

# **THE CHURCH AGE AND CHURCH IN THE PROPHECY**

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Session**

The church age began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and will end with the rapture of the church before the beginning of the Tribulation. The church age is not characterized by historically verifiable prophetic events except its beginning on the Day of Pentecost and its ending with the rapture. But Bible prophecy does reveal the general course of this age.

Even most of the specific prophecy that is fulfilled during the church age relates to God's prophetic plan for Israel and not directly to the church. For example, the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70 relates to Israel (Mathew 23:38; Luke 19:43-44; 21:20-24). Prophetic preparations relating to Israel are already underway with the reestablishment of Israel as a nation in 1948 even though we still are living in the church age.

### **THE CHURCH AGE DESCRIBED**

#### **Mathew 13**

The parables of Mathew 13 provide insight in to this present age in its relation to the future kingdom. They cover the period of time between Christ's two advents - His first and second comings. This includes our present era (the church age), the Tribulation, the second coming and the final judgment, though it bypasses the rapture.

Pentecost summarizes the description as follows:

We may summarize the teaching as to the course of the age by saying:

1. there will be a sowing of the Word throughout the age, which
2. will be imitated by a false counter sowing;
3. the kingdom will assume huge outer proportions ,but
4. be marked by inner doctrinal corruption; yet , the Lord will gain for Himself
5. a peculiar treasure from among Israel, and
6. from the church;
7. the age will end in judgment with the unrighteous excluded from the kingdom to be inaugurated and the righteous taken in to enjoy the blessing of Messiah's reign.

This means that the church age is a time of constant preaching of the gospel. The church begins as a small band of individuals but becomes a global institution. As Christendom expands to fill the whole world, it will become increasingly apostate. This will result in global judgment after the rapture of the church.

#### **Revelation 2 – 3**

The letters to the seven churches also provide an overview of the course of this age (Revelation 2-3). These passages applies to the church and not to the future kingdom, as indicated by the often-repeated phrase, "He who has ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22 NASB). The seven historical

churches of the first century provide a pattern of the churches that will exist throughout church history.

### **The Epistles**

A number of New Testament epistles speak of the condition within Christendom near the end of the age. The following is a list of the seven major passages that deal with the last days of the church: {1-Timothy 4:1-3; 2-Tim 3:1-5 & 4:3-4; James 5:1-8; 2-Peter 2& 3:3-6 and the tiny letter of Jude}. Each of these passages emphasizes repeatedly that the outstanding characteristic of the final time of the church will be **apostasy**.

The English meaning of APOSTASY is “departure from one’s faith”. Apostasy occurs in two main areas: Doctrine and Behavior OR the way we think and the way we act. According to the New Testament, the professing church at the end of the age will be filled with denial about the truth and about godly living.

- Denial of God—2-Timothy 3:4-5
- Denial of Christ—1John 2:18 & 4:3
- Denial of Christ’s return—2-Peter 3:3-4
- Denial of the faith—1-Timothy 4:1-2; Jude 3
- Denial of Sound doctrine—2-Timothy 4: 3-4
- Denial of Christian liberty—1-Timothy 4: 3-4
- Denial of morals—2-Timothy 3:1-8&13 and Jude18
- Denial of authority—2-Timothy 3:4

Scriptures indicates that apostasy will characterize Christendom at the time of the rapture. The current church-age apostasy is preparation for even greater deception and apostasy lead by the Antichrist during the Tribulation. Yet at the same time, as long as the church is on the earth, God the Holy Spirit will be at work bringing new people to Christ and enabling faithful believers to grow to maturity.

### **The Prophetic Destiny of the church**

The Bible consistently warns church-age believers to be on guard against apostasy. This characteristic is a general sign of the end times. BUT WHAT IS THE PROPHETIC FUTURE OF THE CHURCH??? To answer this question, we must separate the true church in particular from Christendom in general. The true church is made up of Jews and Gentiles who genuinely know Christ as their Savior and have their sins forgiven.

Beginning on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and continuing to the rapture, all believers are part of Christ’s body-the church.

We call the realm of the professing church’s influence *Christendom*. Christendom constitutes everything associated with the visible church, including all of its branches. Christendom includes TRUE BELIEVERS and MERE PROFESSORS, the wheat and the tares growing up together (Matt 13:24-30). But remember, the true church and Christendom have very different prophetic destinies.

### **The Rapture awaits the Church.**

*The next event on the prophetic calendar for the true church is the Rapture(John 14”1-3; 1-Corinthians 15: 51-52; 1-Thessalonians 4: 13-18). This event could happen at any moment, without warning. While Christ is preparing a place for the church, the church is to remain faithful and constantly watching for His return. When the Father gives the*

*signal, the shout will go forth and the church age will be completed at the rapture AND we will always be with the Lord.*

## **Church in the Prophecy**

The Church is not found in the Old Testament. Rather, the Old Testament anticipates Messiah's kingdom (Isaiah 2; 4:11; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 37: 21-25). Abraham "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God"(Hebrews 11:10 NKJV). In the Davidic Covenant, God promised David a perpetual(never ending or changing) line to rule Israel from an eternity throne(2-Samuel 7). Angel Gabriel told Mary that her child would "be called the son of the highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end"(Luke 1:32-33).

John the Baptist preached that: the kingdom of heaven is at hand"(Matt 3:2). Jesus announced the same, saying "The kingdom of God is at hand"(Mark 1:14). These references will apply to the kingdom, not to the church.

### **CHRIST PREDICTED THE CHURCH.**

When the Jewish leaders and people rejected Christ's offer of the kingdom, especially as seen in Matthew 11-12, Jesus announced something new—the Church. The word **church** occurs in the Gospels only in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17. At Caesarea Philippi, just six months before the crucifixion, Jesus used the future tense to prophecy something new. He said "I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"(Matt 16:18). Later, Jesus raised the possibility of one brother sinning against another, and He commanded that if the erring(making mistake/sinning) brother ignore repeated efforts toward reconciliation, the offended brother should "tell it to the church"(Matthew 18:17).

### **SO WHAT IS THE CHURCH & HOW IT IS DEFINED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.???**

The Greek word **ekklesia** originally referred to as an assembly of people summoned together. In the NT **ekklesia** is translated **Church** and designates primarily the congregation of God's people in Christ, who are called together as citizens of God's Kingdom(Eph 2:19) for the purpose of worshiping God.

The word "Church" can refer to a local church (Matthew 18:17; Acts 15:4) or the universal church (Matthew 16:18. Acts 20:28; Ephesians 2:21-22).

Please note the following characteristics of the CHURCH according to the Scriptures and this is the Church that will be transferred, move, shift, taken away and Raptured to heaven.

The church is **represented symbol** of the people of God( 1-Corinthians 1:2 &10:32; 1-Peter 2:4-10), the **company of redeemed** believers made possible by Christ's death(1-Peter 1:18-19). It is a **pilgrim people** no longer belonging to this earth ( Hebrews 13:12-14), whose first function is to stand as a **community in living, personal relationship** with God (1-Peter2 :4-5 & Hebrew 11:6).

The Church is the **temple of God and of the Holy Spirit** (1-Corinthians 3:16; 2-Corinthians 6:14—7:1; Ephesians 2:11-22 and 1-Peter 2:4-10). This truth about the church demands separation from unrighteousness and from worldly immorality.

The Church is the **body of Christ** (1-Corinthians 6:15-16; 10:16-17 & 12:12-27). This image indicates that no true church exists apart from vital union of the members with Christ. The head of the body is Christ (Ephesians 4:15; 5:23 and Colossians 1:18).

The Church is the **bride of Christ** (2-Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-27; Revelation 19:7-9). This marriage image emphasizes the devotion and faithfulness of the church to Christ as well as Christ's love and intimacy with His church.

The Church is a **spiritual fellowship**(Gk koinonia) **with God and one another** (2-Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1 and 1-John 1:3). This fellowship **MUST** demonstrate observable love and care for one another (John 13:34-35).

The Church is a **spiritual ministry** (Gk diakonia). It serves through the gifts of bestowed by the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:6; Ephesians 4:11; 1-Corinthians 12:4-11).

The Church is **an army involved in spiritual conflict**. It fights by the sword and power of the spirit (Eph 6:17). The Church is **an spiritual struggle** against Satan and Sin. The Spirit, with which the true church is filled, is like a warrior wielding (holding and using) the living word of God, delivering people from Satan's dominion and conquering every power of this dark world (Acts 2:18; Eph 6:10-18; Heb 4:12 and Rev 1:16; 2:16; 19:15,21)

The Church is the **pillar and ground of the truth** (1-Timothy 3:15; supporting the truth as the foundation supports a building. It must uphold the truth and keep it safe, defending it against distorters and false teachers (Jude 3)

The Church is a **people with a future hope**. This hope centers in Christ's return for His people (John 14:3; 2-Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13 and Hebrews 9:28)

The Church is both **visible and invisible**. The invisible church is the body of true believers united by their living faith in Christ. The visible church consists of local congregations containing faithful overcomers (Rev 2:11,17,26) as well as those professed Christians who are (i) false (Rev 2:2), (ii) fallen (Rev 2:5), (iii) spiritually dead (Rev 3:1) and lukewarm (Rev 3:16).

It will be greatly helpful/beneficial/productive to **read and compare** Romans chapter 12 with 2-Timothy chapter 3.

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