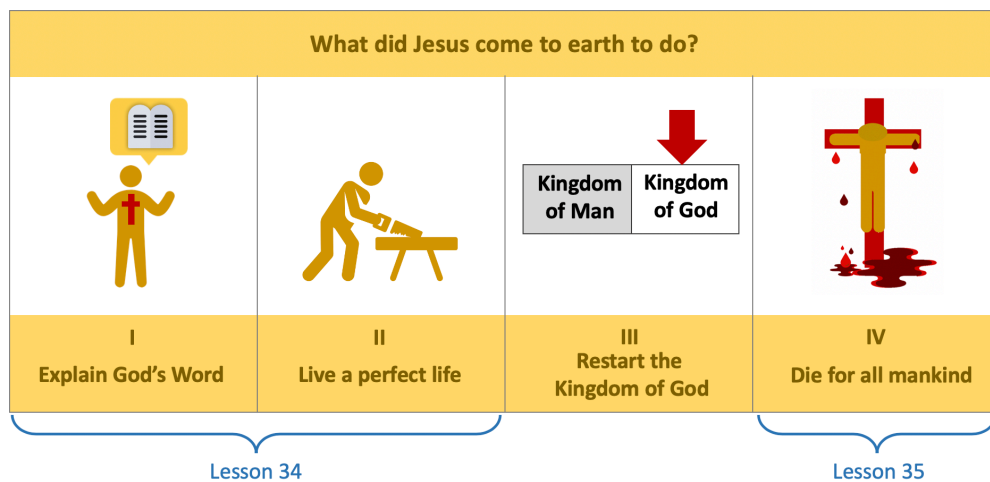


Lesson 40: The Delay of the Kingdom

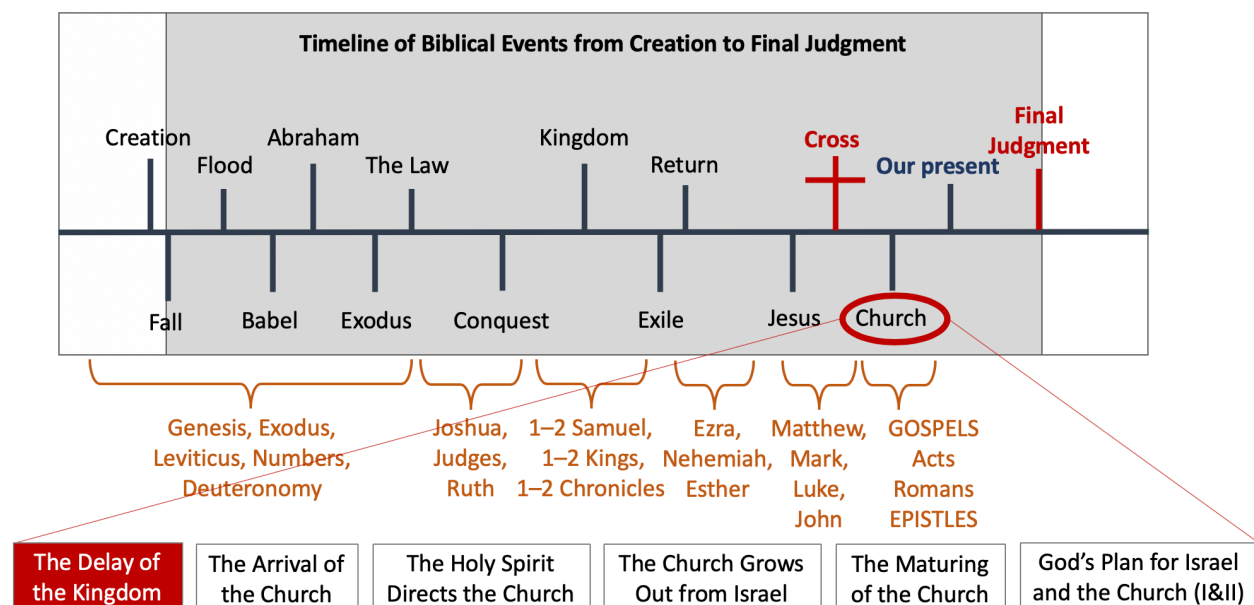
Previously...

We've studied the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. We learnt why it was necessary for Jesus to be born as a man, live a perfectly sinless life, die as the perfect substitute for mankind's sin and then be raised to life with a resurrection body.

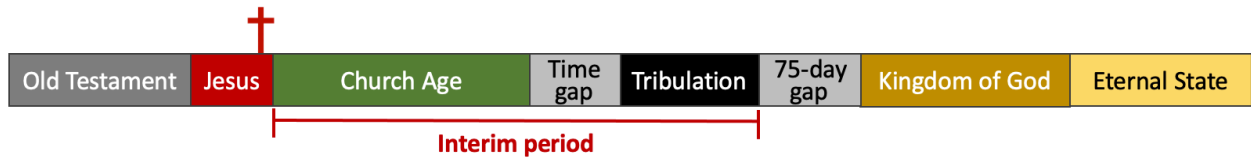
Jesus accomplished most of what He came to do. However, there was one task that He didn't complete at His first coming: He didn't restart the non-functioning Kingdom of God.



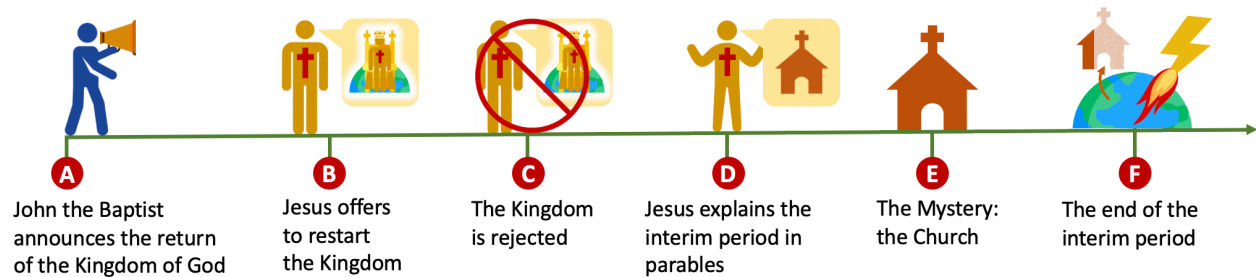
In fact, He delayed it.



Instead, what Jesus started to do was to talk about an interim period. Later on, the New Testament writers gave more details.



But why was there a delay in the coming Kingdom? We will study what happened.



A. John the Baptist Announces the Return of the Kingdom of God

When Israel first demanded a human king, Yahweh said He would select one for them by sending an “anointing” prophet to announce His choice of king. Samuel was the first “king-making” prophet. He anointed and announced both Saul and later, David, as kings.



Similarly, Yahweh told the people that before He sends His chosen King, the Messiah, to restart the Kingdom of God, He would also send a prophet to announce His arrival.

Malachi 3:1

“Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

Malachi 4:5–6

⁵ “Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives. ⁶ His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse.”



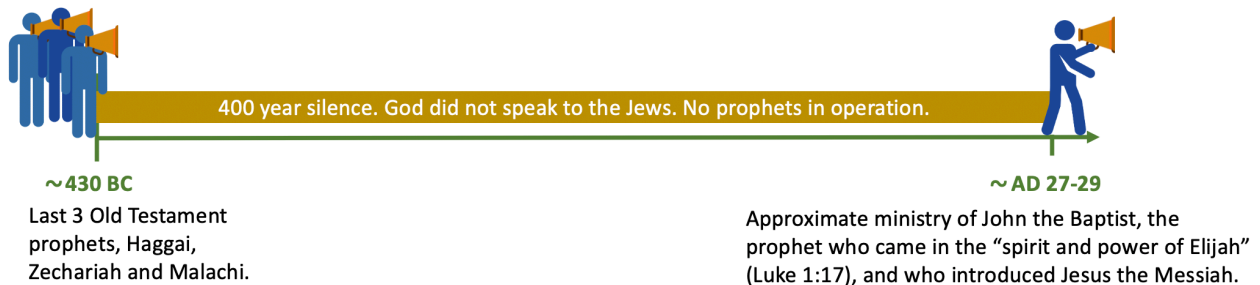
God was going to send Elijah again, or someone with the spirit of Elijah. Why Elijah? What did he do? Elijah showed clearly who the real Creator-God is (1 Kings 18:36–40).

So now, God sent John the Baptist, the last “anointing” prophet to announce Yahweh’s final King: Jesus. Jesus Himself confirmed this.

Matthew 11:10

John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say, ‘Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you.’

God had not sent a prophet for over 400 years but now here was one again!



What did John the Baptist do?

Matthew 3:1–2, 5–6

¹ In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, ² “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”
⁵ People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. ⁶ And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

John the Baptist announced that Yahweh was ready to restart the non-functioning Kingdom of God, also called the Kingdom of Heaven, which they lost at the time of the exile. This was the physical Kingdom of God, to be based in Jerusalem, that the Jews had been waiting for.



Exile: Visible Kingdom of God ended

Rule of the Kingdom of Man

Kingdom of God
returns forever

John told them to repent from their rebellious ways, to trust the Messiah and get baptised.

But why get baptised? At that time, baptism was a ceremony of identification for Gentiles. If a Gentile wanted to become a Jew, they had to be circumcised and go through water baptism as a ritual cleansing.



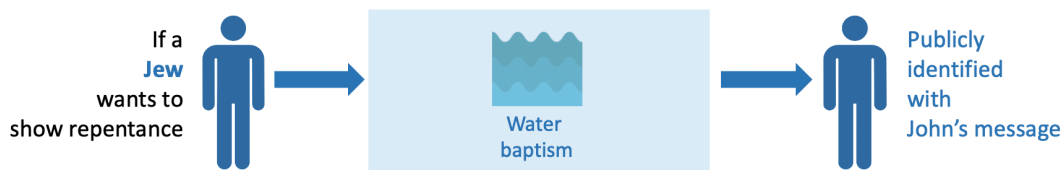
So baptism was technically only meant for Gentiles, not Jews.

But John told Jews to get baptised. Why? John was preparing the way for Jesus by telling them to acknowledge their sins and repent from their rebellious ways.

Acts 19:4

Paul said, “John’s baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus.”

God intended to restart the Kingdom but every Jew had to personally respond to Yahweh’s invitation to trust His Messiah. How would a Jew show repentance? He or she had to get baptised: each Jew had to identify with John’s message. (Note: This is different from the believer’s baptism which we will discuss in a later lesson.)



B. Jesus Offers to Restart the Kingdom

When Jesus met with John, He too showed He agreed with John’s message of repentance by asking John to baptise Him.

Matthew 3:13–15

¹³ Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to talk him out of it. “I am the one who needs to be baptized by you,” he said, “so why are you coming to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus said, “It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.” So John agreed to baptize him.

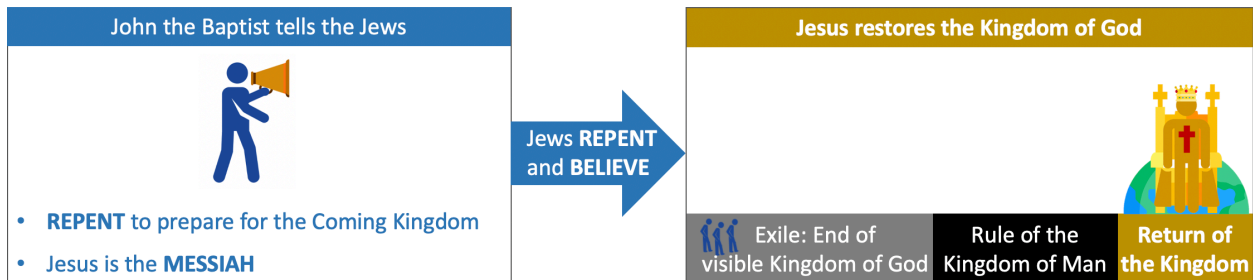


After Jesus' baptism, John announced that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God (John 1:29–34)! At that point, Jesus started talking about restoring the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 4:17

From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”

What should have happened



However, only a small number of Jews listened and believed. Most of them did not. In fact, Jesus said that they were becoming violent in their protest of the Messiah!

Matthew 11:11–15

¹¹ “I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is! ¹² And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it. ¹³ For before John came, all the prophets and the law of Moses looked forward to this present time. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept what I say, he is Elijah, the one the prophets said would come. ¹⁵ Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!

Jesus later explained to His disciples that the Jews refused to recognise that John had come to be like the prophet Elijah. They also rejected John's message that Jesus was the Messiah. And just as they got John killed, the Jews would also get Messiah Jesus killed.

Matthew 17:10–13

¹⁰ Then his disciples asked him, “Why do the teachers of religious law insist that Elijah must return before the Messiah comes?”

¹¹ Jesus replied, “Elijah is indeed coming first to get everything ready. ¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, but he wasn't recognized, and they chose to abuse him. And in the same way they will also make the Son of Man suffer.” ¹³ Then the disciples realized he was talking about John the Baptist.



Jesus' words came true.

The Jewish leaders claimed Jesus' miracles were not powered by the Holy Spirit but by Satan! These leaders were completely rejecting what God the Holy Spirit was revealing about Jesus.

Matthew 12:22–32

²² Then a demon-possessed man, who was blind and couldn't speak, was brought to Jesus. He healed the man so that he could both speak and see. ²³ The crowd was amazed and asked, "Could it be that Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah?"

²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard about the miracle, they said, "No wonder he can cast out demons. He gets his power from Satan, the prince of demons."

²⁵ Jesus knew their thoughts and replied, "Any kingdom divided by civil war is doomed. A town or family splintered by feuding will fall apart. ²⁶ And if Satan is casting out Satan, he is divided and fighting against himself. His own kingdom will not survive.

²⁷ And if I am empowered by Satan, what about your own exorcists? They cast out demons, too, so they will condemn you for what you have said.

²⁸ But if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you. ²⁹ For who is powerful enough to enter the house of a strong man and plunder his goods? Only someone even stronger—someone who could tie him up and then plunder his house.

³⁰ "Anyone who isn't with me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me. ³¹ "So I tell you, every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven—except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will never be forgiven.

³² Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come.

Jesus said that by the power of the Holy Spirit, He was showing the Jews that He was the Messiah. He was the worldwide blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant and the eternal Son of David coming to claim David's throne and restart the Kingdom.

But the Jewish leaders claimed that Satan was the power behind Jesus!

- They rejected the Holy Spirit's message that Jesus was the Messiah.
- They rejected Jesus the Saviour and King.



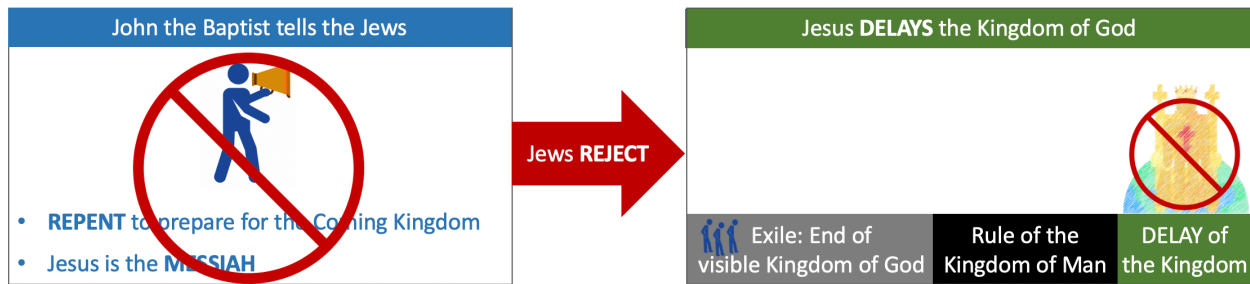
Anyone who rejected the Holy Spirit’s message that Jesus was the Messiah would never be forgiven because there was no other Saviour!

God’s Judgment on the Pagan Kingdom of Man	God’s Only Solution for Salvation
<p style="text-align: center;">Eternal Death</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Messiah Jesus Dying on the Cross</p> 

**No other solution
No other Saviour**

Such rebellious Jews would never enter the Kingdom. They would be eternally separated from Yahweh in the lake of fire.

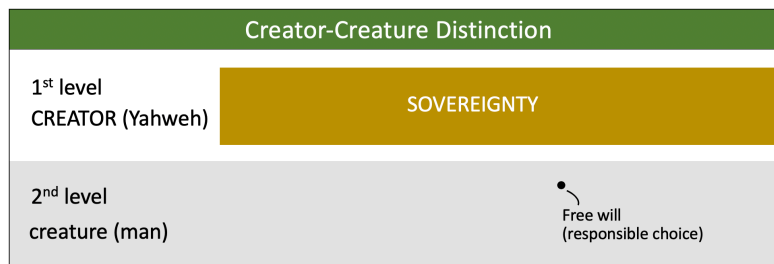
What happened instead



C. The Kingdom is Rejected

As a nation, the Jews rejected Jesus. And so He stopped offering the Kingdom and postponed its return. Did this mean God’s plan to restart the Kingdom was thwarted? No.











God chooses to give man genuine free will and He interacts with that free will. So, even when evil mankind continually rejects God’s plans, sovereign Yahweh is never trapped or caught in a hopeless situation.



The all-knowing, all-powerful Creator-God of the universe has many “Plan Bs” to move history towards the perfect and good end He has in mind.


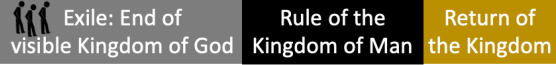
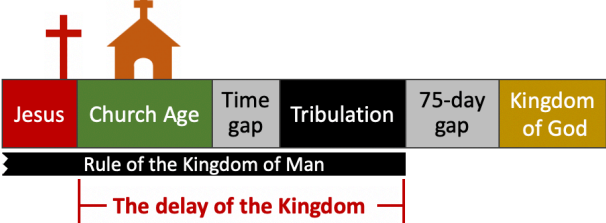
His alternate plans are not worse than His originals. His “plan Bs” are not made in a panic. Because He is sovereign over all creation, time and history, God’s “plan Bs” are perfect and already in place before He even made the world. Here are some examples:

God is never thwarted: His plans always achieve His ultimate goals in history

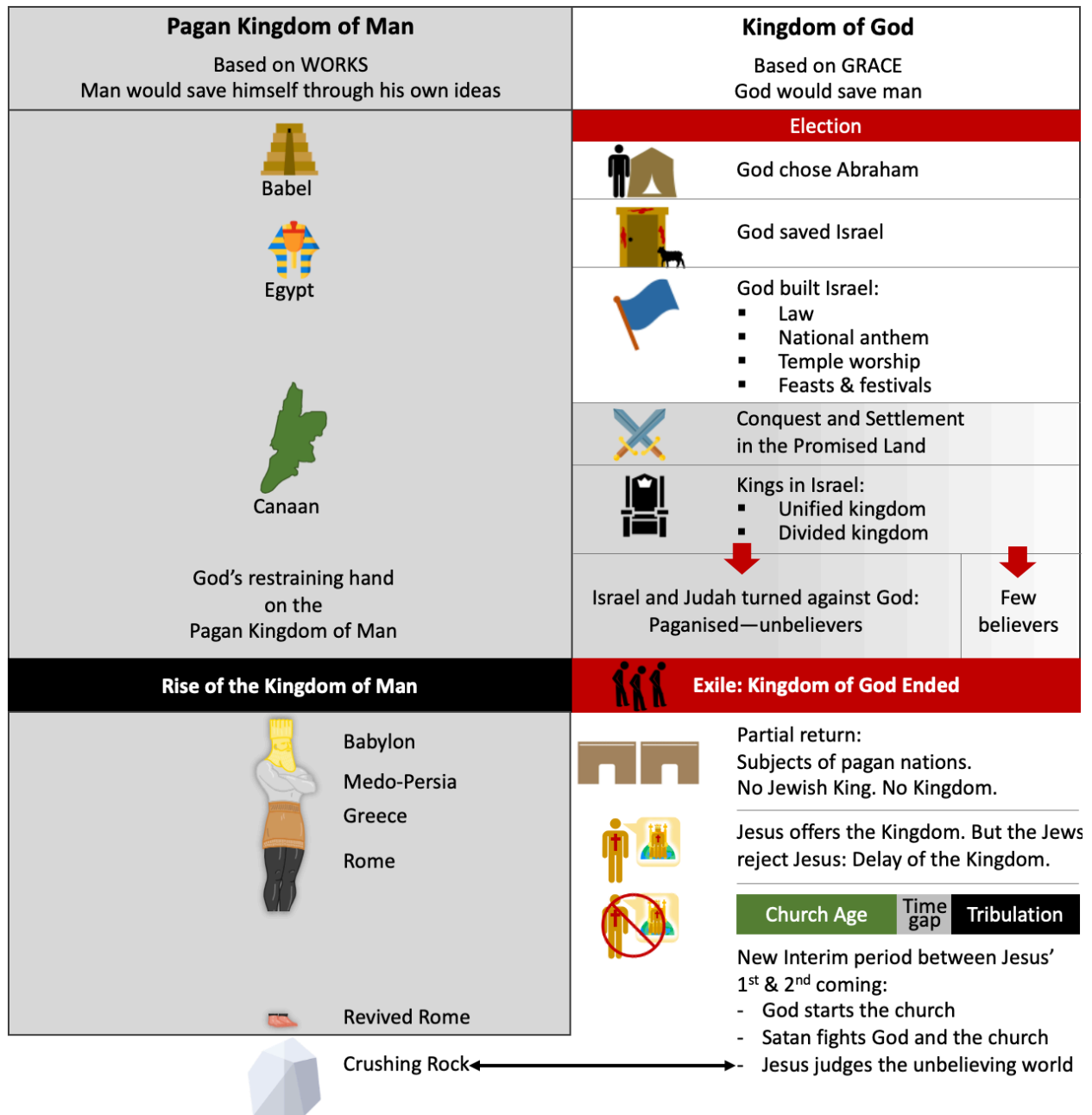
Plan A	Plan B
 <p>1. Adam and Eve were told to “trust and obey Yahweh” in exercising responsible dominion. They failed.</p>	<p>God told Adam and Eve His plan for a Second Adam, the “seed of the woman”. Jesus will exercise responsible dominion perfectly and also rescue mankind.</p> 
 <p>2. God told people to “multiply and fill the earth”. They rebelled at Babel.</p>	<p>God created languages and tribal diversity to scatter mankind all over the earth.</p> 
 <p>3. At Kadesh-Barnea, God told Israel to enter the Promised Land. They rebelled.</p>	<p>God raised up the next generation (the children of the rebellious generation) to conquer the Promised Land.</p> 
 <p>4. God would be Israel’s King. They demanded a human king instead.</p>	<p>God says He would choose the king. He selected the final perfect King for His people: King Jesus.</p> 
 <p>5. God offered to restart His visible kingdom on earth after 70 years of exile if the Jews repented. They did not.</p>	<p>God informed Daniel that He would only bring back a remnant of Jews after the 70 years. The restoration of His Kingdom would be postponed. Instead, God introduced the “Age of the Gentiles”.</p> 

Some people wonder what God would have done if all the “Plan As” had happened instead. For example, if the people didn’t rebel at Babel or Israel didn’t demand a human king. We don’t know. Even though God knows all the “what-ifs” (Matthew 11:20–22), He doesn’t tell us. But as the sovereign God, we know His plan for history will never be frustrated.

Now, since the Jews rejected Jesus, what was Yahweh’s “plan B”?

Plan A	Plan B
<p>Jesus offered to restart the Kingdom with Him as the King. But the Jews rejected Him.</p> 	<p>Jesus extends the Kingdom invitation to Gentiles throughout the world. Satan fiercely fights against God in this. But Jesus will finally rid the earth of both Jews and Gentiles who reject His Kingdom invitation.</p>
	

So, this is what happened in history and what happened when the Jews rejected Jesus.





D. Jesus Explains the Interim Period in Eight Parables

Jesus told His disciples what would happen under this “Plan B” (Matthew 13), but instead of telling them plainly, He used parables or stories.

Matthew 13:10–17

¹⁰ His disciples came and asked him, “Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?”

¹¹ He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. ¹² To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.

¹³ That is why I use these parables,
For they look, but they don’t really see.

They hear, but they don’t really listen or understand.

¹⁴ This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says,
‘When you hear what I say,
you will not understand.
When you see what I do,
you will not comprehend.

¹⁵ For the hearts of these people are hardened,
and their ears cannot hear,
and they have closed their eyes—
so their eyes cannot see,
and their ears cannot hear,
and their hearts cannot understand,
and they cannot turn to me
and let me heal them.’

¹⁶ “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.

¹⁷ I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn’t see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn’t hear it.

The reason why Jesus uses parables:

to **share truth** with those who are open to God and to **hide truth** from those who have already rejected His message



What “secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven” (verse 11) was Jesus hiding? Was it the message of the gospel and how to be saved from eternal death?

No! God wants all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4)! Since the garden of Eden, Yahweh has been steadily providing more and more details about His solution to man’s sin problem.

In the Bible, the word “secrets” is also translated as “mysteries”. It refers to information that man would never know unless God reveals it.

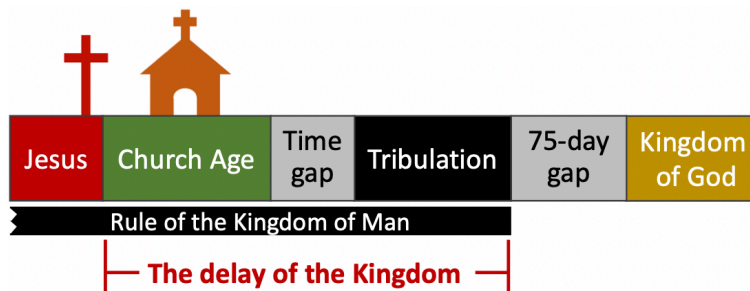


Jesus told His disciples that even the Old Testament prophets didn’t know what He was about to tell them. This was because Yahweh never revealed His plan about this delay or interim period to earlier prophets. (He probably didn’t need to while He was still offering “Plan A” to the Jews.)

But with the Jews’ rejection of their Messiah, Jesus would now tell His disciples about this delay or interim phase of the Kingdom. And He would deliberately use parables so that:

- those who already had hard hearts and didn’t believe Him would not understand but
- those who believed and were willing to listen would be able to prepare themselves for the coming interim period.

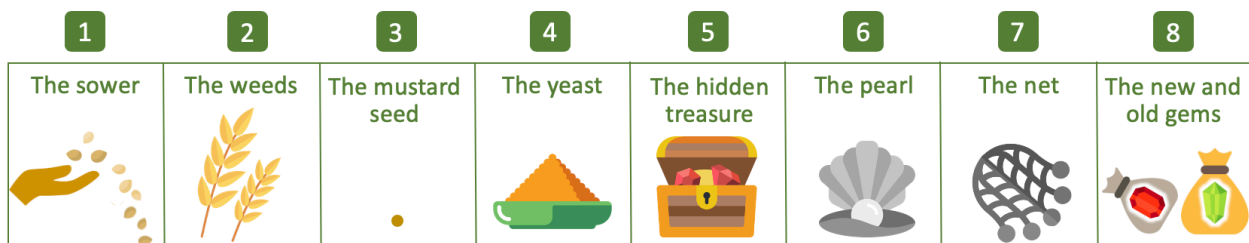
It is important to understand that the “secrets” or “mysteries of the Kingdom” are not about the Kingdom itself. Rather, they are about **what to expect in the delay or interim phase of the Kingdom** before the Kingdom of God physically returns.



Jesus talked about:

- How He would **create citizens** who would be ready to occupy the Kingdom.
- **What Satan would do** to fight this work.
- How the Kingdom would actually **come**.

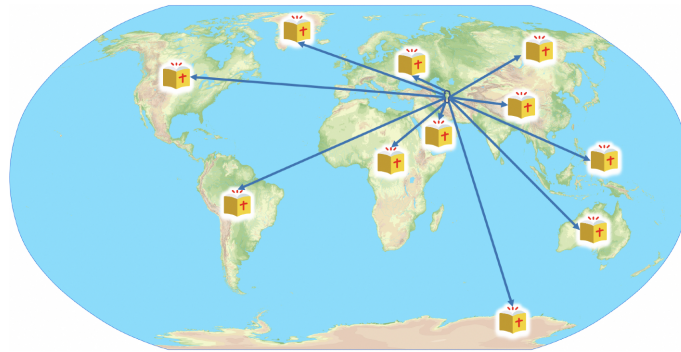
Jesus told His disciples eight parables that very day.



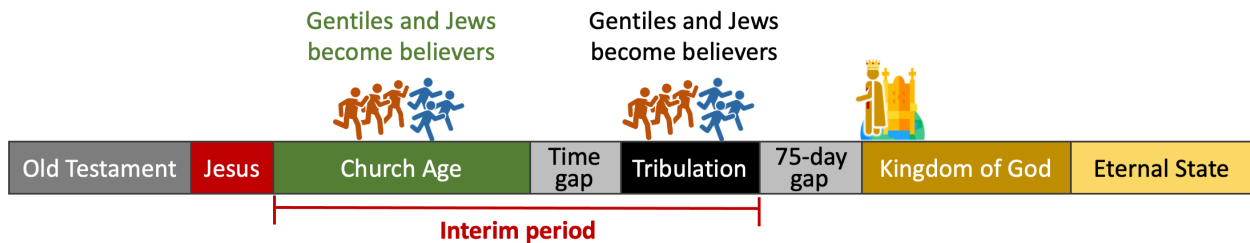
Each parable revealed one truth about this interim period. Many started with the phrase, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like...”

Through these eight related parables, Jesus explained that during this interim period:

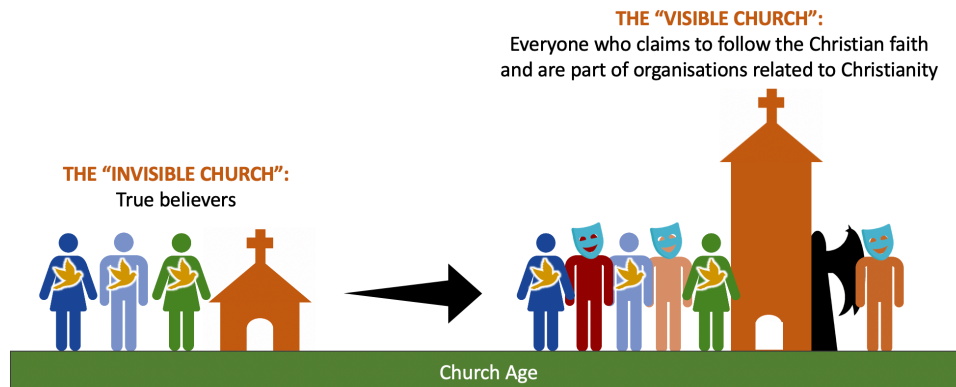
- The good news of God’s salvation would spread outside of Israel to all the world.



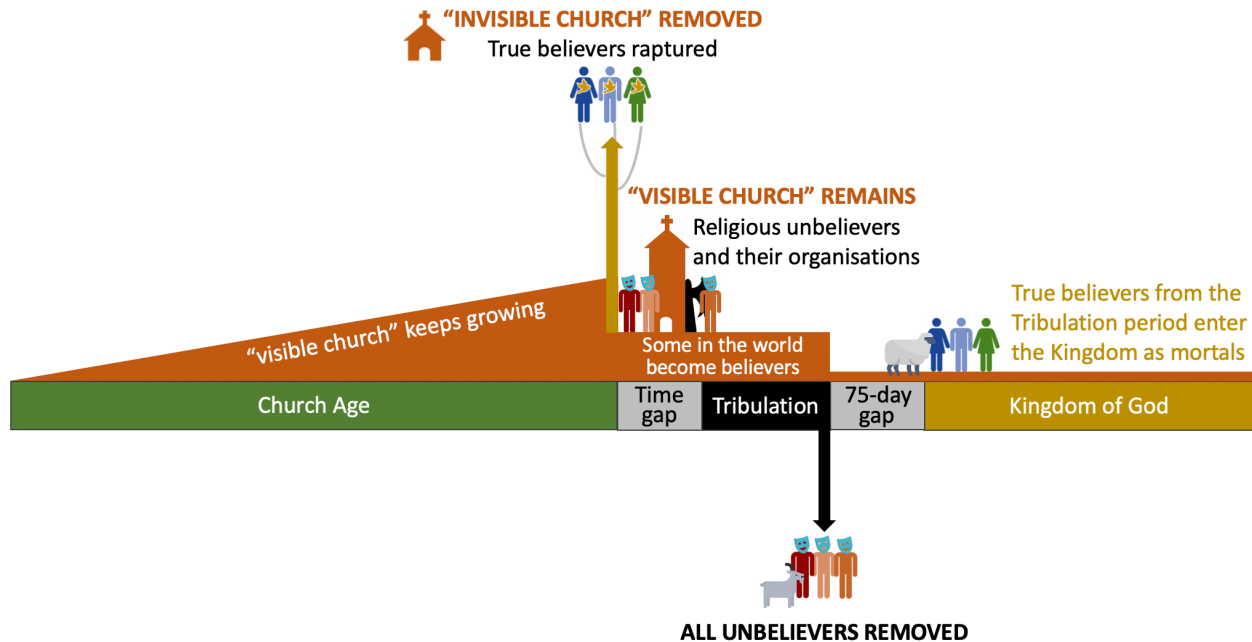
- He would start gathering citizens for the coming Kingdom from both Gentiles and Jews, first in the church age and later, during the brief time of the Tribulation.



- The true or “invisible” church, made up of true believers in Christ, would grow throughout the church age. (It’s “invisible” because only God can see into the hearts of people and know who are true believers.) But Satan would gradually corrupt this group by bringing in religious unbelievers who would claim to follow the Christian faith and were parts of organisations related to Christianity. This corrupted mix would be the “visible church”. These religious unbelievers would distract the church from its main mission of taking the gospel to the world.



- Jesus would end the church age by removing all true believers in Christ, that is, the true or invisible church. This event is known as the rapture. He would leave behind a mere “shell” of Christianity made up of religious unbelievers and their organisations. He would then put the world through the Tribulation.



- At the end of the Tribulation, He would come to remove unbelievers through judgment. He would do this to save those who had responded in faith to the gospel during this seven-year period. Those who were saved would remain on earth and enter His Kingdom. With that, the interim period would end.

Jesus started by telling and explaining the meaning of two of the parables to His disciples: (i) the sower and (ii) the weeds.



Parable 1: The sower

Matthew 13:3–9, 18–23

³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.
⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.
⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.
⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.
⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.
⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.
⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

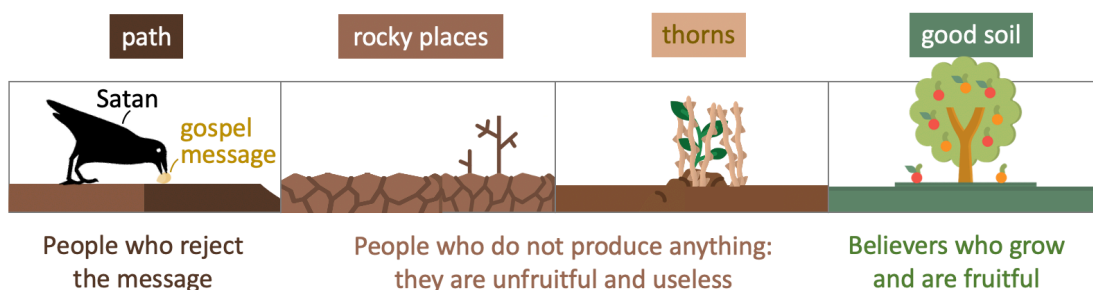
¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches

away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Commentary

This is the first parable that Jesus explains in detail.

1. The **farmer**, or sower, is Jesus Himself (Jesus says this in the parable of the weeds).
2. The **seeds** are the gospel message. The “farmer went out to sow” means the gospel will spread beyond Israel to the whole world.
3. There are various responses to the gospel.
 - The “**good soil**” are believers who grow and produce crop (good works). They are all fruitful but to different degrees (100 times, 60 times or 30 times the crop).
 - The “**hard path**” are people who reject the gospel. The birds are agents of the evil one (Satan) who take away the gospel message because the person has rejected it.
 - Both the “**rocky ground**” and the “**thorny ground**” do not produce anything. Trouble, persecution, worries of life and the distraction of wealth cause them to be unfruitful and useless. They might be fake believers or failed believers, but the point of the parable is that they are unfruitful.



Jesus is saying that during the interim period, the gospel will go out into the world but most people will not respond positively. It will have different impact on different people. Some will reject the gospel and some will believe. But only one group will be fruitful.

We should therefore not be surprised when we see various negative responses to the message of the gospel. Nor should we be discouraged when it doesn't seem to transform our culture.



Parable 2: The wheat and the weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

²⁴ Here is another story Jesus told: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. ²⁵ But that night as the workers slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat, then slipped away. ²⁶ When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew.

²⁷ “The farmer’s workers went to him and said, ‘Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?’

²⁸ “‘An enemy has done this!’ the farmer exclaimed.

“‘Should we pull out the weeds?’ they asked.

²⁹ “‘No,’ he replied, ‘you’ll uproot the wheat if you do. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, and burn them, and to put the wheat in the barn.’”

³⁶ Then, leaving the crowds outside, Jesus went into the house. His disciples said, “Please explain to us the story of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷ Jesus replied, “The Son of Man is the farmer who plants the good seed. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one. ³⁹ The enemy who planted the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the harvesters are the angels.

⁴⁰ “Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!



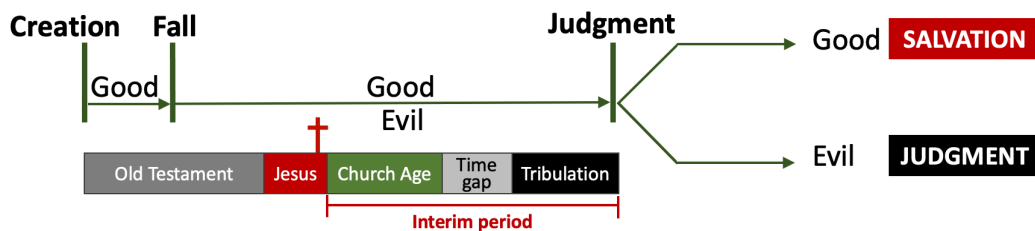
Commentary

This is the second parable that Jesus explains in detail.

During this interim period, Jesus is planting wheat (believers). But Satan will actively plant weeds (unbelievers) among the believers. The weed mentioned is the darnel, a type of ryegrass that looks just like wheat! Jesus is saying that these unbelievers will look and behave like believers, but they are not. And He will tolerate this mix for a time.



At the end of the interim period, Jesus returns at His second coming to judge and save. (Remember: judgment and salvation always go together.) He will separate believers from unbelievers. Believers will enter the Kingdom, while unbelievers will be removed from the earth and thrown into the lake of fire.



So we must not be surprised to discover evil and unbelievers mixed in with believers. We need to be aware that not every person who claims to be a believer is actually one.

Jesus only explained these first two parables. But then He went on to tell more that He didn't explain or interpret for His disciples! How was He expecting His disciples to understand them correctly?

Thankfully, Jesus gave them some guidance through the last parable He told.



Parable 8: The new and old gems

After Jesus told the first seven parables, He stopped to ask His disciples if they understood what He said.

Matthew 13:51–52

⁵¹ Do you understand all these things?"

"Yes," they said, "we do."

⁵² Then he added, "Every teacher of religious law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a homeowner who brings from his storeroom new gems of truth as well as old."

Commentary

Why does Jesus ask if the disciples understood? What does this parable mean?

Jesus is saying that all believer-disciples who want to understand what He is teaching need to go back into Scripture (the **storeroom**). They need to compare His new revelation (**new gems**) with what they have learnt in the Old Testament (**old gems**).



In other words, study the Old Testament prophecies and the covenant promises about the Kingdom of God and fit them together with all the new information that Jesus had just given them.

This would help them get a better understanding of God's "Plan B" for the coming Kingdom—a plan that graciously allowed many Gentiles living around the world to receive the Messiah and enter His Kingdom.

If we were to apply Jesus' advice and turn to old truths that God had revealed earlier, how would we understand the other five parables? We will go through each one in turn.

● Parable 3: The mustard seed

Matthew 13:31–32

³¹ Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.”

Commentary

It is important to know that a mustard seed doesn’t grow into a tree. It grows into a bush.



Left: Mustard plants in the Valley of Elah, Israel

Right: Flowers of mustard, lupine and anemone in the Valley of Elah, Israel

1. As with the parable of the wheat and weeds, we understand that the **mustard seed** represents the small, initial group of believers. This is the beginning of the church. Then it grows to be the largest of garden plants, but then something abnormal happens—it grows into a tree! Jesus is saying the church will turn into something abnormal. It will get corrupted.



2. And then **birds** build nests in the tree. The parable of the sower tells us that the birds are agents of Satan. Once again, Jesus warns that Satan will disrupt the church by planting unbelievers in it.

This is not the first time the Bible describes a large tree with birds in them. During the time of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king, had a vision of such a tree.

Daniel 4:10–12, 19–22

¹⁰ “While I was lying in my bed, this is what I dreamed. I saw a large tree in the middle of the earth. ¹¹ The tree grew very tall and strong, reaching high into the heavens for all the world to see. ¹² It had fresh green leaves, and it was loaded with fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived in its shade, and birds nested in its branches. All the world was fed from this tree.

¹⁹ “Upon hearing this, Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar) was overcome for a time, frightened by the meaning of the dream. Then the king said to him, ‘Belteshazzar, don’t be alarmed by the dream and what it means.’

“Belteshazzar replied, ‘I wish the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my lord, and not to you!’ ²⁰ The tree you saw was growing very tall and strong, reaching high into the heavens for all the world to see. ²¹ It had fresh green leaves and was loaded with fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived in its shade, and birds nested in its branches.

²² That tree, Your Majesty, is you. For you have grown strong and great; your greatness reaches up to heaven, and your rule to the ends of the earth.

In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the tree represented his pagan kingdom, the Kingdom of Man. It was a proud, powerful kingdom but in the end, Yahweh cut it down (Daniel 4:13–14).

The prophet Ezekiel was also given a vision of a tree that represented another proud king and his kingdom. This time it was Egypt.

Ezekiel 31:1–6

¹ On June 21, during the eleventh year of King Jehoiachin’s captivity, this message came to me from the LORD: ² “Son of man, give this message to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and all his hordes:

“To whom would you compare your greatness?

³ You are like mighty Assyria,
which was once like a cedar of Lebanon,
with beautiful branches that cast deep forest shade
and with its top high among the clouds.

⁴ Deep springs watered it
and helped it to grow tall and luxuriant.
The water flowed around it like a river,
streaming to all the trees nearby.

⁵ This great tree towered high,
higher than all the other trees around it.
It prospered and grew long thick branches
because of all the water at its roots.

⁶ The birds nested in its branches,
and in its shade all the wild animals gave birth.
All the great nations of the world
lived in its shadow.

The great tree was Egypt, the evil Kingdom of Man. Its fate was the same. Yahweh cut it down (Ezekiel 31:11–12).

Both these visions of great trees were Old Testament symbols of pagan kingdoms with earthly greatness, worldly importance and who provided shelter for other nations. But they were proud and arrogant.



By using this same picture, Jesus is saying that:

- His church will also be impacted by pride issues.
- the church will also shelter the birds, who are Satan's agents.
- the church will grow big and corrupted over time.



Parable 4: The yeast

Matthew 13:33

Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”



Commentary

Following Jesus' example of how He interprets the parables, we need to understand the symbols.

1. Jesus Himself warns His disciples to be careful of the “yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees”. This is what He says.

Matthew 16:11–12

¹¹ Why can't you understand that I'm not talking about bread? So again I say, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.'”

¹² Then at last they understood that he wasn't speaking about the yeast in bread, but about the deceptive teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jesus is warning the disciples not to be under the evil influence of the Jewish leaders. Many of them are not believers but are pretending to be. They are hypocrites. The yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees that Jesus is referring to is false teaching.



The apostle Paul later confirms this.

Galatians 5:9

This false teaching is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough!

2. Interestingly, the person in this parable is a **woman**, rather than a man. All the other parables in this series have a man who represents Jesus. By using a woman, we know she does not represent God. This woman worked the yeast into a **big batch of dough** (about 27 kg or 60 lb) until the yeast spread through all of it.



Rather than thinking that the woman was doing something good, Jesus warns His disciples again that the church will be influenced by false teaching, evil and hypocrisy. Don't be naive but be prepared! We need to guard against these things.

Does Satan work in the same way during the interim period as he did in the past?

It appears that Satan makes more direct attacks against believers during the interim period.

In the past, God worked His plans for the whole world through the **nation** of Israel. And Israel's main enemies were other nations such as Syria, Egypt, Assyria and Babylon.

However, in the interim period, God specifically reaches out to **individual** Gentiles and Jews throughout the world with the good news about what the Messiah has done. Believers then are made up of an international group of people, living in different nations and speaking different languages.

But just as God reaches out more directly to individuals during the interim period, Satan also makes more direct attacks against believers. How do we know this? The apostle Paul explains who the enemies of believers are during the interim period.

Ephesians 6:10–13

¹⁰ A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. ¹² For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

¹³ Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.

There is no doubt that Satan was active in the past such as when he:

- tempted King David to take a census to prove his military strength (1 Chronicles 21:1)
- interfered in Job's life (Job 1:6–12, 2:1–7)
- accused Jeshua the high priest in front of God (Zechariah 3:1–5).

However, based on what Paul said in Ephesians, it appears that in the interim age, Satan attacks believers in a more intentional, direct and specific way than in the past.

In fact, Satan is now called the “god of this world” and he works to blind every person to Christ and His gospel.

2 Corinthians 4:4

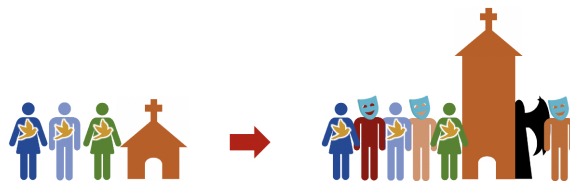
Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

Satan has taken control of the world and is now its illegal ruler. His kingdom, often called “the world”, hates everyone who has left it to join Christ.

John 15:18–19

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. ¹⁹ The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.

In the Matthew 13 parables of the mustard seed and the yeast, Jesus describes the evil character of this time period where Satan is intentionally planting false teaching within the group of believers to corrupt it.



But every believer of Christ through faith can defeat Satan and his evil world.

1 John 5:4–5, 19

⁴ For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. ⁵ And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

¹⁹ We know that we are children of God and that the world around us is under the control of the evil one.

The New Testament writers warn of Satan's continued and direct attacks on the followers of Christ, especially through the use of bad or false teaching. We need to be alert as we study Scripture so that we don't fall for Satan's false teaching.



Parable 5: The hidden treasure

Matthew 13:44

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.”

Commentary

What is the treasure? Who is the man? Has the Bible used these symbols before?

1. In the Old Testament, Yahweh called Israel His **treasure**.

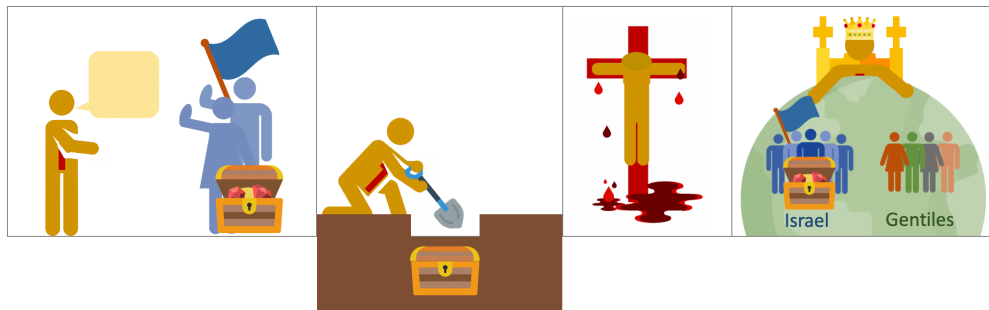
Exodus 19:5–6

⁵ Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. ⁶ And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.’ This is the message you must give to the people of Israel.”



The Israelites are God’s treasure! (See also Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; Psalm 135:4.) Yahweh had placed them into the world (“the field” is the world as shown in the parable of the wheat and the weeds) to bless the world but they had failed in their mission.

2. Who is the **man**? Following the examples of the previous parables, the man is Jesus.
 - As their rightful King, when He comes to earth, He first goes to Israel, His treasure.
 - But they rejected Him, so He will now put them aside for a time by “burying” them. But they won’t stay buried forever because He intends to come back to claim them.
 - He sold everything He owned, that is, gave His life, in order to “buy back” (redeem) His treasured people. But interestingly, He not only bought the treasure, but the entire field, that is, the whole world.



In this parable, Jesus is saying that in the future, He will come back for the Jews.



Parable 6: The pearl of great value

Matthew 13:45–46

⁴⁵ “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls.

⁴⁶ When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!

Commentary

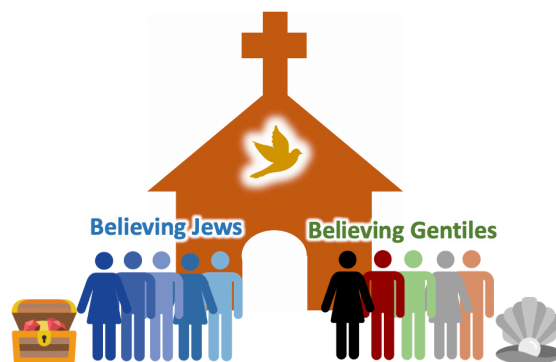
Who is the man, and what or who is the pearl?

1. The **man** is the consistent symbol throughout these parables in Matthew 13 so it has to be Jesus.
2. The **pearl** is an interesting choice of symbol because pearls come from oysters which are an unclean food under Mosaic Law (Leviticus 11:9–12). Jews must not eat oysters, so the pearl is not the same as the treasure from the previous parable. The pearl is not Israel.

Who else is of great value? Jesus is referring to the “unclean”, that is, Gentiles who do not follow Mosaic Law. Jesus is giving advance information that He has come to give His life (“sold everything he owned”) for the Gentiles too!



Jesus is telling His disciples that the coming church will be made up of Jews and Gentiles!



This parable is one of hope compared with the earlier ones. While the church will become corrupted, Jesus continues actively seeking believers from outside Israel.

In fact, when Yahweh places the city of New Jerusalem on the new earth, we see something fascinating. The 12 gates into the city each have the name of one of Israel’s tribes. But each gate is made of one gigantic pearl!

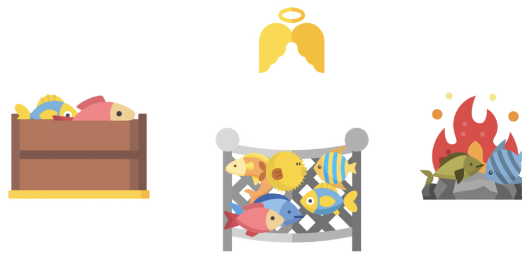
Revelation 21:21

The twelve gates were made of pearls—each gate from a single pearl! And the main street was pure gold, as clear as glass.

New Jerusalem will bear symbols of God’s people who are united in Christ—both Jews and Gentiles!

**Parable 7: The fishing net****Matthew 13:47–50**

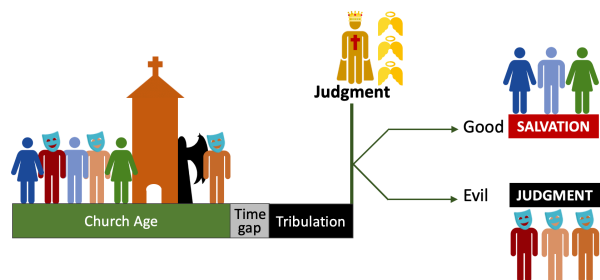
⁴⁷ “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away. ⁴⁹ That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, ⁵⁰ throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**Commentary**

This parable is like the one about the wheat and the weeds.

Jesus makes the point again that in the delay or interim period there will be believers (good fish) and unbelievers (bad fish) mixed together. When Jesus says things multiple times, we should pay attention! Today, believers are surprised or shocked when some “bad fish” are discovered among them. But Jesus warns there are many! So we should stop being shocked!

This also means that no matter how hard we try to sort things out, there will always be a mix of believers and unbelievers in any group of “Christians”. But at His second coming, Jesus, along with His angels, will finally separate the bad fish from the good. Not man.



Are parables moral stories that even children can understand?

Everyone loves stories. The parables in the Bible are taught even to small children. But often, they are given a moral twist: “What can we learn from it so that we can become good people?” Was that God’s intention?

Even we who read the parables sometimes give meanings to the different symbols based on our own experience or preference.

For example, we love nature and because God created trees and birds, we immediately assume the tree and the birds in the parable of the mustard seed are good.



However, we need to remember that Jesus told parables purposely to hide information from those who are hard-hearted towards Him.

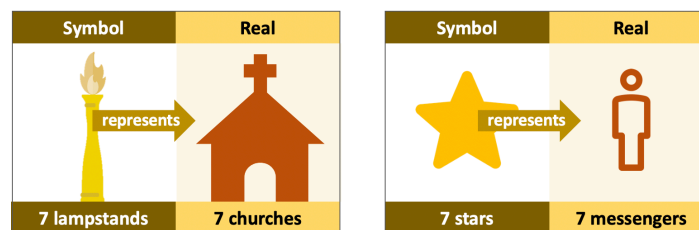
One of Jesus’ purpose for parables: **Hide Truth**



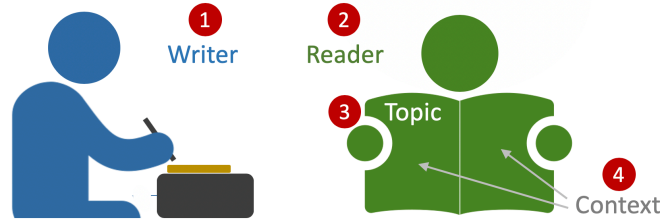
This means the parables’ meanings are not obvious. We would be wrong to think that anyone can interpret and understand them.

Jesus means to share the information with believers only. So in the parable of the new and old gems, Jesus gives His disciples the “key” to interpreting and understanding parables. In fact, in the Bible, we learn some interesting guidelines on understanding symbols.

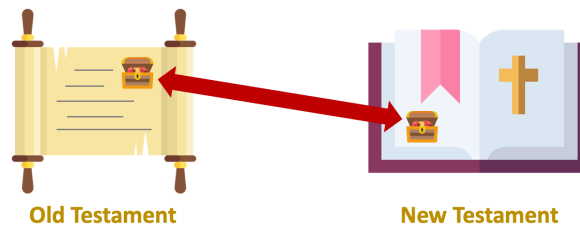
1. We must not make up our own meanings about the different symbols. Each parable and its **symbols have specific meaning**. (See for example Revelation 1:20.)



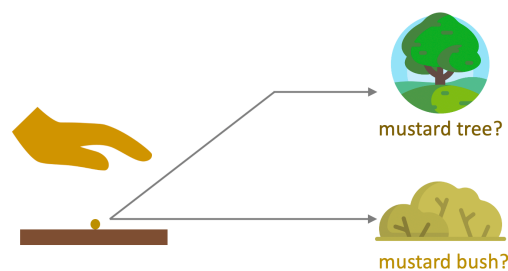
2. **Look at the immediate context.** Who is the speaker and audience? What is the topic of discussion? What event happened before and after that? Does the context give an interpretation of the symbol?



3. Has the **symbol appeared before** in the Bible and especially in the Old Testament? Did God Himself interpret what the symbol means?

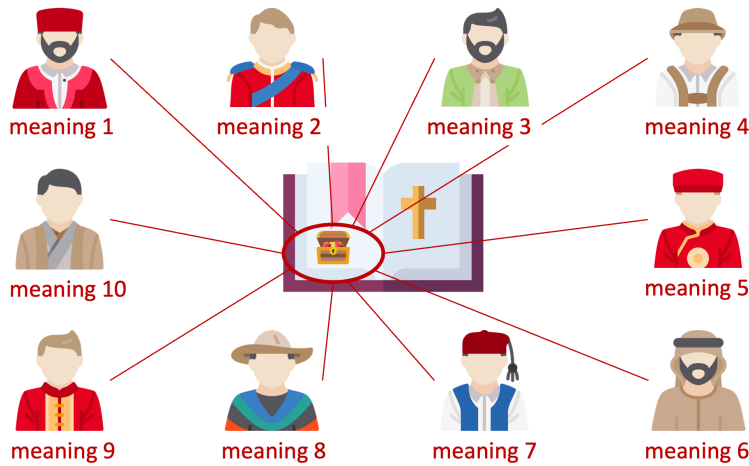


4. Have we diligently **studied the details** given? Nothing in the Bible is random. For example, God didn't make a mistake when He said that the mustard seed turned into a tree. There are details that He wants us to understand.



We must remember that God wrote the Bible to be understood. No one writes an article, book or letter or even says things just so people can interpret it however they want. **There is a right and wrong way to understand the writer or speaker.** They actually have a specific message to communicate. We would not think of making up our own meanings.

Yet when it comes to the Bible, we assume we can insert whatever meaning we want so that Scripture can mean different things to different people. We use our own culture and traditions to interpret the symbols and pictures in the Bible. We think since God is infinite, His Word can have many meanings. We need to be careful not to think that way.



Instead, we need to remember that God meant the Bible to be read and understood by people of every nation, culture and language over centuries of time. To ensure correct understanding, oftentimes, God Himself provides the interpretation of words and symbols through events and explanation.

Let us humbly and with a teachable attitude ask the Holy Spirit to teach us what the Bible means, to correct us when we are wrong in our understanding, and to continually help us understand things from God's perspective and not insert our own man-made ideas into His Word.



All believers need the Holy Spirit's help to understand, not just the parables, but the whole Bible. This is because biblical truth can only be rightly understood through the Spirit.

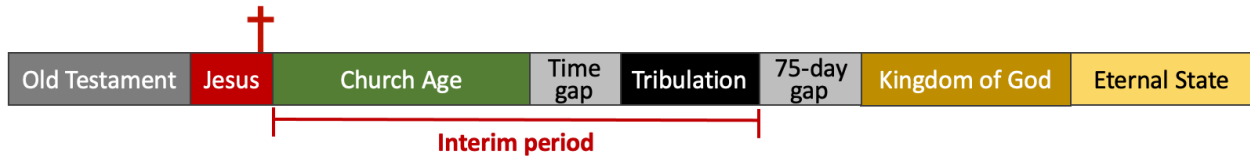
1 Corinthians 2:14

But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.



E. The Mystery: the Church

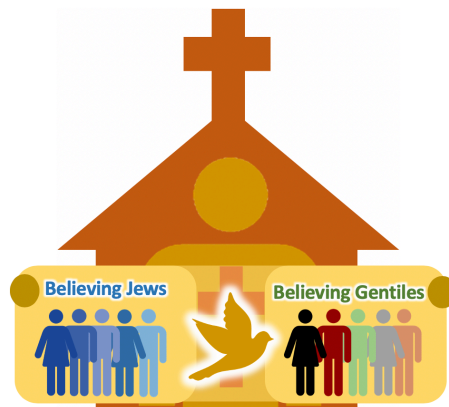
With these eight parables, Jesus told His disciples about this delay or interim period. During this time, He would start the previously unannounced church.



Later, Jesus' appointed apostles shared more with believers everywhere. The apostle Paul wrote about how the church was a mystery that was never revealed by Jesus until the timing was right.

Ephesians 3:1–6

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—
² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.



Paul gave more details about this mystery church age. Believing Gentiles and Jews would be joined together as one body with Christ as the head!

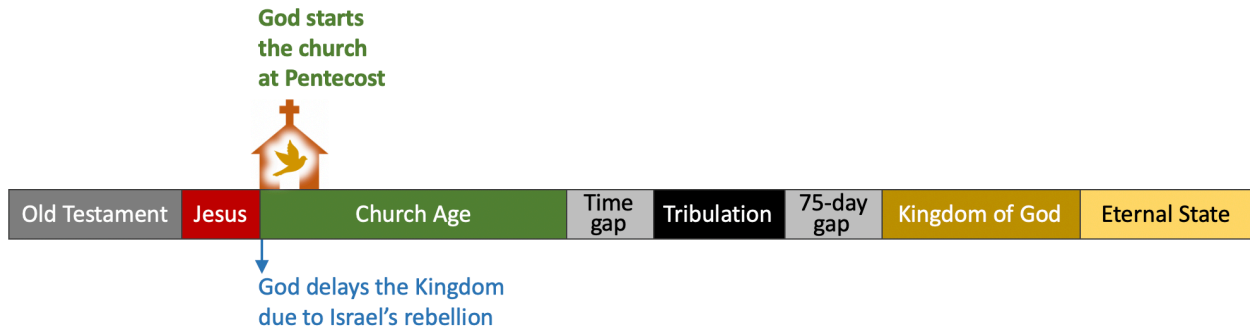
On the day of Pentecost, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to earth to start the church.

Acts 2:1–4

¹ On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. ² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.



In Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell believers. (We will study this in a later lesson.) But now, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell all believers! This was how He started the church!

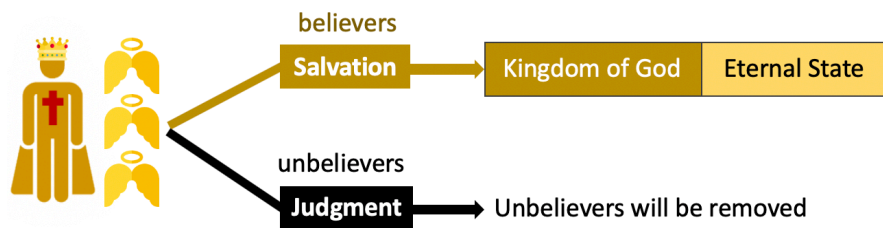


Jesus delayed the return of the Kingdom of God but started the church age because the Jews continued to rebel against Him.

- During this time, He is busy “sowing seed” that will produce citizens for the coming Kingdom.
- At the same time, He is patiently allowing Satan’s evil influence to grow on the earth.

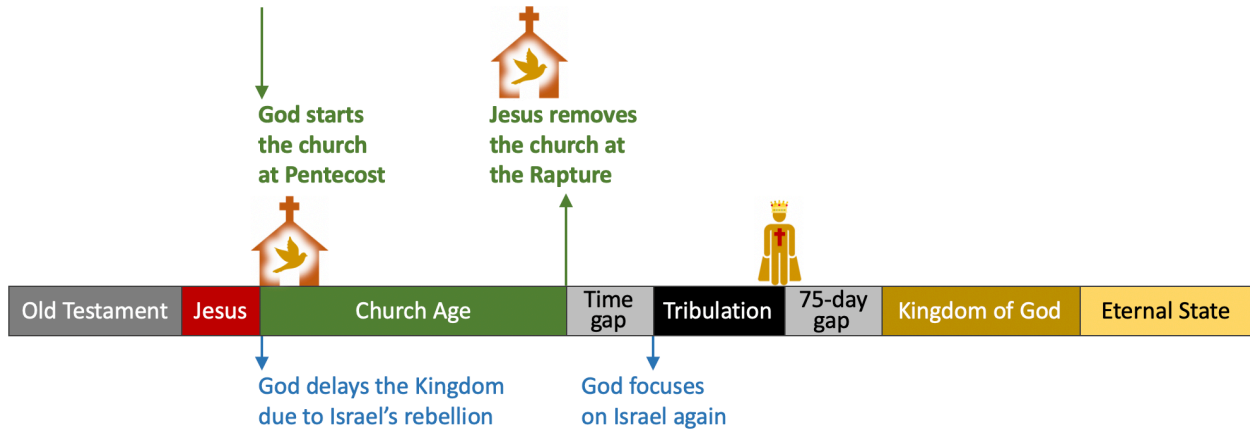
But how will God bring in the Kingdom in the future?

In the two parables, “the weeds” and “the net”, Jesus said that at the end of the world, at His second coming, His angels would separate good from evil. This separation would affect all Jews and Gentiles living at that time.



F. The End of the Interim Period

God will end the interim period with Jesus’ second coming. But before Jesus returns, God will specifically turn His attention back to the Jews (Romans 11:11–27). Yahweh will use the Tribulation to discipline them severely. It will be a terrible time like no other (Deuteronomy 4:30–31; Jeremiah 30:4–7). This will cause many of them to believe in their Messiah. And He will remove those who continue in their rebellion.



To be clear, the purpose of the Tribulation is to rid Israel of rebellion and unbelief. The Tribulation is mainly about Israel.






But before the Tribulation judgments begin, we believe God will end the church age by removing the body of Christ, the church.

Why do we believe this? Here are four reasons.

1. This would be consistent with Yahweh’s pattern of judgment/salvation.

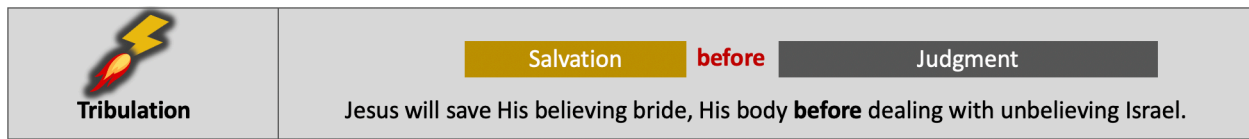
In the Bible, we see that whenever God judges, He first saves. God saves those who believe in Him and only judges those who reject Him. He does not put those who believe in Him through the judgment of unbelief.

YAHWEH’S PATTERN OF JUDGMENT / SALVATION

 The Flood	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>God saved believing Noah and family before He destroyed the unbelieving world.</p>
 Sodom and Gomorrah	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>God saved believing Lot and his daughters before destroying the two unbelieving cities.</p>
 The Passover	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>God saved the believing Israelites before killing the firstborns of unbelieving Egyptians.</p>

In all these historical events, God saved the believers before the judgment, not after the judgment started, not partway through the judgment and not after the judgment.

So before Yahweh brings in the time of Tribulation, which is meant for the Jews, we believe He will also save the believers, the church, from this time of judgment.



The book of Revelation tells us about God’s “wrath” or how He “pours out His anger” on the wicked world.

But Paul says Jesus will not pour out His wrath or punishment on believers when He returns. This information is supposed to assure and calm us.

1 Thessalonians 5:9–11

⁹ For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us.

¹⁰ Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. ¹¹ So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

2. Revelation 4–18 describes the events leading to the Tribulation and the Tribulation itself, but throughout all these chapters, the church (“ekklesia” in Greek), is not mentioned at all.

Book of Revelation	Chapters 1-3	Chapters 4-18	Chapters 19-20	Chapters 21-22
What it is about	Church age	Tribulation	Kingdom of God	Eternal State
Number of times the church is mentioned	19 times	Zero	1 time (Church is called the Bride)	1 time

Also, Jesus said to the church in Philadelphia:

Revelation 3:10

“Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world.”

This “time of testing” is the Tribulation. Jesus says He will not let church-age believers suffer the judgments at the end of the interim period. How do we know this promise applies to all believers in the church age?

It is because Jesus says that it applies to the “churches” (Revelation 3:13).

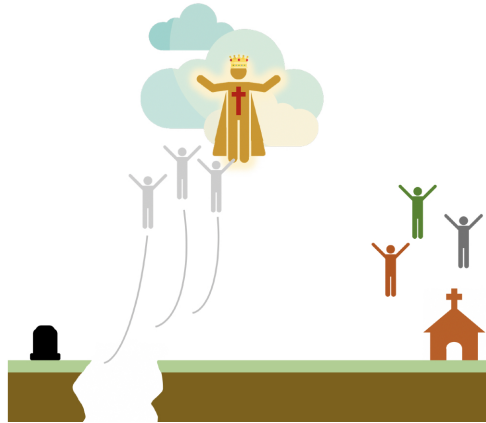
Also, taking all that the Bible teaches, we see that the promises Jesus made to the believers of the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 are also true for all church-age believers (for example, eternal life, eternal rewards, ruling with Jesus, etc.). We will study this in greater detail in a later lesson.

3. Paul explained that believers (those who are alive at that time and those who have already died) will meet the Lord Jesus in the sky!

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (NIV)

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.



Note: Only those who are “in Christ” will be caught up to meet Jesus. Who are they? They are church-age believers, the ones who have the Holy Spirit living in them permanently.

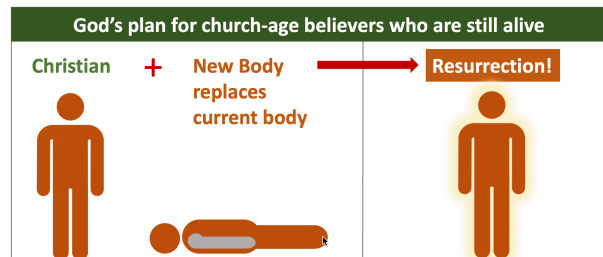
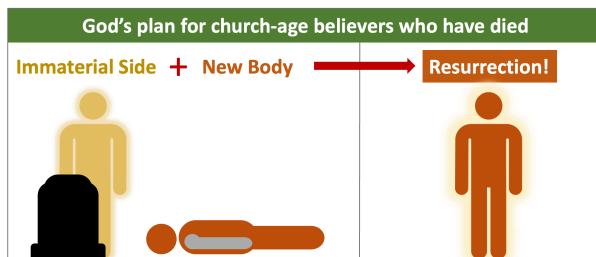
Though Old Testament believers are saved by Christ, they are never described as being “in Christ”, so they are not involved in this “catching up in the air”. Their resurrection will be at the end of the Tribulation. (We will study this in a later lesson.)

The Bible uses the Greek word “*harpazo*” which means to “carry off by force” or “to snatch away” to describe this event. When the Bible was translated into Latin, the word “*rapio*” was used. From this we get the English term “rapture”.

4. Paul said that at the rapture, God will give church-age believers resurrection bodies! But God is only revealing this information now.

1 Corinthians 15:51–53

⁵¹ But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! ⁵² It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. ⁵³ For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.



When Jesus raptures us, we will go with Him back to heaven! This is why Jesus said He is going to prepare a place for us. Our physical resurrection bodies will need a place to stay!

John 14:1–3

¹ “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. ² There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? ³ When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.



And this is how church-age believers will escape the Tribulation. The church will be safe in heaven, preparing to return later with Christ at His second coming (Revelation 19:6–9, 14).

This news is meant to encourage church-age believers. It also warns us to live in a way where we are prepared for the Lord’s any-moment return for us.

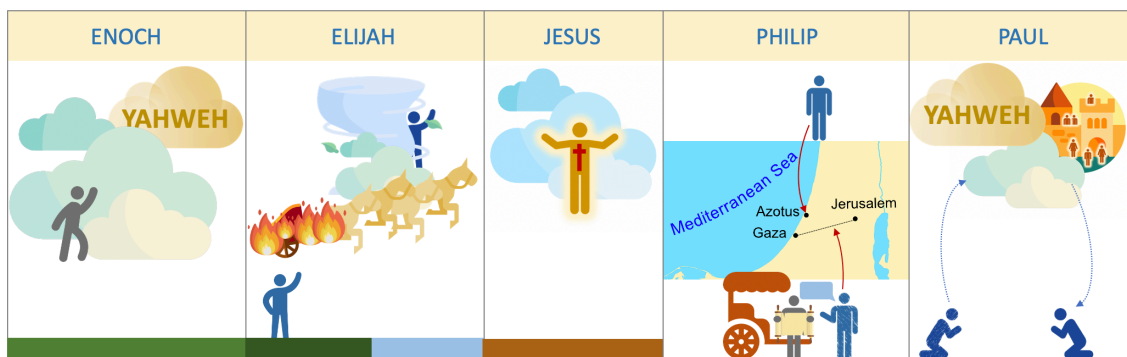
Is there really a rapture? Isn't that the same as the second coming of Christ?

Paul writes about the mystery of the rapture of the church. However, some people have trouble believing that there will be a rapture because it sounds so strange.

Yet, this is not the first time that the Bible records believers being “snatched away” from earth to be with God.

Here are six instances where a live person is “caught up” by God.





1. **Enoch:** God took him directly to heaven without him dying (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5).
2. **Elijah:** He was caught up to heaven in a whirlwind without dying (2 Kings 2:1, 11).
3. **Jesus:** John uses the term “caught up” (Greek: “harpazo”) to describe Christ’s ascension to heaven (Revelation 12:5).
4. **Philip:** He was physically caught up (“harpazo”) by God and vanished from sight. He was not brought to heaven but to another town (Azotus), about 32 km (20 miles) away (Acts 8:39–40).
5. **Paul:** He was caught up (“harpazo”) to heaven and then returned to earth. So when Paul wrote about the rapture of the church, he knew what he was talking about. He had experienced his own personal rapture (2 Corinthians 12:2–4).




6. **The Two Witnesses:** In addition, during the Tribulation, Yahweh sends two witnesses to prophesy for Him. Though they are killed, God resurrects them and He takes them back to heaven in a cloud. (Revelation 11:3, 12.)

In all these instances, the believers are literally and physically transported. So the idea of being physically snatched away to another place is not a new one.

Actually, the idea of Christ coming to take away the church is also found in the phases of a Jewish marriage. Compare the marriage phases to how Christ joins with His bride, the church.

Phases of a Jewish Marriage	Phases of Christ's Marriage to His Church
<p>Phase 1: The father selects a bride for his son</p> <p>The father chooses a suitable bride for his son.</p> 	<p>God the Father selects a bride for His Eternal Son.</p> <p>Ephesians 1:4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and <u>chose us in Christ</u> to be holy and without fault in his eyes.</p>
<p>Phase 2: The betrothal of the bride and groom</p> <p>The groom and bride enter into a binding, legal contract of betrothal.</p> 	<p>Believers are joined to Christ like a bride when they trust Jesus for salvation.</p> <p>2 Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. <u>I promised you as a pure bride to one husband—Christ.</u></p>
<p>Phase 3: The marriage of the bride and groom</p> <p>During the betrothal period, the groom typically goes to prepare the marital home or room.</p>  <p>The father will inspect the room and upon his approval, he will tell the groom to go get his bride.</p> <p>When the groom comes is not known to the bride. She is to be ready at all times. The groom arrives and announces he is taking the bride home. They will then be officially joined as husband and wife.</p> 	<p>Jesus is preparing a home for His bride. At the appointed time, the Father in heaven will tell His Son to go and bring His bride home (John 14:1–3).</p> <p>Christ will then come to take or rapture His bride. She will be presented to Him as a glorious, unblemished bride (Ephesians 5:25–27).</p> <p>Matthew 25:6 “At midnight they were roused by the shout, ‘Look, <u>the bridegroom is coming!</u> Come out and meet him!’</p>

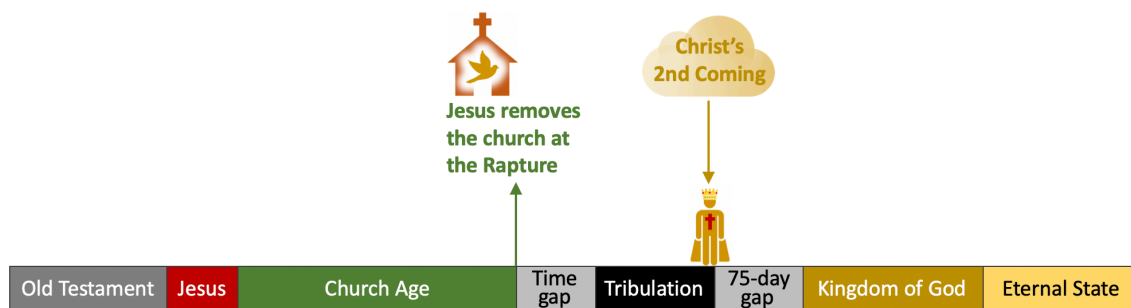
Phases of a Jewish Marriage	Phases of Christ's Marriage to His Church
<p>Phase 4: The marriage feast</p> <p>There is a feast for family and friends to celebrate the marriage. The groom (and not the bride) is the centre of attention.</p> 	<p>Christ and His bride, the church, celebrate with a wedding feast. He is the centre of attention.</p> <p>Revelation 19:6b-7</p> <p>⁶ "Praise the LORD! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. ⁷ Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give <u>honor to him</u>. For the time has come for <u>the wedding feast of the Lamb</u>, and his <u>bride has prepared herself</u>."</p>

It is interesting how Jesus calls the church His bride and also how, when speaking with His disciples, He talks about going to prepare a place for believers and then coming back to get them (John 14:1-3).

Jesus is using the picture of the Jewish marriage to describe the rapture.

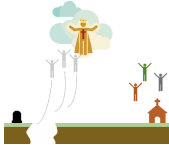


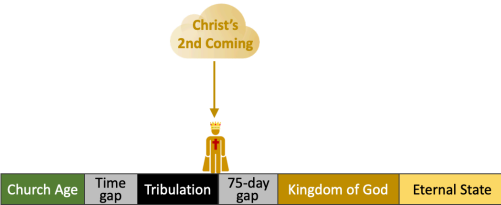

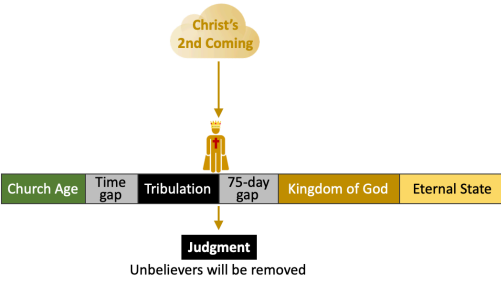




Moreover, importantly, we see that the rapture or "snatching away" is about being taken up.

This is very different from the second coming which is described as a "coming down".



Here is a summary of the different ways the Bible describes the two events. (See the appendix for the full Scripture passages.)

Differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming

Rapture	Second Coming
<p>Jesus COMES FOR His believers. They meet Him IN THE AIR. 1 Thessalonians 4:17.</p> 	<p>Jesus COMES WITH His believers. They return with Him TO THE EARTH. Revelation 19:13–14.</p> 
<p>Occurs BEFORE THE TRIBULATION. 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Revelation 3:10.</p> 	<p>Occurs AFTER THE TRIBULATION. Revelation 19:1–2, 11–16.</p> 
<p>BELIEVERS DEPART. God removes believers from the earth as an ACT OF SALVATION. They don't need to face judgment. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17, 5:9.</p> 	<p>UNBELIEVERS DEPART. God removes unbelievers from the earth, like He did in Noah's day, as an ACT OF JUDGMENT. Matthew 24:37–41.</p> 
<p>NO SIGNS. Happens in an instant without any warning. 1 Corinthians 15:50–54.</p> 	<p>MANY SIGNS. Visible across the whole world. Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:29–30.</p> 
<p>NO SPECIFIC PROPHESED EVENTS NEED TO OCCUR FIRST. Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18.</p> 	<p>SPECIFIC PROPHESED EVENTS MUST OCCUR FIRST. 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Matthew 24:15–30; Revelation 6–18.</p> 

When we read Scripture and carefully lay out the details, we see that the two events are described differently. It leads us to conclude that the two events are not the same.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. The Kingdom of God is embedded deeply into the covenants God made with Israel. How has learning about Jesus' offer and the Jews' rejection of it affect your understanding of the New Testament?
2. Yahweh follows through on His plans, step by step, interacting with mankind as He does. What do you think of the way He directs history? As you think of the Creator-creature distinction and God's sovereignty and man's free will, how does that impact your thinking on how God works out His plans for mankind?
3. Have you thought much about the rapture and Christ's second coming? How has your thinking changed after this lesson? And how should advance knowledge of these coming events impact the way you live your life?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Psalm 2, 110; Daniel 7; Matthew 22:1–10; John 14–16; Acts 1–3

Endnotes

Page 18: The left photograph "EmekHa'Ella11.02.2006(30)" ("Valley of Elah - 30") by Yaniv Ben-Arie, 2006. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-SA 2.0). <https://www.flickr.com/photos/yanivba/98363795/> (Accessed 8 Oct 2022.)

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Appendix: Scripture passages for Rapture vs Second Coming

The table on page 38 has numerous Scripture references. For the convenience of the study, the Bible passages are listed here in full.

Rapture	Second Coming
<p>Jesus COMES FOR His believers. They meet Him IN THE AIR.</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 4:17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to <u>meet the Lord in the air</u>. Then we will be with the Lord forever.</p>	<p>Jesus COMES WITH His believers. They return with Him TO THE EARTH.</p> <p>Revelation 19:13–14 ¹³ He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, <u>followed him on white horses</u>.</p>
<p>Occurs BEFORE THE TRIBULATION.</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, <u>not to pour out his anger on us</u>.</p> <p>Revelation 3:10 "Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, <u>I will protect you from the great time of testing</u> that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world.</p>	<p>Occurs AFTER THE TRIBULATION.</p> <p>Revelation 19:1–2, 11–16 ¹ <u>After this</u>, I heard what sounded like a vast crowd in heaven shouting, "Praise the Lord! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. ² His judgments are true and just. <u>He has punished</u> the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality. <u>He has avenged</u> the murder of his servants."</p> <p>¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. ¹² His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him that no one understood except himself. ¹³ He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God.</p> <p>¹⁴ The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed him on white horses.</p> <p>¹⁵ From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. <u>He will rule them with an iron rod</u>. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. ¹⁶ On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.</p>

Rapture	Second Coming
<p>BELIEVERS DEPART. God removes believers from the earth as an ACT OF SALVATION. They don't need to face judgment.</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 4:13–17 ¹³ And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so <u>you will not grieve like people who have no hope</u>. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.</p> <p>¹⁵ We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. <u>First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves.</u> ¹⁷ <u>Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.</u> Then we will be with the Lord forever.</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God chose to <u>save us</u> through our Lord Jesus Christ, <u>not to pour out his anger on us</u>.</p>	<p>UNBELIEVERS DEPART. God removes unbelievers from the earth, like He did in Noah's day, as an ACT OF JUDGMENT.</p> <p>Matthew 24:37–41 ³⁷ "When the Son of Man returns, it will be <u>like it was in Noah's day</u>. ³⁸ In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. ³⁹ People didn't realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. <u>That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes</u>.</p> <p>⁴⁰ "Two men will be working together in the field; one will be <u>taken</u>, the other <u>left</u>. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be <u>taken</u>, the other <u>left</u>.</p> <p>(Note: Jesus is saying that at the Flood event, unrepentant, rebellious people were removed from the earth. Now, at the second coming, it will be the same: unrepentant, rebellious people will be removed from the earth, leaving behind only believers.)</p>
<p>NO SIGNS. Happens in an instant without any warning.</p> <p>1 Corinthians 15:50–54 ⁵⁰ What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.</p> <p>⁵¹ But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but <u>we will all be transformed!</u> ⁵² It will <u>happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye</u>, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. ⁵³ For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; <u>our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies</u>.</p> <p>⁵⁴ Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory.</p>	<p>MANY SIGNS. Visible across the whole world.</p> <p>Revelation 1:7 Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And <u>everyone will see him</u>— even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for him. Yes! Amen!</p> <p>Matthew 24:29–30 ²⁹ "Immediately after the anguish of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will give no light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.</p> <p>³⁰ And then at last, <u>the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens</u>, and there will be <u>deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth</u>. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.</p>

Rapture	Second Coming
<p>NO SPECIFIC PROPHESED EVENTS NEED TO OCCUR FIRST.</p> <p>Titus 2:13 while we <u>look forward with hope</u> to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed.</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. ¹⁷ Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ So <u>encourage each other with these words.</u></p>	<p>SPECIFIC PROPHESED EVENTS MUST OCCUR FIRST.</p> <p>2 Thessalonians 2:4 (Antichrist's action) He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, <u>claiming that he himself is God.</u></p> <p>Matthew 24:15–30 ¹⁵ “The day is coming <u>when you will see</u> what Daniel the prophet spoke about—the <u>sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing in the Holy Place.</u>” (Reader, pay attention!) ¹⁶ “<u>Then</u> those in Judea must flee to the hills. ¹⁷ A person out on the deck of a roof must not go down into the house to pack. ¹⁸ A person out in the field must not return even to get a coat. ¹⁹ How terrible it will be for pregnant women and for nursing mothers in those days. ²⁰ And pray that your flight will not be in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ For there will be greater anguish than at any time since the world began. And it will never be so great again. ²² In fact, unless that time of calamity is shortened, not a single person will survive. But it will be shortened for the sake of God’s chosen ones.</p> <p>²³ “Then if anyone tells you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah,’ or ‘There he is,’ don’t believe it. ²⁴ For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God’s chosen ones. ²⁵ See, I have warned you about this ahead of time.</p> <p>²⁶ “So if someone tells you, ‘Look, the Messiah is out in the desert,’ don’t bother to go and look. Or, ‘Look, he is hiding here,’ don’t believe it! ²⁷ <u>For as the lightning flashes in the east and shines to the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes.</u> ²⁸ Just as the gathering of vultures shows there is a carcass nearby, so these signs indicate that the end is near.</p> <p>²⁹ “<u>Immediately after the anguish of those days,</u> the sun will be darkened, the moon will give no light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.</p> <p>³⁰ <u>And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens,</u> and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.</p> <p>Revelation 16–18 (full chapters) All the events of the Tribulation must occur before the second coming of Christ.</p>