

THE CHURCH IN GOD'S PROPHETIC PLAN

The church is God's body on earth. God had planned from eternity to create a people who would be made in his image and have his moral character. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). However, the image this scripture speaks about is not one of dust. God was looking ahead into the time he would put on flesh and blood made of his own word and Spirit. "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come" (Romans 5:14). Our focus today is not the nature of God's church, but its destiny, so let us explore scriptures that broach this subject. Nevertheless, let every Christian know that his or her main assignment in this world, besides bringing people to salvation, is to testify to the prophetic events that point to the return of the Lord. We are the children of Issachar whose job it was to interpret the signs of the times for the children of Israel.

***1Chronicles 12:32** And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.*

One can sum up the destiny of the church by stating that the church will follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ: the church will (1) testify to his identity and salvation (2) suffer persecution for his name's sake (3) be caught up to be with the Lord and (4) reign with Christ in his glorious Kingdom. Most Christians are familiar with the first two points since the church age began, so let us focus on the last two.

***1Cor 15:52** In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

***1Thess 4:16** For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:*

***1Thess 4:17** Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

***1Thess 4:18** Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

The Greek word for "caught up together" is *harpazō* and means, "to seize, carry off by force". It will not be the first time that God has caught up his people into heaven. Bible students are aware of Enoch and Elijah. Of Enoch it is written "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before

his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5). Furthermore, the prophet Elijah was also caught up to heaven in a spectacular fashion. “And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2Kings 2:11). The translation of Enoch and Elijah out of this world was followed by great calamities. Not long after Enoch was caught up, God judged the world by worldwide deluge – the flood of Noah. Not long after Elijah was translated, the 10 kingdoms of the north, Israel, were destroyed and sent into exile among the Assyrians. Notice what Enoch preached before the flood came:

Jude 1:14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,

Jude 1:15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

There is a clear pattern for the church today. We are the Enochs and Elijahs of the last days. Everything around us signals the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we cannot be silent. Hence this Bible study about the end of time. The Lord himself foretold the catching away of the Bride, the church, in clear language. It is not coincidental that the Lord speaks about three different activities at the same instance the rapture occurs: working in the field, grinding at the mill and, interestingly, people sleeping. In ancient times, people did not sleep during the daytime, as some are in the habit of doing today. The Lord can only be speaking in global terms referring to the fact that while it is day in one part of the world, another experiences night, hence some working and others sleeping.

Mat 24:40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Mat 24:41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Luke 17:34 I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.

Next, what does the church do when it is caught up to be with the Lord? There is a clear sequence or order of events in the Book of Revelation. John indicates there will be a Supper held in heaven. “And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God (Revelation 19:9). This is the same Supper that the Lord mentioned in the Gospels, “And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham,

and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11). This Supper will take place during the seven years of the Tribulation on the earth when the antichrist first consolidates his power, declares himself divine in the Temple halfway through the Tribulation (Daniel 9:27; Matt 24:15), and finally gathers the armies of the world at Armageddon to confront the Lord who returns with the church to destroy him. “And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army” (Revelation 19:19). The battle, if one can call it that, is over before it begins. The Lord destroys these armies with a sword from his mouth and the millennial reign begins.

***Rev 20:4** And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*

The millennial reign of Christ fulfills the prophecy in Isaiah 9:6, “the government shall be upon his shoulder”. The Lord Jesus will usher in a reign of perfect peace, justice and righteousness. All of creation will be restored to their original state in the Garden of Eden because original sin will be no more. “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 65:25). There will be people born during the millennium and they are expected to live to a 1000 years. Satan is bound during these 1000 years and so the only source of sin for the millennial generation will be their own flesh. This is why Isaiah states that a sinner will die at the age of 100 as a child.

***Isaiah 65:20** There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.*

Furthermore, the millennial reign will also be the time the prophecy of the Lord will be fulfilled: “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28). In summary, the church can look forward to a glorious future with the Lord in its midst. God has revealed his future plan for the church so we can be encouraged and comforted in the present time. Let us resolve anew to serve the Lord buoyed by these extraordinarily wonderful prophecies.