



## THE RETURN OF THE LORD JESUS TO THE EARTH

**Reading:** Acts 1

### Two thousand years ago

Jesus had been crucified. His disciples (followers) were puzzled and disappointed. All their hopes had been placed in him, but now he lay dead in the tomb.

But after three days in the grave, God raised Jesus from the dead. His disciples did not believe that he was alive until they had actually seen him. Then they remembered what Jesus had said to them before his death:

*"... you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy" (John 16:20).*

They were filled with joy when they saw their Lord and Master again!

*"Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20).*

### The Lord Jesus is taken into heaven

Read the first eight verses of Acts 1. The apostles (Jesus' special disciples) must have been so happy during the 40 days when the Lord Jesus was with them once again. At the end of those 40 days they were standing with their Lord on the Mount of Olives. Suddenly, the Lord Jesus was taken from them, upwards into heaven. They watched as he left the earth until he was hidden from their sight by a cloud. He had been taken from them again.

But this time they were neither puzzled nor disappointed. Luke tells us that the Lord Jesus *"parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:51,52).*

### The secret of their joy

Why were the apostles so joyful at this time? Partly because their sins had been forgiven through the death of Jesus – they would now preach this message of salvation for the rest of their lives. However, this was not the only reason for their joy. While the apostles were watching the Lord Jesus go into heaven, two angels came to them with a message. They said,

*"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).*

As the apostles went back to Jerusalem they knew without any doubt that Jesus Christ himself would come back to this earth to reign as king in God's kingdom. The resurrection of Jesus was God's guarantee that this would happen.

### Jesus spoke of his return to this earth

These events happened nearly 2,000 years ago and Christ has not returned yet; but he will come – he said so himself. In Luke 21 Jesus speaks about coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Notice that Jesus went to heaven in a cloud and the angels said that he would return in the same way (Acts 1:9-11).

**Luke 21:27** And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Many of Jesus' parables also speak of his second coming. The parable of the virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) tells the story of a bridegroom coming to his wedding. In the parable the bridegroom represents the Lord Jesus, and the story warns us that when he comes, there will be some who are not prepared for him. His return is certain and we need to be ready, but we do not know **when** he will return. Jesus ends the parable with this warning:

*"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25:13).*





## The apostle Peter preached about Christ's return

We read that Peter went to the temple in Jerusalem shortly after the Lord Jesus had gone into heaven. He spoke boldly about the death and resurrection of Jesus to the Jews who had put Jesus to death. In Acts 3:19-21 he says to them,

*“Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may **send the Christ** appointed for you, Jesus, whom **heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.**”*

Many people today say that Christ will not return to the earth. But God Himself has promised to send the Lord Jesus, and we know that God will keep His promise. Peter says that God is waiting to give time for more people to repent:

*“The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord **will come** like a thief ...”* (2 Peter 3:9,10).

## The apostle Paul wrote about Christ's return

In the New Testament there are two letters written by the apostle Paul to the believers at Thessalonica in Greece. In every chapter of these letters Paul mentions the return of the Lord Jesus from heaven. Here are two examples.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

**2 Thessalonians 1:7-10** ... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven ... inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus ... **when he comes** on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed ...

1 Thessalonians 4:16 speaks of the resurrection of the dead at the coming of Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 shows that some will be punished by Christ when he returns and others will welcome him.

## What will happen when the Lord Jesus Christ returns?

The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will be a tremendous event. Many who are dead will be raised. The lives of everyone living at that time will be changed. It will be a very joyful time for some, but also a time when God brings His judgements on the world. This is sad but necessary. Without God's judgements, sin and its effects will never be destroyed.

Christ will raise from the dead those who have known the Gospel. People who have died not knowing the Gospel will remain dead – they will not be raised. This is because the Lord Jesus is coming to judge people on their response to the Gospel (Romans 2:16). People who have never heard the Gospel will not be judged on their response to it. If they have died, then they have gone for ever – they are *“like the beasts that perish”* (Psalm 49:20).

After the resurrection there will be two groups of people on the earth:

- people who have known the Gospel (both those who were raised from the dead and those who are living when Christ returns)
- people living at the time who do not know the Gospel.

We will look at what will happen to these groups.

## People who have known the Gospel

Jesus Christ will summons to judgement everyone who has known the Gospel (both those resurrected and those alive when he returns).



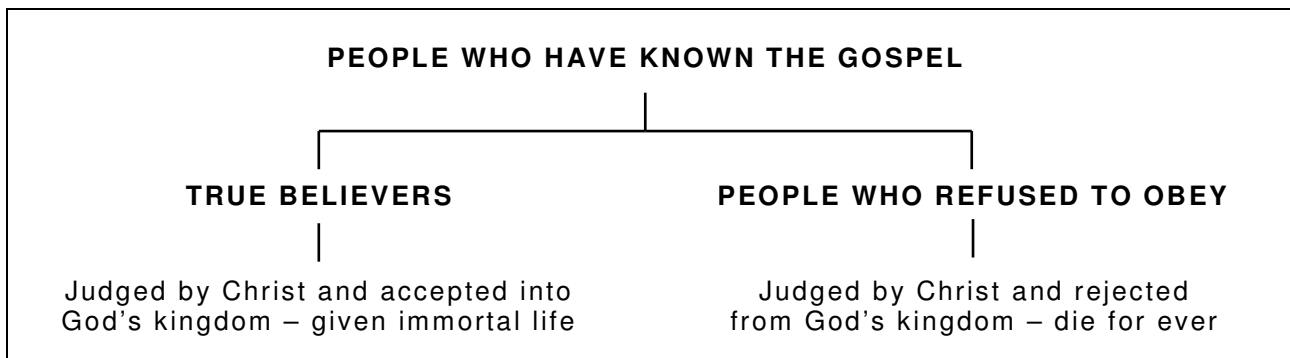


**(a) True believers will be given immortal life** – Baptized believers who have tried faithfully to follow the example of the Lord Jesus will receive a place in God’s kingdom on earth. There will be great joy. They will be changed to share a nature like God Himself – a nature that cannot sin and cannot die, and will have no pain or suffering.

**(b) People who have known but refused to obey the Gospel will be rejected** – These are people who have known the Gospel but decided not to follow the Lord Jesus. They will not be given a place in God’s kingdom because they chose to ignore the Bible message. They will depart from the judgement in shame, knowing they have not been able to share in the blessings of God’s kingdom. They will then die for ever.

The Old Testament prophet Daniel speaks of the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked:

*“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2).*



### People alive when Christ returns who do not know the Gospel

In His mercy God will allow some people from all nations to live as mortal people in His kingdom when Christ reigns as king. Others will be punished and die.

#### 1. The Jews

**(a) Some of the Jews will accept Christ as their king** – Jesus Christ will come back at a time when the nation of Israel is in a desperate state. They will be surrounded by enemies on all sides. The Lord Jesus Christ, with his power, will overcome those who are fighting against them. Then many of the Jews will realise at last that Jesus really is their promised king. They will repent of their nation’s sin in crucifying him and gladly accept him as their king. The prophet Zechariah says, “... *when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn*” (Zechariah 12:10).

These Jews will be allowed to live in God’s kingdom as mortal people when Jesus Christ reigns as king. They will live in the land of Israel and become the chief of the nations. Israel’s capital city, Jerusalem, will become the capital of the world. It will be the centre of worship for all the people who live in God’s kingdom. It will be a time of great happiness for the Jews, after all their suffering.

As mortal people they will still have human nature and be able to sin, and they will still grow old and die. They will have the opportunity to accept the Lord Jesus as their saviour, and some will later be given immortal life.

**(b) Jews who refuse to accept Christ as their king will be punished** – The people of Israel who reject the Lord Jesus Christ when he returns will receive God’s judgements and be destroyed. They will never live again.

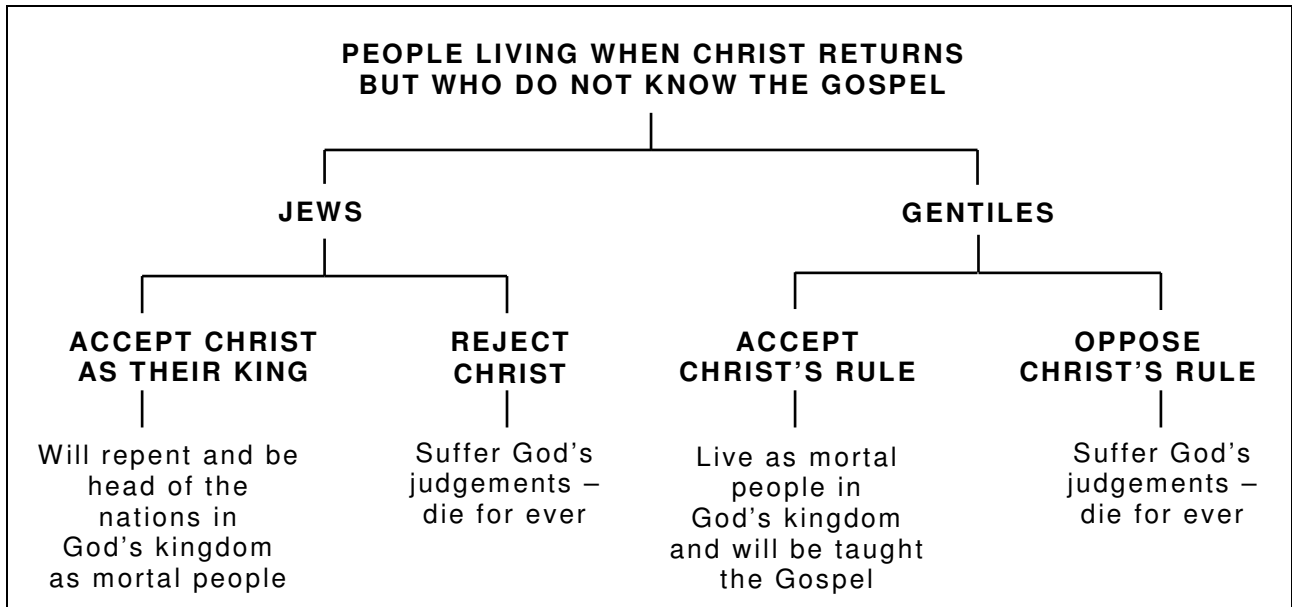
#### 2. The Gentiles

**(a) Some Gentiles will accept Christ’s rule** – God will allow these Gentiles to live as mortal people in His kingdom when Jesus Christ reigns as king. They will be taught God’s ways by the Lord Jesus and the immortal believers. They will have the opportunity to accept the Lord Jesus as their saviour. Some will later be given immortal life.





**(b) The Gentiles who do not want Christ to rule over them will be punished** – The Gentile nations who do not want the Lord Jesus Christ to rule over them when he returns to set up God’s kingdom on earth will fight against him. God’s judgements will be poured out on these people and there will be a time of great trouble on the earth. After suffering the wrath of God for a short time, they will be completely destroyed. They will not suffer in fire for ever – this is not Bible teaching as you will learn from later lessons.



**What will happen to you and me?**

We have a choice.

- If we are baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ (Lesson 31 is about baptism) and are faithful to him now, then he will accept us into God’s kingdom at his return. He will change us to be like himself – we will live for ever and be unable to sin.
- If we are not baptized or are not faithful to him now, then he will reject us at his return and we will die for ever. Part of our punishment is that we shall see the glory of God’s kingdom before we die but will never be part of it.

**Summary**

1. Jesus Christ will return to the earth. When he comes, he will give true believers immortal life and a place in God’s kingdom.
2. People who have known but refused to obey the Gospel will be rejected and die.
3. Jews who are alive and accept Christ as their king when he returns will be allowed to live in God’s kingdom as mortal people. The Lord Jesus will make them the chief of the nations. The Jews who reject him will be punished and die.
4. Gentiles who accept Christ’s rule will be allowed to live in God’s kingdom as mortal people. They will be taught God’s ways by the Lord Jesus and immortal believers.
5. The Gentile nations who fight against the Lord Jesus will be destroyed.

**A verse to learn: Acts 1:11**

*The angels said: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven”.*

**Verses to read: Matthew 25:1-13, 1 Thessalonians 4.**

