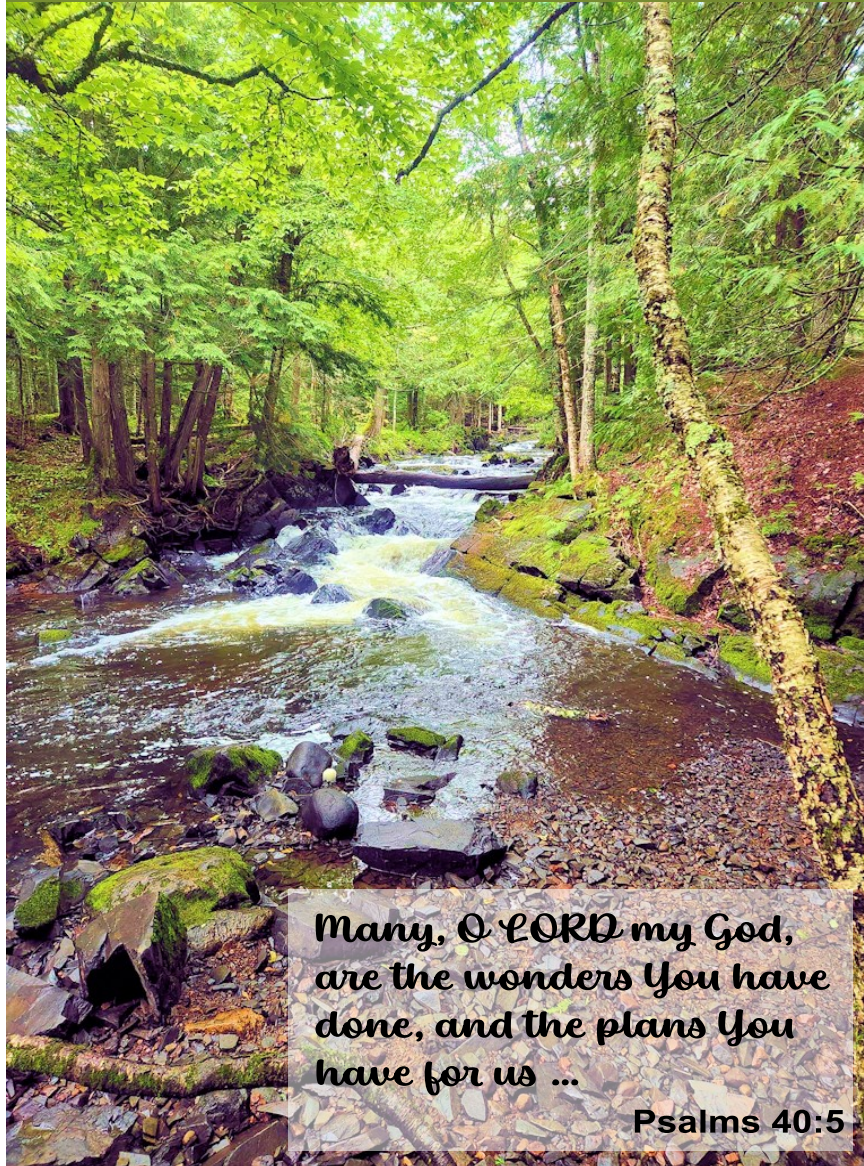


# May 2024 Daily Devotional



*Many, O LORD my God,  
are the wonders You have  
done, and the plans You  
have for us ...*

**Psalms 40:5**

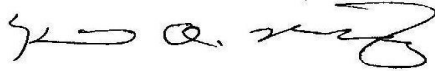
## Vistoso Community Church

## Foreword

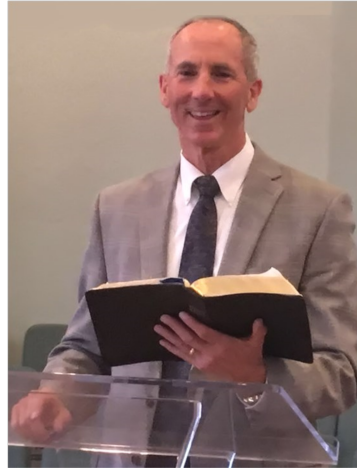
Quite a range of Scripture readings this month, for we will be in Leviticus, Matthew, Acts, and a variety of readings on the subject of the prophetic. The sections on the prophetic future and our readings in Matthew dovetail very nicely. Also I think you will find the selections from Leviticus to be highly interesting.

May God continue to guide you into His truth as you set aside time to read and reflect upon His Word.

In His grace,



Kevin Redig



*All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).*

## Reading Ahead

### Wednesday, May 1: Read Daniel 7:13-22

By opening a discussion on Jesus returning to reign over an earthly kingdom to be established at His coming, I have opened a topic that is beyond the scope of our devotional. But it is both so compelling and so important that we can at least spend several days addressing a few of the basics.

To begin, consider with me a portion of today's reading:

**"... I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His Kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."**

Daniel 7:13-14



After reading this and the surrounding context, it should not be hard to figure out that the Ancient of Days is God the Father, and *one like a Son of Man* is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, what we have is yet another passage that clearly describes the coming reign of Jesus Christ.

Continued on the next page.

## Reading Ahead

**Wednesday, May 1:**

**Read Daniel 7:13-22** (Continued)

Now those who hold that there is no kingdom, or the Church is the one to establish it, put forth a number of arguments to support their positions. Several of the more important are as follows: You cannot take prophecy literally; prophecy has to be interpreted using a different method than the rest of Scripture; Jesus is currently reigning from heaven; and if it is outside our normal experience, then it can't actually happen!

I don't know about you, but none of those sounds like a good enough reason to ignore or set aside what seems to be the clear teaching of Scripture. So, let's just let the Word of God speak for itself and drive our theology. I will make one observation on this topic today and three more tomorrow.

1. Did not the earlier prophecies of Daniel speak of the end of Gentile history and the establishment of an eternal kingdom? Absolutely:

**"... the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever."**

Daniel 2:44

There is nothing here that indicates this should be understood in any way other than the plain meaning of the words used. Just because it is going to take the power of the supernatural to bring it to pass is not a sufficient reason to dismiss it. After all—the God of heaven is omnipotent and sovereign!



## Reading Ahead

### Thursday, May 2: Read Isaiah 9:1-7

So are we going to have a coming kingdom and a coming King? Let's pick up where we left off yesterday:

2. It would seem that redemptive history as described in Genesis 3:15, "... *He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel*" requires Christ to put an end to Satan's ongoing mischief—something like:

**And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.**

Revelation 20:10

3. Ponder this clear declaration to Mary about the coming Christ child:

**"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His Kingdom will never end."**



Luke 1:31-33

Do we think the angel is prophesying the coming of a literal son who will be the Son of the Most High? Of course we do!

Continued on the next page.

## Reading Ahead

**Thursday, May 2:**

**Read Isaiah 9:1-7** (Continued)

Why do we dismiss the idea of a coming literal kingdom while believing in prophecy regarding Jesus' coming? It is not enough to say, "Well, this is being fulfilled by Christ's current reign in heaven." David's throne is not in heaven and neither is the house of Jacob! Those two items clearly refer to an earthly rule, headquartered in Jerusalem, and intimately involving the Jewish people.

There are 59 references to David in the New Testament, and many references to the current session of Christ at the right hand of His Father, but not one single connection between God's promises to David and the current session of Christ at the Father's right hand. That's because Jesus Christ must return to fulfill what is commonly called the Davidic Covenant:

**For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his Kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.**

Isaiah 9:6-7

4. So, where does this leave us? God is going to establish a kingdom that supersedes all Gentile rule. He is going to establish a kingdom in fulfillment of His promises to the Jews. And Jesus, as the King of kings, is going to reign over this everlasting kingdom that fulfills both promises—a kingdom with a world-wide impact headquartered in Jerusalem!

Exciting times are coming!

## Reading Ahead

### Friday, May 3: Read Isaiah Chapter 65

Since we have established a kingdom is coming over which the Lord Jesus Christ will reign, let's investigate the nature of this kingdom. What will it be like? Start with these prophetic verses:

**... reigned with Christ a thousand years.**

Revelation 20:4

**"... They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. ..."**

Isaiah 2:4

**Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.**

Isaiah 9:7

So this coming kingdom is going to last a long time, and it is going to be a time of peace, with Christ Himself promoting righteousness and justice. Wouldn't you agree, His kingdom will be much different than our day?



REVELATION 20:4 WEB

*I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as didn't worship the beast nor his image, and didn't receive the mark on their forehead and on their hand. They lived, and reigned with Christ for the thousand years.*

Continued on the next page.

## Reading Ahead

**Friday, May 3:**

**Read Isaiah Chapter 65** (Continued)

Then, how about this wonderful passage from today's reading:

**"I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in My people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ... They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord ... The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain," says the Lord.**

Isaiah 65:19-25

To allegorize the above, as many have done, is to rob the words of their plain meaning regarding the wonders of the kingdom to come. By the way, to allegorize is to take the words as symbols of some deeper meaning. Go back and read the above prophecy again. Does it read like symbolic language or a description of what God intends to actually do?

Of course, all this is not something that man can bring about. It is in God's timing that Jesus comes as King. What part of the above is outside of the capability of the Lord Jesus Christ as a sovereign, omnipotent King? Why, none of it!



## Reading Ahead

### Monday, May 6: Read Isaiah Chapter 19

Today I want to draw your attention to an absolutely astounding passage! Let me tell you up front, I believe this to be a *kingdom passage*. By that I mean that it is describing the kingdom that is yet to come, the one to be established by God and ruled over by Jesus Christ.

**In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and witness to the Lord Almighty in the land of Egypt. ... So the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the Lord. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings; they will make vows to the Lord and keep them. ... In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria My handiwork, and Israel My inheritance."**

Isaiah 19:19-25



In short, in the coming Kingdom, the Arab peoples are going to worship the one true God, and Arabs and Israelis are going to get along.

Continued on the next page.

## Reading Ahead

**Monday, May 6:**

**Read Isaiah Chapter 19** (Continued)

Read the marvelous ending to the above scripture, and be amazed:

**" ... Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria My handiwork and Israel My inheritance."**

A few questions for you:

1. Isaiah wrote to the Jewish people. Do you suppose He meant this as a series of symbols for the people or hope for the future?
2. Given the events of the recent past, does this seem like something world leaders could accomplish? How about the Church? Let me suggest, that for these events to occur, it is going to take the Most High God reigning among men!
3. Do you believe the Word of God or does this seem so unlikely we should find a way to dismiss it? Let me close by reminding you:

**The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ... The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. ...**

Psalms 19:7-9

*The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul ...*

Psalm 19:7



## Reading Ahead

### Tuesday, May 7: Read Luke 1:26-38

In our effort to understand what God has planned for the future, we have looked at the Scripture that points to: (1) a coming kingdom; (2) over which Jesus is going to reign; (3) in fulfillment of a promise to the Jewish people to have a descendant of David reign forever.

For this reason, Jesus, from the standpoint of His humanity, is said to be *David's greater Son*. We are going to close out this section by looking at what I call the *Terrible Error of Replacement Theology!* In short, this false teaching says that the Church *replaces* Israel, and therefore Christians are God's true *Jews* today.

To be clear, I think this is a terrible error, without any support in Scripture. Further, since it takes away from the plain meaning of Scripture, it tends to greatly lessen its authority, for it forces Scripture to be interpreted allegorically and symbolically. This puts the meaning in the hands of the interpreter, rather than where it belongs—in the will of God! Thus, I will spend several days walking you through the several points on the *Terrible Error of Replacement Theology*.

**First Point.** For the first point, let me show you how muddled becomes the process of trying to understand Scripture once you move away from a *normal approach* to interpreting Scripture. When the angel spoke to Mary, he told her:

**"You will be with Child and give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His Kingdom will never end."**

Luke 1:31-33

Continued on the next page.

## Reading Ahead

**Tuesday, May 7:**

**Read Luke 1:26-38** (Continued)

Do you think Mary was thinking *church* when the angel spoke of David's throne and the house of Jacob? Of course not! For the plain sense of the message to Mary carries no such meaning. Yet, that is exactly how those, who teach that the Church has replaced Israel, force their theology upon the otherwise plain meaning of this Scripture.

Notice how the first *impossible* portion of this passage has already been fulfilled at Jesus' First Coming, so there is no reason to believe that the same God cannot complete the second impossible part of the above prophecy—without forcing the Church into the text! For *nothing is impossible with God*. (Luke 1:37)

**Second Point.** Ponder the second point until tomorrow when we will complete the discussion:

**So when they met together, they asked Him, "Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know the time or the dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power ... and you will be My witnesses ..."**

Acts 1:6-8

The disciples knew all about the very same coming kingdom that we have been learning about. They were looking for it! Jesus declines to comment directly, but did you note how He redirects the disciples' attention to something else!

To what do you suppose Jesus is redirecting His disciples? We'll find out tomorrow.



## Reading Ahead

### Wednesday, May 8: Read Ephesians Chapter 3

Let's pick up where we left off yesterday by looking at a second problem of trying to force the Church to *replace* Israel. Consider again this dialogue just prior to the ascension of Jesus:

**So when they met together, they asked Him, "Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know the time or the dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power ... and you will be My witnesses ..."**

Acts 1:6-8

When the disciples ask Jesus about the coming kingdom, Jesus doesn't answer their question, instead He redirects the disciples attention to what is going to happen very soon. We don't have to wait long to find out what that was. In Acts Chapter 2, the Holy Spirit came in power upon the disciples, and the Church began.

Now, I want you to note something about the Church as described by Paul in today's reading:

**... grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God ... His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known ...**

Ephesians 3:8-10

You see the Kingdom is coming, but it is not yet time for the Lord Jesus to bring to an end Gentile rule. Instead,

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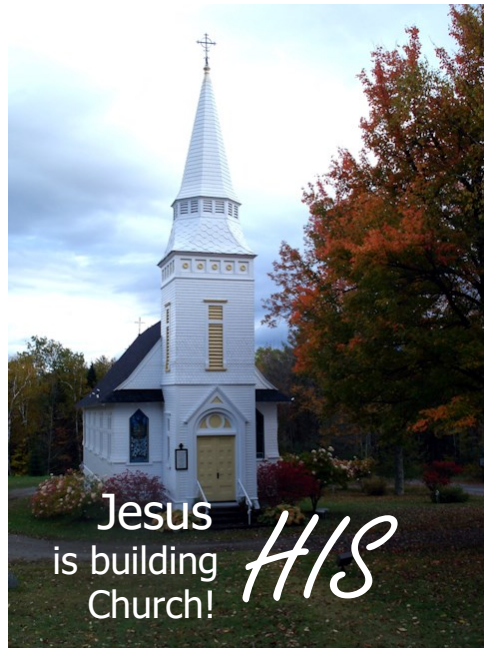
## Reading Ahead

**Wednesday, May 8:**

### **Read Ephesians Chapter 3** (Continued)

He is continuing to unfold His plan of salvation through what Paul calls the *mystery* of the Church. The Greek Word translated *mystery* means something that was hidden in the past, but is now revealed. That is exactly what happens in Acts chapter 2. The Jews have rejected their Messiah, and now the Church springs into existence and spreads outward from Jerusalem to the Gentiles.

As a mystery, the Church is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament, but it has been clearly on display as God's vehicle for manifesting His grace for the past two thousand years. In addition to the wonder of seeing God continue to work to draw mankind to Himself, despite the failure of Israel, I hope you also see how this completely invalidates the idea that the Church is Israel and believers are the true Jews.



Upon the authority of God's Word, the Church is a mystery—something hidden. So what hubris on the part of man to promote a system of theology that takes that which God has declared to be the future of Israel and direct it elsewhere!

## Reading Ahead

### Thursday, May 9: Read Romans Chapter 11

For the past few days I have been trying to make clear the distinction between Israel and the Church. Allow me to spend one more day showing the Biblical support for that distinction, as I do not think it is possible to understand God's plans for the future apart from keeping Israel and the Church distinct from one other. To begin, today's reading describes both the present situation, and the future, for the Jewish people. Note:

**Salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel  
envious.** Romans 11:11

Who are the Gentiles to which Paul refers? Why they are those non-Jewish people who make up the Church in Asia Minor and eastern Europe. If you read through Romans Chapter 11 carefully, you will see Paul makes a very strong distinction between the Church (Gentiles) and Israel throughout! Why is that? Not because one has merged into another, but because they are distinct entities, each with a separate future. Here are a few more of the Scriptural distinctions between the Church and Israel:

1. Israel is a nation with very specific geographic boundaries. The Church consists of those from every tribe and nation and knows no boundaries.
2. Israel has a physical temple where God dwelt. The Church consists of individuals in whom God dwells by His Spirit.
3. Israel's future includes the Lord Jesus reigning from a headquarters in Jerusalem. The Church is a heavenly Bride whose citizenship is in heaven.

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## Reading Ahead

Thursday, May 9:

### Read Romans Chapter 11 (Continued)

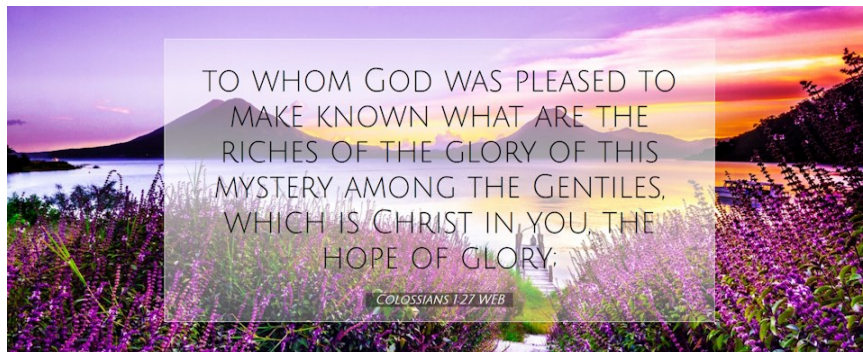
In short, attempting to force the Church into the mold of Israel is really an affront to the nature of the Bride of Christ.

**And He is the head of the body, the Church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.** Colossians 1:18, 27

Search the Old Testament if you will and, although Israel has a glorious heritage in the Lord, you will never find anything even remotely like the description of those who are the Church ever applied to Israel. In fact, ponder this final reason to maintain the unique character of the Church:

*The effort to make the Church all, instead of preserving the true dignity of the Church as the heavenly spouse of the Lord Jesus, lowers her to the position of earthly Israel ... a people reigned over, not reigning with Him, His inheritance, not heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.*

Kelly





## Lessons from Leviticus

### Friday, May 10: Read Leviticus Chapter 23

Some weeks ago, we read the opening chapters of Leviticus and were introduced to the major sacrifices instituted by God for His chosen people, the Israelites. Although this sacrificial system does not apply to us as Church-age Christians, this Old Testament book is still for us, specifically in the way that every Old Testament sacrifice, in one or more ways, points to Christ. In this way, the Jewish people were prepared daily for the coming of the Messiah.

Today we look at a second portion of Leviticus, just Chapter 23, although it will take some time to unravel even a portion of what is there. In Leviticus 23, we have the seven feasts that were prescribed by God for His people. Let me list them for you: *Passover*, the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, the *Feast of Firstfruits*, the *Feast of Weeks* (Pentecost), the *Feast of Trumpets*, the *Day of Atonement*, and the *Feast of Tabernacles*. The first four all happen in the spring. In fact, the first three all happen in the month of Nisan which falls sometime during March or April. It is important to note that Nisan is the beginning of the Jewish religious calendar. This is the first month of the year, religiously speaking, and it corresponds to the Passover and falls in March or April. Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after *Firstfruits*, which puts it roughly at the beginning of summer.

The other three feasts occur in the fall. More important than dividing them by the time of year is to understand that the first four feasts have been fulfilled as the result of the First Coming of Christ. On the other hand, the remaining three feasts speak prophetically, at least in part, of events yet to come. Since the first four have been sovereignly fulfilled, we can have confidence the remaining three will be as well. And so we begin!

## Lessons from Leviticus

### Monday, May 13: Read Exodus Chapter 12 (Leviticus 23:4-5)

On the 14th day of the first month (Nisan), the Jewish people were to celebrate the *Passover*. The Jewish calendar is based on the moon, ours the sun, so there is no exact correlation. That's the reason that Nisan falls sometime in the March-April timeframe. Furthermore, it was designated by God as the first month of the year in terms of their relationship with Him. In other words, all future generations of His people are to mark the time beginning with God's delivery of the Jewish people from their bondage in Egypt. Consider now what God was teaching His people through this first feast of the year:

- The chosen lamb was to be without blemish or defect (Exodus 12:5), as Christ was without sin.
- The lamb was to be roasted over the fire. There is much historical evidence to indicate that the lamb was roasted upright on a pomegranate pole with a crossbar through its shoulders. If so, the sacrifice was even then pointing ahead to the cross.
- The lamb's blood was to be painted on the sides and tops of the door-frames of all Jewish homes because:

**"The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."**  
Exodus 12:13

The blood kept the destroying angel from executing the judgment of God upon the first-born in that house.

## Lessons from Leviticus

**Monday, May 13:  
Read Exodus Chapter 12  
(Leviticus 23:4-5) (Continued)**

So consider what it means when the scriptures say in I Corinthians 5:7:

**For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.**

Could it be that His blood, a reference to all that He accomplished on the cross, is what preserves, from the judgment of God, all those who have trusted in Him? If so, then the Jews had an annual sacrifice to prepare them for the coming of the eternal Lamb of God Who would take away the sins of the world! (John 1:29)



## Lessons from Leviticus

### Tuesday, May 14: Read I Corinthians Chapter 5 (Leviticus 23:6-8)

The second of the seven major feasts immediately follows the first:

**On the 15th day of that month the Lord's Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days ...**

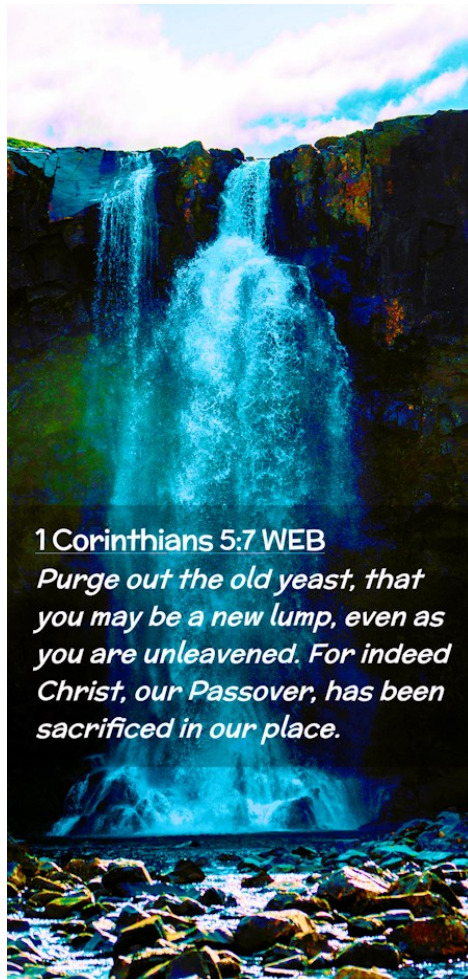
Leviticus

23:6

The *Passover* was a one-day feast held on the 14th of Nisan and then was immediately followed by the seven-day *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. Both feasts are connected to the same historical event—the exodus of God's people from Egypt.

Leaven speaks of sin, and thus God is calling His people to fellowship with Himself by the removal of sin from the

life. Once again, we see this beautifully connected to the



**1 Corinthians 5:7 WEB**

*Purge out the old yeast, that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed in our place.*



## Lessons from Leviticus

### Tuesday, May 14: Read I Corinthians Chapter 5 (Leviticus 23:6-8) (Continued)

idea of *Passover* in a New Testament passage in the Book of I Corinthians:

**Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover Lamb also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.** I Corinthians 5:7-8

Now, how does the Lord address this call to remove the leaven of sin from our lives?

**But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.** I John 1:7-8

There is no fooling ourselves. We do sin and it needs to be addressed. Furthermore, it is not something we can address ourselves. Rather it is the precious blood of Christ that cleanses us from sin.

Do you see it? Every year the Jews were reminded of the need to remove sin from their lives that they might have fellowship with God. In reality, this is beyond us, but God has provided the means—the finished work of His Son on the cross whereby:

**... by one sacrifice He made perfect forever, those who are being made holy.** Hebrews 10:14

## Lessons from Leviticus

### Wednesday, May 15: Read Luke Chapter 4 (Leviticus 23:9-14)

The *Feast of Firstfruits* is the third of the spring feasts. During the early spring, the Jews were to take the first of their crops to ripen—this would have been barley—gather it into a sheaf and bring it to the priest who waved it before the Lord on behalf of the person who brought it. The barley harvest, as well as each of the grains to follow, had three components:

- Firstfruits, that which ripened first
- General harvest, the bulk of the harvest
- Gleanings, a final portion that had been overlooked.

So when the first crop of each year (barley) was ready for harvest-, no grain of the portion that ripened first was to be eaten until the *Firstfruits* offering was made. At the start of each year's harvest, the Lord was given the glory due His name—first! Of course, this was fitting and appropriate, but there is much more included in the timing of this feast. It actually occurred during the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* and was the day after the Sabbath that occurred at the start of the feast. This means that the first three feasts all occur during the same eight-day period.

Even more astounding is that Christ was crucified and died on the day of the *Passover*, and then was resurrected on the day corresponding to the celebration of *Firstfruits*:

**He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.** Leviticus 23:11

For the Jews, the day after the Sabbath is the first day of the week—Sunday for us. I trust the truth of Christ, the *Firstfruits* of the resurrection, has taken on new meaning.

## Lessons from Leviticus

### Thursday, May 16: Read Acts Chapter 2 (Leviticus 23:15-22)

The final spring feast is called the *Feast of Weeks*, which occurs in early summer. Here are a few of the details from the Jewish perspective:

- It is celebrated 50 days after *Feast of the Firstfruits*, which dealt with the first of the barley harvest. This feast corresponded to the harvest of the wheat crop.
- It is again a time of giving thanks for God's bounty.
- It is also a remembrance of God giving the Law through Moses at Mount Sinai following the Exodus. So it is a feast intimately related to God's guidance of His people.

Have you caught the connection to the fulfillment of this feast in the New Testament? The Greek word for 50 is *Pentecost*. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit in Acts Chapter 2 was 50 days following the *Feast of Firstfruits*, which we have already seen corresponded to the resurrection of Christ. Once again, God has determined to guide His people. This time it is His Church and He guides them by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Praise God for His Spirit whom He has poured out on all who believe. (Acts 2:17, I Corinthians 6:19)

What a difference between the law and the Spirit! In Exodus 32:28, 3,000 died on the day the Law was given. In Acts 2:41, 3,000 were saved. That is because:

**... the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

II Corinthians 3:6

After some lessons from Acts, we'll return to the three fall feasts in a few days—feasts which speak prophetically of things yet to come.

## Lessons from Matthew

### Friday, May 17: Read Matthew 24:1-20

We are in the midst of the week between the Triumphal Entry of Jesus, and the crucifixion. When last reading in Matthew, we left Jesus sorrowing over the desolation to fall upon Jerusalem. As we pick up again in Chapter 24, Jesus is now going to devote His remaining time to His disciples. Right in the first verse of this chapter, the disciples show how out of touch they are with unfolding events, for they call Jesus' attention to the temple—a temple built by the thoroughly pagan Herod! Mark 13:1 reveals just how impressed they are with this structure:

**... "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"**

So, how does Jesus respond?

**"... I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."**

Mark 13:2

That is exactly what happened in 70 AD when the Roman general Titus overran a rebellious Jerusalem, destroying the city and throwing the rubble down into the Kidron Valley.

Jesus' statement really gets the attention of His disciples, and they can't help but ask a question which really has three parts:

**"Tell us," they said, "When will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"**

Mark 13:4

Jesus' answer to this three-part question provides us with a great deal of information about the future, and is often referred to as the *Olivet Discourse*, because of the place

## Lessons from Matthew

**Friday, May 17:**

**Read Matthew 24:1-20 (Continued)**

From which it was given. As you can imagine, in-depth analysis of this discourse is beyond the scope of a daily devotional, but let's see if we can extract a few things. We'll close today by noting a matter of perspective. Jesus' disciples are not asking their question from the perspective of the Church. Rather, they are asking as Jews who are looking for a Messiah who is going to reign over the nation of Israel.

We see this exact same perspective on their part, following the resurrection:

**"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"** Acts 1:6

So, as we shall see, Jesus answers the question in keeping with what's on their mind—the kingdom to come!

We'll consider His answer in more detail tomorrow.



# Lessons from Matthew

## Monday, May 20: Read Matthew 24:21-51

As we look more closely at Jesus' answer to the disciples' question regarding His return and the kingdom to come, a number of things stand out quite clearly:

1. Things on earth are going to get bad—and then really bad! We start out with wars and rumors of wars, nations rising against nation, and then on top of that—tremendous natural disasters. Wickedness will increase and the love of most will grow cold. Finally it reaches the point:

**"... there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive ..."**

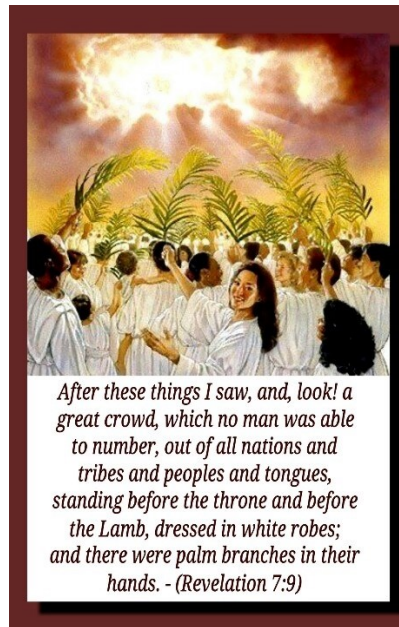
Matthew 24:21-22

2. Despite the terrible times to come, *"And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations ..."* (Matthew

24:14) And this Gospel will bear much fruit. For Revelation Chapter 7 describes those who come out of this time of great tribulation as:

**... a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."**

Revelation 7:9





## Lessons from Matthew

**Monday, May 20:**

**Read Matthew 24:21-51** (Continued)

3. How is this time of great tribulation on earth going to end?

**"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory."**

Matthew 24:30

There you have it: a time of unparalleled distress, unparalleled evangelism, and the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ. You would probably be surprised to know that there are many who believe this occurred when Jerusalem fell in 70 AD and that Jesus is reigning now from heaven and isn't coming again. We just read what the return of Jesus will look like in Verse 30, and it is also described in Revelation Chapter 19.

**I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords."**

Revelation 19:11-16

Has anything like that ever happened? Is the Lord Jesus ruling the nations? Not yet—that's because it is still to come! And, what a day that will be.

## Lessons from Matthew

### Tuesday, May 21: Read Matthew 25:31-46

Yesterday we considered the terrible time yet to come as Gentile history winds down. I temporarily skipped over some text to get to today's reading, because it continues the storyline. In other words, what happens when Jesus returns? The answer begins this way:

**"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."**

Matthew 25:31-32

In short, there will be a time of judgment for those who are alive at the return of Jesus, as He establishes His earthly reign. This judgment is going to work out in one of two ways:

**"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take up your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'"**

Matthew 25:34

That's one option, here's the other:

**"Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"**

Matthew 25:41

Then will the Son be called:

**... Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God ... Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom ... from that time on and forever. ..."**

Isaiah 9:6-7

## Lessons from Matthew

**Tuesday, May 21:**

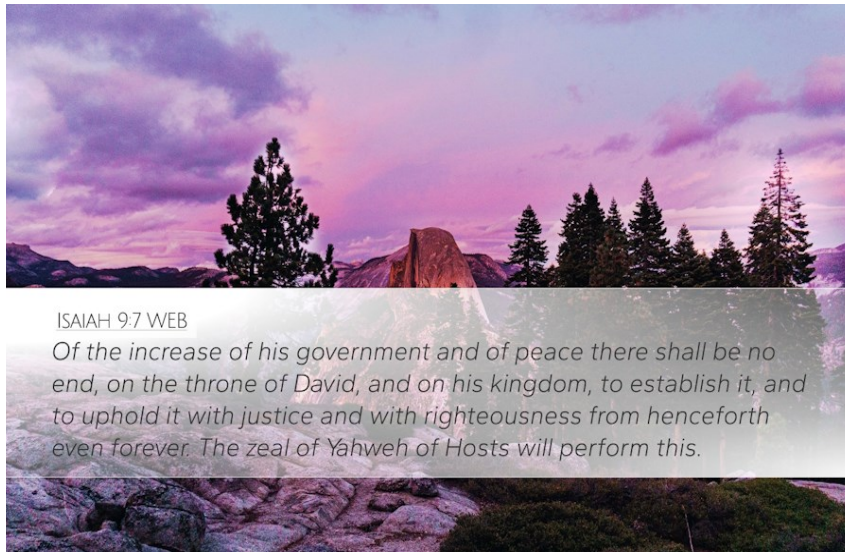
**Read Matthew 25:31-46** (Continued)

With Jesus reigning,

**"... Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."** Isaiah 2:4

I want you to note something very carefully: Politicians and intellectuals always claim to know the way to make the world a better place. The Church has also often been deceived into thinking it could bring about a utopia. But what does the Word of God say? Jesus has just told us that things are going to get really bad—and then He appears.

It would seem to be the case that some wrongs can only be set to right, peace established, and justice administered after the Lord Jesus returns and is on the throne—and not before!



## Lessons from Matthew

### Wednesday, May 22: Read Ephesians Chapter 5

As we have seen, Matthew Chapter 24 raises the issue of the Kingdom from a very Jewish perspective, and Jesus responds in both Chapters 24 and 25 with what is going to happen prior to and immediately following His return.

Since His answer deals with the Jews, what about the Church? I would submit to you that the Church is nowhere to be found in Chapters 24 or 25. That is because Jesus has already gathered the Church to Himself. Rather than being here when He returns, the Church is instead going to be following in the train of His triumphant return! Let me do my best to succinctly lay that out for you:

1. In today's reading, we see the Church marvelously described as the Bride of Christ.

**"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife ... This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the Church."**  
Ephesians 5:31-32

2. At the time Paul wrote Ephesians, a Jewish man was considered married at the time he paid the betrothal price. He then spent a period of up to a year apart from his legally betrothed wife in order to prepare a place for her to live—typically on his father's property. When all was ready, the Father would say, "Son, go and get your bride!" What followed would be a procession with trumpets sounding to get his bride, bring her back to his father's house, followed by a lengthy time of celebration. Do you see the parallels? Jesus has paid the betrothal price for His bride, the Church, which He bought with His own blood. (Acts 20:28) He is right now preparing a place for His bride in His Father's heaven. (John 14:1-3)

## Lessons from Matthew

**Wednesday, May 22:**

**Read Ephesians Chapter 5** (Continued)

Now the somewhat enigmatic Matthew 24:36, speaking of the return of Jesus, makes perfect sense:

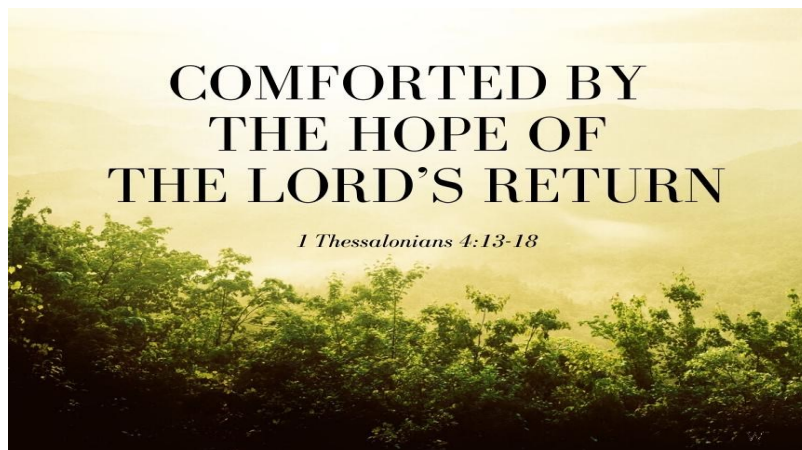
**“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”**

In keeping with the bride-groom analogy, it is the Father who will one day say, “Son, go and get Your Bride!” And this is how it will play out, with trumpets sounding:

**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. 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. Therefore encourage each other with these words.**

I Thessalonians 4:16-18

Of course, believing that Jesus is coming one day to gather the Church, His bride, to Himself, I find the above words to be very, very encouraging!



## Lessons from Matthew

### Thursday, May 23: Read Matthew 24:37-25:14

Although I have made a distinction between the nation of Israel and the Church, as well as pointing out their distinctly different futures, today's reading most certainly applies to both. You see God is always calling us into a relationship of dependent trust centered in Himself. He has laid out a glorious future for both the Church and Israel, and then in essence said, "*Trust Me!*"

The challenge is that we need to trust God to bring about what He has promised while we live through the present. We do so by allowing our glorious future to motivate the life we live each and every day! However, we have a tendency to get caught up in the here and now. Sometimes we even forget what is coming and live as if it is only the present that matters—as if we need to extract all we can from this world, rather than live in light of eternity.

So, today's reading seeks to help form the right perspective in our thinking. Follow along with me:

**"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him."**

Matthew 24:44

We are called to live in light of Jesus' return. Would you live any differently if you knew Jesus was going to return today?

**"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge ... It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when He returns."**

Matthew 24:45-46



## Lessons from Matthew

**Thursday, May 23:**

**Read Matthew 24:37-25:14** (Continued)

The Lord Jesus is the master. He has commissioned us to fulfill the role of witness and ambassador, as we live a life worthy of who we are in Christ. If Jesus were to return today, of all the things I might be in the midst of doing what could be better than pointing a lost soul to faith in Christ while living for Him in the midst of a nation decaying around me?

By the way, these are not hypothetical questions! Jesus is coming, though no man knows the day or hour, but it could be today!



**“But of that day and  
hour no one knows ...  
but My Father only...”**

Mark 24:36

## Lessons from Matthew

### Friday, May 24: Read Matthew 26:1-5

A very short reading today because I want you to ponder something. Go back to Matthew Chapter 21, and quickly skim what we have covered. Jesus has presented Himself to the people of Jerusalem as their promised Messiah. This is on the heels of three years of claiming to be the One sent by God to both reveal the Father and be their Messiah—all the while authenticating that claim by one miracle after another. Then what a week of ministry: Driving the money changers from the Temple, one lesson after another calling the people to repent, rebuking the religious leadership, confounding all their efforts to trap Him, and speaking of His glorious return followed by judgment.

In the face of all of this, what do we read is the response of the religious leadership?

**Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled ... and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill Him.** Matthew 26:3-4

Those are some hard hearts right there! I think we need to understand how clearly this exemplifies the condition of fallen man. You see, it is not an absence of evidence, not an absence of truth, but rather their plotting is a commitment to pursuing one's own agenda above all else and no matter the cost. The Pharisees had positions of power, wealth, and prestige and they were not going to budge an inch—even if God Himself were calling. And, in fact, He was!

Those who reject what God is doing in their midst have no excuse for the judgment to follow. Perhaps you think I am overstating their condition of unbelief.

## Lessons from Matthew

**Friday, May 24:**

**Read Matthew 26:1-5** (Continued)

Let me show you one more thing.

**And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His Spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. ... the tombs broke open and bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to live. ... after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.**

Matthew 27:50-53

Then what about the report of the soldiers who were guarding the tomb?

**When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'"... And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.**

Matthew 28:12-15

Who would have discovered the curtain separating the Holy of Holies torn in two? Why these same priests. Who would have heard about the holy ones raised to life, and who received an eyewitness account from the soldiers? Again, these very same priests! How did their hard hearts respond? They chose to persist in unbelief and formulated a lie to keep others from responding to the truth of the resurrection. As a closing point of application, no matter what is going on in the world in our day, no matter the hardness of the hearts of others, pray that our hearts would always remain tender and responsive to the Word of God and the voice of His Spirit!

## Readings in Acts

### Monday, May 27: Read Acts 5:1-11

Although short, our reading today raises many questions! Let's answer two today:

1. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira?
2. Why were the consequences for this sin so extreme?

The sin is relatively simple to extract. In Acts 4:36-37, Barnabas sold a piece of property and gave the proceeds to the Apostles in order to meet the needs of the growing church. Apparently, the deed was well known and brought Barnabas acclaim.

Ananias and Sapphira followed the example of Barnabas and others when they too sold a piece of land and donated the proceeds. However, there was a catch in their gift, which no one would have known if God hadn't brought it to light, for they were double-minded in their behavior. They acted like they had given the entire proceeds of the sale, while they actually retained some of those proceeds for their own use. Presumably, they too wanted to receive the acclaim that Barnabas had received, while keeping some of their treasure for themselves.

It is important to note that there was no requirement to give all of the money. They could have given any portion they chose. Their sin was that both participated in a deception—"We gave it all!"—while actually holding some back. That's why Peter asked why they would "*lie to the Holy Spirit.*" (Verse 3) Do you think the Holy Spirit was fooled for a moment?

## Readings in Acts

### Monday, May 27: Read Acts 5:1-11 (Continued)

Now why is this of such import that God put these two to death? We just have room for a short answer today.

Look back at Acts  
4:32:

**All the believers  
were one in heart  
and mind.**

This is what Paul calls

**... the unity of the  
Spirit through the  
bond of peace.**

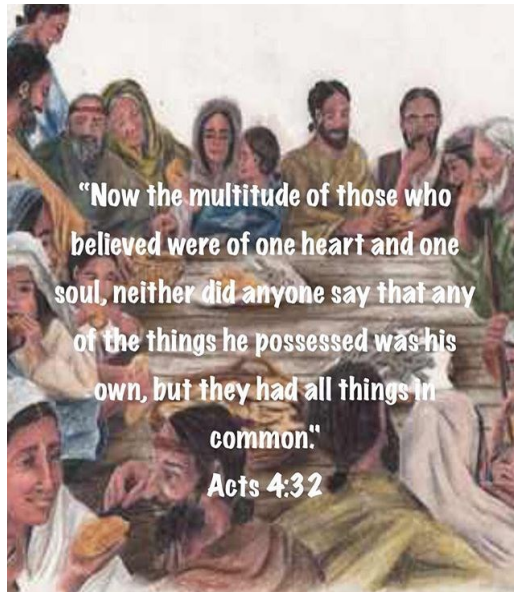
Ephesians 4:3

This is what the  
Church is supposed to  
be like.

Now overlay the think-  
ing of Ananias and

Sapphira with the *one heart and mind* that was the status quo in the Church! It is in complete discord! It is earthly thinking, double-mindedness, a weakness that Satan could exploit. It is incompatible with the function of a body of which Christ is at the head.

So what does God do? He draws attention to the discontinuity in a most dramatic fashion. As you can imagine, there is still much more to be learned.



## Readings in Acts

### Tuesday, May 28: Read Habakkuk Chapter 2

Almost every Christian knows you cannot serve two masters as Jesus advised in the Sermon on the Mount:

**“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”** Matthew 6:24

Yet, at some point, almost every Christian tries—as did Ananias and Sapphira! Now, when we try to *have it both ways*, thankfully, God does not usually put us to death. If He did, Barnhouse’s observation would likely be true:

*If this were true every time someone wanted to be thought more spiritual than they were: every church would have a morgue in the basement and an undertaker on pastoral staff!*

Why then such a strong reaction from God for something we have to acknowledge is a common failing? Consider this very simple principle: What we are studying in Acts is not just about Church growth, it is not just about what the Spirit of God can do through the children of God; we are also meant to understand a principle from Habakkuk 2:20:

**... the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him.**

God really, really cares about His Church. It is meant to be His masterpiece, and He wanted to let everyone know there are certain things He would not tolerate. And, His actions had the desired response:

**Great fear seized the whole church, and all who heard about these events.** Acts 5:11

Of course it did! And, may we allow the *Fear of the Lord* to grab hold of us before He needs to reach into our lives to get our attention!



## Readings in Acts

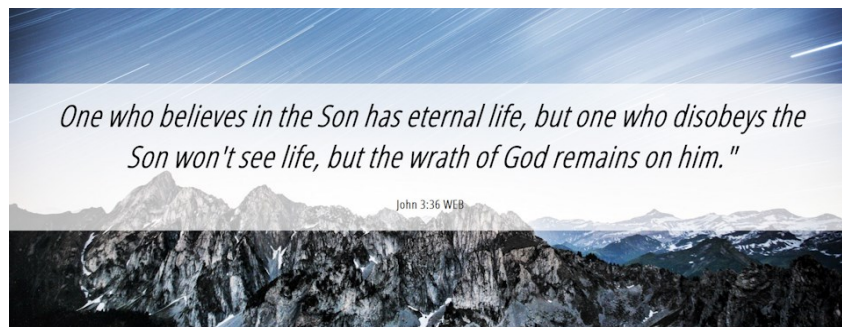
### Wednesday, May 29: Read Hebrews 4

Everyone wants to know if Ananias and Sapphira, from Acts Chapter 5, were believers. There are many who will say, “True believers would never sin this way” or “God would not have struck down His children in this way.” To begin with, always be suspicious when someone puts the word *true* or *real* in front of the word *believer* or *Christian*. When they do, they typically add some unbiblical criteria to what it means to be a child of God. In this case, they are using the presence or absence of sin in the life.

The single criterion for salvation is whether or not the person has placed his or her faith in the person and work of Christ. (John 3:36) Although the text never addresses this subject directly, let me give you five reasons why I think there is ample reason to believe that Ananias and Sapphira were believers. In fact, the narrative loses its impact if they are not believers!

1. One possible reason their belief is not addressed in the text is that it never crossed Luke’s mind that it would be an issue. He has been writing nonstop about the early Church since the end of Chapter 2. In context, those who were added to the Church were believers!

Continued on the next page.



## Readings in Acts

**Wednesday, May 29:**

**Read Hebrews 4** (Continued)

2. The decision of Ananias and Sapphira to sell the land is in keeping with something a believer would do and not an unbeliever. Remember, no one was under any compulsion to sell personal property. Furthermore, the subtlety of their sin is also more in line with the sin of a believer, rather than an unbeliever.
3. Ananias and Sapphira were put to death for a combination of deceit, hypocrisy, and lying, which are certainly sins. But, if they are unbelievers, then they are already objects of God's wrath, so why would these sins prompt additional judgment? On the other hand, if they were believers, these are exactly the kinds of sins that would prompt discipline from a holy God. (Hebrews 12:5)
4. The life of an unbeliever is by definition a lie against the Spirit—for the unbeliever resists and suppresses His ministry of conviction. Additional lies would simply be words consistent with the unsaved state. Only a believer could be called to account for doing something he or she shouldn't be doing, that is lying to the Holy Spirit! For only a believer stands as a new creature in Christ.
5. This narrative is preserved in the Word of God to caution believers, not unbelievers. If this described unbelievers, much of the take-home message is lost. Unbelievers don't need to stop lying to the Holy Spirit in order to get saved, they need to trust in Christ. Conversely, believers should most definitely tread lightly with respect to the life they live before the scrutiny of a Holy God!

**Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.**

Hebrews 4:13

## Readings in Acts

### Thursday, May 30: Read I Samuel Chapter 16

I am sure you would agree that the Ananias and Sapphira narrative is a piece of high drama in the life of the early Church. Although most are familiar with the story, rarely do we pause to consider the principles that God is trying to teach us as the result of His swift action, or why the incident is included in the pages of Scripture.

So, for the next two days, let's see what kind of application we might make. By the way, if Ananias and Sapphira were unbelievers, there really is no application for the believing church and that would squander what God intends for us to consider. So ponder the following points.

First, Our lives as Christians are ultimately lived before God, not before men!

**And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ... And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.**

Colossians 3:17, 23-24



Continued on the next page.

## Readings in Acts

Thursday, May 30:

### Read I Samuel Chapter 16 (Continued)

This exact point stands out clearly in the narrative when Ananias and Sapphira are charged with *lying to the Spirit*. Didn't they actually lie to Peter? We need to learn that all of our actions on the horizontal, toward one another, are ultimately lived in the vertical!

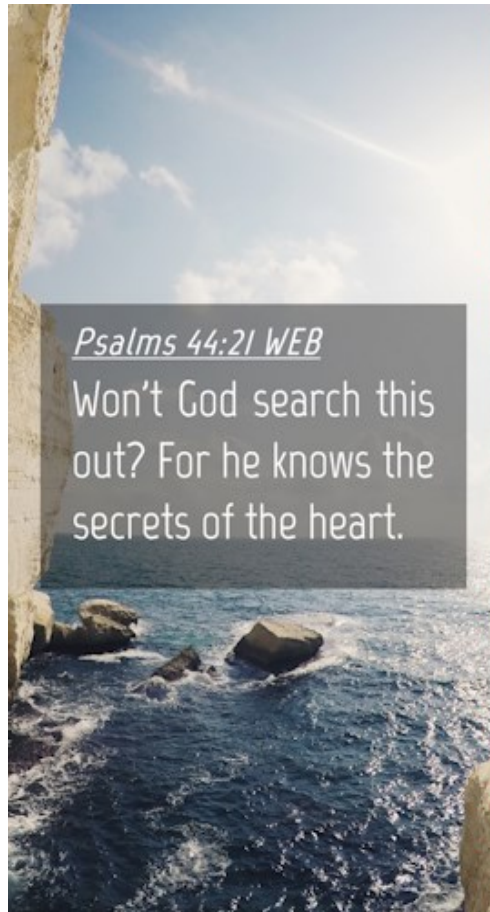
Second, God measures the thoughts and intents of the heart, and is not taken in by outward appearances!

**For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.**

I Samuel 16:7

Ananias and Sapphira had a small view of God. They apparently gave no thought to the basic truth that He would see right through their deception before Peter and the others. We make a huge mistake ourselves when we forget we are dealing with a sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient God!

More tomorrow.



## Readings in Acts

### Friday, May 31: Read Titus Chapter 2

Taking up where we left off yesterday, these are additional lessons we can learn from the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:

Third, somewhere in the recent past, Ananias and Sapphira responded to a message that proclaimed:

**Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.** Acts 2:36

In this sermon, Peter is calling the people of Jerusalem to faith in who Jesus is—Lord—and what He has done—Christ! He is both divine and the savior of the world. Although Ananias and Sapphira had responded in faith and were believers, their actions were those of individuals who thought God wouldn't know, couldn't act, and wasn't holy. GOD SIMPLY SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT! We really need to learn this lesson! It will save us a lot of wear and tear in the Christian life when we do.

As one last point, consider Titus 2:11-14:

**For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say, "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions ... to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.**

This is a powerful statement of the pattern for those who turn to the Lord—deny self, live godly lives, while expectantly waiting for Christ's certain return. This is—a pattern that Ananias and Sapphira compromised. I suggest we respond to this lesson, preserved through the centuries, by avoiding ever doing any such thing! And, all God's people say, "Amen!"

VISTOSO  
  
Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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