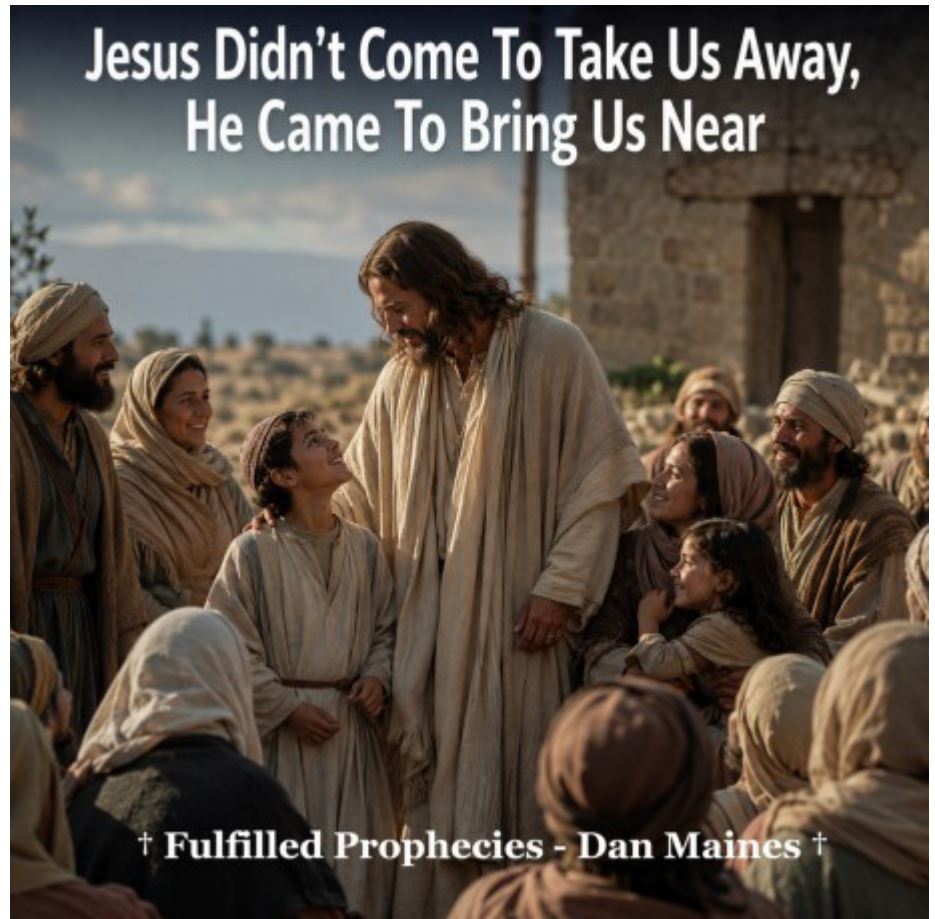


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Jesus Didn't Come To Take Us Away, He Came To Bring Us Near



By Dan Maines

Jesus Didn't Come To Take Us Away, He Came To Bring Us Near

Introduction

† Much end-times teaching has made the Christian hope about escaping the earth. The picture often presented is that Jesus came to prepare a way for believers to leave this world behind. But when we follow the biblical story from beginning to end, we find something much greater. God's purpose wasn't primarily to take His people away from His creation, it was to remove the separation between God and His people.

† The story begins with humanity separated from God's presence, but it ends with God dwelling with His people. The direction of redemption isn't humanity getting farther away from earth, it's humanity being brought near to God.

† This is one of the great WOW moments of fulfilled eschatology. Jesus didn't come merely to change our location. He came to change our relationship with God. The goal wasn't evacuation, it was reconciliation. The goal wasn't distance, it was access. The goal wasn't escaping God's creation, it was dwelling in God's presence.

† Jesus even prayed that the Father wouldn't take His disciples out of the world, but would keep them from the evil one (John 17:15). His prayer wasn't for their removal from the world, but for their protection while they remained in it.

† The New Testament repeatedly describes salvation as being brought near, receiving access to the Father, becoming God's dwelling place, coming to the heavenly Jerusalem, and finally seeing God's face. That's the direction of the biblical story.

John 14:23

Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will follow My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him.

† Notice the direction. Jesus didn't say that the believer must travel away from the earth to find God. Jesus said, we will come to him. The movement described here is God coming to dwell with His people.

† Jesus promised that the Father and Son would make their dwelling with the believer. This is covenant presence, not geographical evacuation. God's purpose was fellowship restored through Christ (John 14:20; 17:21-23).

† This also helps explain Jesus' promise concerning the Father's house. The emphasis of John 14 isn't simply believers going somewhere else, but believers being received into fellowship with Christ. Only a few verses later Jesus explains this relationship as the Father and Son coming and making their dwelling with the believer (John 14:2-3, 20, 23).

† The great promise of Christ is therefore much bigger than leaving the earth. Through Him, the separation caused by sin has been overcome, and God's people have been brought into communion with the Father.

Ephesians 2:13

But now in Christ Jesus you who previously were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

† Paul describes salvation with two powerful ideas, far away and brought near. The problem wasn't that believers were physically located too far from heaven. The problem was covenant separation from God.

† Christ's blood changed that condition. Those who were far away were brought near. This is accomplished redemption, not a promise that Christians must wait for a future escape from the earth (Ephesians 2:11-16).

† Jesus didn't die so God's people could spend thousands of years waiting to become near to God. Through Christ, they were already being reconciled to God and brought into His covenant family (Ephesians 2:19).

† That's the WOW moment. The gospel isn't primarily God saying, Someday I'll take you away from here. The gospel announces that through Christ, those who were far away have been brought near.

Ephesians 2:18

for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

† Paul doesn't say that believers will someday have access to the Father after they're removed from the earth. He says we have our access. Access to God is a present reality through Christ.

† Under the old covenant, access to God's presence was pictured through priests, sacrifices, the temple, and the veil. Christ fulfilled what those things represented and opened the way into God's presence (Hebrews 9:8-12; 10:19-22).

† Jew and Gentile now share the same access to the Father

through the same Spirit. God's dwelling is no longer centered in a physical temple made with human hands. His people are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

† Christianity isn't a religion of standing outside waiting to get in. In Christ, we have access.

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† The writer doesn't tell these believers that they must wait thousands of years to come to Mount Zion. He tells them, you have come. They were participating in the transition from the old covenant order to the heavenly reality established through Christ.

† They had come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. This wasn't describing an airplane trip into the sky. It was describing covenant access to God through Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13).

† This passage completely changes the direction of the discussion. The Christian hope isn't centered on escaping God's creation. God's people have been brought into the heavenly Jerusalem and into the presence of God through Christ.

† What the earthly Jerusalem, temple, priesthood, and sacrifices pictured temporarily, Christ brought into reality permanently.

Revelation 21:3

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will

be among them,

† Here is the direction of the entire biblical story stated plainly. The tabernacle of God is with humanity. God dwells with His people.

† Revelation doesn't end with the declaration that humanity has finally escaped God's creation. It ends with God's dwelling being with His people. The separation pictured throughout the old covenant order has been removed through Christ.

† The language reaches back through the entire covenant story. The tabernacle and temple represented God's presence among His covenant people, but those structures were shadows pointing toward something greater (Exodus 25:8; Ezekiel 37:27; Hebrews 8:1-5).

† In the fulfilled new covenant reality, God's presence isn't confined to a building in Jerusalem. God's dwelling is with His people.

Revelation 22:3-4

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

† The Bible begins with humanity losing unhindered access to God's presence, and Revelation ends with God's servants seeing His face. That's restoration.

† The throne of God and the Lamb is present with His people. The curse associated with covenant separation has been overcome through the victorious work of Christ (Galatians 3:13; Revelation 21:1-4).

† Seeing God's face communicates restored fellowship, acceptance, and covenant presence. What humanity couldn't accomplish through law, sacrifice, priesthood, or temple was accomplished through Jesus Christ.

† This is where the biblical story was always going. Not God abandoning His people. Not God's people endlessly waiting to escape. God and His people dwelling together.

Historical References

† Josephus recorded the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, describing the burning of the sanctuary and the collapse of the old Jewish center of worship. This historical judgment provides the setting for understanding the final removal of the old covenant temple order (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Books 6-7).

† Eusebius later recorded that the believers in Jerusalem left the city before the war and went to Pella. His account is significant because the Christians didn't remain attached to earthly Jerusalem as though God's presence depended upon that city or its temple (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5).

† The destruction of the earthly temple didn't leave God's people without God's presence. The New Testament had already declared that believers were God's temple and dwelling place through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19-22).

† The historical end of the temple system therefore fits the theological movement already announced throughout the New Testament, from the earthly shadow to the completed new covenant reality in Christ.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't have to live as though God is far away. Through Jesus Christ, believers have access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18).

† We don't have to look toward earthly Jerusalem to find God's dwelling place. God's people are His dwelling place through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

† We don't have to build our Christian hope around escaping the earth. Jesus prayed that His disciples wouldn't be taken out of the world, but that they would be kept from the evil one (John 17:15).

† We can live with joy because Christianity isn't about waiting outside God's presence. In Christ, we've been brought near.

† We can live with confidence because Jesus accomplished

reconciliation. The distance between God and His covenant people has been overcome through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

† We can live with peace because the kingdom isn't waiting for some future generation to discover it. God's people have received a kingdom that can't be shaken (Hebrews 12:28).

† We can live every day knowing that God's purpose wasn't to abandon His creation or leave His people waiting for an evacuation. His purpose was communion, reconciliation, access, and dwelling.

† That's the WOW moment. The story isn't about how far away Christians can someday go. It's about how near God has brought us through Jesus.

† Jesus didn't come to take us away, He came to bring us near.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Didn't Jesus say He was going to prepare a place and come again to receive His disciples to Himself?

A: Yes. But the surrounding context explains the purpose as union and fellowship with Christ, not simply transportation away from the earth. Jesus said, I will come to you, and then said that the Father and Son would come and make their dwelling with the believer (John 14:2-3, 18, 20, 23).

Q: Doesn't Revelation teach that believers eventually leave the earth for heaven?

A: Revelation's closing picture emphasizes the opposite direction, God's dwelling is with His people. The New Jerusalem comes down from God, and God's tabernacle is with humanity (Revelation 21:2-3).

Q: Are Christians still waiting to be brought near to God?

A: No. Paul said those who were far away had already been brought near by the blood of Christ and already had access to the Father (Ephesians 2:13, 18).

Q: Have believers already come to the heavenly Jerusalem?

A: Yes. Hebrews says, you have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Q: Where does God dwell today?

A: God dwells with and in His people through the Spirit.

Believers are described as being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Q: Then what is the great hope of fulfilled eschatology?

A: It's not that we're waiting for God to finish an unfinished redemption. It's that we live in the reality Christ accomplished, reconciliation, access to the Father, the new covenant, the kingdom, and fellowship with God (Hebrews 12:22-24, 28; Revelation 21:3).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† John 14:23; Ephesians 2:13; Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21:3; Revelation 22:3-4

† Historical writers: Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Books 6-7; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5

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