



Lesson 7

THE RETURN OF THE LORD JESUS TO THE EARTH

Reading Acts 1

Two thousand years ago

Jesus had been crucified. His followers were puzzled and disappointed. All their hopes had been placed in him - now he lay dead in the tomb.

But - ***the third day, Jesus came out of that tomb alive!***

His followers remembered the words he had spoken to them before his death:

"Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice ...but your sorrow shall be turned into joy John 16.20).

What a joy it must have been to see their beloved Lord and Master again!

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

We can hardly imagine how glad they were.

When Jesus went to heaven

Now read the first eight verses of Acts 1 again. Picture to yourself how happy the apostles must have been during those forty days, when Jesus was among them once again. Think of those men, at the end of the forty days, standing on the green slopes of the Mount of Olives, with Jesus in their midst. Suddenly, he was taken from them, upwards into heaven. How they would gaze after him as he left the earth, and was hidden from their sight by a cloud. He had been taken from them again.

Yet this time they were neither puzzled nor disappointed. Not at all! Luke tells us that,

"... he was parted from them, and 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, after this second parting, were they so joyful?

Partly, because Jesus had made them a promise. He had said to them:

"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

This meant that although they could not see him he could see them and would always care for them.

But that was not the only reason for their joy. While they were watching him go into heaven, two angels came to them with a message. They said:

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

As the disciples went back to Jerusalem to obey the commandments of their Lord, they knew ***for certain*** that Jesus himself would come back to this earth. That was something to make them rejoice.

The words of Jesus

All these things happened nearly 2000 years ago, and Jesus has not come back yet. But he ***will*** come. He said so himself. In Luke 21:27 he speaks about coming in a cloud, with power and great glory. (Did you notice that he went in a cloud and that the angels said he would come 'in like manner' as they had seen him go?)

Many of the parables also speak of his second coming. Take, for instance, the parable in Matthew 25:1 - 13. This speaks of a bridegroom, and although the picture is of an Eastern wedding, we have no difficulty in understanding it. The bridegroom is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the story warns us that when he comes, there will be some who are not prepared for him.

Notice verse 13. Jesus does **not** say, "Ye know not whether your Lord will come or not". There is no doubt about it. His coming is certain. But he **does** say:

"Ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh"

The witness of Peter

Not many days after Jesus had gone into heaven, we read about Peter in the Temple in Jerusalem, speaking boldly to the Jews who had been responsible for crucifying Jesus. In Acts 3:19 - 20 he says to them:

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you."

Peter also spoke of the second coming of Christ in a letter which he wrote later to believers. In 2 Peter 3:4 he writes of those who would say in disbelief,

"Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation".

You may have heard people use words very much like these. But God Himself has promised to send the Lord, and we know that He will keep his promise. Peter goes on, in verses 9 and 10, to say:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord **will come**, as a thief in the night."

The witness of Paul

Jesus himself appeared to the apostle Paul, and sent him to preach to others. Paul claims that the gospel that he preached was given him by Jesus Christ. And Paul taught about the second coming of the Lord. In 2 Timothy 4:1 we read:

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing... "

Paul wrote two letters to the ecclesia at Thessalonica. You will find these letters in your Bible. They consist of eight short chapters, and - here is the surprising thing - in **every chapter** Paul mentions the coming of Jesus.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 he speaks of the resurrection of the dead at Jesus' coming:

"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."

In 2 Thessalonians 1: 7 – 8 Paul tells how Jesus will be . . .

"...revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Here he speaks of Jesus coming to punish some; but if we read on, we find that he also speaks of some to whom his coming will bring joy, for he will come *"to be admired in all them that believe"*.

What will Jesus do when he comes?

The coming of Jesus will change the lives of everyone living at that time. It will be a tremendous event for

- a. believers who are watching and waiting for him
- b. all who are living at the time, who do not know the true gospel
- c. the nation of the Jews.

We will consider these in turn:

(a) True believers (those 'in Christ') who are waiting for his coming:

Jesus will raise from the dead all who have died in faith, and gather together the living believers.

"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" (1 Corinthians 15:51 - 52)

Those who have been unfaithful will be rejected, but for the faithful, there will be great joy. Jesus will give them eternal life. He will, as Paul tells us,

"change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21).

Like him, they will share immortal life, free from all pain and suffering. They will help Jesus in the great work of teaching all nations about God, and helping the people of the world to respond to His great love, and walk in His ways.

(b) The people of the world:

At the time of the coming of Jesus, God's judgements will be poured out on the wicked, and there will be a time of great trouble on the earth. This is sad, but it is necessary. Without God's judgements, the world will never turn to Him, and accept the Lord Jesus as His chosen King.

After the pouring out of God's judgements, the people of the world will be ready to accept Jesus as their King. He will establish God's Kingdom on earth. His rule will be wise and loving, and he will care for the poor and needy. Turn to Psalm 72 and read it through. It will give you a picture of the rule of Jesus. It tells how he will care for the poor and needy, and those who have no helper.

The people of the world who survive the judgements of God will live in the Kingdom of God and receive many blessings. They will, however, still be open to sin and will die, much like people do today, though their lives will be longer. During their lives they will be taught the ways of God and have the opportunity to accept or reject the Lord Jesus. At the end of the Millennium, or 1000 years reign of the Lord Jesus, there will be a second resurrection and judgement for those who have lived on the earth during the Millennium. Some will be given everlasting life, and some will be rejected. Finally, death will be abolished for ever.

(c) What of the Jews?

Jesus will come back at a time when the nation of Israel is in a desperate situation. They will be surrounded by enemies on all sides. Jesus, with his divine power, will overcome those who are fighting against them. Then many of the Jews will realise at last that Jesus really was their promised King - and they crucified him! The prophet Zechariah says they will *"look on me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn"* (Zechariah 12:10).

They will gladly accept him as their king.

The Lord will set up God's Kingdom, and the Jews will be the chief of the nations. Their capital city, Jerusalem, will become the capital of the world. It will be the centre of worship for all people. It will be a time of great happiness for the Jews, after all their suffering.

What love and joy and peace will flow from this new world centre!

What will happen to you and me?

Read again the parable of the ten virgins, in Matthew 25:1-13. If we are wise, like the wise virgins in this parable, we will study God's Word, and prepare ourselves now for the coming of Jesus. When Jesus said to the apostle John, "*Surely I come quickly*" (Revelation 22:20), he replied, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus*".

Shall we be like the apostle, and make this our prayer?

Summary

1. Jesus Christ is coming back to the earth.
2. We can be quite sure of this, because he said so himself.
3. Also, the angels said so. Peter, Paul, and John said so.
4. When he comes, he will give his faithful followers everlasting life.
5. He will make Israel the chief of the nations.
6. He will teach all people of the earth God's ways.
7. If we are wise, we shall prepare **now** for his coming.

Chapters to read

1 Thessalonians 4; Daniel 12:1 - 4; Matthew 25:1 - 13

A verse to learn

Acts 1:11 The angels said:

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. "