

BASIC BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

18. THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

Introduction

The return of Jesus Christ is the last major prophecy of Scripture yet to be fulfilled. From all indications, we are persuaded that its fulfillment is at hand. For believers, it is our blessed hope for which we look with happy expectation. For the unbelieving world, however, it will be a sad and awesome day of reckoning, when they shall face the mighty Creator, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The study of this vital topic will greatly enrich the spiritual understanding of Christians, and awaken those who are slumbering and backsliding into the world. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (Revelation 1:13). Our ardent prayer is that every member of our Church, reading and hearing this, will resolve to live a holy life. Even more important, may each believer be up and witnessing to the unsaved, to turn many to righteousness, before the dread day of our Lord's return.

To the unbeliever - those still outside Christ - we have but one plea: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. Turn ye from your ways and come to the Lord now. The opportunity of salvation is not for always. Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.

Behold He comes! Believe now before it is too late!

GOD HAS PROMISED: THERE IS NO EXCUSE

The coming of our Lord is a **climacteric with extreme consequences and awesome finality** for all mankind. While His coming will be **unexpected** and **sudden**, nevertheless it will not be without ample fore-warning. For our God is of abundant mercy, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance and everlasting life.

So our God gives advance notice. His word says: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servant the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Our Lord Jesus Himself said: "But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things" (Mark 13:23).

Our Lord's return is referred to over 1,500 times in the Old Testament and over 3,000 times in the New Testament. His birth, death, burial, resurrection and ascension have all been prophetically fulfilled. Only His return to earth remains unfulfilled. When it happens, time and events will come to a standstill. Judgment and retribution then begin before the Almighty and Holy Judge. To repent then will be too late. But none should complain. Advance warning has been given. There is no excuse not to know and not to be prepared.

WHY MUST JESUS RETURN?

Jesus Christ must return to **complete His unfinished work**. But some may say, Did not our Lord on the cross say, “It is finished”?

That is quite true, but it was the great act of sin-bearing that was finished. To that work nothing needs to be added. Indeed, nothing can be added! So, in Hebrews 1:3 it says, “when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Our Lord has finished His work and sat down. It is finished!

However, the consummation and perfection of God’s plan of redemption of our bodies and the lost creation has yet to be realized. “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22). God has appointed Jesus “heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2) and has “put all things in subjection under His feet ... But now we see not yet all things put under Him” (Hebrews 2:8).

The Lord ascended to Heaven over 1,900 years ago leaving behind the promise, “If I go ... I will come again.” At the Ascension, the angels said, “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).

God’s Word is true. His promises never fail. We look with confidence to the Lord’s return. When He comes He will change our mortal corruptible body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body (Philippians 3:21) and He will redeem the lost creation to its original state of perfection.

WHEN JESUS COMES, WHAT WILL HE DO?

Our Lord returns for four main objectives:

1. To reward His servants
2. To judge the world
3. To deliver Israel
4. To establish His kingdom on earth

The world is in its darkest hour. Satan, the prince of this world, has usurped dominion from our Lord - for a time, while He tarries. Violent men, agents of Satan, control the world and hold sway over the nations. The end-time Church has identified herself with the world and “denied the Lord that bought her.” The great apostasy and final onslaught of Satan is upon the Church. True believers are isolated, ridiculed or dismissed as irrelevant. In many lands they suffer heavy persecution.

The night is dark. The Light must shine! Christ, our blessed hope, must return! When He comes, He will put an end to the present rebellion and restore all things.

RESPONSE TO THE MESSAGE

The message of our Lord's return is for all people. "He who has ears, let him hear." The response to the message, however, will depend on the heart condition of the hearer. Some will be indifferent, some will shut their ears with disgust, some will hate it. Only the believers, whose garments have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb, and who love His appearing, shall rejoice whenever the glad message is proclaimed.

Dear reader, what is your attitude to the return of Jesus Christ? Your attitude will reveal your heart condition.

1. Attitude of Unbelievers

Unbelievers, still in their sins, do not welcome the message of Christ's return. Their attitude is one of indifference, ridicule or hostility. For if the message is true, then they are in danger of judgment. All their vain hopes and ambitions on earth will come to an end, and even now they become meaningless. This unwelcome reality they will not accept. Therefore the unbelieving world beguiles itself with its own godless philosophy.

This state of society was foretold by the Apostle Peter in these words: "... there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 2:3,4).

"For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water" (2 Peter 3:5).

Men of the world deny the Creation account of Genesis. They reject the message of the Second Coming. They reason to themselves: this talk of Jesus' coming has been going for close to 2,000 years, ever since Jesus' day on earth. Those to whom the promise was made have died long ages ago. The promised coming has not materialized. The threatened end of the world has gone on as always, without great cataclysmic upheavals. They scoff at those who persist in preaching the return of Jesus. They dismiss them as "alarmists" and ignorant "prophets of doom".

These men are committed to building a better world of tomorrow - without God or Jesus Christ. Man can do it!

2. Attitudes of the Apostate Church

It is a fact that the established Church, by and large, no longer believes in the Return of Jesus Christ, even though the doctrine may be included in the official articles of doctrine and belief. This rejection is part of a broad denial of and departure from the fundamental doctrines of historic Christianity. Some churches retain these historic doctrines in their articles of faith but only pay lip service to them. They have given new and unscriptural meaning to old words. Some other Churches have discarded them altogether and gone "liberal" and "modern".

So the apostate Church (i.e. all those churches that have departed from the historic Christian faith) in general has taken the same position as the unbelieving world. For them large portions and vital truths of the Bible are regarded as legends and myths. These include the Creation, Fall, Flood, Atonement, Resurrection, Second Coming. These belong to the liberal-modernist school of theology.

They scoff when we talk of Jesus Christ returning to set up His kingdom on earth. They are convinced that by the efforts of the Church (with man in charge), by spreading the social gospel and by moral improvement, the Kingdom of Heaven will be established on earth.

By means of socio-political and religious reform, the world will become “Christian”. What need then for Christ to return or men to make believe in such fantasy? This is the thinking of the apostate Church. When they talk of Christ’s coming they either refer to His spiritual “return” at the Pentecost, or they mean the moment of death when the soul returns to Jesus. In reality they reject this blessed doctrine.

3. Attitude of Dead Orthodoxy

These people are doctrinally “correct”. They assent to the doctrine of the Second Coming at an intellectual level - in their heads, but not in their hearts. It is a piece of academic and theoretical knowledge.

At the spiritual and practical levels, these men have no real interest. They do not talk about the Lord’s coming, neither do they lead lives which reflect this belief. If you say they believe, it is only lip service. Jesus coming again? Perhaps, in a thousand years!

4. Attitude of the Believing Christian

It is necessary to add the pre-fix “believing” because the word “Christian” in general has too broad a meaning and includes too many non-Christian church members - nominal Christians and unsaved persons.

For the believer, the true Christian, nothing is more marvellous than the prospect of Christ’s return. In Christ he has received salvation, the forgiveness of sins, new life and the indwelling spirit - and the promise of the Lord’s personal return, to deliver his body from the present corruption of sin.

On that glad day, when we see Him, we shall be like Him! We shall see Him as He is - the King in all His glory and magnificence. The deliverance so long awaited will have come.

With joy unspeakable we shall celebrate the marriage of the Lamb, together with the ransomed of all the ages. Then shall we ever be with the Lord. The earth and all its burdens have become a thing of the past.

So, every true believer’s constant heart cry is, Come, Lord Jesus!

PROMISE TO THOSE WHO FAITHFULLY WATCH

Whether our Lord's return is soon or later, all believers are commanded to be vigilant so as not to be caught unawares. Our Lord's injunction is, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh find so doing" (Matthew 24:42,46).

Then our Lord says in Revelation: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him in the name of my God ... and I will write upon him my new name" (Revelation 3:11,12).

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS

Over the years the doctrine of Christ's Return has been abused and capitalised by the deluded and unscrupulous to misled the ignorant and gullible. Periodically, self-acclaimed prophets have set dates for His appearing, in direct disobedience of the express prohibition of our Lord Himself: "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of Heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36). Every time men have exceeded their bounds they have erred, but that has not deterred others afterwards from falling into the same trap.

Among the heretics we mention the most notorious. The Seventh Day Adventists through their prophetess Mrs White predicted Christ's return in 1844. When this proved futile, new dates were set with similar disastrous results.

Other so-called Christian sects have also ventured into the quicksands of date setting. In some instances, they and their deluded followers shed off all their worldly belongings and, robed in white, congregated at some appointed mountainside to await the Lord's appearing. When this failed to materialize, the group now disappointed, deceived and dispossessed, dispersed their separate ways - disillusioned, to say the least.

Let all true believers take heed: beware of date setters. May we be vigilant and faithful.

Watch!