

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE POSTAL COURSE

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LESSON 8 • SIGNS OF THE COMING OF JESUS

Reading: Luke 21

Jesus will come back to this earth. The Bible tells us this very plainly, as we saw in the last lesson. His coming is part of God's plan for our world. He will be 'King of Kings', ruling the world from his throne in Jerusalem. This was the promise of God to the Jews in Old Testament times, and it is the message of the New Testament. The early followers of the Lord Jesus looked forward to the day when ...

"... the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ..." (Acts 3:19,20).

The coming of Jesus will be the most tremendous thing that has ever happened. It will change the lives of all who live on earth. So we are bound to ask, "When will this happen?"

We do not know the exact date. Jesus himself said: "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36). But God has given us very clear signs in His word. Jesus tells us some of these in this same chapter, Matthew 24. He says:

"When ye shall see all these things, know that it (that is, the coming of Jesus and the Kingdom of God) is near, even at the doors." A man going on a journey knows when he sees certain landmarks and signposts that he is getting near his journey's end. In the same way, the signs we see in the world show us that we are getting very near the time of the return of Christ. When the disciples asked Jesus, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3) he gave them certain signs. He told them that Jerusalem would be destroyed (this happened about 40 years later, in A.D.70), and the Jews would be scattered. He went on to speak of his return. He gave them 'landmarks' to watch for, and we should be watching too.

What signs are there that today we are living in the last days?

(1) SIGNS CONCERNING THE JEWS

The Bible says that in the last days -

- (a) the Jews will return to the land of Israel;
- (b) Israel will become a nation again;
- (c) Jerusalem will be freed from its enemies.

(a) The Jews were scattered throughout the world in A.D. 70. From that time, for nearly 2000 years, they have had no country of their own. But in our day we have seen them going back to the land of Israel and so fulfilling Bible prophecy. "For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it" (Jeremiah 30:3).

(b) In May 1948, in spite of the bitter opposition from the Arabs, and against all odds, the State of Israel was set up, and Israel took its place among the nations of the world. God had said long ago through the prophet Ezekiel that this would happen. "Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:21,22).

(c) Jerusalem is now the capital city of the Jews. Read the words of Jesus in Luke 21:24, which tell of the scattering of the Jews. Notice that Jesus says that Jerusalem will be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. See what an exciting verse this is. After almost nineteen hundred years, in May 1967, the Jews fought the six-day war, and freed Jerusalem from its enemies. The city is no longer "trodden down of the Gentiles" but is in the hands of the Jews. What a sign that the coming of the Lord is near!

(2) SIGNS IN THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

Everywhere in the world there are troubles - troubles which the rulers of the nations cannot solve. There are:

- millions of people starving, while others have far more than they need.
- problems of pollution. Men are destroying the world they live in through their greed and carelessness.
- problems with the growing world population. Growth is so fast that governments cannot cope with the increase.
- wars throughout the world bringing suffering and death.

Jesus foresaw these problems. He said: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity" (Luke 21:25). The word 'perplexity' means 'with no way out' - and that is true of the problems the world faces today. Men can find no way out. In the next verse, Jesus goes on to speak of "... men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26). In these days, men are afraid! They are afraid of nuclear war, and nuclear accidents like the one at Chernobyl in Russia in 1986. They are afraid of terrorism, hijacking, violent robbery, kidnapping, vandalism - and there is no way out! There seems to be no answer to all these problems; but see what Jesus says in the very next verse: "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27). Surely we are getting very close to the time when the Lord will come.

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Disbelief in God and His Word

The apostle Paul wrote of the people of his day: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." How true this is of people to~! Most people do not want to hear the truth written in God's Word; they do not want to know about Jesus coming back to set up God's Kingdom. They prefer to go their own way, and listen to anyone who will tell them, not what is true, but what they want to hear. Paul said that such people have "itching ears": "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3,4). The apostle Peter also said that in the last days men would scorn God's Word. He said they would be "scoffers", saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Peter 3:3-4). That is just what men say today.

The breakdown of law and order

In the days when Israel was ruled over by Judges, we are told that "... there was no king in Israel; but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). The result of this was murder, robbery, rape, and every kind of violence. It is like this today. Men disregard both God's laws and the laws of the nations; there is no self-control. Men are greedy (the Bible calls this "covetousness"). They do not care how much others suffer so long as they can get what they want - whether it be riches or power. Paul said it would be like this in the last days:

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous... disobedient to parents, unthankful ... without natural affection... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

A time of trouble such as never was

That is how the prophet Daniel spoke of the days we live in. And how true it is! We hear a lot about the 'economy' these days - all nations depend for their prosperity on a stable economy.

In 1973 the Arabs attacked Israel, but failed to destroy it. After this, they put up the price of oil very steeply. Now many nations depend on Middle East oil and the action by the Arabs has created a very unstable economy throughout the world. Rich people get richer, and poor people get poorer. Every country suffers from the unrest this creates - there is unemployment and unhappiness everywhere. There seems to be no way out of these difficulties. Today there is "a time of trouble such as never was" just as Daniel said: "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time ... and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:1,2).

The resurrection of the dead?

When Jesus comes back, that is the first thing he will do. The 'time of trouble' we are living in shows how near we are to the Lord's return.

Israel and the nations

Israel is surrounded by enemies. The Arab nations are determined to wipe out the Jewish nation and repossess the land which they consider is theirs. There is continual strife and warfare on Israel's borders.

The Arabs consider that they have a claim to the land, but God promised that land long ago to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants for an everlasting possession. The bitter struggle goes on, and all nations will at last be drawn into this war. That is when Christ will return. The scene is set: his return is near. Talking of these times, the apostle Peter said to those who knew about them: "What manner of people ought ye to be, in all holy conversation (that is, way of life) and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:11). That is a question we all have to answer for ourselves.

Summary

We do not know the exact date when the Lord Jesus will come back from heaven to this earth, but there are many signs that his coming is near. Here are some of them:

- The return of the Jews to their land;
- The establishment of the State of Israel, 1948;
- Jerusalem the capital of Israel since 1967;
- World problems;
- Men fearful of the future;
- Violence and increasing crime;
- A time of trouble, such as there has never been before;
- Israel's enemies waiting to strike at her.

Verses to read: Jeremiah 31:10; Ezekiel 5:5; Joel 3:1-2, 9-17

Learn by heart: Luke 12:40

"Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not."