

416 The Return of the Lord

At this time we thank God afresh for the incarnation of His Son, and for all the blessings achieved by Jesus, in obedience to His Father's wishes, during the period of His physical presence on the earth. After the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah and King there followed the "Church Age" focussed on the Gospel of grace, with salvation granted by faith alone in Christ alone (egs., John 14.6 / Acts 16.29-31 / Ephesians 2.8-9 / I Peter 1.1-9 / ...).

As we dwelt on last week, we currently await Jesus coming FOR His saints, the first stage of His promised return to earth. This glorious "seizing-away" of His true Church may well be not long delayed now, for the Jews have had their own state of Israel for over 70 years, against all human probabilities, and the world is clearly in an increasingly chaotic and parlous state. When Jesus comes may we be found ready and prepared "to meet the Lord in the air", along with all the saints whose bodies are currently "asleep in Christ": indeed, what a prospect, and what a comfort (I Thessalonians 4.13-18).

There is then to follow the 7-year tribulation. This ends with the second stage of Jesus' return when He comes WITH His saints in power and glory, as Messiah, Lord, King and Judge (egs., Jude 14-15 / I Thessalonians 3.13). This very public return is frequently foretold by the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament prophets, and we can now consider some of its features.

We read in Daniel 7.13-14 that "the Ancient of days" will give to "the Son of man ... dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him" (KJV). That gift from Father to Son will be vividly manifested when Jesus returns to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1.11 / Zechariah 14.4). The Jews "will look on (him) whom they have pierced", and the "tribes of the earth shall mourn" (Zechariah 12.10 / Matthew 24.30).

In Luke 4.16-21 we have the famous incident of Jesus reading from Isaiah 61.1-2 in the synagogue in Nazareth. Crucially Jesus' reading ends at Isaiah 61.2a - "to preach the acceptable year of the Lord", and He then told His listeners, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4.21b). This cutting-short of the original passage is so significant because Isaiah 61.2B - "and the day of vengeance for our God" - was not yet fulfilled in their hearing! That sombre "day of vengeance" was, and is, still in the future: it will be focussed in the

tribulation period, “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30.4-9), and will approach its close at the second stage of Jesus’ return with His triumphant arrival on the Mount of Olives.

There then occurs Jesus’ victory over the forces ranged against Him (eg., Revelation 16.14,16; 17.14; 19.11-21), and His judgment of separation between “the sheep nations and the goat nations” (Matthew 25.31-46). We note that this separation is based on the Gentile nations’ treatment of “one of the least of these my brethren” – the Jews – both before and during the tribulation period (Matthew 25.40,45 / Genesis 12.1-3). The word “nations” covers national leadership, peoples and individuals, showing that the current wave of “anti-semitism” in many parts of the world, which of course is nothing new, is seen to have central significance as far as Almighty God is concerned.

We see also from this act of nation-separation by Jesus that “the blessed of (the) Father” remain, to “inherit the kingdom” on earth, while “the cursed” are bidden to depart “into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (25.34b; 41,46). By contrast, in the previous seizing-away at the “rapture”, it is the blessed who have been removed while the wicked remain, to pass through the tribulation period.

After these fearful yet wholly just judgments, the many Old Testament promises of future blessings upon Israel, some of which have had partial though short-lived fulfilments already, will now blossom into fulness in the millennial kingdom on the earth: Jesus reigns in righteousness (eg., Jeremiah 23.5-6); the captivity of Israel is ended (eg., Amos 9.14-15); nations shall flow to “the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob” in Jerusalem (eg., Isaiah 2.1-3); times of peace and blessing come at last (Micah 4.1-7); the temple will be in use (Haggai 2.6-9 / Ezekiel 40.1 – 48.35); the tribulation martyrs will reign with Christ (Revelation 7.13-17; 20.4end, 6end).

Then there is Satan’s last revolt (Revelation 20.7-10); the great white throne (20.11-15); the renovation of the earth by fire (II Peter 3.7-10); Jesus delivering up the kingdom to His Father (I Corinthians 15.24-28); the new heaven, the new earth and the holy city, the new Jerusalem (Isaiah 65.17; 66.22 / II Peter 3.13 / Revelation 21.1-22.7); and the eternal state.

Quite a path ahead! - but it shows that Almighty God is in complete control of that path, and by His many mercies all shall indeed be well for those “in Christ”.

So we Keep The Faith, as we now sing once again the song of those joyful herald angels – “Glory to the new-born King!”.

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