

The Rapture and the Restoration of Israel

Eric Michael Teitelman
Pastor • Teacher • Worship Leader



Contents

Introduction.....	2
Is the Rapture a new theological teaching?	2
Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.....	4
The 70 th Week of Daniel: Is this God’s wrath against the world or Israel?	6
The Seven Seals; Are they the wrath of God or the persecution of Satan?	8
The Rapture shadowed in the Jewish feasts	11
The Last Trumpet: Which trumpet is Paul referring to?.....	14
The Mysteries of God; the Seventh Trumpet and the Second Coming of Christ.....	15
The timing of God’s judgments and the timing of the Rapture.....	16
Will the Church be taken out of the world before the seal judgments?.....	17
Is the Rapture the harvest of the earth, or the gathering of the Elect of Christ?	19
The Imminent Return of Christ	22
Prepare for the worst and hope for the best	24
Will the Church be witness to the judgments of God?.....	25
Two resurrections or three?	25
The Church versus those who come out of the great tribulation	26
Will those in the great tribulation prevail over the Antichrist?	28
He That Restrains; is it the Holy Spirit or Michael the Archangel?.....	29
Are Israel and Zion the same?.....	29
The salvation of Israel to come out of Zion	31
The consummation of the wedding and the marriage supper of the Lamb	33

Introduction

The following is a pre-tribulation apologetics response to commonly asked questions about the general timing of the rapture of the church. A very Hebrew reply is a discussion framed around questions. Is the rapture pre-tribulation, middle, or post-tribulation? That is the fundamental question this white paper seeks to answer. It is stated in response to these frequent questions and attempts to explain through validation with scripture. Stitching together Old and New Testament prophecies is challenging, mainly because they are not spoken chronologically. Time is necessary to confirm the fulfillment of prophecy.

But God, having created time, is outside of its limited boundaries. God more often speaks in prophetic pictures and poetic images of people and people groups; these are often tied with a spirit or god that is to be judged along with those who have bowed their knees and submitted to it. Some passages in the book of Revelation are parenthetical, meaning they repeat and overlap, often providing greater depth to an already spoken prophetic image. Some images are in the heavenly realm, while others are in the natural.

In reading this paper, you must have a sound grasp of scripture, particularly the Major Prophets and the books of Daniel and Revelation. A challenge to the intellectual thoughts of man, but can we hear God's voice in this discussion? Or will He remain silent, keeping His dark secrets hidden from a lost world, only to reveal this mystery to His bride at His glorious appearance? So, I have written this narrative with great humility towards God and discernment of His Holy Spirit. Enjoy your growth in reading, and be blessed in the Lord.

Is the Rapture new theological teaching?

The rapture, I believe, is not new theological teaching, and the early church seems to have expected the sudden and imminent return of Christ within their lifetime. Our limited window of the early church is characterized by a few writings, some canonized in the New Testament. These were written against a virulent political and often persecuted environment. We read:

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13, NKJV).¹

"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

The Apostolic Fathers wrote about the imminency of Christ's return. For example, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, The Didache, The Epistle of Barnabas, and The Shepherd of Hermas

speak of imminency. The Shepherd of Hermas also discusses the pretribulation escape from God's final wrath and judgments. It says:

"You have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith and because you did not doubt in the presence of such a beast. Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly."ⁱⁱ

Further evidence of a pretribulation rapture appears during the early medieval period in a sermon by Pseudo-Ephraem, entitled Sermon on The Last Times, The Antichrist, and The End of the World.ⁱⁱⁱ Written sometime between the fourth and sixth century, the portion on the rapture reads as follows:

"Why, therefore, do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that he may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms all the world?... 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 that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins."

These writings prove that early Christians believed they would escape the end-time tribulation by being gathered with the Lord, which we recognize as the rapture. However, some incorrectly teach that the revelation or knowledge of the rapture was not brought forth in theological terms until the middle 1800s. Some even believe the rapture is an incorrect or apostate teaching. This theological position is viewed from an "amillennial" or "postmillennial" timeframe, meaning they think we are living in the millennial kingdom and Christ is ruling from heaven. The correct doctrinal teaching, according to scripture, is called pre-millennial, saying that we are living in a time before the millennial kingdom, otherwise referred to as the one-thousand-year reign of Christ. For us, the return of Christ is yet to happen, first to receive His bride, the church in what is referred to as the rapture, and second to return to this physical earth with the church to establish His earthly kingdom.

We must validate all theological teachings with scripture, but His word also tells us that not all mysteries of God have yet been revealed. Therefore, we must study the mystery of the rapture in the context and framework of the whole Bible and with the revelation of the Holy Spirit. We read:

"And the vision of the evenings and mornings Which was told is true; Therefore seal up the vision, For it refers to many days in the future" (Daniel 8:26).

"Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them" (Revelation 10:4).

While it is evident that the early church believed in the sudden appearance of our Lord, what is being revealed now and becoming more apparent every day is the order of events in biblical prophecy unfolding before our eyes. Hence, our discussion is only about the timing of the rapture and not its occurrence. We believe in the rapture of the church.

Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy

The Apostle Paul told the church that prophecy is one of the greatest gifts and urged every Christian to seek it. Scripture tells us the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. Therefore, every faithful Christian must confess that He is Lord. We read:

"Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1).

"And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10).

Some use this scripture to limit prophecy to testimony narrowly. Scripture is not telling us to do so, for again, we know there are still mysteries written, hidden in the Bible, which are to unfold. The Apostle John was explicitly told that he must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings, implying that the Lord continued speaking through him. The spirit of prophecy continues to this day and will remain until Christ returns to the earth. We read:

"And he said to me, You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings" (Revelation 10:11).

If prophecy is a gift that only some seek or receive, why are we *all* called to share His message of salvation? Because scripture tells us the test of a true prophet is their confession that Jesus is Lord. You will always find that false prophets deny this biblical fact. We read:

"Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

"By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world" (1 John 4:2-3).

"For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4).

That does not mean, however, that true Christians, in every instance, prophesy correctly. Learning to hear and discern the voice of God takes time, learning, and spiritual growth. However, a person diligently seeking the Lord will continue to grow closer to Him. As our faith and knowledge of scripture grow more robust, we learn to discern God's truth from the lies thrown at us by the enemy.

Prophecy today is different than it was in the olden days. Not that the Lord ever changes, but in the old days, the Lord exclusively spoke through a select group called "prophets" or "seers." And those individuals became spokesmen for the Lord to the people of Israel. But with the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we have each been given the Spirit of the Lord as an eternal indwelling gift. We read:

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

Therefore, we are each anointed as spokesmen for the Lord; first, to testify that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, and secondly, I believe to receive and share revelation from the Holy Spirit for correction and edification of the body of Christ. This revelation is often a personal impartation of the word of God in our lives. We read:

"But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men" (1 Corinthians 14:3).

But the Lord still has His selected prophets today. These are part of what is called the five-fold ministries of the church. In other words, we are all a prophetic people of God, but some are still distinctively marked as His prophets. These have a unique calling within the body of Christ to equip the body with the gifts of the spirit until the entire body comes to spiritual maturity. We read:

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:1-3).

As a precaution, we must understand that each person has only been given this gift in part and measure to their faith lest they become prideful in their gift. And every prophecy must be verified with scripture, for any prophecy that contradicts the word of God is false. We read:

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9).

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith" (Romans 12:6).

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged" (1 Corinthians 14:29-31).

The 70th Week of Daniel: Is this God's wrath against the world or Israel?

The Lord spoke to the Prophet Daniel, telling him there would be seventy weeks or seventy periods of seven years that the Lord would bring His wrath against Israel for their transgression. The last week, also called the seventieth week of Daniel, is God's final seven-year wrath against Israel. The last three and one-half years of these seven years are also called "the time of Jacob's trouble." We read:

"Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob's trouble, But he shall be saved out of it" (Jeremiah 30:7).

"O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts. You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the LORD" (Ezekiel 13:4-5).

"For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:22).

In the book of Revelation, we see this wrath is also appointed to the nations of the earth, but for slightly varied reasons. Therefore, this period also coincides with the rise of the Antichrist and the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments described in Revelation. It is a dual judgment for Israel because they have rejected Christ and for the nations, because they have divided God's land, oppressed His people, and scattered them to the nations. We read:

"I will also gather all nations, And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; And I will enter into judgment with them there On account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up My land" (Joel 3:2).

"For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near; As you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head" (Obadiah 1:15).

"For this is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, A day of vengeance, That He may avenge Himself on His adversaries. The sword shall devour; It shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood; For the Lord GOD of hosts has a sacrifice In the north country by the River Euphrates" (Jeremiah 46:10).

In the judgment for Israel, the Lord will use the Antichrist and the nations of the earth to execute His wrath against them. And when the times are fulfilled, He will turn His full wrath against the nations that have come against His people. So, there is a division of His wrath because He has promised to destroy the nations of the earth that have come against Israel, but for Israel, He has vowed not to bring it to a complete end. We will see later with this division that the seal and trumpet judgments are poured out on the whole earth, including Israel, except the 144,000 that are preserved, while the bowl judgments are poured out on the remaining nations right after the final harvest.^{iv} We read:

"For the day is near, Even the day of the LORD is near; It will be a day of clouds, the time of the Gentiles" (Ezekiel 30:3).

"For I am with you, says the LORD, to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, Yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, And will not let you go altogether unpunished" (Jeremiah 30:11).

"For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, The year of recompense for the cause of Zion" (Isaiah 34:8).

The Old Testament repeatedly shows this example of God using another nation to execute His judgment against Israel. The Lord would use a foreign army to bring His judgment against Israel because she rejected Him and afterward would turn His wrath against that nation that He used to execute His judgment. Jesus warned Israel when He said:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men" (Matthew 5:13).

Jesus was warning the Jewish people that their hearts had grown dull, and if their desires were more for the things of this world than of the Lord, then He would give them over to the lusts of their hearts, and they would have their earthly king. This king at the end of the age is the Antichrist. And like every other earthly king that came before, he will oppress them until they cry out for His deliverance. At this very last moment, at the end of the age when all the nations have surrounded Jerusalem, the Lord will descend upon the Mount of Olives with His army to destroy the Antichrist and the kingdoms of this earth that have come against Israel. At this moment, the Lord will make His enemies His footstool.^v We read:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, BLESSED is HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!" (Matthew 23:37-39).

"And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large

valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south” (Zechariah 14:4).

Some believe the wrath against Israel was completed with the destruction of either the first or second temple. Unfortunately, this contradicts scripture. God’s everlasting righteousness and the final reconciliation for the remnant of Israel will happen when the Lord returns to the earth on the Day of the Lord at the end of the seventieth week of Daniel. According to scripture, this return coincides with the Day of Atonement, which will be discussed in the Feasts of the Lord section. Since we have not seen His everlasting righteousness and reconciliation for Israel, it is clear this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. We read:

“Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy” (Daniel 9:24).

Daniel is given a vision of the desecration of the temple.^{vi} While some point to historical events that suggest the fulfillment of these prophecies, the Lord’s explanation for the vision spoken to Daniel clearly states, “The vision is for the time of the end.” We read:

“So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end” (Daniel 8:17).

“And he said, Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be” (Daniel 8:19).

Jesus later spoke to His disciples about the time of the end and expressly referred to the things said to the Prophet Daniel. So, it is even clearer these events will take place many days in the future, at the end of the age. We read:

“But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand)” (Matthew 24:13-15).

The Seven Seals—Are they the wrath of God or the persecution of Satan?

Some theologians have attempted to break down or dissect the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments in the book of Revelation, defining which ones are the wrath of God and which ones are the persecution of Satan. In doing so, they reason, for example, that the church is on the earth for part or all the seal and trumpet judgments, and hence new theological teaching phrased “pre-wrath rapture.” I agree with the “pre-wrath rapture” theology because we are not

appointed unto His wrath. However, these same teachers also argue one of two points: (1) that some or all the seal judgments are not directly from God, except that He allows these things, or (2) that the Lord will either supernaturally protect or provide supernatural powers to His people on the earth as He did with Moses and the nation of Israel in the land of Egypt.

The first argument is that the seal judgments and the trumpet judgments are the persecution of Satan against the world and God's people. And since we are not spared the persecution of Satan, then the church is subject to his tribulation. This argument contradicts scripture because Jesus is opening the seals, and no one in heaven or on earth has the authority to unlock them. The seventh seal releases the seven trumpet judgments, continuing the same judgment. The scriptures specifically tell us the seals are the wrath of the Lamb. We read:

"I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood" (Revelation 6:12).

"And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" (Revelation 6:15-16).

So, the "pre-wrath rapture" theology argues for the "pre-tribulation rapture" theology. While Satan may be God's instrument to execute part of His judgment, it is still God's judgment. We read:

"For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled" (Revelation 17:7).

Although not found in scripture, the second argument is that the Lord will supernaturally protect His people on the earth during the seal and trumpet judgments. I observe that the Lord rarely duplicates Himself regarding His most inspiring miracles. Another error is the assertion that the Lord prevented all the plagues in Egypt from affecting the Jewish people. Scripture tells us the first three plagues fell on the whole land of Egypt, including the land of Goshen where Israel was dwelling, where it says:

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, Say to Aaron, Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone" (Exodus 7:19).

"And the LORD said to Moses, Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh as he comes out to the water. Then say to him, Thus says the LORD: Let My people go, that they may serve Me. Or else, if you will not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. And in

that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the land" (Exodus 8:20-22).

These scriptures from the book of Exodus do not suggest that the church might be subject to the first three seal judgments or some part of the tribulation. It is clear, however, that the Lord wanted the Jewish people in Egypt to witness His power and fear Him. But the day of the Lord will be much different than the judgments over Egypt. The judgments against Egypt were only against the Egyptians and their gods, not the Israelites. But the tribulation is God's judgment against Israel and the nations of the earth. Scripture tells us there will be no refuge or survivor on the day of the Lord's anger. We read:

"You have invited as to a feast day The terrors that surround me. In the day of the LORD's anger There was no refugee or survivor. Those whom I have borne and brought up My enemies have destroyed" (Lamentations 2:22).

A similar but even more difficult position is the church will remain on the earth during the tribulation period. We will put on God's armor to withstand His judgments and battle the enemy even unto death. This position contradicts scripture. First, this armor is not to endure God's wrath but to allow us to stand against the wiles or persecution of the devil. We read:

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

Second, this contradicts everything Jesus taught the church about overcoming the evil on the earth with His love. The Apostle Paul made it clear we do not battle against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers that have present authority to rule the earth. Our spiritual weapons are faith, prayer, salvation, and the word of God. In contrast, our natural weapons are tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, peace, truth, righteousness, justice, and above all, love. These are the fruit of the Spirit. We do not pick up swords of steel as Simon Peter did, but we pick up the sword of His word. We do not come with anger, hatred, or vengeance. We begin with humility, kindness, and love. We read:

"Therefore IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM; IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP COALS OF FIRE ON HIS HEAD. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:20-21).

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

The Rapture shadowed in the Jewish Feasts

The Lord gave Israel seven holy convocations or dedicated events that point to His first and second coming.^{vii} They are shadows of things to come, also called feasts or celebrations. The Day of Atonement, however, is a required day of affliction, a Sabbath of solemn rest, and is observed as a fast. The first four spring feasts pointed to Christ's coming as a suffering servant, and the last three fall feasts looked to His coming as a conquering king. The teachings on the feasts are lengthy and complicated, so the following is a quick overview. We read:

"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

The first four feasts: the Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of First Fruits, and Feast of Weeks have all been fulfilled in the crucifixion, death and burial, resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The last three, The Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles, will be fulfilled at His second coming. The Feast of Trumpets is a picture of the mystery of the resurrection and rapture. We read:

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The Day of Atonement is a picture of the physical second coming of Christ to the earth and the final atonement for the salvation of the remnant of Israel. We read:

"Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders And all the inhabitants of the land Into the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD. Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand; It shall come as destruction from the Almighty" (Joel 1:14-15).

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10).

"In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (Zechariah 13:1).

"Remember these, O Jacob, And Israel, for you are My servant; I have formed you, you are My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me! I have blotted out, like a thick cloud,

your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you” (Isaiah 44:21-22).

Lastly, the Feast of Tabernacles is a picture of the marriage supper of the Lamb and the ushering in of the Millennial Kingdom. We read:

“Then he said to me, Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God” (Revelation 19:9).

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:16).

There are other festivities the rabbis have added over the millennia, including Hanukkah, Purim, and *Simcha Torah* (the day of the giving of the Torah). However, these are not mentioned in the Bible and are therefore not given as direct references to Christ’s first and second coming. They have prophetic imagery of the Lord as He has always been present with His people, but they are otherwise without written substance.

We discussed earlier that the Lord physically returns to the earth on the Day of Atonement, also called the Day of the Lord. If Christ’s rapture and second coming are a singular event, why are three uniquely separate holy convocations connected with His second coming? Several distinct events will occur during the dispensational period known as the Day of the Lord. In other words, the Day of the Lord is not just a 24-hour event. It is also a dispensational period that will last for one thousand years. We read:

“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8).

Scripture says that a day is as a thousand years to the Lord. I believe this dispensation begins when the Lamb takes the scroll from the Father and opens the first seal of judgment spoken in the book of Revelation.^{viii} The dispensation comprises two parts: Christ’s judgment against Israel and the nations, which will last for seven years, and His millennial rule, which will last for one thousand years. Therefore, the day of the Lord is not just His day to judge the nations but also His day to rule over them. More specifically, the dispensation encompasses the Lord’s sovereign action to judge Israel and the nations of the earth, to destroy its current man-centered governmental authority ruled by the powers and principalities of this dark age, to usher in the rule of Christ with His kings and priests (the church), and to establish and fulfill the promises of the millennial kingdom. We read:

“And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be The LORD is one, And His name one” (Zechariah 14:9).

The Day of the Lord or the Day of the Lord’s Vengeance climaxes over ten days, stretching from the Feast of Trumpets to the Day of Atonement. It is a unique period known only to the Lord in

which He reveals His mysteries. He also shows His bride, physically takes possession of the kingdoms of this world, atones for the sins of the Jewish people, atones for their land, gathers them from the four winds of the earth, and establishes the nation of Israel in its perfect physical and spiritual form. And it is the day in which the Lord's final destruction is poured out on the armies of those nations that have come against Israel to destroy her. For reference, I have included several timelines that drill down and outline the events that will occur during the seven-year tribulation, connecting them to the feasts of the Lord. We read:

"The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD" (Joel 2:31).

"It shall come to pass in that day That there will be no light; The lights will diminish. It shall be one day Which is known to the LORD Neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen That it will be light" (Zechariah 14:6-7).

"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15).

"The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth. Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail" (Revelation 11:18-19).

Interestingly, the Feast of Trumpets is the only feast out of the seven to occur on the first day of a month. In the Hebrew lunar calendar, the beginning of the month is initiated by a new moon, which cannot be seen. Therefore, it is the only feast where "no man can know the exact day or hour at which it occurs." If the precise date of the first fall feast cannot be determined, then those that follow are also based on presumption and cannot be predicted. Hence, the proclamation by Peter that the Day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night, referring to both the dispensation and the actual day of the Lord's physical return. We read:

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

One last point deals with where we are living in prophetic history. Scripture says Israel will be revived on the second day and raised on the third day. If each day to the Lord is a thousand years, Israel was revived in 1947 during the second day. This suggests the return of the Lord is growing ever closer since we entered the third day beginning around the year 2000. So, we must watch for His imminent return with even greater zeal. We read:

"After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight" (Hosea 6:2).

The Last Trumpet—Which trumpet is Paul referring to?

One of the main points made by those who believe in the post-tribulation rapture is the correlation between Paul's statement "at the last trumpet"^{ix} and the last or seventh trumpet written in Revelation.^x The problem with this interpretation is that the church would have to endure the seven seal judgments of the Lamb, including the seven trumpet judgments, before the rapture. The Apostle Paul had urged the church to understand and preserve the feasts as a shadow of His second coming.^{xi} So, in the context of the holy convocations, the Feast of Trumpets is, therefore, a picture of the mystery of the rapture, but it is not the rapture. We read:

"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation" (Leviticus 23:24).

"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

There is one last trumpet event beyond the Feast of Trumpets. That is the Lord's atonement for the remnant of Israel that came out of the great tribulation and their final gathering from the ends of the earth where they had been scattered. This last trumpet blast announces the Jubilee year, a Sabbath year of rest, and is blown on the Day of Atonement. It is a picture of Israel entering its rest in the Lord and announcing the ushering in of the millennial kingdom at the second physical coming of Christ. It is not, however, the rapture of the church because it is blown explicitly for the remnant of Israel as they are gathered from the nations to possess the land as an eternal inheritance. We read:

"Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family" (Lev 25:9-10).

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people" (Deuteronomy 32:43).

So, the mystery of the rapture remains just that, a mystery. We cannot know its timing nor predict the day or hour. We only know with assurance that we, the church, the bride of Christ, will never be subject to His wrath. It must occur before the wrath of the Lamb is poured out on

the nations of the earth. The Feast of Trumpets gives us a prophetic picture of this mystery, but since its precise timing cannot be predicted, it is not for us to know. We are to watch the times and seasons and expect the Lord's imminent return.

The Mysteries of God—the Seventh Trumpet and Second Coming of Christ

There are pictures of the return of Christ in both the Old and New Testaments. Many confuse the second coming with the rapture, but they are different. The Bible says that when the seventh trumpet is about to be blown, the mystery of God is finished. This mystery is the natural revelation of Christ to the earth at His second coming. It is also the revelation of His bride, the sons of God. It is not the resurrection or rapture, for that mystery, except its timing, has been made known to us through the Apostle Paul. Further, it is called: "the mystery of God," not the mystery of the rapture or resurrection. We read:

"But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets" (Revelation 10:7).

"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15).

"I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him" (Daniel 7:13).

"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30).

"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:11-16).

"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" (Revelation 1:7).

These scriptures depict the physical return of Christ. All nations of the earth shall see Him, and Christ shall take physical possession of the earth at that time. But only Israel shall mourn for their savior whom they crucified, for He will pour out His spirit of forgiveness, grace, and supplication upon them,^{xii} and all Israel will repent and shall be saved as it is written.^{xiii}

The timing of God's judgments and the timing of the Rapture

The timing of God's judgments and the Rapture is the most challenging discussion because there is no exact reference in the Bible. For Jesus Himself said:

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

But we must know the times and seasons, for we are called "sons of light." Paul urged the church to understand the Feasts of the Lord and recognize the times and seasons. For this reason, the Lord gave His feasts to the nation of Israel so they would be looking for His first and now imminent second coming. We read:

"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord 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. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-9).

In Matthew chapter 24, Mark chapter 13, and Luke chapter 21, the disciples ask Christ about the timing of His return. Jesus did not tell them not to concern themselves with these issues but instead warned of the wrath that would come upon the nation of Israel, the destruction of the temple, and the time of Jacob's troubles (the great tribulation). Most importantly, He told them to be ready and watch constantly. And He comforted them that their salvation was near when this season came upon them, even at the beginning. I believe Jesus was giving them the hope of the rapture. We read:

"Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28).

So, we are to be ready and watching always, and we are to be waiting patiently for His return. We cannot know the exact day or hour, but we can recognize the signs of His coming. And the

signs are everywhere. The most crucial sign was when He reestablished the nation of Israel in 1948, for Jesus spoke of a time when the fig tree would once again begin to sprout green leaves. We read:

"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!" (Matthew 24:32-33).

Will the Church be taken out of the world before the seal judgments?

I believe the church will be removed from the world before the seal judgments. However, for many years, I felt differently and thought that Christians were teaching a form of escapism theology. And worse, they were practicing separatist theology from God's chosen people, Israel. But as I continued to study His word, the Lord gave me a clear picture of the relationship between Israel and the church. First, the Apostle Paul says that not all Israel are of Israel, but faithful Israel are those who have received the promises of the Lord by faith, not by the works of the law. We read:

"But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, IN ISAAC YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed" (Romans 9:6-8).

"What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone" (Romans 9:30-32).

Second, scripture tells us that the Gentiles, as wild olive branches, have been brought into a covenant relationship with Christ and grafted into the cultivated Olive tree with faithful Israel, the natural branches. The cultivated tree is a picture of the church. Hence, the Gentiles have joined faithful Israel as fellow heirs of the kingdom of heaven and received the inheritances and blessings of the Lord. The Gentiles do not replace faithful Israel but join them as equal brethren in Christ. We have become "one new man." We read:

"And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree" (Romans 11:17).

"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6).

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16).

"That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14).

"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

"For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity" (Ephesians 2:14-16).

The Lord also showed me the distinctions He has made between faithful Israel and secular Israel and how secular Israel must suffer for her rejection of Christ. We read:

"Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience" (Colossians 3:6).

And He showed me how those in Christ would be spared the wrath of God, for we are not appointed unto His wrath. This knowledge has been challenging for me, considering that none of my extended family members have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and none are saved yet. The Lord has put on my heart a significant burden and sorrow for the Jewish people, and like the Apostle Paul, I pray continually for their salvation. But at the same time, He has also assured me I will not be subject to His wrath. We read:

"For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

"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" (Zechariah 2:3).

"Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name. They shall be Mine, says the LORD of hosts, On the day

that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him" (Malachi 3:16-17).

In this scripture from the book of Luke, it is fascinating to note how one could stand before the Son of man if he were not resurrected or raptured. Merely being preserved or protected on the earth does not place us in the presence of the Lord. Many of the Jewish people will miss the rapture, and unfortunately, more will perish during the great tribulation. But Jesus does give hope for those of Israel who will persistently seek Him during this time of great darkness.

In the following parable, a Jewish man receives a visitor, likely a visit from an angel or the Holy Spirit. The man then goes to another friend at midnight to borrow three loaves of bread, implying that Jesus came suddenly like a thief in the night, and he missed the rapture. We know that Jesus is the bread of life, and the man is seeking this bread. The friend answers, saying the door is shut and he is resting with his children. This door of heaven is now closed, implying the man missed the rapture. And the children are the church, for we are the children of Zion. The hope is that because Israel is the friend of God, the Lord will rise to provide them with bread, but only if they diligently persist in seeking Him during this time after the rapture. We read:

"And He said to them, Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him; and he will answer from within and say, Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs" (Luke 11:5-8).

Is the Rapture the harvest of the earth or gathering of the Elect of Christ?

Jesus spoke of a great harvest at the end of the age. A study of scripture suggests the final wrath of God (the bowl judgments) comes either through or after this harvest. Let us follow the significant theme of the scriptures in the book of Revelation from Chapters 11 through 15 to see the things that unfold:

1. *"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15).*
2. *"The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth. Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail" (Revelation 11:18-19).*

3. *"Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1).*
4. *"Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (Revelation 14:6).*
5. *"Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped" (Revelation 14:14-16).*
6. *"Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete" (Revelation 15:1).*

After the seventh trumpet is blown, the mystery of Christ is revealed to the nations of the earth. It is a dispensation of time, a period of ten earth days between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, and these mysteries are revealed in a sequence of supernatural events that shake humanity to the foundation of its soul. At this moment, Christ is given the nations of the earth as an inheritance. The temple of God and the Ark of His covenant are open in heaven, and the time of His final judgment begins. All the stars and celestial objects disappear, rolled up like a scroll against the brightness of His appearance. Only His light could overpower the most brilliant star in the universe. They would look dim and even dark compared with His glory.

The Apostle John peers into this open heaven and sees the Lamb of God standing on Mount Zion with 144,000 redeemed sons of Israel. This mountain is the spiritual Zion, not the real mountain in Jerusalem. The church, the governmental kingdom of Christ, is this mountain. We read:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion the law shall go forth" (Micah 4:1-2).

We know the church is to return to earth with Christ when He physically returns. And when He stands on the mountain in Jerusalem, His holy ones with Him, He comes as lightning blazing across the Kidron Valley straight into the temple mount, instantly causing an earthquake, blasting His way through the sealed Golden Gate, and splitting the mountain in half. Now, that is a grand appearance!

We see in the book of Zechariah that Israel flees from the Lord when His feet touch the Mount of Olives, and the great earthquake splits the mountain in two. So why does Israel escape? Because of the wrath of God that has come to the earth, although they do not yet realize that He has come to redeem them, not to destroy them. The church has not remained on the earth with the remnant of Israel during the tribulation, for we are taken up to be with Him in heaven and will not be fleeing from Him when He returns. We read:

"And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee As you fled from the earthquake In the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, And all the saints with You" (Zechariah 14:4-5).

One more point. After the ark of His covenant is open in heaven, the Lord sends an angel to preach the everlasting message of salvation. If the church were still on the earth, the Lord would not need to send out an angel to proclaim the message of salvation. This calling has been given to the church. Immediately, the Apostle John sees an image of Christ sweeping His sickle across the earth to reap the final harvest; both the righteous and wicked are harvested. John sees a spiritual picture of Christ in heaven holding a sickle for the harvest, hence the statement "one like the son of man." And then the bowl judgments, the seven last plagues, and God's final wrath are poured out upon the earth. God is always merciful, giving humanity every chance to repent and be saved before His final destruction.

Scripture distinguishes between "who" will come for the church and "who" will harvest the earth. For the church, the Lord Himself will descend from heaven. For the earth, it is the angels who are sent out.^{xiv} Some confuse the image in Revelation, chapter 14:16, with that of the rapture. This final harvest is for Israel, possibly the 144,000 redeemed sons of Israel, but it is not the rapture. We read:

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven" (Mark 13:26-27).

"The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels" (Matthew 13:39).

One last point. John's vision correlates perfectly with the book of Joel. Here, we see the harvest of those judged at the end of the age, specifically for the nations and Israel. Some argue that Mathew chapter 13:30 confirms in scripture that the rapture occurs at the end of the age

because the wheat and tares grow together until that time. However, the rapture is not the harvest at the end of the age because the harvest at the end of the age involves the final judgments of the Lord. The rapture is the return of Christ for His bride, the church. We read:

"Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; For the winepress is full, The vats overflow—For their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:12-14).

"Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe. So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs" (Revelation 14:17-20).

The Imminent Return of Christ

The scriptures tell us to expect the Lord's imminent return. The metaphor of the thief is that His coming will be sudden and without warning, likely when we are asleep. This metaphor contrasts with prophetic scripture, the books of Daniel and Revelation, which gives specific timeframes during the tribulation period, i.e., one week, forty-two months, etc. Even the exact rule of the Antichrist is provided in the book of Daniel. So once this period begins, there is a clock that counts down to the return of Christ. But before then, no warning or prophecy points to the time of the rapture. Nor is there any prophecy pointing to the exact timing of the seven-year tribulation. We see signs of things aligning with the heavens and the nations but nothing more. We read:

"He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered. Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot? And he said to me, For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed" (Daniel 8:11-14).

Jesus commanded us to watch for His return! He spoke this with a warning in nearly all the gospels, the book of Revelation, and several of the epistles. The clear indication is that the church must always be ready and expecting His imminent return. We read:

"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into" (Matthew 24:42-43).

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:13).

"Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:33-37).

"But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into" (Luke 12:39).

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

"For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord 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. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

"Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you" (Revelation 3:3).

"Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame" (Revelation 16:15).

Even the early church and apostles spoke of the sudden return of Christ and taught those in the church to be ready for His appearance. We read:

"I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing" (1 Timothy 6:13-14).

"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13).

"So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28).

Prepare for the worst and hope for the best

The Bible never tells the church to prepare for the wrath of God. It does, however, tell us we will have tribulation in this world, but there is a distinction between the wrath of God, which is released during the great tribulation, and the tribulations of this world caused by the enemy. As we discussed, the scriptures tell us to be "watching" with expectation for His imminent return. And there are many warnings to those who are not watching. For us who teach the word of the Lord, we must do so with His fear upon us, for there is a stricter judgment because we can lead many astray. We read:

"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1).

Some call themselves pan-tribulationists, meaning they will wait and see how everything pans out. Others say that it is not possible or essential for us to know the timing of the rapture and that we should occupy our time until He comes. And yet others say that we should not claim an exact knowledge of the rapture because the arguments on all sides are convincing. They argue that we should not create division within the body of Christ, even for the knowledge of the truth. These positions make light of Christ's command to be "watching" for His imminent return.

The Lord has chosen us, the church, to proclaim His truth, and He has given us the mind of Christ. Just like in the days of old, He had selected the house of Levi to be the messenger of the Lord of Hosts. So, is it better to prepare God's people for His coming wrath and judgment upon this world, or is it better to prepare God's people for the coming of His presence? I would rather people be ready to receive Christ than receive His judgments. We read:

"Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, That My covenant with Levi may continue, Says the LORD of hosts. My covenant was with him, one of life and

peace, And I gave them to him that he might fear Me; So he feared Me And was reverent before My name. The law of truth was in his mouth, And injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, And turned many away from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 2:4-7).

"For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD THAT HE MAY INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Will the Church be witness to the judgments of God?

If those in Christ are raptured before the tribulation, just like the Apostle John, we will stand before the Lamb when He opens the seal judgments and witness God's judgments upon the earth. We read:

"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-6).

"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, and I will show you things which must take place after this" (Revelation 4:1).

But scripture also tells the church that we are seated in heavenly places and that we will judge the nations and the angels. Daniel sees a vision of heaven with thrones of judgment set up,^{xv} and the Apostle John sees a similar image.^{xvi} So our role at some point is more than just observers of His judgments, but also participants.

Two resurrections or three?

There are two resurrections according to scripture, but they need to be understood as dispensations rather than just singular events. Proof of this occurs in the book of Matthew. The first dispensation ends with the second coming of Christ. This detail is often a subtly overlooked scripture, and some even try to argue against it because it does not fit their paradigm of the resurrection. But scripture is clear. Many were resurrected when Christ was crucified. We read:

"Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the

saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (Matthew 27:51-53).

There is also a second resurrection that comes at the end of the one-thousand-year reign of Christ. This period is also called the "great white throne of judgment." We read:

"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (Revelation 20:11-12).

The Church versus those who come out of the great tribulation

Many confuse those who come out of the great tribulation as the church. It is interesting to note that the word church is mentioned seventy-four times in the New Testament. The last reference is in Revelation, chapter 3:14. After that, the word Saints is used exclusively, hence the term "tribulation Saints." Let us look closely at the unfolding vision of the Apostle John in the book of Revelation as he is taken up in the spirit. You will see the only group missing in heaven is the church. I believe they are in heaven, but not in a form John can recognize. Jesus said we would become equal to or like the angels in the resurrection. Psalm 82 also gives a glimpse of this revelation, and Jesus even quoted this Psalm. We read:

"But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35-36).

"I said, You are gods, And all of you are children of the Most High" (Psalm 82:6).

"Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I SAID, YOU ARE GODS?" (John 10:34).

John was led through this vision by an angelic host, one of the twenty-four elders. Some claim these are great men redeemed from the earth, but they do not sing the new song of the redeemed. Hence, they are likely angels who have been given dominion over men's affairs. For this reason, they are holding golden bowls containing the prayers of the Saints. John even tries to worship him but is corrected. Notice he does say that he is a fellow man redeemed from the earth, but that he is a fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Christ. In other words, he implies equality with John as one who serves God and those redeemed in Christ. The angels are called sons of God. So, if we become equal to the angels in the resurrection, we become their brethren. We read:

"But one of the elders said to me, Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals" (Revelation 5:5).

"And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10).

So, let us see the order of the things that John sees in heaven:

1. *The Throne of God (Revelation 4:2-3)*
2. *Twenty-Four Elders (Revelation 4:4)*
3. *Four Living Creatures (Revelation 4:6-9)*
4. *God on His throne holding a scroll (Revelation 5:1)*
5. *A Strong Angel crying out (Revelation 5:2)*
6. *The Lamb of God (Revelation 5:6-7)*
7. *The prayers of the Saints (Revelation 5:8-10)*
8. *The Voice of Many Angels (Revelation 5:11-12)*
9. *The Voice of Every Creature (Revelation 5:13)*
10. *The Lamb opens the seals (Revelation 6:1)*
11. *White Horse (Revelation 6:2)*
12. *Red Horse (Revelation 6:3-4)*
13. *Black Horse (Revelation 6:5-6)*
14. *Pale Horse (Revelation 6:7-8)*
15. *Martyrs of Christ (Revelation 6:9-11)*
16. *A Great Earthquake (Revelation 6:12-17)*
17. *Four Angels holding the four winds (Revelation 7:1)*
18. *Angel with the seal of God (Revelation 7:2)*
19. *144,000 Sons of Israel (Revelation 7:3-8)*
20. *The Great Multitude – Tribulation Saints (Revelation 7:9-17)*

There is a difference between those who sing the new song in Revelation, chapter 5:8-10 versus those who cry out in Revelation, chapter 7:9-15. The first are redeemed from the earth and are made kings and priests to reign on the earth. The second group comes out of the great tribulation and stands before the throne of God to serve Him day and night. Still, Jesus called us friends and not servants. We read:

"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:14-15).

I believe that we, the church, are mentioned in Revelation 5:11. First, we sing the song of the redeemed after we have been raptured and become like the angels, then we join with the angels as sons of God and sing our praises to the Lamb. Also, notice that the seventh seal has not been opened; hence, the seven trumpet judgments have not yet been sounded. We read:

"Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And 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. Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:8-12).

"Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from? And I said to him, Sir, you know. So he said to me, These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them" (Revelation 7:13-15).

We discussed earlier that many believe that the rapture occurs at the seventh trumpet blast written in the book of Revelation, and compare this with the last trumpet that Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4:16. In this verse, we see an additional problem with this assumption. The tribulations Saints are standing before the Lord,^{xvii} before any trumpet judgments.^{xviii}

Will those in the great tribulation prevail over the Antichrist?

Some teach that the church will live on earth during the great tribulation and that the church will wage war against, prevail, and even destroy the Antichrist on the earth. While there is an army of God in heaven, who we are part of, the scripture clearly shows that the tribulation saints and secular Israel do not prevail against the Antichrist during the tribulation period. We read:

"It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation" (Revelation 13:7).

"The LORD gives voice before His army, For His camp is very great; For strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; Who can endure it?" (Joel 2:11).

In contrast, Jesus spoke to Peter, telling him the gates of hell would not prevail against the church. So why is there a contrast to the book of Revelation? Because the church would not be on earth during the tribulation period. We read:

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of

heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19).

He That Restraints; is it the Holy Spirit or Michael the Archangel?

There are different speculations about who is the restraint that will be taken out of the world before the rise of the Antichrist. In scripture, the Holy Spirit is always called "He." I believe "He" is the Holy Spirit in second Thessalonians. It is capitalized and, therefore, always a reference to the Lord. Secondly, it is unlikely that one angel would be restraining the entire force of evil. For example, the book of Revelation reveals four angels are holding back the four winds of the earth.^{xix} The angels have limited authority, so it is unlikely that one angel would be given the power to restrain every principality and spirit of darkness in this world. Even the angel Michael, one of the chief princes, wrestled against the prince of Persia for twenty-one days.^{xx} We read:

"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" (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26).

So, if He, being the Holy Spirit, is the one restraining, then when He is taken out of the world, he would have to be removed with Him because His Spirit dwells within us, and He has promised never to leave us. We read:

"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU" (Hebrews 13:5).

Are Israel and Zion the same?

Many argue that current Israel and Zion are the same. But scripture tells us otherwise. Zion is now a representation of the church, comprised of faithful Israel (those who have accepted Christ of the natural seed of Abraham) and the Gentile branches that by faith have been grafted in with them. While Israel in scripture is called Zion, it is more aptly a future promise for Israel that they would become the dwelling place of God. That dwelling place is now in the heart of every believer in Christ. Zion, therefore, is the heavenly spiritual place where the Lord dwells, while Mount Zion is the natural physical place upon which the kingdom of God will descend. A frequent reference in the Old Testament is to the "daughter of Zion." It symbolizes Old Covenant Israel and its promise to the adoption as sons of God, often concerning her rebellion towards God. It is also used to describe the New Covenant elect of Christ, including now both Jews and Gentiles and the fulfillment of their promise as adopted sons of God. We read:

"The LORD loves the gates of Zion More than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!" (Psalm 87:2-3).

"And of Zion it will be said, This one and that one were born in her; And the Most High Himself shall establish her" (Psalm 87:5).

"For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it" (Psalm 132:13-14).

One argument for a post-tribulation rapture is the concern about the church becoming separated from the remnant of natural Israel. While this may be difficult to accept, scripture distinguishes between the church and Israel regarding resurrection, physical transformation, and spiritual completion. The church will receive the inheritance and promises made to Israel, now comprised of a remnant of the Jewish people referred to as faithful Israel and the Gentiles who have been grafted in to become "one new man" with them. It is the church that becomes like the angels. It is the church who are called sons of the living God. It is the church that inherits the kingdom of God. It is the church that receives Christ as an inheritance. It is the church who become kings and priests unto the Lord. It is the church that rules and reigns with Christ over the earth. And most significantly, the church is now married to God and becomes His bride.

There are not two Gods: one for Israel and one for the church. There is one God, Yeshua. He is the God of faithful Israel. He is my salvation. And now He has invited my Gentile brothers and sisters to join me in this new eternal covenant relationship with Him. So now "we" are His bride, not subject to His wrath, but to be taken out of the earth as He brings His judgment against the rebellious remnant of Israel and the nations who have rejected His love. Yes, we will be separated for a season from the earth, but we will return with Christ to gather the remnant of Israel and those of the nations who have come out of the great tribulation. And these will come up to Jerusalem to celebrate with us the marriage celebration of Christ to the church, the marriage supper of the Lamb. We read:

"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. Then he said to me, Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 9:7-9).

There is a shadowed picture of the church in the Old Testament, those who are called out of the people of Israel to become their leaders. We see in the book of Exodus that the children of Israel came to *Elim*. In this place were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees. The twelve wells represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and the seventy palm trees represent the leaders of the people of Israel. Moses selected seventy men to become elders over the people, and the Lord took some of His Spirit from Moses and placed it upon them.

We then see much later that Jesus took seventy disciples to go out and spread the message of salvation, and in the book of Revelation, those standing before the throne of God are holding palm branches in their hands. So, there is a correlation and a fulfillment of the promises that the Lord would choose His leaders out of the earth; those leaders now are the church who will be allowed to share the throne of Christ and judge the nations. We read:

"All those who were descendants of Jacob were seventy persons (for Joseph was in Egypt already)" (Exodus 1:5).

"Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there by the waters" (Exodus 15:27).

"Now He said to Moses, Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar" (Exodus 24:1).

"After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go" (Luke 10:1).

"So Jesus said to them, Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28).

The salvation of Israel to come out of Zion

The Psalmist cried out that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion. And since Zion spiritually is the place, the Lord has chosen for His holy habitation, that being within our hearts. Therefore, the salvation of Israel will come out of the church.^{xxi} The Lord stated, and the Apostle Paul reaffirmed that the Gentiles would provoke Israel to jealousy. Israel will seek that which the Gentiles have been given: the presence of the Holy Spirit.

But there is also an actual city of Zion called the New Jerusalem. This city is comprised of the resurrected believers in Christ.^{xxii} So, the salvation of Israel is predicated on the Lord completing His work in building the church. Once this is complete, the Lord will turn His face towards Israel to fulfill her physical and spiritual restoration. So, the rapture must take place before the second coming of Christ. And the church, as kings and priests, will oversee the people of the earth and the construction of Christ's earthly kingdom. We read:

"Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad" (Psalm 14:7).

"Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When God brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad" (Psalm 53:6).

"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: THE DELIVERER WILL COME OUT OF ZION, AND HE WILL TURN AWAY UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB" (Romans 11:26).

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and nursing babes; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, And the bride from her dressing room" (Joel 2:15-16).

"And it shall come to pass in all the land, Says the LORD, That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, But one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, This is My people; And each one will say, The LORD is my God" (Zechariah 13:8-9).

"The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, To the Mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, A remnant of them will return; The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness" (Isaiah 10:21-22).

One last crucial point for it will be the church, which will intercede for Israel during their time of great tribulation. And our cry of intercession to the Lord will cause his heart to relent of the judgment and cause Him to be zealous for His land and spare His heritage, Israel. We read:

"Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, Weep between the porch and the altar; Let them say, Spare Your people, O LORD, And do not give Your heritage to reproach, That the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God? Then the LORD will be zealous for His land, And pity His people" (Joel 2:17-18).

As a significant point to emphasize, it is precisely the church, comprised of faithful Israel and the many Gentile branches who have been grafted in to become one with them, who will not only cry out to save the remnant of natural Israel but will also be responsible for restoring God's inheritance and rebuilding Jerusalem. A picture of this is seen in Isaiah, chapter 45. Here, we see Cyrus, the king of Babylon, who decreed the return of Israel and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. He is a shadow of the Gentile church. Cyrus is promised the inheritance of the earth but is reminded that YHVH is the God of Israel. Cyrus is not a picture of Christ, for it says explicitly, "You have not known Me." That reference is always given to the Gentiles. We read:

"Thus says the LORD to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held— To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:1-6).

"Thus says the LORD, The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; And concerning the work of My hands, you command Me. I have made the earth, And created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, And all their host I have commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, And I will direct all his ways; He shall build My city And let My exiles go free, Not for price nor reward, Says the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 45:11-13).

So, I find these passages in the books of Joel and Isaiah amazing: first, because Israel will not and cannot be saved apart from the Gentile church, and second, because God has promised the restoration of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the Gentiles. So, it will be the Gentiles who will restore God's inheritance, Israel. The Lord has established a plan to work all things together for His glory. The salvation of the Gentiles has come to them because of the transgression of Israel, and now the salvation of Israel has come upon them because of the mercy God has bestowed upon the Gentiles. We read:

"For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD? OR WHO HAS BECOME HIS COUNSELOR? OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM AND IT SHALL BE REPAID TO HIM? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:30-36).

The consummation of the wedding and the marriage supper of the Lamb

Although there are no written instructions in the Bible, the more ancient Jewish wedding contained all the symbolism for the marriage with Christ. It is essential to know that traditional Jewish marriage was historically consummated privately in the bridegroom's chambers with at least two witnesses. Then, according to ancient tradition, it was celebrated with the friends and family of the bridegroom for seven days. We read:

"So he said, These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:1).

"Then I answered and said to him, What are these two olive trees—at the right of the lampstand and at its left?" (Zechariah 4:11).

"These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth" (Revelation 11:4).

The friends of the bridegroom are not the bride. Jesus referred to His disciples as friends of the bridegroom because they had not yet become married to Him. The bride of Christ is the church, and our marriage will be in heaven after the rapture, while the friends of the bridegroom are the remnant of Israel who return to the Lord after the great tribulation. They will join with the church on Mount Zion after Christ returns to celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb. They are the guests. The bride is never invited to her wedding, and in fact, she is the one who sends out the invitations. There is a distant physical difference between the two; the church has been resurrected and raptured into their glorified eternal bodies, while the remnant of Israel remains in their present mortal bodies, are given and taken in marriage, and will have many children. Both sin and death remain in the world until the second resurrection and great white throne of judgment. However, lives will be prolonged during this period.

"Return, O backsliding children, says the LORD; for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion" (Jeremiah 3:14).

"And it shall be, in that day, Says the LORD, That you will call Me My Husband, And no longer call Me My Master" (Hosea 2:16).

"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom" (Matthew 25:1).

"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2).

And it is the church that will rule Israel and the nations. But not like the lords of this earth who lord over their people in oppression. We will be like Christ and shepherd the nations as kings and priests who love and serve their people unconditionally. And every year, all the nations shall come up to Mount Zion to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, the marriage supper of the Lamb. We read:

"Then he said to me, Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:9).

"Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will bring back the captivity of Jacob's tents, And have mercy on his dwelling places; The city shall be built upon its own mound, And the palace shall remain according to its own plan. Then out of them shall proceed thanksgiving And the voice of those who make merry; I will multiply them, and they shall not diminish; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small" (Jeremiah 30:18-19).

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16).

Amen!

-
- ⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.
- ⁱⁱ The Shepherd of Hermas 1.4.2.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Timothy J. Demy and Thomas D. Ice. *The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation*. Bibliotheca Sacra (Vol. 152, No. 607; July-Sept. 1995), pp. 306-17.
- ^{iv} Revelation 14:14-16.
- ^v Matthew 22:44.
- ^{vi} Daniel 8:11-12.
- ^{vii} Leviticus 23:1-44.
- ^{viii} Revelation 6:1.
- ^{ix} 1 Corinthians 15:52.
- ^x Revelation 11:15.
- ^{xi} Colossians 2:16-17.
- ^{xii} Zechariah 12:10.
- ^{xiii} Romans 11:26.
- ^{xiv} Matthew 13:39.
- ^{xv} Daniel 7:10.
- ^{xvi} Revelation 20:4.
- ^{xvii} Revelation 7:15.
- ^{xviii} Revelation 8:2.
- ^{xix} Revelation 7:1.
- ^{xx} Daniel 10:13.
- ^{xxi} Psalm 132:13-14.
- ^{xxii} 1 Corinthians 6:19, Revelation 21:2.