



Lesson 4

THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE EARTH

For those who accept the Bible as the word of God, there is no doubt that Jesus will return, as the following passages make clear:

“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done” (Matthew 16:27).

He will come as a Judge:

“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27).

“He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him” (Revelation 1:7).

He will come visibly, and with power: *“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).*

“. . . so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28).

When he returns he will raise the dead. He will judge those who have heard the Gospel and have either accepted or rejected it. He will reward the true believers with salvation from death, by giving them eternal life.

The Apostle Paul wrote that in the last days (the time just before the return of Christ) there would be an increase in ungodliness. He said that men will become lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (2 Timothy 3:1-6). In these verses he gives us a description of the world as it is today. The situation may become even worse.

Some words of Jesus confirm this: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith in the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Of course there will be some who will be looking and hoping for his return. Sadly, most people will know nothing of that great event. Others, having heard about it, will scorn the idea or simply turn their backs and ignore it.

When will Christ return?

For the few who are hoping for the return of Jesus, it is natural to wonder how long they must wait. Will his return be soon, or a long way off? The disciples themselves were concerned about this, and they said to their Master, “Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). In the parallel account in Luke’s gospel we can read how Jesus first of all warned them of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. He prophesied that Jews would be scattered into all parts of the Roman Empire, where most of them would be sold into slavery. This happened in AD 70.

“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. . . . There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” (Luke 21:20-24)

For many centuries after AD 70, Jerusalem was under the rule of various Gentile conquerors, Roman, Persian, Arab, Crusader, and Turk. In 1917 the Turks were driven out and a British army entered Jerusalem. However, in 1948 the British gave up their control, and the Jews declared the establishment of the State of Israel. This was followed immediately by a war between Arabs and Jews. At the end of this war Jerusalem was partitioned between Israel and Jordan. In 1967 there was another war, the ‘Six Day War’, during which Israel took the Old City, which had been in Jordanian hands.

Since that time Jerusalem has been the key element in the conflict in the Middle East. Both Muslims and Jews claim it belongs to them. This conflict was prophesied in the Bible:

“I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves” (Zechariah 12:2,3)

Zechariah continues to describe how the conflict will be resolved by divine intervention.

In Luke 21, we find that Jesus spoke of a coming time of distress, the nations being ‘in anguish and perplexity’. He spoke of a time of terror, when “men’s hearts will fail them for fear” (v.26). He then declared:

“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:27,28).

The return of the Jews

To this we can add a passage from the prophecy of Ezekiel concerning the return of the Jews to their own land:

“I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them . . .” (Ezekiel 37:21,22).

This ‘king’ can be no other than Jesus. When he was crucified, there was written over his cross the words, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19).

The revival of the Jews as a nation, the capture of Jerusalem from Gentile powers and the conflict centred on Jerusalem are clear signs that the second coming of Christ cannot be far off. For nearly two thousand years the Jews have been scattered into all parts of the world, often persecuted, hated and despised. But during the last hundred years there has been an almost miraculous change. There are now over four million Jews in Israel. They speak their ancient tongue, which for ages had been spoken only in their synagogues as a dead language, and Jerusalem is now a mainly Jewish city.

The Bible also says that the nation of Israel has “a heart of stone”. It will take the coming of Jesus Christ to make them respond to God’s mercy and grace, to be given “a new heart and a new spirit” (Ezekiel 36:26). At that time, all the peoples of the earth will see God’s grace in action. Those who accept the rule of Jesus Christ will be invited to live in a world filled with blessing.

These amazing events are a warning that we must be prepared for the early return of the Jesus Christ. Are we ready to meet him? Are we prepared to “stand up and lift up our heads, because our redemption is drawing near”? (Luke 21:28).

In our next lesson we shall have more to say about the Jews in the purpose of God. Later on we shall explain why the apostle Paul described his faith as the ‘hope of Israel’.

Summary

Jesus will return in person to the earth, in a time of trouble and distress, and increase in ungodliness. The return of the Jews to their ancient land is a sign that his coming is not far off.

Questions

D1 Near the end of each chapter of 1 Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul mentions the second coming of Christ. Find and list the verses (in the form 1:10 etc.)

D2 What signs indicate that the return of Christ is not far off?

Please send questions to your tutor.