

## Thursday Evening Bible Study

**Series: the End Times – Bible prophecy about future events and periods**

### Teaching Summary for Week 69

## The Future of the Church

### Overview

We have finally returned to us, today, during the Church Age. What does the Bible say about the future of the church, the body of Christ?

Quite a bit, actually. In preparing for this final installment in our series on the End Times, I reviewed 50 New Testament passages in the gospel of John and the epistles.

That's a lot of verses – many more than I would have guessed before I began my study.

The passages that describe the future of the church are quite general, not specific.

They lack details about :

- Chronology (no verses give us the timing of the Rapture , for example)
- Location (where we are when the Second Coming occurs)
- Events (Are all the passages about the judgment/rewarding of believers talking about the same event?)

These verses fall into three broad categories or periods:

1. The **trends** in these **last days of the church age** are for increasing *darkness*.
2. The **hope** for the church is *bright: the Rapture*.

3. The **ages to come** – from the Rapture to all of eternity (the new heavens and new earth, and the New Jerusalem) - will be *glorious* for the church.

We are now going to examine the Scriptures for each of these periods/events.

## **Last Days of the Church Age**

1. The **trends** in these **last days of the church age** are for increasing *darkness*.

The first passage, 1 Timothy 4:1-4, describes conditions within the “church” – those who assemble and profess to be Christians. However, in later times, many of these will be unbelievers or false teachers.

*1 Tim 4:1-5*

*But the Spirit explicitly says that **in later times** some will **fall away** from the faith, paying attention to **deceitful spirits** and **doctrines of demons**, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 3 **men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods** which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; 5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.*

What trends are identified in this passage? When will they be occurring?

Important: with respect to the question of “when”, don’t forget that each generation of Christians eagerly anticipates the return of our Lord in the clouds.

The next passage, 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13 describes conditions in the world – although these conditions also show up in the church to the extent that members act no differently than the unbelievers in the world.

*2 Tim 3:1-5,13 ; 4:3-4*

*But realize this, that in **the last days difficult times [seasons]** will come. 2 For **men** will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. [note carefully – what does this tell us when these men are on the scene?]*

Verse 5 was addressed to Timothy. What does this reveal about when these men will be on the scene?

This tells us that such men will be present in each generation. It is a matter of intensity, as verse 13 below brings out. In other words, things will get worse as time passes. This will come in waves (seasons). The waves will keep getting bigger and more frequent.

.....

*13 But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

.....

In chapter 4, verses 3-4, Paul returns to describing conditions inside the church:

*4: 3 For **the time will come** when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside [be turned aside] to myths.*

What conditions are described here?

The conditions inside the church include:

- Believers will not endure sound doctrine
- Instead, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires
- As a result, they will turn their ears away from the truth, and they will be turned aside to myths.
- Some will fall away from the faith
- Instead, they will pay attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons

- They will fall for the hypocrisy of liars who will be seared in their own consciences
- These false teachers will forbid marriage and will advocate abstaining from foods

Here are some additional scriptures that describe conditions outside the church in the last days/hour.

*1 John 2:18*

*18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now **many antichrists have appeared**; from this we know that it is the last hour.*

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*Jude 17-19*

*17 But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, 18 that they were saying to you, "**In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.**" 19 **These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.***

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At the same time, we groan inside, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons – the redemption of our body at the Rapture.

*Rom 8:18-25*

*18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we **ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.** 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.*

We note in passing that verse 19 says that creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. But there is no time or place (on earth, from heaven) specified.

This present age is evil, but the Lord will rescue us out of it.

*Gal 1:3-5*

*3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.*

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“This present evil age” refers to the world, not to the church. Satan is the ruler of this world. He has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.

*2 Cor 4:3-4*

*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

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*Rom 13:11-14*

*11 Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 **The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.** 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.*

## **The Rapture**

2. The **hope** for the church is *bright*: **the Rapture.**

Titus 2:11-14 begins with the present age, and moves on to the blessed hope of the Rapture:

*Titus 2:11-14*

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly **in the present age**, 13 looking for **the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus**, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

The clearest presentation of the Rapture appears in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

*1 Thess 4:13-18*

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, **that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.**

The Lord Himself descends from heaven, but He is not accompanied by His angels. Notice that the trumpet is God's trumpet, not an angel's trumpet. This trumpet is not one of the seven trumpets that are sounded by angels in the book of Revelation.

Both the dead and those who are alive will be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. At the Second Coming, the Lord comes down to the earth with His angels and rescues the saints on earth.

Finally, from this point forward, we shall always be with the Lord. Always.

Do not let this fact escape you. It is the key to understanding the future of the body of Christ in the ages to come.

*John 14:2-3*

"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "If I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.**

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Christ will be in His Father's house in heaven, and we will be there with Him.

*1 Cor 15:50-57*

*Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Here the kingdom in view is the **heavenly** kingdom of God. Flesh and blood will inherit the earthly kingdom.

Verses 51-53 line up with 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16. The dead in Christ will be raised , and those who are alive with be changed; their mortal bodies will be changed to immortal bodies.

This immortal, imperishable body will be like the Lord's. It will be a heavenly, glorified body – a body suitable for living in the heavenly kingdom.

*Phil 3:20-21*

*20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*

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*2 Cor 5:1-4*

*For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, **eternal in the heavens**. 2 For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with **our dwelling from heaven**, 3 inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. 4 For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.*

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So we have these four facts:

- (1) We will be with the Lord always.
- (2) Our kingdom will be heavenly.
- (3) We will have a glorified immortal body that is just like the Lord's resurrected body.
- (4) Our body will be heavenly.

These facts have profound implications for the body of Christ in the ages to come.

But when will this event of the Rapture take place? We are not given any specifics. Just a general indication about what will happen at some time after the Rapture.

*1 Thess 1:9-10*

*9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who **rescues us from the wrath to come**.*

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*1 Thess 5:9-11*

*For God **has not destined us for wrath**, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that **whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him**. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*



In context, this wrath refers to the Day of the Lord. We have not been destined for the wrath of the Day of the Lord. Instead, all members of His body will be living together with Him.

## *2 Thess 2:1-6*

*1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him [The Rapture], 2 that you not **be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed** either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect **that the day of the Lord has come**. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. 5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?*

If the Rapture occurred during the Day of the Lord, or after the Day of the Lord, then the news that the Day of the Lord had come would be welcomed with great joy. The blessed hope was about to happen. They would not have been shaken from their composure or disturbed by the news.

Only if they knew that the Rapture would take place BEFORE the Day of the Lord would they be shaken and disturbed by a report that the Day of the Lord had already come.

So this passage also teaches that the Rapture will occur some time before the Day of the Lord.

Finally, the New Testament epistles talk about **judgments and rewards**. The passages do not all agree on all the particulars – including the time, the place, the basis, the nature of the rewards, and the people who are included.

We do not have time to study this in detail. Instead, I have prepared a table with helpful information about these passages. It is titled “**Judgment/Rewards/Blameless**”.

## The Ages to Come

3. The **ages to come** – from the Rapture to all of eternity (the new heavens and new earth, and the New Jerusalem) - will be *glorious* for the church.

*Eph 1:18-23*

*18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand **in the heavenly places**, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, **not only in this age but also in the one to come**. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, **and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.***

*Eph 2:4-7*

*4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the **heavenly places** in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the **surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.***

Notice that the Father has seated us with Christ in the heavenly places. He has done that so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us. Clearly He will do that for us in the heavenly places.

The ages to come are the periods after the Church Age ends (ie, after the Rapture).

What does Ephesians 2:7 tell us about the church in the ages to come?

What does this suggest about the timing of the Rapture relative to Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week is one of the ages to come.

*2 Thess 1:5-10*

*5 This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of **the kingdom of God**, for which indeed you are suffering. 6 For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well **when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.** 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 **when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed — for our testimony to you was believed.***

Which kingdom is in view in verse 5?

In the above passage, 2Thessalonians 1:5-10, Paul describes the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. How do we know?

This description matches what is said about the Second Coming by the prophets, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the book of Revelation. But we have a new wrinkle here.

Christ will be glorified in his saints on that day. This means that the body of Christ will be revealed in glory with Him. Romans 8:19-21 and Colossians 3:1-4 also describe this.

The prophets don't mention the presence of the body of Christ in glorified bodies. Nor does Jesus in the gospel of Matthew, and Revelation does not include this either.

Why not?

Hint: the prophets deal with events -where?

On earth!

The body of Christ is a heavenly people. (Colossians 3:1-4; Philippians 3:20-21).

We will be present with Him as His body. We will always be with Him after we are raptured. But we will not be involved with the things on earth, other than being revealed with Him as His body. His angels descend to earth with Him in flaming fire, when the Lord deals out retribution to unbelievers.

*1 Cor 6:1-3*

*1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?*

At some time in the future, the saints will judge the world. We will also judge angels.

But there is no time or place specified.

When will the saints judge the world? And where will we be when we do that?  
When will we judge angels? And where?  
We simply do not know.

*Heb 12:18-24*

*18 For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 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, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.*

You have not come to a mountain on earth.

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

You have come to myriads of angels.

You have come to the general assembly and the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.

Our future after the Rapture is completely heavenly.