# THE NEW SHOFAR

***The coming of the Son of Man is not just a calendar event. It is a transformational invitation. It arrives wherever hearts are pierced and egos undone and speaks of the breaking in of the enduring power of God over all things.***

***November 16th***

## The End is Nigh!! Really?

I can tell you with a clarity of heart why it is I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord and my God, my Saviour and my comfort in time of need. That He is the unbreakable rock on which I build my life, and the gentle breeze I can only hear when I stop and listen. I know these things because I have experienced them all, these and many other powerful attributes of God in creation, in my life. Moses said it well: "*I have seen Gods face and lived*". I have also experienced God's Presence in and through others as they too journey through their own pilgrimages of faith. There is no doubt that My God, Our God is a Living God. I do not need many more lines to put this kind of Christian experience into words. One word will do: **Hope**.

None of this come easily to us, and we were even warned by Jesus that the road to the Kingdom is narrow, winding and difficult to navigate. But at least we know there is a road we can choose and follow. We are not without direction in our daily living and the direction our lives cab take. It is a road that will inevitably invite us to follow up the steep climb from Jericho to Jerusalem where the Cross awaits.

For some that road is too steep and the pain and suffering that comes with it a little too much to bear. They skip Jerusalem or seek an alternative. But Jesus' Way to life beyond the grave, to a glorious ascension to the Heavenly Throne where all suffering is gone and Peace and Joy envelop us in eternally in awesome ways. Jesus' road brings us blessings we cannot even imagine or define. Jesus victory over death is our victory over death and his ascension to His Father is our ascension to our Father. And so we climb to Jerusalem. It does not matter how many times the climb proves to be too steep and we slip backwards, for the Holy Spirit, like Joseph of Arimathea who helped carry the cross with Jesus, will be there to lighten the load. We start walking all over again. The Biblical word for that is perseverance.

## Those who persevere to the End will be saved

Perseverance does not mean hanging in there until the end, until the inevitable happens. It is the life and death of Jesus that personifies the perseverance grace empowers within us. As Christians we are not powerless victims of the powerplays of others or the whiles of the devil. We are not subject to the movements of the planets, the whims and fancies of those who have power and wealth in our world. We have no need to hide from our limitations and sinfulness for we know that regardless of our weaknesses and our inclination to sin, God loves us and draws us to Himself. We know this because of our relationship to the Father in Jesus Christ, and our relationship to others in the same Jesus Christ. For us, then, meaning to life and what happens when the time comes for us to

die is not a mystery. As we imitated Jesus in our living, so we follow Christ in our dying and in our rising from the grave. Life is not pointless when we live in Christ Jesus for we remember his promises to us…*Come to me all you who are weary and are overburdened and I will give you rest.*

## Looking at life through the prism of faith

I have been thinking a lot about ***endurance*** and like millions before me find there is great comfort to be found there as Jesus offers us a glimpse of the realities of living in the Kingdom of God. By the time Luke puts the finishing touches to these verses at the end of his gospel, the temple's destruction has already happened. Thus, for Luke's readers what Jesus says in Luke 21:5-6 is more a reflection on the temple's destruction than a prediction of it. Luke uses the destruction of this magnificent temple to make a statement on the impermanence of human achievement. In response to their wonder at the temple's beauty, Jesus attempts to divert the attention of his audience away from their fascination with "*these things that you see"* (**21:6**). Their focus should be on something else. What, exactly, is not specified, but immediately before this exchange Jesus drew attention to a poor widow in the temple (**21:1-4**). Perhaps Luke's Jesus thinks his audience should focus their attention on the poor, on the needy and the desperate who surround us not on the temple building and all that happens therein.

Those listening to Jesus teach in the temple, however, remain concerned with what will happen to the building (**Luke 21:7**). In response, Jesus moves from discussing a specific catastrophic event to more general statements about the coming of false prophets, wars, and other calamities (**21:7-12**). Here Luke employs language and imagery that is conventional in apocalyptic literature from this period (for example Daniel 11:20, 25, 44; 4 Ezra 13:31; Revelation 6:12; 8:5; 11:13 ). These texts cannot be and should not be read as though pointing to events happening in 2025.

Apocalyptic literature uses unsettling language and imagery as a means to assure the faithful that they should keep their trust in God even when facing the most challenging of circumstances. Sure enough, while describing the terrible events, Jesus tells his listeners not to be afraid (**Luke 21:9**). There is nothing particularly original or specific about Jesus' "predictions" here. Every age has its own false prophets, wars, natural catastrophes, and so on. We will misread **21:7-11** if we think Jesus is describing a specific set of calamities. The point is that when bad things happen — and they will — we should "*not be terrified*" (**21:9**) or follow anyone proclaiming these are signs of God's judgment and the end (21:8). Instead, we should trust that God remains present in our lives.

Jesus details the persecution that his followers can expect to face: arrests; persecution; trials before government authorities; betrayal by family and friends; hatred on account of Jesus' name; and even execution. Throughout his Gospel, Luke depicts Jesus as a prophetic figure who risks rejection and death as a result of his prophetic message (see especially Luke 4:16-30). Anyone who follows Jesus can expect the same hostility that Jesus and Israel's great prophets endured. Indeed, the Acts of the Apostles (written by the same author who wrote Luke's Gospel) provides numerous examples of early Christian leaders facing precisely the sort of troubles that Jesus describes in 21:12-19.