

WAKE THE BRIDE

JEFF KINLEY



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To all those who wear the fine linen.
"Blessed is the one who stays awake..."

REVELATION 16:15

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Introduction

The French poet Paul Valéry, describing the pessimism arising from post-World War I Europe, wrote, “The future, like everything else, is not what it used to be.”

One hundred years later, his words have fresh meaning. The future has never been more uncertain. Never more unknown. Never more volatile. And yet, despite this ambiguity, we remain fascinated with the future, fixated on discovering what the world will be like *then...* in the “post-now.” There’s a natural intrigue regarding what’s going to happen to this terrestrial ball we’re inhabiting. But why? Why is the future (and more importantly, the subject of the end times) so interesting? Why does it captivate our attention? Why do we get that deer-in-the-headlights stare whenever some TV show, blockbuster movie, or best-selling book on the subject crosses our path?

I suspect it has something to do with our inherent human curiosity. We’re wired to *know*. And the future is, by definition, *not* known. We don’t like that, so we seek to satisfy that curiosity by creating lifelike fantasy scenarios giving our imagination a temporary fix. Hollywood has smartly tapped into this curiosity by creating

epic, futuristic productions. Though pure conjecture, these films tap into the human psyche, temporarily fulfilling our longing to know what the future will be like. It's these imaginary scenarios of the apocalypse or postapocalypse that draw us (and our debit cards) to the box office.

But unlike fictional books or fantasy movies, Scripture's prophecies are not portrayals or predictions of things that *might* happen. Instead, they're visual previews of events Jesus Himself declared "*must* soon take place."¹ Backstage passes to coming attractions. If the Bible is true and can be understood literally, then the events foretold in Revelation are prophetic truths our generation must know and respond to.

If we are indeed rapidly approaching the end of days, could Jesus presently be preparing His bride for such a time?

Chances are you're one of those curious souls not satisfied with being left in the dark, imagining, guessing, hoping. You're hungry for some concrete confidence concerning the last days of planet Earth and the return of Jesus Christ.

This book will help satisfy that hunger. It fills that void where your voyeuristic curiosity dwells, replacing it with knowledge and truth. It won't answer every trivial detail about the end times, but what you see and learn about the future will be enough to change you *in the now*. Journeying through these pages, you'll experience a head-on collision with history...in advance. A sneak preview into the future. It's the ultimate reality drama, only this one isn't staged.

This is the real deal.

And every bit of it is going to happen.

But knowing about the end times does more than just satisfy your sweet tooth for prophecy. These truths will strengthen your faith in the accuracy of Scripture. Your confidence in the Bible will rise, giving you a firm conviction concerning the Book you love.

These end-time realities will also reveal the wise plans and

purposes of God. And though His judgments are often beyond understanding and His ways deeper than our minds can fathom, there's still plenty to know and digest.² You'll see God's view of things to come, gaining through His eyes a clearer perspective on humanity, the church, and your own life. And you'll have a brand-new lens through which to see and interpret world news.

Prophecy tells us what's going to happen before it happens. Some people in God's long story have been privileged to see prophecy fulfilled in their lifetime, while others have had to believe by faith that certain things would one day come to pass. Others have even suffered for those beliefs, considered fools for believing in what many labeled as ridiculous fantasies.

Right, Noah?

Encountering Revelation's prophecies will guard us against lies, half-truths, crazy ideas, and end-times rumors. No doubt our adversary would try to deceive us into chasing fads and trends leading us to believe things not found in Scripture. Therefore, we must stick to the script, keeping us from falling prey to false or imagined theories about the future.

These prophecies also give us great comfort and peace in uncertain times. Knowing that God Himself is orchestrating history brings calm in the midst of a gathering global storm.

Perhaps best of all, prophecy also inspires us toward a different kind of life. Not one where we hop into our pajamas and climb the nearest mountain to wait for Jesus's return, but one that motivates us toward personal purity and preparation for the One who promised to come back for us.³

Make no mistake about it—Revelation was intended to be read *and* obeyed. Just as much as Psalms, Philippians, and the Gospels. Though much of it is prophetic, those prophecies nevertheless carry a message for us now. Revelation was written *to* the church and *for* the church. And if you're a believer in Jesus, that means you.

As you read, expect to develop not only a deep concern for your world and friends, but also a fresh excitement for your life. Like those original, first-century Christians, you'll begin living with a sense of urgency and expectancy, infused with a massive dose of hope. And like the aged apostle John, you may find yourself exclaiming, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."⁴

But for Jesus's bride to experience this, she must first wake up.

A Day Is Coming

One day. And the world is never the same.

D-day

November 22, 1963

9/11

Days like these imprint generations, shaping the destinies of nations. They impact global culture, and like those still-visible D-day bomb craters along the Normandy coast, they transform the landscape, becoming lasting reminders to the colossal difference a day can make.

But according to our Bible, there are more significant days than D-day ahead for us. Dates and times on heaven's calendar that are indelibly preset. Moments to come in which everything—and I mean *everything*—will change.

We occasionally mention these times in the church. Prophetic events do have a place in our Christian experience. But biblical prophecies can often seem seasonal, stored in the same church closet where we keep the Christmas manger and that big cross we use for the Easter presentation. Much like those holidays, Scripture's future stuff can become almost novel and, at times, even trite. We reflect on the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus with great meaning

and contemplative focus, and rightly so. These events impact us, not just because of their historical certainty, but also because these past events were meant to influence our lives in the here and now.

What often becomes difficult, however, is applying that same importance to events that have yet to take place. Because we can't schedule Scripture's predictions like we do Christmas and Easter, the average believer struggles to embrace them. We talk about "signs of the times" and use words like *rapture*, *tribulation*, and *last days*, but all too easily relegate them to that mental file marked "Complicated," "Too Much Mystery," or "Above My Spiritual Pay Grade." And though we may profess belief in their certain and eventual fulfillment, we fail to understand their relevance to our lives today because they seem so foggy and far off.

However, this is precisely where we can miss God's plan and purpose for prophecy. Prophecy's future realities are meant to impact us in the now. It's always been this way. Messianic prophecies given centuries before the birth of Christ gave hope, helping believers prepare and live in light of that coming reality.¹ Ignoring or treating lightly God's future events lulls us into a spirit of complacency, slumber, and unpreparedness. But God wants His people to be awake...and prepared.

Ezekiel was appointed as a spiritual watchman who upon seeing approaching danger was to blow the trumpet, alerting Israel.² Jesus urged His followers to adopt the same attitude. In describing the events of the end times to His disciples in Mark 13, the Lord repeatedly urges them to "see" (v. 5), "be on your guard" (v. 9), "be on guard" (v. 23), "be on guard, keep awake" (v. 33), "stay awake" (v. 35), "lest [the master of the house] come suddenly and find you asleep" (v. 36). He concludes, "And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."³

Just days later, Christ would lead them to the Garden of Gethsemane where, after returning from a time of prayer, He found them

fast asleep. Jesus's response in this important moment of His life was anything but cordial.

“Simon, are you *asleep*? Could you not *keep watch* for one hour? *Keep watching* and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again He came and found them *sleeping*, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. And He came the third time, and said to them, “Are you *still sleeping* and *resting*? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. *Get up*, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!”⁴

The disciples' hearts may have been sincere, but they lacked the stamina to stay awake. Their eyes were heavy. They were sluggish. Lethargic. Lacking vigilance. Furthermore, they didn't “get it” either, failing to grasp the historic weight of the moment. They had no clue how earthshaking the following day would be. Even after some three years with Jesus, they still couldn't comprehend how critical that near-future event would be to them...and to all humankind.

It makes you wonder how closely they had been listening to Jesus all along.

Are we listening?

Just the previous day, during the final week of His life, Jesus had gathered His disciples together on a Jerusalem hillside called the Mount of Olives. There they asked Him about His coming kingdom, and specifically about the signs leading up to the end of the age. Part of the Lord's answer involved a fascinating story about ten virgin bridesmaids.⁵

The Jewish custom of the day was for the bridegroom to surprise the bride by snatching her away from her house and leading her in

a procession to the wedding festivities and their new home. Attending the bride were young, unmarried maidens. In this story, Jesus says these ten bridesmaids were equipped with lamps in the event of a surprise night wedding procession. Five of these young women had purchased oil for their lamps and five had not. When the bridegroom seemed to delay his arrival, all ten girls became drowsy and fell asleep. Then suddenly, at midnight there was a shout.

“Behold the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.”

But while running out to fulfill their duty and light their lamps, five of the bridesmaids realized they had forgotten to purchase oil. After trying to persuade the others to share some of theirs and being denied, they headed into the night searching for oil. In the meantime, the bridegroom led the prepared virgins away to the wedding feast. When the unprepared bridesmaids finally arrived outside the celebration, they found the door shut. They pleaded, “Lord, lord, open up for us.” But the groom replied without hesitation, “Truly I say to you, I do not know you.”⁶ Jesus then turns to His disciples with a sobering warning, “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.”

Are we prepared?

Dr. Luke recounts the story of a young man who, while Paul spoke at a church gathering, fell asleep and tumbled out of a third-story window to his death. This kid didn’t have narcolepsy. He just gradually dozed off. Young Eutychus was lulled to sleep even while surrounded by the truth.⁷

Are we awake?

Paul repeatedly urged New Testament believers to fight spiritual drowsiness, especially as it relates to spiritual warfare, the end times, and the return of Christ.

- “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit... *be on the alert* with all perseverance.”⁸

- “So then *let us not sleep* as others do, but let us *be alert* and sober.”⁹

Peter warned Christians scattered across Asia Minor,

- “Therefore, prepare your minds for action, *keep sober in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the *revelation of Jesus Christ*.”¹⁰
- “The *end of all things is near*; therefore, be of sound judgment and *sober spirit* for the purpose of prayer.”¹¹

Are we alert?

So Jesus places a high value on His bride being watchful, ready, and awake. But why? The answer is found in Revelation. In fact, that’s exactly why this last book of the Bible was written—to provide believers like you and me with a verbal panorama of the end times, and to motivate the church to prepare herself for the imminent return of her bridegroom. Part of the New Testament’s majestic symphony of theology, Revelation plays a huge part in describing the pivotal, prophetic days that lay ahead for planet Earth.

I believe the next prophetic event will occur when our Lord returns like a bridegroom, snatching up His bride and taking her to heaven prior to global judgments being unleashed upon our world.¹² According to Scripture, this dramatic day will set in motion a series of catastrophic happenings outlined in Revelation 4–18. And all this is merely the opening act leading up to the main event, the climactic moment of history itself.

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

Though many scenes described in Revelation are not yet fully understood, grasping every detail is not necessary in order to get the big picture. And knowing how all these prophecies will play out isn’t needed in order to know how we should live. In fact, even though I

don't believe the church will endure the judgments unfolding during the seven-year period known as the tribulation, those judgments nonetheless impact us today. But more about that later.

So here's the big idea. You may think Revelation is off limits for you, reserved only for PhDs and PNTs (Prophecy Nerd-Types). Perhaps you've experienced sensory overload from Bible teachers armed with confusing charts and drawings of ten-headed beasts. Or maybe you've been turned off by wild-eyed TV preachers predicting the identity of the Antichrist or describing giant "grasshopper demons" in Revelation 9. Or you may have no idea what Scripture says concerning the future of the church or planet Earth.

Whatever the case, don't despair. God originally wrote Revelation to Christians living at the end of the first century. These believers lived in a day when both their government and culture were hostile to those professing faith in Jesus. So He gave them this—His final book. It was intended to be read aloud, and like all Scripture, designed to teach, reprove, correct, and train us in righteousness.¹³

And though much of it is prophetic and sometimes puzzling, even what is presently unclear serves an important role in believers' lives, both then and now. Throughout the mind-blowing, apocalyptic vision found in Revelation, a natural spirit of expectancy rises in the hearts of those who engage it. Jesus's Revelation produces in us a deep longing for His return, and a heart that cries out for Him to "come."¹⁴ Those first-century disciples *expected* their Lord to return at any moment, and were daily "looking for that blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."¹⁵

Are we looking?

My friend, Jesus Christ is returning to retrieve and rescue His bride! God's judgment on our world cannot be avoided, and His Son's return cannot be delayed. This announcement ought to invigorate our minds and hearts. It should raise our spiritual heartbeat in anticipation and stimulate our soul to alert status. Yes, there really

is another climactic Day coming, one making all previous red-letter dates pale in comparison. And it may appear on history's horizon much sooner than we realize.

So if God wants us to be *awake*, exactly how do we open our eyes? How does a believer learn to see?

The Perils of Prophecy

Not long ago, I was in El Paso visiting my son, an army officer stationed at Ft. Bliss. While there, our family decided to hike up the Franklin Mountains. I was curious about an historic site located on one of the mountain's upper slopes. Some sixty years ago, a Convair B-36 Peacemaker bomber crashed there on a frigid December afternoon a few weeks before Christmas 1953, killing all nine crewmembers.¹⁶

The Air Force dispatched a team to the site, eventually recovering what was left of the servicemen's bodies. They also retrieved a portion of the tail section, along with classified bits and pieces of the bomber. The remaining wreckage was left as it was at fifty-two hundred feet, scattered wildly across the side of the mountain range. A mute monument to a tragic military aviation disaster.

Now I found myself about to ascend the mountain and try to locate the historic crash site. Even though the hike was described as "very strenuous," I casually brushed it off as a pretty easy climb. I purchased a cheap hat at a local outdoor market, laced up my hiking shoes, and grabbed a bottle of water to quench my thirst in the sweltering summer heat.

We discovered the first part of the hike involved a half-mile walk up a trail snaking its way along the base of the mountain. A gradual incline, this rocky footpath proved to be much longer and more difficult than I had anticipated. Having previously researched it, I had already predetermined our eventual destination...*generally speaking*. Even so, there was no actual trail leading up to the

site. But no big deal, right? Well, maybe, unless you realize this is no ordinary hike.

The Franklin Mountains are in the desert, a precarious terrain liberally littered with prickly pear cacti and a plentiful supply of Spanish daggers, a plant with long, swordlike leaves. Encounter one of these hard needle tips, and you don't forget it.

Loose rocks made an already unsteady, nonexistent path even more perilous. So steep is the mountain grade that one misstep, and I would be rapidly tumbling head over feet, collecting thorns and accumulating broken bones along the way.

Oh, and did I mention there are rattlesnakes? I hate snakes. *Hate* them. Every rock overhang I passed gave me caution, fearing the sudden strike of poisonous fangs at my ankles.

Like some ancient mythological goddess, the mountain stands stoic and stern. She is treacherous and unforgiving and cares not for the occasional hiker. She dares you to ascend her and welcomes all challengers with a silent sneer that seems to whisper, "Bring it."

Needless to say, I chose my steps with great precision and caution. And because of the altitude, I was also forced to take frequent stops to catch my breath. More than once, I wondered to myself if this excursion was worth the effort. Would I make it? Was I crazy for even attempting such a hike? Was I going to regret this?

"One step at a time," I kept repeating.

And so, stopping for a moment to extract some oxygen from the thin mountain air, I collapsed on a large rock and took a well-deserved drink from my water bottle. Dropping my head, I stared at the scorching sand beneath my shoes.

And that's when I saw it.

Gleaming in the afternoon sun was a small object protruding between the rocks and sand. I bent down, digging and probing with my walking stick. What I eventually unearthed proved to be a small spring, about a half-inch in length, broken and encrusted with rust.

Though I didn't know exactly how long it had been buried there, of one thing I was certain—it had come literally *from the sky*. Something really big had birthed this metal fragment. Something that disintegrated into a million pieces sixty years earlier.

This insignificant fragment proved to be a tiny clue, and one pointing to a much greater reality. It was confirmation that if I just kept moving forward and upward, I would eventually find what I was searching for. Six decades ago, the world's largest bomber crashed into the Franklin Mountains. And now I was holding a piece of it in my hand.

After another forty-five minutes, I finally reached the crash site and discovered what past hikers and explorers had found—huge landing gear, a giant, twisted propeller, a crushed jet turbine, and mangled pieces of melted fuselage and metal—all randomly scattered across the mountainside. These silent sentries hold perpetual vigil over the spot where nine servicemen stepped into eternity all those years ago.

But not everyone who traverses this terrain makes it to the crash site. Some have no idea where they're going or what they're actually looking for. They are content to remain on the marked trail along the mountain's base, unaware what lies some thirteen hundred feet above them.

Others who make the climb unknowingly step right over important clues along the way. They misread the mountain and end up in a different place altogether. Some begin the climb, only to discover it's much more challenging than it looks and turn back too soon, forfeiting the amazing discovery and vantage point awaiting them at journey's end.

But for those determined souls who carry on—persevering and pushing through the heat, altitude, rugged terrain, fatigue, and threat of injury—those who carefully observe the signs and clues along the way—those who navigate the treacherous journey,

believing it leads to a worthwhile destination—*these* seekers are rewarded with an encounter like none other. And here's why: the higher and farther you go in this uphill expedition, the more you know. The clues start out small, but they get bigger the closer you get to the point of impact. Journeying upward, the crash's debris increase in size and frequency, indicating you're getting close to your destination. And your heart races in anticipation.

But the thing is, you never really know what the next step will bring.

Prophecy Peak

I find that Revelation and Bible prophecy are very much like the Franklin Mountains. They seem foreboding. Intimidating. In the clouds. Unapproachable. Unconquerable. The kind of thing only experts ascend while the rest of us gaze at it in wonder from a safe distance. We stare at such mountains in wild-eyed amazement, often settling for a well-framed selfie or a postcard at the gift shop down below.

Even so, like a huge mountain, prophecy remains, and it's not going away. From its peaks it calls to you, producing a natural yet strange curiosity. It beckons you to explore. To understand. And yet you hesitate, unsure of your hiking skills. You think if you try, you might not make it to the top and comprehend God's prophetic plan.

But others have been there and know the way. You won't walk alone on this journey. Together, we'll make the climb, and Scripture will be our personal guide, pointing out the dangerous places as we progress.

Much like hikers, those attempting to scale "Revelation Mountain" typically fall into several categories. Some believe in last days' prophecy, but choose to keep their distance, safely remaining in the valley below. They've concluded that Revelation and prophecy are far too complex for anyone to really understand. So they settle for

general truth—“Jesus is coming back...I hope. And that’s enough for me!” So they remain in virtual ignorance about things to come. But this does very little for their present lives or future confidence.

Other truth-seekers begin their prophecy journey well, but get lost along the way. This often happens because they are not properly equipped for the trip. Their lack of biblical understanding hinders their advance up the mountain. They don’t know the difference between a discarded candy-bar wrapper and a clue. They’re unable to effectively read the terrain, and thus fail to navigate it accurately.

There are hikers who come to the trailhead well-equipped, but with the wrong mindset. Preconceived ideas, personal preferences, and faulty interpretations eventually lead them to false conclusions. These are the guys who claim to have identified the antichrist or who place leaflets under your windshield wipers announcing the exact date for Jesus’s return. They seem to know a lot more than the Bible does. Guides like these will get you lost in a hurry.

Yes, Revelation can be a foreboding mountain, especially when you live life in the valley below. But you *can* understand it. This book will be somewhat of a hike, one that involves exploring the clues God has scattered throughout Scripture and history—evidence and signs pointing to the truth about the end times and the return of His Son, Jesus. And though it may at times seem random, everything has a place and a purpose. Together, we’ll pause to consider the pieces He has left for us, both large and small.

But I will give you a heads up. This journey is not without its perils. There will be obstacles and unknowns along the way. Not every path is clearly marked. At times you will wonder how a particular piece fits into the end-times puzzle. And as we journey along, you will feel the gravity of the path you’re on. And the air does get thin up there. Thorny truths of divine judgment and the end of life as we know it will prick your mind and conscience. What you discover may sting a bit, even disturb your spirit. You might even grow

short of breath. But that's natural, and okay. It's during those times you'll need to pause, put the book down, and contemplate the magnitude of what you're discovering. It's perhaps during those breathers when you'll make even more discoveries—about God, the future, and especially your own life.

But no worries. We won't get stranded. If you continue up the mountain with me, I promise your perseverance will be rewarded. So if you're ready, then gear up, lace up, and hydrate.

And let's go.