

## **STUDY 12                      Future Things (Eschatology)**

Four main points

1.     Personal Return
2.     Millennium
3.     Judgment
4.     New Order

### **1.     Personal Return**

Reading:

KTT 312–322  
H & W 179-184  
Acts 1:10-11; 1 Thess. 4:15-17; 2 Pet. 3: 3-4, 8-10

### **2.     Millennium**

Reading:

Mt. 24:3, 21, 29-30, 37, 40-41; Rev. 20:4-6, 7-9;  
Rev. 21:1-4  
KTT 322–327

### **3.     Judgment**

Reading:

KTT 309–312, 327-338  
H & W 184-191  
1 Cor. 15:20-23, 51-52; Acts 17:31; Heb. 9:27; Mt. 13:47

### **4.     New Order**

Reading:

KTT 338–347  
H & W 191-192  
Dan. 12:3; John 14:2-3; 1 Pet. 1:3–4

## 1. Personal Return

The Bible teaches that Jesus will return and although it never uses the expression 'Second Coming' this is a convenient way of distinguishing the future advent of Christ (sometimes called the 'Parousia') from his advent at Bethlehem, or spiritual presence with his people.

There are numerous predictions in Scripture which refer to the coming and kingly rule of Christ which clearly are not fulfilled by the earthly ministry of Jesus. Jesus himself gave the Apostles the assurance that he would come again.

Before the return of Christ we may expect to see disorder in the world. The Bible phrase 'the last times' could mean any time between the ascension and the Parousia and it is wise not to speculate too closely about the moment of Christ's return for no one knows that time. Nevertheless, disorder in the world, famine, earthquake, plague; people who are materialistic, arrogant and immoral; wars, revolutions and political disturbances; hatred and division even in the family; aimlessness; and numerous false teachers are all signs of chaos giving the Christian the opportunity to proclaim order and hope in the Gospel of Christ.

The return of Jesus will not be secret or hidden. To some the sudden appearing of Jesus and his retinue will be glorious but others will be dismayed. (The parables contain a great amount of teaching on these points.)

The appearing of Jesus Christ will bring this age to an end. All governments, nations and authorities of every kind will be brought under his rule and judgment. In the face of his majesty and power all will have to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. The triumphant Jesus Christ will overthrow the whole empire of evil.

## 2. Millennium

Some believe that the second coming of Christ will either be preceded or followed by a millennium (thousand years). The three common views are pre-millennialism, post-millennialism and amillennialism.

Pre-millennialism teaches that Christ will return prior to a literal thousand year period and prior to the seven year period known as the Great Tribulation (pre-tribulational). Christ returns secretly for the Church and then in glory with the Church. This view (Pre-millennial, pre-tribulational is often called 'Dispensationalism' - for short! and is to be found in the footnotes of the 'Scofield' Bible and in the works of J N Darby.)

Some believe that Christ will return before the millennium (pre-millennialist) but after the Great Tribulation. According to this view the Church does go through the Tribulation.

However, such literal interpretations as these sit uncomfortably with other Scriptures, which represent the coming Kingdom as spiritual and universal. The passage itself does not mention the Jews or an earthly kingdom where Jesus will rule.

Post-millennialism holds that the second coming of Christ will follow a period (not necessarily a literal thousand years) during which the Gospel will be welcomed. But this does not seem to fit in with what the Bible tells us about the general apostasy before the end of the age.

In the amillennial view, the thousand years are taken to be symbolic. The binding of Satan for a thousand years simply means that he is completely bound.

This is a notorious area of disagreement among those who believe in the personal and visible return of Christ.

### 3. Judgment

The final judgment is a definite future event that will take place when Christ returns in glory. By his actions God will be shown to be completely righteous. Every power that has stood in opposition to God will be subject to Jesus Christ. Christ will receive the glory and worship that is his due. The basis of judgment will be the response that individuals have made to the light that God has given them. Entering into the Kingdom of God or separation from the Kingdom of God is in effect a decisive underlining of the choices that men and women have already made.

The Bible knows nothing of purgatory or limbo. There is no middle ground. At the general resurrection there is eternal life in heaven for those who are in Christ and eternal death in hell for those who are not. The Scriptural imagery relating to both heaven and hell is difficult to interpret. A sentimental interpretation should be resisted. Abiding in the eternal presence and glory of God is impossible to express. So is the horror of exclusion. The word 'Hades' (Heb. *Sheol*) or abode of the dead is a word that the Bible seems to use loosely to mean a number of things. On the other hand hell (Gk. *Gehenna*) is a place of destruction. Whether destruction means torment or annihilation is hard to say though traditionally it has meant the former and in any event it is to be avoided.

Christians will not be judged on the basis of sins that they have committed. These are dealt with by the work of Christ on the cross and the Christian is fully absolved from sin. But the work of Christians will be measured and so faithful Christians are encouraged to serve the Master throughout life.

Satan has power in this age but Jesus Christ has decisively overcome him, through his cross and resurrection. Judgment will bring the triumph of Christ to completion. God will completely and eternally overthrow Satan and his cohorts.

#### 4. New Order

Revelation describes a new heaven and a new earth. Though some think of heaven as a condition the Bible teaches that it is a place. God recreates the universe destroying the old order by fire. The final home of those whom God receives into his Kingdom is described in terms of the New Jerusalem. The reward of the righteous is described as eternal life, that is, not merely endless life, but life in all its fullness, without any of the imperfections or disturbances of the present. Perfect fellowship and the worship of God are the characteristics of such life.

Christians are raised from death to enjoy eternal life with God. At the resurrection the body is spiritual (that is suited to a totally different order) but there is continuity with what went before. Reminders of death, decay and disease will be banished from the spiritual body.

Heavenly worship will be of God and of Jesus Christ, the Lamb:

Come, let us join our cheerful songs  
With angels round the throne;  
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues  
But all their joys are one.

Worthy the Lamb that died, they cry,  
To be exalted thus;  
Worthy the Lamb, our hearts reply,  
For he was slain for us.

Jesus is worthy to receive  
Honour and power divine;  
And blessings more than we can give,  
Be, Lord, for ever Thine.

(Isaac Watts)