

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Bible speaks today: What the Bible says about the Future

This morning we will consider what the Bible says about the future. It would be helpful, first of all, to look at examples of events which have taken place and which the Bible foretold would happen. To do this, let's look at what the Bible said about Jesus Christ prior to His incarnation.

The very first reference to a coming Saviour is immediately after the fall of man in Genesis 3:15 when God said, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." This verse refers to Christ's future victory over Satan. "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." (Galatians 4:4)

John writes, "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). This is a victory His people share in, "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (Romans 16:20).

In the book of Isaiah there are further prophecies about Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 7:14 the virgin birth is foretold, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." More detail about His person is given in Isaiah 9:6, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Later in Isaiah, the prophet writes of the sufferings and death of the Messiah, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked - But with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth." Isaiah 53:4-9.

Psalms 22 vividly describes the sufferings of Christ. The Psalm unfolds to us in the most poignant way what Christ endured upon the cross for our salvation. It speaks to every Christian's heart about the depth of Christ's love - a love which should never be forgotten and which should move us to greater devotion and service for the Lord.

Isaiah 53 goes on to foretell the resurrection of Christ and His power to save, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:10-12).

These examples of Old Testament prophecies about Jesus Christ show how the Bible foretold future events. This is confirmed at the end of Luke's Gospel, "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He that [Jesus] expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

Although the Bible provides information about future events, it does not always give precise detail. Christians have been, and sometimes still are, guilty of insisting on details about forthcoming events on which the Bible is silent.

We could ask why God does not simply tell us clearly and in greater detail what will happen? But this would remove the necessity of faith. The Christian life is a life of faith and one in which, as Paul puts it, "we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope,

love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:12-13). Faith, hope and love are key themes of the Christian life. In the Bible God has given us information about the future to stimulate faith and hope and to encourage us express love but He has not told us everything. One of the last things the Lord Jesus said on earth was, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” Acts 1:7. But then He added, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) We live by faith and our primary concern is to be His witnesses.

Before the Lord Jesus went to the cross He spoke of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to the past, “He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you,” (John 14:26) the present, “He will testify of Me” (John 15:26) and “He will guide you into all truth,” (John 16:13) and the future, “He will tell you things to come.” (John 16:13) The New Testament is the great witness to this ministry as we find within its pages the things which Jesus said and did, the way Christ was preached and the Church built up, and finally the completion of the prophetic word in regard to future events. “All Scripture”, Paul reminds Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16 is “God breathed,” that is, of the Spirit. Peter confirms this in 2 Peter 1:21, “prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

We should also bear in mind that prophecy is not it simply foretelling the future, it means to “declare God’s mind”. It is a spiritual declaration which cannot be known by natural means but only by God’s revelation. Such revelations can relate to the past and the present as well as the future. God promised in Deuteronomy 18:18, “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.” When Jesus told the woman about her past life, in John 4, she said, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet” (John 4:19). Those who physically assaulted Jesus asked Him, “Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?” Matthew 26:68. Finally John who wrote the Revelation was instructed to, “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.” (Revelation 1:19).

However, this morning’s talk is about prophecy in the predictive sense. In other words, events foretold before they occur. These can be divided into two groups. Fulfilled prophecy is what God predicted would take place and has happened. Many prophecies relating to the Messiah, to Israel and the Gentile nations have been fulfilled. Unfulfilled prophecy is what God has said will take place but has not yet happened.

I have given examples in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ that show God has already fulfilled earlier prophecies. This helps us to be confident that He will fulfil those prophecies that remain.

There are three main teachings in regard to Christ’s 1,000 year reign described in Revelation 20 which is called the millennium. The three views expressed in these teachings impact on how Christians view on future events. They are the postmillennial, millennial and pre-millennial views. There is not time this morning to discuss the differences between these. My following comments on future events in the Bible are given from a pre-millennial viewpoint. I believe that just as preceding kingdoms have been literal, the millennium will be literal as well (Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 2:44-45; 7:13-14).

The future events I will look at briefly are:

1. The Rapture
2. The Great Tribulation
3. The Appearing
4. The Millennium
5. The Final Rebellion
6. The Great White Throne
7. Eternity

1. The Rapture

Today the true Church awaits the return of Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:10). This return is in two parts. The Rapture, when Christ comes for His people (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The Appearing, when He returns with His people to begin His millennial reign (2 Thessalonians 2:1-8).

The Rapture as a future event is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Paul writes that the Lord Jesus will descend from heaven with an assembling shout. The archangel’s voice will also be heard and the trumpet of God will sound. The “dead in Christ” will be resurrected and believers who are living on earth at the time of this resurrection will then be gathered together with these resurrected saints to form the “one flock” in John 10:16 and to meet the Lord in the air.

The angels in Acts 1:11 had said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." Paul adds that, "we shall always be with the Lord," (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This fulfilled hope relates to the words of the Lord Jesus in John 14:1-3, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And 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."

1 Corinthians 15 Paul adds further details in regards to the resurrection to life of all believers. Not all believers will die. Those who are alive on earth at the time of the Rapture will be translated into heaven without dying just as Enoch was in Genesis 5:24 and Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11 who did not see death.

All believers will experience resurrection in the sense that their bodies will be changed to make them suitable for their heavenly home. Paul writes of this in Philippians 3:20-21, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

1 Corinthians 15:44-57 describes these new bodies as spiritual, immortal and incorruptible! The Rapture will be completed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye and will not be observed by those on the earth at that time.

The Rapture is part the first part of the First Resurrection, when death is being swallowed up in victory. "then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:54-57.

2. The Great Tribulation

The Great Tribulation is a period referred to by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24:21, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be," and in Matthew 24:29-30, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." This Great Tribulation immediately precedes the return of Christ to reign on the earth. It appears to refer to a period when the Jewish nation will suffer at the hands of the Man of Sin (the Antichrist) described in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. It is also called "the time of Jacob's trouble" in Jeremiah 30:7. The Lord Jesus explains in Matthew 24:15 that it begins when the "abomination of desolation," spoken of by Daniel (Daniel 11:31, 12:11), is set up.

In Daniel 9:20-27 we find a prophecy about Seventy Weeks. Each week refers to a seven year period based on Genesis 29:27. The word "week" means "seven". The prophecy concerns Daniel's people and their city - that is the Jews and Jerusalem. Commentators have deduced that 69 weeks of the prophecy came to an end when the Lord Jesus was crucified and at that point God's prophetic clock stopped and the Day of Grace commenced. Some students of prophecy believe the prophetic clock will restart in the future following the rapture of the church to heaven.

Daniel's final week in Daniel 9:27 is still future. It will commence after the church has been "raptured." The ruler of the "Revived Roman Empire" (the empire illustrated by the statue's feet of iron and clay in Nebuchadnezzar's dream) will, according to Daniel 9:27 make a treaty with Israel and then break it after 3½ years. He will stop the worship of God in the Temple at Jerusalem, destroying the godly Jews who protest, and with the help of the Anti-Christ will enter the temple claiming to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4) and demanding the worship of himself and the Beast (Revelation 13:15).

An image of the Beast "the abomination of desolation" (Daniel 12:11) will be set up in the Temple. This is the sign for the godly Jews to "flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:16) as the Great Tribulation begins. The subsequent 3½ years are the same period as the 1,260 days of Revelation 12:6, the time, times, and half a time of Revelation 12:14 and the 42 months of Revelation 13:5. During this period the seal, trumpet, bowls judgments of Revelation 6-16 will take place.

3. The Appearing

At the end of the Great Tribulation the armies of the Beast will gather in the plain of Megiddo to besiege Jerusalem (Zechariah 12 and Revelation 16:16). Christ will appear and descend upon the Mount of Olives as prophesied in Zechariah 14:4 and destroy the armies of the Beast (Revelation 19:11-21). The Beast (the head of the Revived Roman Empire) and the False Prophet (the head of Israel) are cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20). It appears that at this time that the King of the North, who is possibly a ruler in Asia Minor under the protection of the great

northern confederacy of Joel 2, the Gog of Ezekiel 38, or the Assyrian of Isaiah 10 is conducting a war against Egypt, Daniel 11:42-43, the King of the South. He will return to make war against Christ (Daniel 11:44) and will meet defeat (Daniel 11:45). After this Satan is described as being bound for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-3).

4. The Millennium

There are several events at the start of Christ's millennium reign. The "First" resurrection which began with Christ Himself and was then added to at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) is completed when those who were martyred during the Great Tribulation are also resurrected (Revelation 20:4).

Israel will be gathered from the nations of the world (Isaiah 11:11-12, Ezekiel 20 and 34) and brought into the wilderness (Hosea 12 and 13) where Jehovah (Jesus) will speak to them, judge them and restore them to the Land (Amos 9:15, Zephaniah 3:14-20). The divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah will be reunited under Christ (Jeremiah 31:33-34, Ezekiel 36:24-31, 37 and Zechariah 13:1).

Christ will then judge the living people of the Gentile nations according to their treatment of His brethren, the Jews, as described in Matthew 25.

Christ will set up His millennial kingdom: the Kingdom of God established on earth. The Davidic covenant will be fulfilled with Israel (Micah 4:8) and will Christ owned as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Ezekiel's temple and the Levitical priesthood will be established. The believing Jews and Gentiles will populate the kingdom and the reign will continue for a thousand years (Jeremiah 23:5-6, Zechariah 6:12-13, Revelation 20:4). Man and nature will be in perfect harmony and righteousness will reign (Isaiah 35:5, 65:25).

One of the most compelling arguments for the millennium reign of Christ is that His rejection on earth and crucifixion as the King of the Jew is reversed and He will administer the world perfectly as it was intended.

5. The Final Rebellion

According to Revelation 20, at the end of the millennium Satan is released once more tests the hearts of the children of the millennium. He will succeed in raising a final rebellion against Christ which is defeated. The Kingdom is given up, the heaven and earth removed (Revelation 20:11).

6. The Great White Throne

The last resurrection will take place at the Great White Throne. "The dead both small and great" will stand before this throne. The books are opened and the final judgments are pronounced (Revelation 20:11-15, see John 5:29b).

7. Eternity

Finally the old creation is destroyed by fire and a new heaven and earth created in which "righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:10-13). There will be no more sea (Revelation 21:1), the Church is described as the New Jerusalem and God will dwell with men and remove all tears, death, sorrow, crying or pain. (Revelation 21:2-4)

When Peter writes of these astonishing events he adds, "what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:11-13)

God has given us a remarkable insight into the ultimate destiny of this world and the creation of a new earth and heavens. When this will take place we are not told. But Peter reminds that such knowledge should make us more like Jesus Christ and poses the question, "What kind of life am I living in the light of what Bible tells me about the future?"

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