

WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING ?

The Personal Return of Jesus Christ

A careful consideration of the foregoing lecture will without doubt have convinced the reader that the personal return of Jesus Christ from heaven is the divinely appointed means whereby God's purpose with the earth and man will be brought to fruition. That personal, physical return was promised in unmistakable terms by the angels immediately after our Lord's ascension :

"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)

And in that day, "every eye shall see him" for "he shall come with power and great glory" (Rev. 1:7; Luke 21:27).

"As it was in the days of Noah"

Jesus likened the days which immediately precede his coming to "the days of Noah" when the earth was filled with violence, and to the days of Lot when "pride, fullness of bread and abundance of idleness" led Sodom into the most infamous and vile practices-and in both cases God brought His vengeance upon them, for Noah's contemporaries "knew not until the flood came and took them all away" and the Sodomites were destroyed by fire and brimstone. (Luke 17:26-30.)

We are thus led by Jesus to expect what we who live in these "last days" actually find around us, namely godlessness, violence and vice. So prevalent were these things to be that Jesus, after referring to God's coming vengeance on the persecutors of His people, asks:

"Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8.)

It will obviously not be found in the grossly pagan or atheistic nations; nor will it be found in the large established and nominally Christian political and religious institutions and nations in East or West. Where, then, shall Jesus find faith? Only among the few who can be identified with the faith of the "Sect everywhere spoken against."

Scoffers in the Last Days

The return of the Lord Jesus Christ is rarely, if ever, found in the religious themes of Catholic and Protestant Christendom: least so among those who identify the Kingdom of God with these ecclesiastical organisations on earth! Scripture teaching plainly reveals the Kingdom of God to be a divine political kingdom, once existing as the Israelite theocracy, then overthrown because of disobedience, but to be restored by Jesus at his coming; for God by the angel promised his mother that he would give him "the throne of his father David" and that he should "reign over the house of Jacob for ever" in a kingdom which shall never end. (Luke 1:32, 33.) The apostle Peter, writing by the spirit of God, provides a description of the conditions which shall prevail on the earth just prior to the Lord's return and the restoring of this Kingdom, and he issues a grave warning to those who would neglect or presume to deny the fulfilment of God's promise. He wrote, he said, to stir up his readers' minds, from which the dross of ignorance and superstition had been purged, and reminds them of the words spoken by the prophets concerning God's purpose with the earth and man upon it. He writes of the last days-these days in which we are now living-thus :

". . . 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 3:3-4.)

The "promise" cannot be questioned. No one familiar with the Bible would be foolish enough to deny that! It is the *fulfilment* of the promise that is denied. Men wrongly assume, says Peter in effect, that God never interrupts the "normal" course of human history, but these "scoffers (even if "ordained") are "willingly ignorant" of the facts of history, such as the divine intervention in the Noachic flood of which Jesus spoke, and which destroyed all mankind, except faithful Noah and his family; and most are wilfully ignorant of the fact that by that same warning word of God (which Noah preached) the world is reserved for judgment because of the godlessness that would prevail in these closing days of Gentile domination. Says Peter:

"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; whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth that are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." (vs. 5-7.)

The Prophets have spoken

The seeming delay in God carrying out His threat is misinterpreted. Man counts years by his own short span of life, and in shutting his eyes to the threatened judgments on the godless, he denies himself also the merciful opportunity to repent. The Eternal God does not measure time by man's fleeting life, and Peter urges the recognition of this on his readers: ". . . be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (Verses 8-9.)

The political and politico-religious institutions will be abolished. The "heavens" of the Dictatorial Governments will collapse in a revolution which shall leave no vestige of former misrule; and the "earth" of roaring and seething democracy shall be swept away as though by fire, leaving neither root nor branch. In place of the present political "heavens and earth" Jesus will establish God's Kingdom as "spoken before by the holy prophets." There will be a "new heavens and a *new* earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." (vv. 2, 12, 13.) God through the prophet Isaiah paints a vivid picture of the glorious conditions then to prevail (ch. 65:18-25), and takes up the theme again in the Revelation which sums up the wondrous finality of God's purpose (Rev. 21). There shall be no more troubled sea of nations "to cast up mire and dirt," for there shall be One King over all the earth (Zech. 14:9), even Jesus, assisted by his then immortal faithful brethren and sisters who lived by the faith "once for all" delivered to them (Jude 3), and common to that minority constituting "the sect everywhere spoken against." (Acts 28: 22.)

It is written that when God's judgments are in the earth *then* the "inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9), and then those who survive the judgments of God will confess, "Surely, our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit." (Jer. 16:19.) The reader is urged to satisfy himself as to the pressing importance of these things by studying the context of the above quotations from Isaiah and Jeremiah. His attention is also directed to the pre-eminent sign that the times of Gentile mis-rule are drawing to a close, namely, the re-gathering in recent years of a remnant of the people of Israel from the lands of their dispersion to settle in Palestine, the land promised to their fathers—a regathering which was foretold 2,500 years ago by the Old Testament prophet as a feature of "the last days." (Ezek. 37 and 38.) Because these things are impending, Peter's warning comes with great force to all who read today: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens

(political) shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Nevertheless, we *according to his promise*, look for **NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH**, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (Verses 10- 13.)

Those who respond to the salvation offered in Jesus "look for and earnestly desire the coming of the day of the Lord" (v. 12 R.V.), and "watch and pray" that they may be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of Man in that day. (Luke 21:27-36.) To such, it will be the day of salvation, if they are faithful, for the faith brings responsibilities:

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (verses 14-15).

Precious Promises

The long-suffering of the Lord can be salvation to all who read if they will accept the faith of the Lord Jesus' immediate disciples, and rejoice in what Peter called the "exceeding great and precious promises; that by *these* YE MIGHT BE PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world, through lust." (2 Peter 1: 4.) -- A.C.

For further Bible Study, the following books are recommended:

THE REAL CHRIST - PROPHET, PRIEST AND KING

CHRISTENDOM ASTRAY