

1335

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Please turn to Acts 1. The scene is the Mount of Olives. It is late spring, there is going to be a new moon that particular night. Christ is ready to ascend to heaven.

Acts 1:6 (NLT) "So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking Him, 'Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore your kingdom?'"

The New International Version indicates that the apostles gathered around Jesus, and the Amplified Bible says they asked Him repeatedly. This incident was not just another instance of Peter's solitary impetuosity, but one that sprang from questions apparently deeply in the forefront of all the disciples' minds. "What's next, and when?"

I do not think we can blame them, and I do not think we should blame them, after all we ask very much the same questions today. Our focus is a little bit different but we ask, "When will Christ return?" I want to put the insistence that they demonstrated in asking this in its historical perspective.

Christ probably resurrected Lazarus, from all indications, about three weeks before His last Passover. That was a major miracle indeed. Now between Passover and Pentecost that year, there were 54 days. So the total span of time between Lazarus' resurrection and Pentecost that year was about 75 days. I am not saying it was exact. We do not know exactly when Lazarus was resurrected. That is not my argument today, but it was about 75 days. Let us then recount what happened in that relatively short period of time.

First event: Lazarus' resurrection is the starting point documented in John 11.

Second event: In John 12 there is a very important event, that of the triumphant entry into Jerusalem of Jesus Christ.

Third event: The Passover with the betrayal of Christ, the trial, the burial of Christ. I am not going to go into that in detail.

For the Fourth event, please turn to Matthew 27: the ripping of the veil in the Temple.

Matthew 27:51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Now we do not spend a lot of time talking about this, but to some idea of how important this may have been to a Jew living there at that moment in time, think of yourselves watching television some night and the president is talking. Behind him is the original document of the Constitution of the United States. It is encased in very thick glass with guards standing all around it. It is deeply protected and as the president is speaking, all of a sudden the document rips in two without any hands. We would be disconcerted; we would be unsettled. That should give you some idea of how the Jews may have felt at that particular time when the veil was ripped.

The Temple was the centerpiece of Jewish culture. The Jews worshipped there frequently. They travelled there for many, many miles very frequently to visit the Temple and to worship. It was a very important thing to them, and the news of this event, the ripping of the veil, would have spread everywhere throughout any population of the Jews at the time no matter where they were. If they were living over in this other country they eventually heard about it. It went all over the place in the Roman Empire. It got to Babylonia. It got to Alexandria where there was a major Jewish enclave there. Everybody heard about it, and everybody was talking about it. This was a very important event to them.

They may not have understood exactly what was going on, but I think basically it was a judgment of God as His presence associated with the Shekinah; His presence was removed at that particular time. I am not totally convinced that the Shekinah was ever present at the Herodian temple, but the Jews thought it was, and that is, of course, all that is important.

The tearing of the veil may have been God's way of emphasizing to them that He was out of there. That He was done with the Temple. That it was as good as gone. It was still there physically for another 40 years or so, but it was basically gone. From His perspective, it was no longer necessary, certainly not in a New Covenant context. The book of Hebrews talks of that in great detail.

I am certain there were lots of talk in Jerusalem about what would happen on the Day of Atonement if that veil remained ripped until the Day of Atonement. In Leviticus 16 the keeping of the Day of Atonement demands the existence of a temple, an altar, and a holy of holies, and indeed, the holy of holies had to be totally separated from the rest of the building.

Today the Jews do not have any of that, and they know that they keep Atonement in effigy, and they actually use that term. They keep Atonement in effigy because they do not have what is necessary to keep it as in Leviticus 16.

We who have God's given access to the heavenly temple do not keep Atonement in effigy. I believe that many Jews of the time realized that if the veil remained ripped until the day of Atonement, they would be observing Atonement that year in effigy as well. That thought would have been frightening to many thinking Jews of the time. This is not a minor event at all.

Fifth event: Again look at Matthew 27. We will look at the events that happened at this time of the year.

Matthew 27:51 and the earth quaked, and rocks were split, 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.

Now, that too, would have been the talk of Jerusalem and other areas. The shopkeeper says to his wife at the dinner table, "Oh, you will never guess: Saul ben-Joshua dropped by the store today. You remember Saul, the guy who lived down the street a little ways, the one who died about two months

ago. You went to his funeral. He seemed chipper. He looks great. He said he got his old job back, working at the mill at the foot of the street.” Now, there is a conversation most of us have not heard very often.

It is my guess that sort of conversation took place over and over again in Jerusalem of those days, certainly the talk of Jerusalem for a long time. These were not normal times, these were amazing times!

Sixth event: There was the resurrection of Christ. I will not spend a lot of time here, but I will stress that what was very important was His appearance to various groups of His disciples for the next forty days. What is important from their perspective is the teaching that He provided during that time as He opened up the Scriptures to them.

Seventh event: I have already mentioned, the ascension of Christ as documented in Acts 1.

Eighth event: Pentecost itself, the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter's sermon, and the founding of the New Covenant church with Christ as its head as documented in Acts 2.

When God works, He works fast. He can get a lot of things done very quickly. All of that happened in about 75 days. We see that kind of thing happening today as God speeds up world events.

I want you to put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. In the space of about 75 days they have lived through everything from an earthquake to resurrections, to the judgment of God on the Herodian temple and a whole lot more, witnessing fulfilled prophecy after fulfilled prophecy. I do not know how many prophecies were fulfilled during that time, but more than you can count on two hands, certainly. Jerusalem was abuzz and it would never be the same in the days of the disciples and apostles. God had left His Temple as an instituted church and had founded a new one.

Those disciples, those followers of Christ, were right in the center of all of those dizzying events that were happening. These men were assured, they did not have to assume it, they did not have to speculate it. They were absolutely assured by what they had seen, what they had experienced, what

they had been a part of, that God was now working in high gear. He was really in high gear!

History was in the making and no wonder they asked Christ just shortly before He ascended, if He was going to restore the kingdom of Israel at that time. They fully expected Him to do that based upon what they had seen and what they had experienced.

At that time, if you had been a follower of Christ, what would you expect to happen on the next holy day, on the Day of Trumpets just a few months away, 31 ^{AD}? What did the disciples expect to happen in the aftermath of that dramatic Pentecost?

Whether the veil in the Temple were fixed or not, what would happen on the Day of Atonement just ten days after that, and beyond that, what would happen at the Feast of Tabernacles which is today for us? Many of Christ's followers probably were anticipating many great events; big things to happen then as well.

God had, as He said in a different context, "worked a work" in their days, yet they would not believe if they were told it. I am paraphrasing Mark 1:5. But nothing happened. It was as if God had turned off the prophecy machine.

On Tishri 1, of that year 31 ^{AD}, on Tishri 10, on Tishri 15, the people gathered at the Temple as they had done year after year after year. They rejoiced, they praised God, and well they should. The Christians were certainly there, and they had every reason to praise God. They may not have internalized it at the time, but they were among the first signatories to the New Covenant prophesied in the Scriptures. They waited to see what God was going to do next, and He did nothing dramatic or spectacular.

Now, I understand in the years and the months after that Pentecost the church grew. It grew exponentially at first. It grew very fast.

There was the choosing of Matthias to replace Judas in Acts 1; the healing of the lame man in Acts 3; the Ananias and Sapphira affair in Acts 5; the

election of the deacons and the murder of Stephen in Acts 6 and 7; the calling of the Gentiles in Acts 9; there was the calling of Paul; and in Acts 15 there was the Jerusalem Council. We read about those things very quickly.

Do you understand? Between some of those things, years, not days, took place. The Jerusalem Council, for example, took place 15-20 years after that particular Pentecost in 31 ^{AD}, almost fully a generation afterward. Events began to slow down.

Trumpets came in 31 ^{AD}, and there were no assassinations, no earthquakes, no armies gathered around Jerusalem, the Roman Empire did not collapse, there was no sign in heaven as Christ said there would be, the Messiah did not return, and Israel was not restored. What had happened?

I am sure, over the ensuing years, there was speculation. People in God's church do that, you know. I am sure they speculated back then. They were wondering, "Surely He would come at the next Land Sabbath or the next Jubilee!" They waited. They had it all figured out.

What about the next time cycle, the next 19 years? I am sure that some of them had it all figured out that He would come then, just like some of us have it all figured out today. But He did not, and He has not.

It is okay to ask, "When will Christ return?" It is okay to ask, "When will He restore Israel?" As long as we understand that no matter the answer to which we arrive, it will probably be wrong. We will probably join the crowd of many of the faithful who over the centuries have speculated and been wrong. Even Paul did not get it right so I guess we are in good company.

What is important that we get right are the many approaches. I am going to approach it through comments that the apostle Paul made to Timothy, which have applications to us today.

I am reading from the New Living Translation which very nicely resolves a figure of speech that occurs at the end of verse one where the apostle begins with a profound statement. He said:

II Timothy 4:1 (NLT) "I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Jesus Christ. . ."

Paul had, like we do, the Holy Spirit. He had Christ and he had the Father dwelling in him, so when he spoke, he was speaking in the presence of God and Jesus Christ.

It is a very interesting statement:

II Timothy 4:1-2 (NLT) "I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus who will someday judge the living and the dead when He comes to set up His kingdom: Preach the Word in season and out of season."

The word the translators render as "comes" there, is the Greek noun, *epipharnia*. It appears only six times in the New Testament, and four of those times are right here in the book of II Timothy. It means just what it says in the King James Version: an appearing; an appearance. You probably recognize in looking behind that word, "epiphany."

In point of fact, false Christians, Christianity, connect the concept of epiphany, the concept of appearing with the incarnation of Christ, His first coming. They observe holidays usually around January 6th, celebrating that event. It is part of some people's winter celebrations in worship of Satan.

Now, there are some, some of them even inside of the church, who teach that when Christ comes, when He appears, He will work quietly behind the scenes, "Even people in God's church won't know that He is there or that He is working."

But this is one of those scriptures that demolish that absolutely silly idea. It connects Christ's appearing with the establishing of the Kingdom. It says, "when He comes to set up His Kingdom." The disciples understood this, that is why they asked Him when He came, "When are you going to set up your Kingdom?" They understood it, we understand too, that when Christ comes,

He is going to come for the purpose of establishing His Kingdom and restore Israel. When He comes, His Kingdom will come to this earth.

Paul continues by telling Timothy to get busy, to never to slack off. We are going to revisit verse 2.

II Timothy 4:2 (MSG) Preach the Word of God. Never lose your sense of urgency in season or out of season.

It has been nigh onto two thousand years since that day of Trumpets way back in 31 ^{AD} when not a lot happened, that day when many of God's people were perhaps quite disappointed that God had not done things according to their timetable. And during that span of time, there has been plenty of opportunity for us to lose a sense of urgency, to let down. Paul tells Timothy to avoid this at all costs. He says we must avoid it as well.

We need to promote the same sense of anticipation which the original disciples must have had at the dawning of the Feast of Trumpets in the year of that Passover in 31 ^{AD}. We need to have the same anticipation they must have had on the Day of Atonement that year, and at the Feast of that particular year so long ago. It is the "Next year in Jerusalem" attitude. It is an attitude that we must not abandon.

Let us drop down to verse 7 where Paul continues, this time on a personal note in verses 7-8 of II Timothy 4. Paul says:

II Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 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.

"Have loved His appearing." There it is again, *epiphaneia*. This is the second time we have seen it. The verb tense is inclusive; it is not past tense; it is not future tense. It says that God will give this crown of righteousness, this great blessing, this great reward to all who have loved His appearing over the centuries; to all of those who have looked forward to Christ's coming.

That is what we need to get right, not prophecy, not speculative ideas. What we need to get right is to look for and to love Christ's appearing. Paul uses the term *epiphaneia* to mean Christ's returning to establish His Kingdom.

There is other evidence of that. The noun *epiphaneia* is related to the Greek adjective *epiphans*, which means conspicuous and illustrious. I will just go quickly over this. Epiphanes appears only once in the New Testament, but its context is rather important. It appears in Acts 2:19-20.

Here Peter is speaking on Pentecost and quotes the prophet Joel who said,

Joel 2:30-31 "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord."

Magnificent is the term *epiphans*. There the adjective in the King James version is, "terrible;" as in the "terrible day." Other versions render this particular word in Joel 2:31 as an "awesome" day, a "dreadful" day, a "fearful," a "terrifying" day. Of course, what we are talking about is the Day of the Lord, which is the day He returns. We understand the Year of the Lord, or the Day of the Lord, to be about one year long. But it also refers to that day, that literal one day that He returns.

Let us look at this from another angle. You remember Paul wrote in II Timothy 4:8 that God would award a crown of righteousness on that day. What day is that? New Testament writers often refer to the day of Christ's return as Christ's Day, or His Day, which is just another form of the Day of the Lord, or The Lord's Day.

I will give you a couple of examples:

Luke 17:24 "For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part of heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day."

That describes what it is going to be like when He returns.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Back to John:

John 8:56 “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”

Some use this scripture to prove that Abraham went to heaven, and that he was up there and he looked down and he saw Christ walking around there and that he was glad; 'that he saw My day,' but Hebrews 11 proves otherwise.

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Hebrews 11:10 For he waited [there is the concept of seeing] for the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Abraham was alive and kicking. He was on this earth. He was not in heaven looking down, but he was here when he saw Christ's Day. What he saw was through the eyes of faith. He saw the New Jerusalem, and he saw the promises fulfilled, and he was glad with what he saw.

Matthew 24:30 “and 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.”

While they mourn, weep, and cry in great anguish, we who long for and indeed love the appearing of Christ will rejoice! Paul is saying there in II Timothy 4:8 that God will bestow this crown of righteousness, this great blessing on those who love and await Christ's appearing.

I want to look a little bit further at this concept of a great blessing. I started my comments with an historical illusion, and so I want to balance them with a few general remarks about prophecy.

Revelation 11:1 Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there."

By the way, when John wrote this, the Temple was already gone. But he is measuring something.

Revelation 11:2-3 "But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given over to the Gentiles. And they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophecy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

Now turn to Daniel 12. Sometimes the reference to 1,260 days covers a much longer span of time; likewise for forty two months. Sometimes it refers for instance, to 1,260 years, but it is clear and very manifest that from this particular context in Revelation 11 that the Two Witnesses are not going to preach for 1,260 years, so we are talking about a literal 1,260 days, that is, 3 1/2 prophetic years. We generally assign the time of their work to the period of time that God calls, "The time of Jacob's trouble." It is a period of distress, a period of tribulation that is going to come just prior to Christ's return.

However, God throws us a curve:

Daniel 12:11-12 " And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall

be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred thirty-five days."

Now assuming that all these figures—1,260 that we saw in Revelation 11, the 1,290, and 1,335 here, all start from the same day—(that may not be, by the way, a warranted assumption, but we are going to assume this for the purposes of my comments today), we see that a major event happened after the 1,260 days that was mentioned in Revelation 11, thirty days after on day 1,290. And then God says that those who wait an additional 45 days, to day 1,335, there will be a great blessing.

That is why the sermon is titled, "1335."

This is not a sermon on prophecy. We are not going to go there and discuss all the things that are going to happen in those days, their sequence, their intensity, or things like that. We all know that the heavenly signs will take place then, the Year of the Lord will transpire, the Two Witnesses will preach, Christ will come, and Israel will be restored. But for my purposes it is not vital that we grasp the sequence of events because we could make a big mess if we try to figure out some of those things, probably as big as those early congregants of God did when they figured Christ would come after, for example, one time cycle.

But this we know: Many of the young people can figure this out. This is not terribly profound. Between day 1,260 and day 1,335 is 75 days. The start of those 1,260 days may be a little ways off, we older people may not see those days happen (we may not live that long), but those who are middle-aged and those who are younger may see the start of those 1,260 days. I am very convinced of that. I am really quite convinced that many of you sitting in this room will see those days and will live through the 75 days at the end of that. Just as happened to the disciples of old, you will see a lot happen. It will happen very fast, just as fast as He can, practically day after day during that time. God will work a work in those days that you would not believe if you were told it.

We know, of course, that the important point is not that we have it all figured out (some people say it is, but it really is not). We even know that it is not

vitally important that we see those last 75 days. After all Abraham, Moses, and David are dead and they will not see them.

What is important is that we see day 1,335—the day of the blessing. That is what is important. The days that Christ will award the crown of righteousness to those who over the years have waited for and have loved His appearing as Paul puts it there in II Timothy 4:8.

While some in the church may have been disappointed as the sun sat on the Day of Trumpets way back there in 31 AD, perhaps they were even upset to see that Christ had not returned according to their timetable. And while some might have felt similarly let down at the close of Atonement or at the close of the Feast of Tabernacles of that year of 31 AD, of this we may be sure, those who have lived their lives loving the appearing of Christ in any age will not be disappointed. There will be no disappointment, there will be no disillusionment for us, only joy on the day of the blessing—on day 1,335.

I will finish with Deuteronomy 33. It is there that the same Hebrew word for “blessed” that we saw in Daniel 12:12 first appears. That passage speaks of the blessing which is our salvation—the immeasurable gift, the unfathomable gift—with which God will bless us. In this passage Moses is addressing today's Israel. He is addressing the true Israel, the Israel of God. Reading from the New American Standard Version, these are the last recorded words of Moses.

Deuteronomy 33:29 (NASB) “Blessed are you, O Israel; who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, who is the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! So your enemies will cringe before you, and you will tread upon their high places.”