “**directly from the Lord.**”

- For Paul to preface his statements with this phrase shows heavy emphasis that should be heeded.
- **First**, we are warned that people will mock His imminent return. They will say, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, we’ve heard about this for generations, and it’s not materialized. Nothing has changed since the early church fathers have passed away” (my paraphrase of 2 Peter 3:3-4).
- **Second**, this will be the first time in roughly 2,000 years the Lord Jesus will leave the great city of God – the heavenly Jerusalem. Our Bridegroom is not sending angels for us, although masses of them will accompany Him. He is coming personally for His bride.
 - It’s similar to the ancient Jewish wedding; the groom comes, accompanied by his wedding party, for his bride. Shouts and blowing shofars suddenly ring through the streets at an unannounced time of evening as the groom comes by stealth to ‘catch away’ his bride.

Similarly, this is a surprise, a day and hour only our Father knows and it will be accompanied by a shout and a very loud trumpet blast.

In an atomic moment, those who have previously died in Christ in generations past will rise out of their graves.

- We can safely conclude these people have not been in the ground all this time, because Paul writes to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.
- Currently God’s city consists of Himself, Jesus, an innumerable company of angels, and **“the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:22-24).**
- These are the men and women who have gone on before us in Christ and they presently possess spiritual bodies.
- Even as Jesus’ Spirit was in the underworld the three days and three nights while His physical body laid in the grave (see 1 Pet 3:19 & Eph 4:9), even so these saints have been separated from their bodies for a season.

Just as Jesus was reunited with His physical body and instantaneously transformed into His present glorified body by the power of God’s Spirit, even so these saints will experience the same.

- They will instantaneously be reunited with their bodies, which for the majority will be dust and bones, and by the same Spirit be glorified as Jesus was on resurrection day.
- This is why He is frequently referred to as **“the first born from the dead.”**

What happens to the saints who are currently living on the earth?

Looking at Paul’s words again:

1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 (NLT)

Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be *caught up* in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. So encourage each other with these words.

In that atomic-second, while the deceased saints are transformed into their heavenly bodies, the exact same thing will happen with the living.

- In Paul’s words, ***“We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye.”***

The word he uses to describe this atomic second event is **‘caught up.’**

- It is the Greek word *harpázō*, and is defined as: “to grab or seize by force, with the purpose of removing and/or controlling — ‘to seize, to snatch away, to take away.’”

This word is found fourteen times in the New Testament, and in all accounts, it definitely carries a ‘snatching away’ emphasis.

Let’s look at some of them translated in the NKJV:

- Matthew 11:12 *“take it by force”*
- Matthew 13:19 *“snatches”*
- John 6:15 *“take Him by force”*

- John 10:12 “the wolf *catches* the sheep”
- Acts 8:39 “The Spirit of the Lord *caught* Philip away”
- Acts 23:10 “*take him by force* from among them”
- 2 Cor 12:4 “he was *caught up* into Paradise”
- 1 Thess 4:17 “*caught up* in the clouds”
- Rev 12:5 “her child was *caught up* to God and His Throne”

What’s the main point?

- There’s no doubt it means “a sudden, rapid seizing and carrying away.”
- He will do exactly this with His bride who are alive on the earth.

Many have used the word ‘rapture.’

- The word doesn’t appear in our English Bible, but it does appear in the Latin Bible.
- An early church father named Jerome took 23 years to convert the New Testament from Greek to Latin. He completed the project in 390 AD, and the translation is widely known as the Latin Vulgate. Church fathers regarded his work so highly that it was used to translate the New Testament into several foreign languages over the next 1,000 years!
- The Latin word Jerome used for *harpázō* was *rapiemur*, which is related to the Latin word *raptus*; the word *rapture* comes from.
- Yes, the word isn’t in our English Bible, but neither is the word *Trinity*, but it’s widely accepted as an accurate description of the relationship and unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Why isn’t “Trinity” so heatedly contested as “rapture” is?

Where are we meeting Him?

It’s important to specify because we have two entirely different locations mentioned in regard to His second coming.

- One is in **the air**, the other is on **a mountain**.

Are these one in the same or two different events?

As an initial inquiry, let’s compare Paul’s words with the prophet Zechariah. Paul writes:

1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NLT)

...we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the **clouds** to meet the Lord in the **air**.

We have two words indicating location: **clouds** and **air**.

- The word ‘*clouds*’ is an exact translation, the Greek word simply means ‘a cloud’ in our atmosphere.
- The word *air* is defined: “the celestial air surrounding the earth.”

So it's clear, this event will happen in the atmosphere somewhere between where our planes fly and the exosphere – the outer atmosphere that rockets need to break through in exiting or reentering the earth.

Why is this important?

Revelation shows that when Jesus returns with His holy ones, He will wage war on a coalition of nations that have gathered together at Armageddon to fight (see Rev 16:16 & 19:11-21).

Zechariah writes:

Zechariah 14:3-4 (NLT)

Then the Lord will go out to fight against those nations, as he has fought in times past. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. And the Mount of Olives will split apart.

Both Paul and Zechariah are quite clear on location and purpose.

1. **Paul:** in the clouds and in the air.
2. **Zechariah:** On the Mount of Olives.

We must ask:

1. *Why do we meet the Lord in the clouds, but are also told His feet will land the Mount of Olives?*
2. *Are these one in the same event?*
3. *Do we meet Him in the air, immediately get on our white horses, do a U-turn, and follow Him back to witness the slaying of His enemies, and put His foot on the mountain?*
4. *Is He coming for His bride and waging war at the same time?*
5. *Does He have a wedding garment on under His armor for war, or are these two different happenings?*

Two Events; Two Phases

When we speak of Jesus' return, does it refer to the Bridegroom catching away His bride or the conquering King returning to defeat all rebellion and set up His thousand-year reign?

The answer is not one or the other, rather it's both!

If it's both, do they occur at the same time or different times?

If the answer is 'different,' then how can two completely different narratives be part of the same event?

Example:

- Consider a typical Western wedding.
- Most weddings are conducted in two phases: the ceremony and the reception.
- Each occur at two distinct times and can be in two different locations.
- The ceremony is usually held in a church; the reception in an event hall.

*The Second Coming of Jesus is **one event** which occurs in **two phases**; each of which have a different function, time, and location.*

3 Most Commonly Held Perspectives About the Rapture

1. Post-Tribulation
2. Mid-Tribulation
3. Pre-Tribulation

Post-Tribulation View

Those who embrace this view believe every aspect of the Second Coming happens at the same time.

- In other words, if we return to our example, the wedding and reception are one in the same function, happening at the same location, and same time.
- Those who hold to this belief say that Jesus will ‘catch away’ His bride at the end of the seven-year tribulation.

If this view is correct, I have a difficult time determining why a meeting needs to occur in the clouds.

- Why not be ‘caught away’ to meet Him at the Mount of Olives, where Jesus will place His feet upon (Zech 14:3-4)?
- This can’t be so, otherwise Paul’s writings to the Thessalonians and Corinthians are unapplicable and untrue.

For the post-tribulation to be accurate, it leaves only one possible scenario.

- Jesus will ‘catch away’ the church in the clouds. Once there we’ll immediately mount up on horses, do a U-turn, and follow Him back to earth to witness His defeat of the rebellious nations. This seems awkward, but possible.

However, there are complications. One of the main ones being the church will still be on earth for the severe wrath of God:

1. The seven Seal judgments
2. The seven trumpet judgments
3. The seven bowl judgments

It will be trouble, anguish, suffering, and death such has never been seen before or will ever be again.

Some of the devastations His wrath includes:

- One-fourth of all mankind killed during just the fourth seal judgment, not to mention catastrophes of the other six seals.
- The trumpet judgments are even worse, one of them will see one-third of the earth burned, and an additional large segment of mankind dying from one-third of the water being made poisonous.
- In another trumpet judgment people will seek death to escape unimaginable torment and will not be able to find it.
- The sixth trumpet will kill still another one-third of mankind (we're now at 4-5 billion people being put to death and far from finished).
- The final bowl judgments include all the water on earth turning to blood; killing everything that lives in water.
- The sun will release blasts of fiery heat which will scorch the inhabitants on earth.
- There will be terrible storms with hail weighing up to 75 pounds each.
- At the completion of the tribulation's fury people will be scarcer than gold.

This is just a sampling of horrific wrath that will be poured out.

Mid-Tribulation View

This view sees the 'catching away' of the bride occurring somewhere during the seven-year tribulation.

- Most who adhere to this belief see it taking place at the midpoint.
- Those who believe this declare we will not be here during the great tribulation (the last three and a half years), only the first half.

Pre-Tribulation View

This view sees the 'catching away' occurring prior to the tribulation, some believe it's the kickstart of the tribulation, others believe there may be a brief unknown time gap between the 'catching away' and the beginning of the tribulation.

3 Groups of Saints During the Timeframe of the Second Coming

- 1) **The Church or The Bride of Christ**: these have received Jesus Christ as their Lord and faithfully follow Him. Most of this group will already be in heaven, however, there will still be a large segment here on earth once the Lord returns to 'catch away' His bride. This group will consist of many Gentiles and some Jewish people.
- 2) **The Jewish Saints**: these are the Jewish people whose eyes will be opened during the tribulation to recognize and worship their Messiah, Jesus Christ. They're the people Paul reference that once the full number of Gentiles comes in all of Israel will be saved (see Romans 11:25-26).
- 3) **The Tribulation Saints**: this will include all of category 2 (the Jewish Saints) but will also include the Gentiles who are saved during the Tribulation.

The 7 Reasons Why There Will Be a Catching Away of the Saints

1) We are Not Appointed to Wrath

There are over 25 references to *the wrath of God* in the New Testament, and even more in the Old.

Most of them identify the culmination of judgment occurring during the seven-year tribulation.

Here's a sample:

Revelation 16:1 (NKJV)

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the *wrath of God* on the earth."

Revelation 6:16 (NKJV)

For the great day of *His wrath* has come, and who is able to stand?

Revelation 11:18 (NKJV)

The nations were angry, and *Your wrath* has come.

This represents just a sampling of the several references found in just the book of Revelation, and you'll also find many in the epistles.

In the New Testament, the words to describe God's wrath are: *thumós* and *orgé*, and both are used in the book of Revelation.

1. The first word includes, "the idea of punishment or punitive judgment." Even more clarifying, and attention grabbing, is this definition of *thumós*: "indignation, wrath as the outburst of a vengeful mind."
2. The second word, *orgé*, which is used in most references, is defined as, "divine punishment based on God's angry judgment against someone."

The tribulation is the time of His punitive judgment and punishment.

- In fact, another passage refers to it as *fierce*:

Revelation 19:15 (NKJV)

He Himself treads the winepress of the *fierceness* and *wrath* of Almighty God.

For continuity, let's review again Isaiah's description of the Day of the Lord, also known as the seven-year tribulation:

Isaiah 13:9-12 (NKJV)

Behold, the day of the Lord comes, *cruel*, with both *wrath* and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. "I will punish the world for *its* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold.

His wrath is labeled as *cruel*, for it will proceed from His fierce anger and will both *punish* and *destroy*.

These Scriptures make quite clear that the tribulation period is without a doubt the *wrath of God* and is not intended for His Son's bride, but a rebellious world.

- Paul writes in perfect harmony with the above passages in his epistles. He only uses the word *orgé*.

Romans 5:9 (NLT)

"Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be *saved from wrath* through Him."

His most interestingly use of this word is found in his letter to the Thessalonians.

- Paul literally bookends the 'catching away' of the church with the very clear message that we are not appointed to wrath.

Here are the bookends:

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (NKJV)

To wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the *wrath* to come.

He proceeds to write of the 'catching away' of Jesus' bride in the fourth and fifth chapters with the following at the end of his discussion of this profound event:

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 (NKJV)

For God *did not appoint us to wrath*, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

It's clear, the bride (church) is not intended to experience the wrath of God, and for the second time in this group of passages, Paul tells believers to comfort each other with these words.

No one would consider the message of going through God's wrath as bringing comfort and encouragement.

Note:

- Jesus states, **“In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33 NKJV).**
- However, there is a huge difference between *‘tribulation’* and *‘the tribulation.’*
- There is a huge difference; one is the world’s wrath against believers, whereas the other is God’s wrath against the world.
- Jesus is referencing persecutions, hardships, afflictions and suffering from the trials and testings of this world.
- The 7-year tribulation is God’s wrath.

Let’s address the accusation of a pre-tribulation ‘catching away’ being an *‘escape’* mentality.

- If it’s so cowardly and unheroic, then why does Jesus instruct believers regarding the 7-year tribulation:

Luke 21:36 (NKJV)

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to *escape* all these things.”

It’s not a cowardly thing to escape the *wrath of God*.

- Jesus took God’s wrath upon Himself to deliver us from the divine punishment to come.
- But it’s correct to identify as a ‘cowardly act’ to escape the *wrath of the world* by denying our faith.

2) We Enter the Heavenly Chamber Before the Outpouring of Wrath.

Isaiah 26:20-21 (NKJV)

Come, my people, **enter your chambers**, and shut your doors behind you;
Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.

Once again, we get a glimpse of **the ancient Jewish wedding** in Isaiah’s words, but it’s not obvious.

Let’s briefly review:

- The groom would prepare a room, **a chamber**, for his wife.
- Once his father approves, the groom would come unexpectedly to his bride’s community, with shouts and shofars horns blowing in the streets.
- Then he would catch her away and immediately bring her to the bridal *chamber* where they’d spend the next seven days together.
- Afterward, the couple would emerge from hiding, and the husband would present his unveiled wife to all in attendance.

Let’s look closer at Isaiah’s words for more context:

Isaiah 26:19 & 21 (NLT)

But those who die in the Lord will live; their bodies will rise again! Those who sleep in the earth will rise up and sing for joy! For your life-giving light will fall like dew on your people in the place of the dead!... Look! The Lord is coming from heaven to punish the people of the earth for their sins.

There's no doubt he's addressing the resurrection of the saints, which is a huge aspect of the Second Coming.

We also see the time frame is made clear in the 21st verse.

In comparing Isaiah's words with our New Testament rendering of the same event we gain a more complete picture.

Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 15:20 (NLT)

Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

And in using almost the exact same words as Isaiah, Paul writes:

1 Thessalonians 4:16 (NLT)

The believers who have died will rise from their graves.

Paul then gives a more thorough description of the believer's resurrection than Isaiah by writing:

- **"Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies"** (1 Cor 15:43-44).
- He amplifies Isaiah's words, who wrote that God's "life-giving light will fall like dew on Your people in the place of the dead!"

Paul continues:

1 Corinthians 15:52 (NLT)

It will happen in **a moment**, in **the blink of an eye**... For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed.

Isaiah and Paul are writing about the exact same event.

- It's even backed by Paul stating that this prophetic promise is **"directly from the Lord"** (1 Thes 4:15).

Make no mistake about it, a certain day is coming in which Jesus will descend into the earth's atmosphere, which just so happens to be the 'community' where His bride resides (either in the grave or still alive), swoop up His beloved and bring her to the *chamber* He's prepared (see John 14:1-3).

Let's continue with Isaiah's *very next statement* and we will see the correlation to the Jewish wedding:

Isaiah 26: 20-21 (NKJV)

Come, my people, *enter your chambers*, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.

The most important question to ask is:

Where are these chambers for the resurrected dead in the Lord? Are they on earth or in heaven?

In other words, as the indignation – the wrath of God – is being poured out, are God's people who are resurrected from the graves going to again live on earth and hide themselves in remote places such as forests, deserts, caves, communes, and so forth, to avoid the plagues of judgments?

- No way! It's so far-fetched: dead people being resurrected so they can hide on earth from the persecution of the Antichrist and the wrath of God.

Now for the next important question:

What happens in the same split second of these who are resurrected from the graves?

The answer is found in the mystery that wasn't made known to Isaiah, or any other Old Testament prophet; the mystery that Paul received 'directly from the Lord.'

- The mystery that those who are alive in Christ will also be caught up **in the same atomic second** to meet the Lord and forever be with Him!

What is scripture making clear?

- If the dead in the Lord are raised before the wrath is poured out (*hiding in chambers*), then the alive are also 'caught up' before the wrath is poured out (*and will be in the same chambers*)!
- Both the dead and the living are united with the Lord within the same atomic second.

Zephaniah confirms this as well:

Zephaniah 2:3 (NKJV)

Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that **you will be hidden** in the day of the Lord's anger.

Reverting back to the Jewish wedding:

- Once the couple are in the Bridal Chamber, **it's seven days of alone time**. They are hidden away from all activities taking place outside the chamber.

This is so important, that it needs to be reiterated.

- Isaiah and Zephaniah clearly state that **just before** the Lord punishes the inhabitants of the world, an event called, The Day of the Lord, which consists of the Tribulation and Great Tribulation, those who are dead in the Lord are resurrected and will be hidden in chambers, and Paul completes the picture with “the mystery” that those of us who are alive in Christ will be caught up at the exact same time!

Once the seven-years are completed, Jesus will return with His unveiled bride, defeat all rebellion, and set up His kingdom with her reigning by His side.

With this in mind, note the remarkable similarities in the following Scriptures:

Jude 14-15 (NKJV)

Behold, the Lord comes **with** ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way.

Jude is not describing Jesus coming **for** His bride, as Paul did with the Thessalonians, rather Jesus coming **with** His bride.

- One of the aspects of Jude's words is describing **the reveal** of Jesus' bride that will occur seven years after the 'catching away.'

The following verses speak specifically of **the reveal**:

1 John 3:1-2 (NKJV)

Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been **revealed** what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him.

Colossians 3:4 (NKJV)

When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will **appear with Him** in glory.

Romans 8:19 (NLT)

For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will **reveal** who his children really are.

The similarities are startling between the ancient Jewish wedding and the Apostles and Prophets writings of Jesus' return.

Keep in mind, these men were very well versed in their wedding's format, unlike our twenty-first century Western World comprehension.

3. The Absence of the Church in the Book of Revelation

Consider these facts:

- The church is mentioned 19 times in Revelation chapters 1-3.
- Then we don't hear of her again until Revelation 22.

Why the abrupt disappearance?

- Approximately a half dozen times we hear the word **'saints'** in these in-between chapters, but not 'church.'

Who are these people if the church is gone?

- *The Tribulations Saints* (which are comprised of both Jews and Gentiles). These are the multitudes who will be saved during the Tribulation (see Rev. 7).

In returning to the Church, it's both interesting and not coincidental, that after Jesus speaks to the seven churches, the very next verse is:

Revelation 4:1 (NKJV)

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was like a trumpet* speaking with me, saying, **"Come up here."**

After these things.

After what things?

- Jesus has just spoken to seven historic churches.
- The messages to these churches wouldn't have been placed in Scripture if they did not have prophetic application.

There are three main views of how these messages apply:

1. They pertain to the seven historic churches.
2. They relate to the different phases of the church's condition over the past 2,000-year span.
3. They identify the various conditions of the global church right before His second coming.

Which one is accurate? Is it possible all three accurate?

The remarkable similarity Revelation 4:1 has with 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.

- Namely the loud trumpeting voice and the words **"Come up here."**

- They both speak of a ‘catching away’ using similar terminology.

Could the reason the church isn’t mentioned by name any longer is because she is in the Bridal Chamber with Jesus?

Isn’t this what Isaiah and Zephaniah prophesied?

4. The Twenty-Four Elders

Another interesting point arises when discussing the absence of the church on earth from Revelation chapters 4-21.

Who did John see in the Throne Room (Revelation 4 and 5)?

Almost everyone mentioned can be found from the numerous descriptions of God’s Throne contained in other books of Scripture.

- We see: the four living creatures, Seraphim, the myriads of angels, Jesus (The Lamb), God Almighty and the Spirit of God (7 lamps burning).

Who are the 24 Elders?

- For the first time in Scripture, we find a new group we’ve not seen in any other place in Scripture: **the twenty-four elders**.
- There is a group now missing, **“the spirits of the righteous ones...made perfect”** (Heb 12:23).

Why do the 24 elders suddenly appear, and are not found in Ezekiel’s, Isaiah’s, the book of Hebrew’s, and the Psalmist’s visions of the Throne Room?

Where did the spirits of the ones made perfect go? Did they now get new resurrected bodies?

I believe they represent the **Old Testament Saints** and **New Testament Saints** combined into one group.

- *Could the reason for the number twenty-four come from the **12 tribes of Israel** and the **12 Apostles** that were chosen by Lord as founders of the church?*

The reason I strongly lean this way is found in their song:

Revelation 5:9-10 (NKJV)

They sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have **redeemed us to God** by Your blood out of **every tribe and tongue and people and nation**, and have made us **kings and priests** to our God. And **we shall reign on the earth.**”

4 Indicators that show this group is most likely the Old Testament Saints and the New Testament Church:

- 1) **“Redeemed us to God.”** The church has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and this good news was also preached to those who waited patiently in Abraham’s bosom for the Messiah to come and sprinkle His blood on the Mercy Seat of God (see Luke 16:22-23, Eph 4:9-10 & 1 Peter 3:18-19).
- 2) They were redeemed from, **“every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”** This shows these elders are not angelic beings. They were purchased back to God by the blood of His Son from every tribe, tongue, people and nation.
- 3) They have been made **‘kings and priests’** to our God. There are only two individuals, and one group identified as such in Scripture. Melchizedek (see Heb. 7:1), Jesus Christ (see Heb 3:1 & Rev. 19:16) and those ransomed by the blood of Jesus:
 - **“To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father.”** (Revelation 1:5-6 NKJV)
- 4) They said, **“we shall reign on the earth.”**
 - Paul writes, **“If we endure, we shall also reign with Him”** (2 Tim. 2:12 NKJV; see also Rev. 20:6).
 - Angels are not promised to rule with Christ, nor are even the Seraphim. The only ones promised to rule with Jesus Christ are His faithful saints.

[There are more!](#)

One of the first things John notices after being ‘caught up’ to the Throne room other than the Lord Himself were these elders.

Revelation 4:2-4 (NLT)

Instantly I was in the Spirit and I saw the throne in heaven and someone sitting on it...Twenty four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads.

These elders were clothed in white and had gold crowns.

- Who wears white and has crowns?
- We are told: **“For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself. She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear”** (Rev 19:7-8).
- Paul writes, **“And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing”** (2 Timothy 4:8).

Now comes the amazing aspect:

- These elders appear before any of the wrath of God is poured out.
- Not one seal has been broken as of yet.
- Why is this? It’s just as the prophet Isaiah declared: we are hidden in the wedding chamber before the indignation is poured out!

5. The Restrainer Must be Removed First

The church in Thessalonica needed comforting as some 'teachers' had troubled them.

- The young church was told the 'catching away' had already occurred, and the Day of the Lord – the tribulation had already begun.

Paul wrote:

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 (NKJV)

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and *the man of sin is revealed*, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Two things must take place before the tribulations begins.

- 1) The first being *the apostasy* – the falling away from faith of many professing believers.
- 2) The second is the identity of *the man of sin*.
 - Many refer to him as **the Antichrist**. However, this term is only used once in the New Testament (1 John 2:18). Other names given to him are *the beast, the son of perdition, the wicked one, the lawless one*, and a few others.

He is the perfect antitheses of Jesus Christ and is the full embodiment of lawless Satan himself.

Things to Note about the Antichrist:

His reveal will occur at the beginning of the seven years when a covenant of peace is made with the Jewish nation, but halfway through:

Daniel 9:27 (NLT)

The ruler will make a treaty with the people for a period of *one set of seven*, but after *half this time*, he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings. And as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the fate decreed for this defiler is finally poured out on him.

How will such a wicked man fool the Jewish people at the onset of the seven-year tribulation?

- Lawlessness is masked as 'what is good for me' and the Bible says this "mystery of lawlessness" is already at work 'secretly' in society.
- No different than what happened in the garden with Eve, this man's initial appearance will seem good and wise.

At the midpoint of the final seven years, he will claim himself to be 'God' and above all that is called 'God.'

2 Thessalonians 2:6-8 (NKJV)

And now you know what is **restraining**, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now **restrains** will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

In these verses we see there is a **restrainer** that is doing **two things**.

- 1) Holding back the secret power of lawlessness.
- 2) Keeping the Antichrist from being revealed.

Who is this restrainer?

Rick Renner writes: *“The Greek words to describe this restrainer in verses 6 and 7 are both neuter and masculine in the original text. This implies that the identity of the restrainer may be a thing, a person or both.”*

In order for the **restrainer** to hold back the secret power of lawlessness, he or it would have to be in all the areas of our social construct.

There have been four of five theories on his or its identity, but **only two stand out** as plausible.

- 1) The first is **the Holy Spirit**, and many believe its Him, even the NKJV translators as they capitalized the pronoun.
 - However, I have a difficult time with this interpretation, for we know there will be a tremendous harvest of souls in the tribulation, and “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). He is the one who opens a person’s heart to recognize Jesus as the Christ.
 - Holy Spirit must be here during the tribulation.
- 2) The other possibility is **the Body of Christ** or **the church**.

Let’s think about this:

What would society be like, if suddenly, the church’s influence was completely removed.

Jesus states:

Matthew 16:18-20 (NLT)

“I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not **conquer** it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

The church cannot be **conquered**; therefore, it’s a restraining force against the mystery of lawlessness.

- In the NKJV version it is translated “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

- Gates are not offensive, rather defensive. The church is told to advance the Kingdom by making disciples of all nations (see Mat. 28:19).
- The Greek word for “nations’ is *ethnos*, which is defined as “a body of persons united by kinship, culture, and common traditions.” This certainly includes actual nations, tribes, territories, and ethnic groups. However, it also encompasses persons with a commonality, such as body builders, entertainers, pilots, hairstylists, salespeople, stay at home moms, and so forth.

The church is to continuously advance, it’s a force of light, and the gates of darkness cannot stop it.

Just as darkness doesn’t overcome light, but is always overcome by light, even so the church has not only been a restraining force, but an advancing force.

- Jesus clearly communicates in a parable that the church is to, “**occupy till I come**” (Luke 19:13 KJV).

The church has been sorely persecuted all through its existence. Many have been brutally martyred, but the church continues to occupy, advance, and tear down the strongholds of hell. No force has been able to overcome it all through the 2,000-year Age of Grace.

During the tribulation, though, the Antichrist will be given power over the saints.

Heaven will allow this:

Revelation 13:5-7 (NLT)

He was given authority to do whatever he wanted for forty-two months...And the beast was allowed to wage war against God’s *holy people and to conquer them*.

Who are **the holy people**?

- It’s **the tribulation saints** – all of Israel and many converted gentiles.
- They are not given Jesus’ promise to the church that: “all the powers of hell will *not conquer it*.”
- During these seven years, the Antichrist will be permitted to *conquer* the believers.

Daniel prophesies the saints will be placed under Antichrist’s *control* the final 3 ½ years:

Daniel 7:25 (NLT)

He will defy the Most High and oppress the holy people of the Most High. He will try to change their sacred festivals and laws, and they will be placed under his **control** for a time, times, and half a time.

Again, Daniel prophesies of the man of lawlessness:

Daniel 8:24 (NLT)

He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause a shocking amount of destruction and succeed in everything he does. He will destroy powerful leaders and *devastate* the holy people.

He will *devastate* the holy people!

- Daniel is later told by the angel Gabriel they will be “completely shattered” (Dan. 12:7).
- Jesus, along the same lines, foretells that once the Antichrist pronounces himself to be God, a great slaughter would begin.

He gives the key indicator of who is being discussed:

Matthew 24:15-22 (NLT)

“The day is coming when you will see what Daniel the prophet spoke about—the sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing in the Holy Place.” (Reader, pay attention!) Then those in Judea must flee to the hills...And pray that your flight will not be in winter or *on the Sabbath*. For there will be greater anguish than at any time since the world began. And it will never be so great again. In fact, unless that time of calamity is shortened, not a single person will survive. But it will be shortened for the sake of God’s chosen ones.

Jesus references Daniel 9:27 – what will occur 3 ½ years into the tribulation – the moment the Antichrist declares himself to be ‘God.’

- If Jesus’ message is directed toward the church, why does He say, “pray that your flight will not be...on the Sabbath?”
- This clarifies who He’s addressing: the Jewish people who’ve now embraced their Messiah.

Zechariah gives dreadful insight into what will transpire:
the Antichrist will murder two-thirds of the people in Israel
the one-third who survive will be purified as silver and gold (see Zec. 13:7-9).

As badly as the church has been persecuted over the past 2,000 years, it has never been overcome or conquered.

- Regarding the church, Jesus’ words clearly state, **“all the powers of hell will not conquer it.”**
- Scripture also states the Antichrist will *oppress, devastate, conquer* and *completely shatter* the saints.

But isn’t this a contradiction?

- No, each of these descriptive words are drawn from multiple Scriptures that all apply to the tribulation saints, not to the church.
- The church, or bride, will have already been taken up and hidden away in the wedding chamber of heaven.

6. It Will Be Like the Days of Noah

Matthew 24:37 (NLT)

“When the Son of Man returns, **it will be like it was in Noah’s day.**”

Our Creator is wonderfully patient, kind, longsuffering, and merciful. His unfathomable love is everlasting!

- Eventually, though, mankind’s disobedience reaches the point of no-return, and the ensuing divine fury is quite serious.

Scripture records three terrifying accounts of God’s wrath being poured out on Gentile people.

The Flood

First, the entire human race in the days of Noah.

- The Lord opened the fountains of the deep and caused a heavy rain to fall non-stop for forty days and nights. He covered the earth with water drowning every living thing that breathed air.

One man walked with God: Noah. He and his family didn’t feel one drop of water.

- God waited until Noah was safely in the ark – **the chamber of safety**, before pouring out His wrath.

Sodom and Gomorrah

The next is Sodom and Gomorrah.

- We read that, **“The Lord rained down fire and burning sulfur from the sky on Sodom and Gomorrah. He utterly destroyed them, along with the other cities and villages of the plain, wiping out all the people” (Gen. 19:24-25).**

In 2021 a 64-page article was published by a scientific journal that points to a horrific fireball explosion that occurred in the same geographic area of these two cities over 3,500 years ago.

- The investigation was conducted by an international team of scientists.
- They determined all 8,000 inhabitants of a 100-acre city (believed to be Sodom) were incinerated by a fireball with a temperature of over 3,600 degrees Fahrenheit!
- These experts estimate a meteor exploded approximately 2.5 miles above ground, creating a 740 mile per hour shock wave that was 1000X more powerful than the atomic bomb that blew up Hiroshima, Japan.

The book of Genesis tells us:

Genesis 19:29 (NLT)

God had listened to Abraham's request and kept Lot safe, removing him from the disaster that engulfed the cities on the plain.

Again, as with Noah, the righteous were put in a place of safety before God's wrath was poured out.

- The angels made sure Lot and his family were far enough away from the incineration that they didn't feel its effects.

The Egyptians

The third is God's wrath upon the Egyptians.

This one is different in two ways.

1. First, in both of the previous judgments, the unbelievers were not given warning as to what was coming; they were taken by surprise. Whereas with Egypt, the people were warned of each act of judgment, and in some cases, were made aware of the timing.
2. Second, God's people were not removed from the land that came under judgment. The Israelites had to endure the first three plagues that were brought against Egypt:
 - The water being turned to blood,
 - The invasion of frogs and gnats. However, God did protect Goshen, the home of His people, for the final seven plagues.

How do these acts of judgment relate to our discussion?

Interestingly, in the New Testament's writings of the coming outpouring of wrath, only two of the three are used as comparisons, and done so frequently:

- the great flood and Sodom and Gomorrah.

Let's briefly look at one of each. We'll begin with Noah:

Luke 17:26-27 (NLT)

"When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day. In those days, the people enjoyed banquets and parties and weddings **right up to the time Noah entered his boat** and the flood came and destroyed them all."

There's a reoccurring comparison both Jesus and the Apostles make.

- They highlight that unbelievers were in a state of peace, prosperity and safety prior to judgment. There were no indicators of what was coming.

Again, with the ancient twin cities:

Luke 17:28-29 (NLT)

“And the world will be as it was in the days of Lot. People went about their daily business—eating and drinking, buying and selling, farming and building—**until the morning Lot left Sodom. Then** fire and burning sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.”

When the wrath of God is being poured out in the tribulation, people will not be going about their ‘daily business.’

Along the same lines Paul writes:

Thessalonians 5:2-5 (NKJV)

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord (*the seven-year tribulation*) so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day.

Two things to note.

1. First, unbelievers will all say, “peace and safety.” This will not be what people say as the Seal, Trumpet and Bowl Judgments are being poured out. However, unbelievers could say this prior to the Bridegroom coming by stealth to ‘catch away’ His bride.
2. Second, Paul states this day will not overtake us as a thief because as *children of light*, we will have been ‘caught away’ prior to the *Day of the Lord* – the outpouring of destruction.

We are repeatedly told in scripture the suffering that will occur in the tribulation will be far greater than any of these, or any other cataclysmic chaos of history.

7.The Early Church Father’s Taught “The Catching Away.”

For this final reason, my text will not come from Scripture, rather the words of the early church fathers.

- **Think of their writings as complementary**, such as books written by Billy Graham, A.W Tozer, C.S. Lewis, or any other great church father of more recent days.

***Many today argue the ‘rapture’ originated in the 1800’s by a man named **John Nelson Darby**, a noted Bible scholar, who was a respected leader in the church.

Yet this is not accurate, several early church fathers wrote about it.

Here are a few:

Irenaeus (130-203 AD): a well-known bishop of Lyons in Gaul. He wrote that Enoch was an example of the 'catching away' of the church. He wrote:

"And therefore, when in the end the Church will be suddenly caught up from this, then it is said, 'There will be tribulation such as not been since the beginning, nor will be.'"

Against Heresies 5.29

Victorinus: He was bishop of Poetovio (Eastern Europe). He authored a commentary in 240 AD, and was eventually martyred for his faith. He wrote:

"...The wrath of God always strikes the obstinate people...and these shall be in the last time, when the Church shall have gone out of the midst."

Commentary on the Apocalypse 15.1

Ephriam: He lived from approximately 306-373 AD and was a renowned scholar and theologian. He was the founder of the School of Nisibis, which became the center of learning for the Eastern Church. He wrote:

"For all the saints and elect of God are gathered prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion and the great tribulation coming upon the unrighteous world."

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***Others who wrote in alignment with these three church fathers are Shepherd of Hermas (150 AD), Hippolytus (210 AD) and Cyprian (250 AD).

Closing Thoughts

We just thoroughly discussed the "catching away" as Scripture clearly reveals to us and the 7 reasons why I believe, according to Scripture, I believe the church will escape the wrath to come.

We've almost completed our study on the Second Coming of Jesus. In our next and final lesson, we'll talk about how to live from now until Jesus returns.

Lesson 6: How Shall We Live?

Purpose of the Lesson

To awaken and equip the Bride of Christ to live in wholehearted devotion, holy fear, and joyful expectation as she prepares for the soon return of her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ—cultivating a life that reflects His character, guards her spiritual garments, and eagerly longs for the day when “the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7 NKJV).

Let’s Begin

We are on our final lesson!

With everything we’ve shared with understanding the time and season of the Second Coming of Jesus, the question now remains:

From now until Jesus returns, how shall we live?

What should we be doing to prepare ourselves for the Lord’s return?

Let’s dive into this!

Revelation 19:7-8 (NKJV)

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and **His wife has made herself ready**.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Notice the words: The marriage of the Lamb—how glorious of an occasion this will be!

- No words can properly describe the grandeur, wonder, and celebration of this joyous event.

In reflecting on my own experience, it’s not hard to recall the excitement I felt once Lisa’s and my wedding day finally arrived. *(Feel free to use your own marriage as an example)*

- It didn’t just happen; a significant amount of **preparation** was required to make it our most memorable day.
- Share about your wedding preparations...
- What gave me the greatest joy and pleasure of our day, wasn’t the décor, flowers, food, spectacular cake and decorations. None of them remotely compared to the magnificent beauty I beheld when Lisa appeared at the back of the church with her father.
- The surroundings only enhanced the main focus of the day – my glorious bride. Her splendor intensified with each step she took toward me... and **a significant part of it was her gorgeous white dress** that accentuated her beauty.

But consider a different scenario...

- Can you imagine if a bride, in her big moment, appeared at the back of a church unkept and wearing a soiled, stained and filthy white dress?
- The groom would be utterly shocked! His first thought would most likely be, *how inappropriate!* He would barely notice his bride because his attention would be fixated on dirt, grime and stains covering his bride's garment.

What would her lack of planning and inaction communicate to him?

We are responsible to prepare for our marriage with the King.

Remember:

Revelation 19:7 (NKJV)

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and **His wife has made herself ready**." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

The Apostle John highlights 3 specific items:

1. First, the garment is made of *fine linen*.
2. Second, it's *clean*.
3. Third, it's *bright*.

John then states that this "**fine linen**" is "**the righteous acts**" of the saints.

- The Greek word for **righteous acts** is *dikaíōma* and is defined as: "*an act which is in accordance with what God requires.*"
- Another Greek dictionary defines it as, "*an action that meets expectations as to what is right or just.*"
- This speaks to **what we do**, not only to what we believe.
- Grace and faith are most important, but the evidence we truly possess both is our corresponding **actions**.
- Jesus says to five of the seven churches in the book of Revelation, "**I know all the things you do**" (2:5,19; 3:1,8,15), not "I know all the things *you believe.*" The emphasis falls on our corresponding *works*, not merely what we *believe*.

The fact this **garment** is **clean** and **bright** tells us it's not just our labor, works, and actions, but our thoughts, motives, and intentions behind them.

- Are they pure?
- Does our behavior flow out of a heart that is abiding, remaining in fellowship or in union with the Lord?
- Do we love what He loves, hate what He hates, holy as He is holy, engaged as He is always engaged?

In the New Testament, there is only one clear description of the church Jesus is returning for.

It is not *a relevant church*.

- Please don't misunderstand, relevance is important, as we will win far less lost souls without it. Paul emphasizes, "I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

The bride is not identified as *a community church*.

- Don't misunderstand, **community** is very important. God is the One who said, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18). If we look at what the early church focused on; it was prayer, doctrine, and *fellowship* (see Acts 2:42).

She's not described as *a leadership church*.

- Leadership is critical to the Body of Christ's success. We wouldn't accomplish much on a large scale without good leadership. Its identified as being one of God's gifts to the church (see Romans 12:8).

The church isn't identified to as *a serving bride*.

- Serving is very important. Jesus illustrated its significance by washing the Apostle's feet in His last illustrated message. In another incident He boldly stated, "I am among you as the One who serves" (Luke 22:27 NKJV).

The only description of the church that Jesus is returning for is found in Paul's words to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NLT)

Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her *holy* and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, *she will be holy*.

The single and overall description of the bride He's returning for is: *A holy church*.

- This is what makes her garments clean and bright, it's what makes her glorious.

John, describe God's Holiness:

- Isaiah 6 describes the Seraphim crying out: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies!"
- Not, "Faithful! Faithful! Faithful!"
- Not, "Love! Love! Love!"

What stands out above all other traits is His *holiness*!

Oswald Chambers: *When we preach the love of God there is a danger of forgetting that the Bible reveals not first the love of God but the intense, blazing holiness of God, with His love at the center of that holiness.*

The predominant characteristic of God is His *holiness*, and the same is true for His bride!

We need to pay very close attention to **holiness**.

Peter wrote:

2 Peter 3:10-11 (NLT)

But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment. Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, **what holy and godly lives you should live.**

These are strong words!

- Again, what does Peter accentuate—our success, leadership, relevance, fellowship, or any other important aspect of our Christian Walk?
- The behavior he stresses is to live **a holy and godly life**, which certainly is identified by our **'righteous acts,'** the very material our clean and bright garment is made of.

Sadly, due to legalism or ignorance, many have a warped view of what holiness truly is.

- C.S. Lewis wrote, *"How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing...it is irresistible."*
- There are many who see holiness as dull, boring, or even as a life suppressor.
- One reason it seems so dull is the way it's been presented. Many teachers have made it an end unto itself.
- When we do this, we easily slip over into legalism, which draws the life out of us.

Holiness is actually a doorway or a bridge to something that every heart longs for who truly wants a relationship with Jesus.

Holiness:

- It's root word, *holy*, is the Greek word *hagios*.
- Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament lists one definition as *"set apart for God, to be, as it were, exclusively his."*
- **"Don't link up with those who will pollute you. I want you all for myself"** (2 Cor 6:17 MSG).

Engagement Example

- A young couple named Matt and Sarah get engaged.
- Matt goes to great lengths to plan the proposal, and once he gets on his knees and asks the big question, Sarah says "Yes!"
- But Sarah also wants to have a few nights with her ex-boyfriends, but Matt will always be her favorite.

- How would Matt respond? How would any man respond?

Do we think Jesus is coming back for a bride that communicates by her actions, “Jesus, You are my favorite, I love You more than my old sins, but I still would like to date them. When they flirt with me it helps my self-esteem and brings me pleasure, I’ll only sleep with them a few nights a year.”

In order to receive Jesus, we must break up with our sins!

- This is identified in the New Testament as *repentance* and is mandatory to enter and maintain a relationship with Jesus. It means we will not flirt or engage with these behaviors that drove nails into Jesus’ hands and feet.

When we think back to our earlier discussion of the ‘**bride-price**’ He paid for us (the terrible suffering He endured), how can we even remotely flirt with what the world pursues and loves?

James writes to professing believers:

James 4:3-5 (NLT)

You want only what will give you pleasure. You **adulterers!** Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him.

In our modern Western Church, there are numerous professing ‘believers’ who still desire what unbelievers pursue, while having a ‘relationship’ with Jesus.

- Those who think like this are as deceived as Sarah and are viewed by heaven as adulterers. They are breaking their covenant with God!

A holy life involves us living separate lives.

- Just as a faithful engaged or married woman doesn’t flirt with other men, even so we live separated lives because we are betrothed to One, and just as Jesus gave Himself completely to us, even so we give ourselves completely to Him.
- Holiness is not an option, it’s the only way to have a pure, bright, and spotless relationship with our Groom.

Can Our Wedding Garment Be Stained?

Jesus said to the church in Sardis:

Revelation 3:4 (NKJV)

“You have a few names even in Sardis who have not **defiled** their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.”

The answer is “yes”, our wedding garments can be “defiled” and/or “soiled”.

Ecclesiastes 9:8 (NKJV)

Let your **garments** always be **white**, and let your head lack no oil.

Most of us enjoy a good pasta dish.

- Share the story of how Lisa warns you not to wear “white” shirts when she makes pasta, especially with tomato sauce.

A very similar principle is true in the spiritual realm.

- There are attractive environments, practices and lifestyles deemed as normal by the people of the world that if engaged with, or even flirted with, will stain a believer’s white garment.
- Only by staying strong in our spirit through prayer and a steady intake of God’s Word are we able to recognize and resist the alluring draw.

If we don’t strengthen ourselves in this way, it’s easy to fall prey to corruption and no different than my wife’s pasta sauce, our white garment will be inevitably stained.

A major aspect of authentic Christianity is to:

James 1:27 (NKJV)

Keep oneself **unspotted** from the world.

To state it bluntly: we stain our white wedding garment when we seek a relationship with the world, living no different than the lost.

This doesn’t mean we cannot go into certain environments to reach the lost.

- I’m referring to embracing behavior that’s contrary to God’s Word with the assumption there will be no consequences.
 - Examples: Porn sites, gossip, planning revenge, refusing to forgive, etc.—these behaviors stain our garments.
 - **Divorce** for unscriptural reasons.

Have we forgotten the Lord God declares:

Malachi 2:16 (ESV)

For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her...covers his garment with violence.

The stain isn’t red sauce, it’s much worse, it’s **violence**.

- Just as stains of red sauce on a white garment require deep cleaning to eliminate, so also, the violence to our souls by divorce is not easily removed.

- God's forgiveness through the blood of Jesus immediately cleanses us once we genuinely repent. However, it takes intentional humility, the washing of God's word, forgiveness and sometimes deliverance to clear the stain from our soul.

We risk staining our garment when we form friendship bonds with unbelievers who show no interest in leaving this world's system.

- They possess no desire to honor God; instead, they persist in immorality, adultery, sexual perversions, greed, and other ungodly behavior; some even while claiming to be 'Christians.'

Paul states:

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 (NLT)

Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever?

So often people ignore these specific Words of God by stating the literal interpretation is legalistic and creates bondage.

- Many push back, saying Jesus was called the '**friend of sinners.**'
- **Zacchaeus** was the most notorious of sinner of his community. Yet he climbed a tree just to see Jesus. Once the Master acknowledged him, he showed **immediate signs of repentance** by stating he would give back fourfold to those he'd stolen from and half his goods to the poor. The people were very displeased and complained that He chose a 'renowned sinner' to hang out with, yet what they missed is Zacchaeus' deep desire to receive truth and change (Luke 19:1-9).

Why Could Jesus Do This?

Jesus controlled the narrative and atmosphere in the midst of these 'notorious sinners.'

- Often, when professing believers ignore the command to live separated lives and subsequently develop relationships with unbelievers, they blend in rather than control the narrative.
- If they're honest, they discover they're flirting with the world, not reaching the world.

Paul warned:

1 Corinthians 15:33 (AMPC)

Do not be so deceived *and* misled! **Evil companionships** (communion, associations) corrupt and deprave good manners *and* morals *and* character.

Consider a marriage.

- Would a husband be OK with his wife spending an evening with a single man?

- Would he be Ok with his wife going on a vacation with another married man, even if they promised to stay in separate hotel rooms?
- No, it's putting his spouse in an environment that will almost surely foster compromise and damage their covenant and relationship.

God is a jealous God, He's not jealous of us, He's jealous for us!

- He wants our entire hearts and lives, not just a fake alignment which includes lovers outside of Him.

This is why we are told:

Hebrews 12:14 (NKJV)
Pursue... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

The Greek word for 'pursue' is *diōkō* and is defined as "to do something with intense effort and with definite purpose or goal."

- This word carries the idea of strong determination coupled with great effort to arrive at the target.
- There's not a hint of being casual in attitude, rather it is a chasing after with urgency.
- This is how we are chase after living a pure and separated life.

If we lump all holiness into one bucket, many scriptures become confusing.

Positional Holiness

We are told in several New Testament Scriptures that Jesus' sacrifice made us holy. It's something we never could have done on our own.

Two examples are:

Colossians 3:12 (NLT)
 God chose you to be the **holy** people he loves.

Ephesians 1:4 (NLT)
 God loved us and chose us in Christ to be **holy** and without fault in his eyes.

We didn't merit this privilege.

- Out of His great love for us, we were **positionally** declared 'holy' in Christ the moment we gave our lives to His lordship.

I'll revert to my own marriage to exemplify.

- On October 2, 1982, Lisa and I were married.
- Lisa took the **position** of my wife.

- Today, 43 years later, she's not more my wife. Nor will she ever be more my wife **positionally** than the day we were married.
- The same is true for our relationship with God. We became Jesus' bride, separated unto Him, declared to be holy, the day we gave our lives to His lordship.

Behavioral Holiness

In returning to our marriage, since we are discussing a bride, I will use Lisa as an example.

- Before we were married, she hung out with other guys, gave her phone number and dated them. However, once we were wed, she stopped all these practices!
- Her behavior reflected her position.

Peter writes:

1 Peter 1:14-15 (NLT)

You must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now **you must be holy in everything you do.**

It's clear, Peter is discussing our *behavior*, not our *position*.

- The Amplified brings this out clearly by stating: "**in all your conduct and manner of living.**"
- Peter is charging us to do what any faithful wife does. We are to take on a behavior that **reflects** our position.
- This is not optional, rather it is a 'must be' command.

Peter's is just one of the many *behavioral* holiness commands in the New Testament.

Paul wrote:

1 Thessalonians 4:7-8 (GNT)

God did not call us to live in immorality, but in **holiness**. So then, whoever rejects this teaching is not rejecting a human being, but God.

To violate this command to live holy is not a trivial thing and is quite costly. However, to heed it brings one of the greatest promises in scripture.

This brings us to C.S. Lewis's description of the 'irresistible' aspect of holiness – what it leads to.

Let's look again at the key verse:

Hebrews 12:14 (NKJV)

Pursue... **holiness**, without which no one will [see the Lord](#).

Is this addressing **positional** or **behavioral** holiness?

Let's answer by using another example.

- Can you imagine if my wife was in a lady's prayer group and said to her friends, "Girls, please pray that I would be John's wife."
- Everyone in the room would be confused by her request and question, "Lisa, you became his wife over 40 years ago. Why pray for this?"
- But if Lisa asked, "Girls, please pray I'd be a better wife to John."
- They would understand she is talking her behavior not her position.

We're to pursue **behavioral** holiness, because without it, we will not *see the Lord*.

What does Scripture mean by declaring we will 'not see the Lord?'

We are clearly told in another place:

Revelation 1:7 (NLT)

Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And **everyone** will see him — even those who pierced him.

Everyone, even those who drove the nails in His hands, will see Jesus when He returns.

- All nations will behold Him, the living and dead alike, and all who have ever lived will see Jesus at the judgment.

What is the writer of Hebrews referring to?

- Consider this, in my 66 years of being a citizen of the USA, I've been under the leadership of 11 Presidents. I've been under their authority; their decisions have affected my life and shaped my community's way of living.
- However, I've never *seen one*, or more clearly stated, not been in the *presence* of one of our Presidents. On the other hand, there are citizens that are in the President's presence; they work with Him or are his friends.

In the same way, there are people who are under the leadership of Jesus Christ, His decisions affect their lives, but they are not *in His presence* — *not seeing Him*.

Jesus clearly states:

John 14:21 (AMPC)

The person who has My commands and keeps them is the one who [really] loves Me; and whoever [really] loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I [too] will love him and will show

(reveal, manifest) Myself to him. [I will let Myself be clearly *seen* by him and make Myself real to him.]

The person who **sees** Jesus experiences His *manifested presence*—He is loyal in action, not merely in word.

- They prioritize being set apart for Him, which means he or she will not flirt with the things unbelievers chase after and are in love with.

Refer back to my marriage with Lisa.

- I don't desire to flirt with, date, or sleep with other women. What's my motivation? First and foremost, I fear God and don't want to break His heart.
- But the other reason, which is also quite strong, I don't want to lose the many times Lisa shares with me the intimate secrets of her heart. I love being close with her!

A husband who's committing adultery with other women may be able to hold his marriage license in his wife's face and declare they're married. It may be technically true, but what **he forfeits is intimacy with her**. She will have no desire for him to be in her presence. And that marriage is not going to last long if he continues.

Let's get personal:

As a Western Church...

Have we committed adultery with the world and taken our marriage license – the grace of God and the promised new birth – and held it up declaring we are technically saved and belong to Him?

Could this be the reason many are not experiencing intimacy with Jesus?

We stand to lose more from spiritual adultery—don't buy the lie that the grass is greener on the other side (as many spouses do today)!

This is the irresistible aspect of holiness.

- When we pursue it, we live in communion with Him and thus will be confident at His return.
- If we flirt with darkness, we are pulled out of fellowship with Him and can easily stain our wedding garment. We will be ashamed by our garment stains at the grand reunion of the bride and Groom.

If we understand the motive behind pursuing holiness, it becomes a delight, not a religious command.

Closing Thoughts

Jesus is coming back. He is coming back soon!

The question isn't, "Is he coming again?"

The question is, "Will you be ready when He returns?"