I. Various biblical symbols represent the church.

A. In the Bible, God has likened the church to many things—among them a 'body,' a 'flock,' a 'family,' an 'army,' a 'building' and a 'planting.'

Now you are the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:27, italics added for emphasis here and elsewhere throughout this chapter)

Be shepherds of God's flock. (1 Pet. 5:2)

It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God. (1 Pet. 4:17)

Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus, (an army) (2 Tim. 2:3)

You are... God's building. (1 Cor. 3:9)

They will be called... a planting of the Lord. (Isa. 61:3)

B. Another magnificent light in which the Bible portrays the church is as the bride of Christ:

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. (Rev. 19:7)

1. Vast segments of the Christian church are unaware of the glorious calling of the church as the bride of Christ. Even among sincere Christians who see and teach this truth, there seems to be much misunderstanding.

2. My goal in the study that follows is to bring clear and biblical definition to the scriptural concept of the bride of Christ.

II. Is there a bride of Christ?

A. The very concept of marriage between God and his people is not a uniquely New Testament idea. It also occurs in the Old Testament.

Your Maker is your husband— the Lord Almighty is his name. (Isa. 54:5)

You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah [which means married], for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom
rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. (Isa. 62:3-5, brackets added for clarification here and throughout this chapter)
I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord. (Hosea 2:19-20, God speaking to his people)

B. Jesus speaks of himself as the bridegroom.

Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast." (Mark 2:18-20)

C. John the Baptist spoke of Jesus as the bridegroom.

"You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and is now complete. He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less." (John 3:28-30)

D. The church is betrothed, espoused and promised as the intended bride of her husband, Jesus Christ. The marriage is not consummated. That is yet to come.

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (2 Cor. 11:2)

E. At the end, we see the bride married to Jesus.

"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Rev. 19:6-8)

Note: Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.... One of the seven angels... said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God. (Rev. 21:2,9-11)

F. The thought of both men and women as a bride need not puzzle you. For although God made us male and female (Gen. 1:27), that distinction is relevant only in our earthly perspective. As far as our relationship to Christ, and our position of being in Christ, there is no relevance of gender to him.

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:26-28)
Note: In Verse 26, both men and women are called 'sons' of God. In our relationship to God, gender distinctions are not significant.

G. There will be a bride, who will be presented perfect to Jesus Christ.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Eph. 5:25-27)

This is a profound mystery— but I am talking about Christ and the church. (Eph. 5:32)

H. The bride-church is called to measure up to the stature of Jesus Christ!

Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Rom. 8:29)

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13)

Unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13 KJV)

I. In Eden God created a bride for Adam, a help meet for him (Gen. 2:18 KJV). The bride was meet for him— that is, suitable, fitting, adapted to and completing him; as Lamsa's translation says, "a helper who is like him."

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."... Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. (Gen. 2:18,22)

1. The Bible (1 Cor. 15:45-49) gives certain parallels (and contrasts!) between Adam and Jesus, calling the former "the first man Adam... the first man," and calling Jesus "the last Adam... the second man from heaven."

2. I am convinced that just as God presented a suitable bride to the first Adam, so he will present a suitable bride to Jesus, the last Adam.

III. Who is the bride of Christ?

A. The church in its entirety is espoused to Christ. But not all will make it to the altar!
Please Note: I am not saying that they won't stay saved. When talking of the church as the bride of Christ, we are talking of a relationship with Jesus while we are still here on earth — a relationship that is so close and spiritually intimate that the best imagery to capture and portray it is that of a bride and groom. And not all of the espoused will press in to that kind of wonderful intimacy and closeness to the heavenly bridegroom.

I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Cor. 11:2-3)

1. All Christians are betrothed for marriage to Christ. But not all will maintain their sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Some will set their affections on other things over and above Christ, and will thereby become guilty of what the Bible speaks of as, in effect, a spiritual adultery.

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? (James 4:4 KJV)

2. In all five chapters of his epistle, James addressed the hearers as "brothers" or "my brothers" or "my dear brothers." They were Christians whom he branded (in an obviously non-literal sense) adulterers and adulteresses. This verse in James refers to believers, not to the harlot church of Revelation 17.

3. Just the fact of being a Christian is not a guarantee of receiving all the Lord's blessings. Among other things, Jesus demands of his people a watchfulness and a prayerfulness.

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. (Luke 21:36 KJV)

B. The bride of Christ will be a perfect bride, with no spot or blemish.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle, or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Eph. 5:25-27)

C. In the last days a measuring rod will be applied to the church. The standard of measurement, of evaluation, will be "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13 KJV).

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the
D. The Apostle Paul, who spoke of the church as Christ's intended bride, also in the same epistle pointed that church-bride toward the standard of perfection.

I promised you to one husband, to Christ. (2 Cor. 11:2)

Our prayer is for your perfection. (2 Cor. 13:9)

Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection. (2 Cor. 13:11)

E. The parable of the ten virgins is an important key to understanding the bride of Christ. It is quoted in its entirety below. It is critically important to notice that this speaks of a distinguishing, even a separation, among the Lord's people.

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps, the bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." (Matt. 25:1-13)

1. "At that time" (vs. 1) and the preceding context indicate this is an end-time event.

The kingdom of heaven is likened to ten virgins, not five. All ten are within the kingdom. This is not, as some have taught, a teaching about a saved group and a lost group.

There were 10 virgins. "I promised you... as a pure virgin to him [Christ]" (2 Cor. 11:2).

They all had lamps. They all had the word of God. "Your word is a lamp to my feet" (Ps. 119:105).

They "went out to meet the bridegroom." All of them were looking forward to the coming of the bridegroom. This is certainly not true of the unsaved!
The bridegroom, of course, from our earlier study (Mark 2:18-20; John 3:28-30; Rev. 19:7) is the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. But "five were foolish and five were wise" (vs. 2). They were all called "virgins." They were all spoken of as part of the kingdom of heaven. All had lamps (the word) and all were looking forward to the Lord's coming. They all had oil. Then what differentiated the foolish from the wise? The answer is found in Verses 3-4.

3. Only the wise had an abundant supply of oil! (vs. 3-4)

   a. The oil symbolizes the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

   Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance?... The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power." (1 Sam. 10:1,6)

   Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one." So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power. (1 Sam. 16:12-13)

   God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. (Acts 10:38)

   In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 1:5,8; 2:4)

   You have an anointing from the Holy One. (1 John 2:20)

   b. The 'wise' category had a plentiful supply of oil. Wise Christians will have an anointing from the Lord—the baptism with the Holy Spirit—and will have an abundant, ongoing operation of the Holy Spirit in and through their lives.

   Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning. (Luke 12:35)

4. "After a long time in coming," the bridegroom will indeed come forth to meet his bride! (vs. 5-6) And note that this occurs in a midnight-hour time frame. Only at the end of the church age will the bride of Christ be prepared, identified and enabled to enter into that very closest of relationships with her bridegroom.

5. All the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps, (vs. 7) They all had some degree of oil. But (vs. 8) the oil of the foolish was running very low, and their lamps were going out.
All Christians have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. And Spirit-filled Christians have additionally partaken of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, with power (Acts 1:8). But the only 'wise' Christians, in this context, are those who possess an abundant measure of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by their having their lamps burning brightly at the time of the bridegroom's arrival.

6. When the bridegroom goes forth for the marriage, it is too late for the foolish to secure this abundant supply of oil. As they scurried about in a last-minute effort to secure oil, the wise virgins entered into the wedding banquet with the bridegroom. The key was readiness (vs. 9-10).

The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, (vs. 10)

The wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. (Rev. 19:7)

7. The parable of the ten virgins is a subject for much study. But two vital things stand out: (1) the anointing and (2) readiness made the difference!

8. Not every Christian will qualify for the bride of Christ. Will all Christians who persevere in serving God spend eternity with Him? Of course! But the bride of Christ comes into being out of that last generation of believers on the earth just before Christ's second coming (Matt. 25:5-6; Rev. 19:7 in the context of Revelation chapter 19— the second coming). The bride of Christ will emerge as a company of believers in the last generation who are still alive and on this earth. Not all believers alive at that time will measure up!

F. Follow a little further the comparison of Adam and Jesus as, respectively, the first man Adam and the last Adam (I Cor. 15:45-47, quoted above). A portion of the first Adam's body— a rib— was fashioned by God and presented as a bride to Adam. I believe that, in the same fashion, a portion of the body of Christ, which is the church, will be presented by God as a bride to his Son.

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. (Gen. 2:22)

Now you are the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:27)
Note: But the entire body will not qualify as Christ's bride!
G. A summary of some characteristics of the bride that we have studied follows:

1. The bride will be presented as a pure virgin to him (2 Cor. 11:2).

2. The bride will be known for her righteous acts (Rev. 19:7-8).

3. The bridal church will be (Eph. 5:25-27):
   a. Holy.
   b. Cleansed and washed by the word of God.
   c. A radiant church.
   d. Without stain or wrinkle.
   e. Without blemish.
   f. Blameless.

4. The bride of Christ will have the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13, KJV).

5. The bride will come from a portion of the body of Christ, rather than being the entire body (Gen. 2:22 by application).

6. The bride will have a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:3).

7. The bride will be watchful and prayerful (Luke 21:36).

8. The bride will have been pressing for perfection (2 Cor. 13:9,11).

9. The anointing, the baptism with the Holy Spirit, will be abundantly operating in the lives of those who qualify for the bride of Christ (Matt. 25:3-4).
10. The bride will live in a state of readiness to meet the bridegroom (Matt. 25:10; Luke 12:35; Rev. 19:7).

With the help and grace of the Lord, all these are attainable. But not all Christians will cooperate with the Lord's grace and expend the effort to measure up in these and any other needful areas.

Remember: Jesus is seeking a perfect bride, a "help meet" for him!

IV. Some typological insights into the bride of Christ are found in Gen. 24.

The reader is encouraged at this point to read the entire 24th chapter of Genesis. There we read the beautiful story of the patriarch Abraham sending his trusted servant back to Abraham's ancestral homeland to secure a wife from among his kindred for his son Isaac. A beautiful picture emerges as we regard Abraham, typologically, as depicting God the Father, Isaac representing Jesus the Son, and the trusted servant typifying the Holy Spirit. Rebekah then comes into focus as the bride of Christ.

A. Abraham is a type of God the Father (vs. 1-4).

Father Abraham. (Luke 16:24)

The faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. (Rom. 4:16)

Those who believe are children of Abraham. (Gal. 3:7)

B. Isaac, Abraham's son, as a type of Jesus, the Son of God.

It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. (Gen. 21:12)

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The scriptures does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed, meaning one person, who is Christ. (Gal. 3:16)

By faith Abraham... offered Isaac as a sacrifice... his one and only son.... Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. (Heb. 13:17-19)

C. The Holy Spirit is typified by the trusted servant who was "in charge of all that (Abraham) had" (vs. 2).
When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. (John 15:26)

D. The Holy spirit is seeking a bride for Jesus Christ from among God's kindred, from among God's people.

Go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac. (Gen. 24:4)

E. During this time of seeking the bride for Christ, Christ is to remain in heaven with the Father. The Holy Spirit represents the Father and Son on earth during this time (vs. 5-6).

Make sure that you do not take my son back there. (Gen. 24:6)

That he may send the Christ... even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything. (Acts 3:20-21)

F. The Holy Spirit has all the Father's resources at his disposal. The one in charge of all that he had. (Gen. 24:2)

Then the servant took... with him all kinds of good things from his master. (Gen. 24:10)

G. This seeking of a bride is at the end of the church age.

It was toward evening... Rebekah came out. (Gen. 24:11,15)

H. The intended bride was working and serving (vs. 15-20).

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning. (Luke 12:35)

I. She was "very beautiful, a virgin" (vs. 16).

I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (2 Cor. 11:2)

J. The bride of Christ will be quick to respond to the Holy Spirit's voice.

Please give me a little water from your jar... [she] quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. (Gen. 24:17-18)

K. The bride of Christ will go beyond the basic requirements of service (vs. 19).

I'll draw water for your camels too. (Gen. 14:19; unsolicited)

L. The bride of Christ will be abundantly gifted by the Holy Spirit.

A gold ring... two gold bracelets.... Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and
articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah. (Gen. 24:22,53)

M. There will be proper recognition of the lordship of Jesus Christ.

My master's wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. (Gen. 24:36)

Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all). (Acts 10:36 KJV)

N. The bride of Christ will evidence a willingness, a desire, to join her espoused husband, Jesus Christ.

"Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said. (Gen. 24:58)

O. Bride and groom will meet at the end of the age.

(Isaac) went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. (Gen. 24:63)

P. The eventual result: the consummation of the marriage!

[Isaac] married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her. (Gen. 24:67)

V. Revelation 12 teaches important truths about the bride of Christ.

A. The book of the Revelation is, from the biblical author's perspective, prophecy, not history. Written late in the first century A.D., its focus was future, not past. Interpretations with a historical focus have brought much confusion to the study of this book. Read it as prophecy, and much that may have seemed confusing begins to make sense.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. (Rev. 1:1)

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy; (Rev. 1:3)

The words of the prophecy in this book. (Rev. 22:7)

The words of the prophecy of this book. (Rev. 22:18)

This book of prophecy. (Rev. 22:19)

1. The book of the Revelation both opens and closes, then, with clear statements that its content is prophetic. It is future-oriented.

2. The 12th chapter, which we will examine, is part of a series
of events introduced by Chapter 4:1.

Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. (Rev. 4:1)

So the interpretation of Revelation's 12th chapter must also be understood in a context yet future from the book's writing.

B. A summary of the 12th chapter of the Revelation is as follows: We see the church, at least the qualifying portion of the church, as the bride of Christ. She will be a company of perfected believers, producing godly spiritual fruit on the earth. Then Satan and his forces, who are to the present time still capable of operating in the heavenlies, will be cast down to the earth after a great war in heaven. Satan will initiate extensive persecution against the bridal church. But God miraculously will deliver the bridal company of believers to a place of preservation that God will have prepared for them. The bride will be provided for and taken care of in that place prepared by God during the last 3 1/2 years prior to Christ's second coming. During this final 3 1/2 years, the antichrist will live out his reign of terror on earth and bring great persecution and martyrdom to those remaining Christians who do not qualify as the bride of Christ, but who will continue to hold fast to their Christian testimony.

A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down— that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time,
times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring— those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (Revelation 12)

Here we see:

1. "A woman"— the bride of Christ, clothed with the fullness of God! (vs. 1).

   a. Sun = the Father.  
   The Lord God is a sun and shield. (Ps. 84:11)

   b. Moon = Jesus, the reflected glory of the Father.  
   He is the image of the invisible God. (Col. 1:15)

   c. Stars = speak of the multifaceted ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit. The '12' stars show that she will be under proper divine government: 12 tribes in the Old Testament, 12 original apostles in the New Testament. This bridal church will have apostolic oversight.

   This is the glorious, last-days church, the bride of Christ. She is clothed with God's fullness. She is founded upon the Lord Jesus Christ. She is filled with the Holy Spirit. And she is properly structured and under God's ordained government. This is not

   (a) Old Testament Israel or

   (b) Mary, the mother of Jesus! Remember, this is a book of prophecy, looking to the future.

   Notice that she "appeared in heaven." Although her geographical place was still on earth (vs. 6,13-16), her spiritual place was "seated... with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6).
2. She is pregnant—the spiritual bridegroom relationship has been consummated! Her closeness and intimacy with the Lord is of a full measure! (vs. 2).

Note: The bride is still on earth; the heavenly bridegroom is still literally in heaven until his second coming recorded in Revelation 19. There is a parallel of sorts in Mary's conception of Jesus by the power of God (Luke 1:30-35). She was on earth, God was in heaven, yet by the power of God Mary became pregnant.

3. The bride gives birth. The radiant church will bear many spiritual offspring (vs. 5).

Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children. (Isa. 66:8)

The perfected, bridal church will bear a fast and massive harvest of souls brought into the kingdom of God. This "son, a male child," is generally understood to be a company of people — perhaps related to the overcomers of Rev. 2:26-27.

To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— He will rule them with an iron scepter."

4. For the last 3 1/2 years prior to the Lord's second coming, the bride of Christ (not all of the believers! [see vs. 17]) will be miraculously delivered to "a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days 3 1/2 years]" (vss. 6,14).

Referring to the miraculous deliverance of Israel out from Egypt to meet with God at Mount Sinai, God said, "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exod. 19:4).

I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall betaken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? [That is, where taken?] And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together. (Luke 17:34-37 KJV)

A portion of the entire church— that is, the bride— will be taken on "the two wings of a great eagle... to the place prepared for her" (Rev. 12:14).

These last 3 1/2 years, in which the bride of Christ will be
delivered safely to and taken care of in "the wilderness" (vs. 6,14 KJV), are the same 3 1/2 years in which the antichrist will rule on the earth.

You have heard that the antichrist is coming. (1 John 2:18)

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. (Rev. 13:5)

He [antichrist] will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints [those left behind after the bride is taken out] and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time. (Dan. 7:25) (See Rev. 12:14.)

5. The woman, the bride of Christ, will make good her escape to the wilderness, despite Satan's desperate attempts to stop her. Enraged, Satan will return from his pursuit of the bride to make war against "the rest of her offspring— those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (vs. 15-17).

God does divide, even among his people!

a. The five wise from the five foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13).

b. One taken on eagles' wings, one left (Luke 17:34-37 KJV).

c. The overcoming saints (Revelation 12), the saints who are overcome! (Revelation 13).

C. During the 3 1/2 years of the preservation of the bride of Christ in the wilderness place prepared for her by God, the remaining Christians who hold to their testimony will begin to lose their lives under the persecution of the antichrist.

I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshipped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshipped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?"

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the
saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation....

He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. (Rev. 13:1-7,15)

1. Antichrist will be given power to make war against the saints and conquer them (vs. 7).

2. The false prophet will cause all who refuse to worship the image of the beast to be killed (vs. 15).

3. Those who do not worship the beast or his image will be beheaded.

I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. (Rev. 20:4)

VI. What is the order of events pertaining to the bride of Christ?

A. The church is already promised (2 Cor. 11:2) for eventual presentation to Christ as a radiant, blameless bride (Eph. 5:27).

B. The church must live and serve now in such a way as to be ready for presentation to the heavenly bridegroom (Matt. 25:10; Rev. 19:7).

C. Before the second coming of Christ, there shall be a spiritual consummation of the relationship between the bride and Christ (Rev. 12:1-2), whereby the bride bears a son, a man child (Rev. 12:2,5; Isa. 66:8).

Note: There is a direct link here with the spiritual fulfillment of the Old Testament 'feasts of Israel.' The New Testament church has received "Christ [her] Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7). And many within the church have experienced the New Testament Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5,8; 2:1-4). So also shall the bridal church, those who have received a full measure of the Passover and Pentecostal blessings, likewise partake of the feast of tabernacles, and specifically the blessed day of atonement that leads to the ultimate fulfillment of the feast of tabernacles. Of that day of atonement the Bible says uniquely, in a manner not attributed to Passover or Pentecost:
"On this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins." (Lev. 16:30)

There is yet ahead for the church a New Testament day of atonement. It shall be the day when the bride of Christ shall find herself indeed a radiant, holy, cleansed, blameless church (Eph. 5:27)— a church "clean from all its sins" (Lev. 16:30).

D. At God's appointed time, he will miraculously deliver the bride of Christ to that wilderness place he has prepared for her (Rev. 12:6,14). There she will be safely cared for during the final 3 1/2 years in which the antichrist will rule the earth and martyr the Christians who do not qualify as the bride of Christ and therefore will not be taken out to the wilderness with her (Rev. 12:17; 13:1-7,15).

E. At the end of the 3 1/2 years will be the second coming of Jesus. He will conquer the antichrist and false prophet (Rev. 19:20). The dead saints of all ages will be resurrected. At the same time, the bride of Christ still living in the place prepared for her by God will be transformed into incorruptible bodies and will be caught up with the resurrected saints to meet the Lord as he comes in the air.

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Cor. 15:51-52)

We eagerly await a Savior from there [heaven], the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Phil. 3:20-21)

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord [that is, the bride in the wilderness!], will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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 [in the wilderness] and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." (1 Thess. 4:15-17)

VII. What can we do to press towards this bride-perfection?

A. "You must be born again" (John 3:7).

B. We need a proper water baptism. "Buried with him [Christ] through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom. 6:3-6).
And, to be fully biblical, we must be "baptized in the name of [the] Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:48; 19:5, Lamsa translation). We must take the groom's name!

C. We need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps, the bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!

"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

"'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

"Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. "Open the door for us!"

"But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'" (Matt. 25:1-12)

We need to "receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on [us]" (Acts 1:8).

We need to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4)

D. We need to pursue a holy, Godly, Spirit-filled and Spirit-led walk.

Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16 KJV)

E. "Be not conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2 KJV).

F. We must handle properly the trials and testings of our faith, which will cause us to become "mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4).

G. We need to be solidly grounded in the scriptures, the word of God, "that the man of God may be perfect" (2 Tim. 3:16-17 KJV).

H. Of all the Christian virtues, we must especially "put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (Col. 3:14).
I. We must properly relate to and receive from the fivefold ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. These ministries are given by the Lord "for the perfecting of the saints ... till we all come ... unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13).

J. "Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal" (2 Cor. 13:11).

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