

Lesson 26

The Ages to Come

In lesson 16, we studied some divisions in the Bible. The dispensation of grace is the "**now**" time in Ephesians 2:7. It is **the time when grace reigns** in Romans 5:21 and the time when "**faith came**" in Galatians 3:23.

In this lesson we will find out how the dispensation of grace ends and what will come after its conclusion. We will briefly study "**the ages to come**" mentioned in Ephesians 2:7.

The Rapture

We do not know how long the dispensation of grace will continue. The Bible does not reveal this information to us. However, we do know *how* the dispensation of grace will end. It will end with an event commonly called "the Rapture." This is when the church, the Body of Christ will be taken up to be with Christ. We will study two passages that speak of this event.

I Corinthians 15:51-52

"Behold, I shew you a **mystery**; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be **changed**, 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."

Notice the following truths about the rapture in these verses:

- 1) The Rapture is a "*mystery*." This means that it is part of the revelation given to Paul. The Rapture is not spoken of anywhere in the Bible except in Paul's epistles. Paul writes about this event several times.
- 2) The Bible uses the word "sleep" often when referring to the death of a believer. Thus, we see in this passage that there will be some members of the Body of Christ who will not die. They will be taken in the Rapture *without dying*.
- 3) Every member of the Body of Christ will "*be changed*" when he receives a glorified, incorruptible body. This change will take place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

Please read this passage in I Thessalonians carefully and observe the following:

- 1) **Christ Himself will descend** from heaven with a shout. Also heard will be the "voice of the archangel" and "the trump of God."
- 2) The "dead in Christ **shall rise first**." Members of the Body of Christ who have already died will be the first ones to be taken up in the Rapture.

3) After the "dead in Christ" are taken, those "which are alive and remain" will be **taken up**. These are saints who will go to be with the Lord without dying.

4) We are told that believers will "be **caught up**." The word "rapture" is not found in the English Bible. However, it comes from a Latin word meaning "caught up."

5) After we are "caught up," we will "ever be **with the Lord**." All believers will then be gathered for "the judgment seat of Christ" (II Corinthians 5:10). This is not a judgment to find out whether the believer will go to heaven or hell. Every believer is already assured of eternity in heaven. Instead, this will be a time for the giving of rewards (I Corinthians 3:10-15).

The Wrath to Come

What will happen on earth after the Rapture? God's purpose for **Israel** will continue from the point where it was interrupted in Acts 7. John the Baptist had warned Israel about "*the wrath to come*" (Matthew 3:7). As we have seen in lesson 22, the time was ripe for the wrath of God in Acts chapter 7. However, this expected outpouring of wrath has been delayed hundreds of years by the *dispensation of grace*. After the Rapture, God will pour out His wrath upon this earth.

The Old Testament and the New Testament devote many verses to this time of God's wrath. In this lesson we can only look very briefly at some of these passages. One important passage is in Daniel 9:24-27. Daniel writes about seventy weeks in Israel's history. [In Daniel 9 a "week" is a week of years. Therefore, one week is equal to seven years.] A careful study of this passage will show that sixty-nine of the seventy weeks are already in the past. However, the seventieth week is yet in the future. The man commonly called "the antichrist" will make a covenant with Israel (verse 27). With the signing of this covenant a special *seven-year period* of tribulation begins in Israel. Jeremiah calls this "**the time of Jacob's trouble**" (Jeremiah 30:7).

Jesus Christ taught His disciples many things about "the time of Jacob's trouble." Matthew 24 is one chapter that contains some of His teachings on this subject. He calls the last three and one-half years of this time the "**great tribulation**" (verse 21). This will be *the worst time in all of human history*. Most of the book of Revelation is describing the astounding events that will occur during that time.

The Second Coming

When the seven years (the seventieth week of Daniel 9) is completed, Jesus Christ will return to this earth. "Behold, **he cometh** with clouds; and *every eye shall see him*, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen." (Revelation 1:7). When Jesus Christ came to earth the first time, He came to suffer and die. However, when He comes the second time, he will come to "*judge and make war*" (Revelation 19:11-16). He will crush His enemies and save Israel (Romans 11:26).

The Millennial Kingdom

A "millennium" is one thousand years. After Christ returns to earth, Satan will be bound for one thousand years (Revelation 20:2). **Christ will reign on earth** for one thousand years. This is often called the millennial kingdom. During this kingdom the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament will be fulfilled (See lessons 17 and 18). There will be *peace and righteousness on the earth*.

Satan and Unbelievers Judged

After the thousand-year kingdom, Satan will be loosed (Revelation 20:7). He will gather a huge army to fight against the Lord (verse 8). However, fire will come down from heaven and destroy them (verse 9). Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet will be *cast into the lake of fire* where they will remain forever (verse 10).

Then comes the "**great white throne**" judgment. All unsaved people of all ages will be *cast into the lake of fire eternally* (Revelation 20:11-15).

A New Heaven and a New Earth

The first heaven and the first earth will pass away. There will be *a new heaven and a new earth* that will be everlasting. Christ will reign on the new **earth** through the nation of **Israel**. He will reign in the **heavens** through the Church, **the Body of Christ**. God's eternal purpose will be fulfilled. Every promise made to Israel and every promise made to the Body of Christ will be fulfilled. The heavens and the earth will be filled with the glory of God and *the saints will joyously serve Him forever!*

Review Questions

True or False

1. The dispensation of grace is the same as "the ages to come" in Ephesians 2:7.
2. The Bible does not tell us how long the dispensation of grace will continue.
3. There are several verses about the Rapture in the Old Testament.
4. Some members of the Body of Christ will have glorified, incorruptible bodies in heaven.

Multiple Choice

5. The first ones to be raised in the Rapture will be:
 - a) The Old Testament saints
 - b) Members of the Body of Christ who have already died
 - c) The unsaved of all ages
 - d) The angels

6. When the time for the Rapture arrives, believers on earth will:

- a) Suffer persecution
- b) Follow the antichrist
- c) Bring the kingdom of God to earth
- d) Be caught up to be with Christ

7. After the Rapture:

- a) God's dealings with Israel will resume
- b) Christ will reign on earth for seven years
- c) Christ will return to earth and save all of mankind
- d) There will be one thousand years of war and wickedness

Fill in the Blanks

8. Jeremiah wrote about the time of Jacob's _____ in Jeremiah 30:7.

9. Jesus Christ will return to earth after the completion of the _____ week of Daniel.

10. When the millennial kingdom ends, _____ will be loosed.

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