

Thursday Evening Bible Study

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

Teaching Summary for Week 70 – the end of the End Times

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?

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*.

We completed our study of this first phase last week.

Our age - the church age – is called “this present evil age” in the Bible (Gal 1:4).

It is the age of trends not prophecy. Conditions worsen as we get closer to the Rapture.

The Rapture

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

We ended in this second phase which is actually an event.

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

Then we reviewed the clearest presentation of the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

Verse 17 teaches us that from the moment of the Rapture 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.***

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.

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.*

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.***

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, "wrath" refers to the Day of the Lord. God has not destined us for this wrath. 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 70th week. Daniel's 70th 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**.

THE END. This completes our study of the End Times.

Next week, we will have a **Q&A** session, and then discuss the **next book or subject** that we will take up.