

THINGS TO COME

Study 1

The Return of Christ



**John 14: 1-6; Acts 1: 8-11;
1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18**

In these four lessons we are going to consider the FUTURE, looking at what the New Testament says about the LAST THINGS. Eschatology is the name given to this study by the theologians. In our world today many people believe that life has no future and even if it has, they are afraid to consider it. The Christian life, however, is one that has a glorious future. Why? Because JESUS IS ALIVE. This gives to all who are trusting Him for salvation a guarantee of eternal peace and joy.

There are four ways in which we can relate the future purposes of God to people and events:

1. The Second Coming of Christ - Who will He come for?
2. The Second Coming of Christ - How will it affect Christians and their service?
3. Judgment - Who will be affected and when?
4. Eternity - What will the end of all things be?

It will be good for you, as you begin, to look at the whole picture first. Why not read ALL the Scriptures in the four lessons and get them in your mind? As you begin, think of a jig-saw puzzle. You have a box of assorted pieces alongside you. Each fits into the whole and you will not have a complete picture until every piece is in its right place. We have to be careful that we do not try to fix a piece into the wrong place. Remember God has a complete picture in His mind of all that is going to happen. His clock is set to the right time; and His time-table is perfect!

The Scriptures you have read in this lesson will clarify three different aspects of Christ's Coming (or Advent, as it is often called).

1. WHY we believe He will come again?
2. HOW He will come again?
3. WHOM He will come for - what it will mean to them?

1. WHY? Belief in the Second Coming of Jesus is a foundation truth of Christianity. Christian hope is based upon it, and we can say that **John 14: 1-6** holds the key to our faith in this truth - the PROMISE of Jesus Himself. Gathering His disciples around Him on His way to the Cross, Jesus told them in plain terms - **"If I go... I will come again". (v. 3)** Isolate just four words and you have a vital promise - **"I WILL COME AGAIN"**.

The Bible is full of promises. If you read the Old Testament you will find that there were many promises connected with the first coming of Christ. When He came to earth, the first time it was in fulfilment of many prophecies. When the wise men came to Jerusalem in search of Jesus, Herod and his men could turn to the books and find the relevant words. (**Matthew 2: 6**) There were promises concerning many aspects of His coming; not just the fact that He would

come, but details of His life and death. It seemed that for each stage of His earthly life there was a relevant promise or prophecy. On the road to Emmaus Jesus was able to turn the minds of His two companions to the Scriptures **"concerning Himself" (Luke 24: 27)**

Now, as Jesus gathers His disciples around Him on His way to the Cross, He sees their troubled looks and He promises to come again. They could rest on that, and so can we! Our belief that He will come again is based upon His own promise which will not fail. As He came the first time in fulfilment of the Scriptures, so He will come the second time.

2. HOW? When Jesus came the first time it was as a Babe to Bethlehem. For about 33 years He lived among mankind. He died and rose again from the dead. **Acts 1**, is most interesting because it shows Jesus with His disciples AFTER His resurrection. They talked with Him, and listened as He instructed them about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Then, quite suddenly, He was taken up into Heaven. They saw Him go. It is here that we find the indication of how He is going to come back again. In **verse 11** the angels say, **"This same Jesus who was taken up from you into Heaven will so come IN LIKE MANNER as you saw Him go into Heaven."** In the clouds - suddenly He went away. In the clouds - suddenly He will come again. Notice how **1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17** puts it. Just as the Lord Jesus was caught up into Heaven, so every believer in the Lord Jesus will be caught up to meet Him when He comes.

3. WHAT WILL HAPPEN? - WHO WILL GO?

Read **1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18** carefully and compare it with **1 Corinthians 15: 23**. The Second Coming of Christ will mark a great crisis in world history. When He comes ALL BELIEVERS (that is those who make up the universal Church), will be **"caught up together with them in the clouds"**. Not only LIVING Christians, but those who **"sleep in Jesus"** - the **"dead in Christ"** will join together with this great company who will be forever with the Lord. This is what the Second Coming of Christ will mean. You see, at Thessalonica, there were some Christians who thought that those who had died would miss the joy of Christ's coming. They thought they would be cheated out of the realisation of their hope. To comfort them Paul spelled out the message. Christ's coming would mean resurrection for the **"dead in Christ"**, and rapture for those who were still alive at His coming - what a glorious hope!

Let us summarise the facts:

1. Christ has promised to come again.
2. He will come again for ALL BELIEVERS - none will be missing.
3. He will come suddenly in the clouds - although we do not know when.
4. The dead in Christ will rise first.
5. Living Christians will join them in the clouds.
6. ALL will be FOREVER with the LORD.

We should be looking for His coming.

Study 2

The Review of Christian Service

Read

**1 Corinthians 3;
2 Corinthians 5**

The Second Coming of Christ will mark a dividing line in God's attitude to the world and His dealings with it. Have you ever heard the phrase "**The DAY OF GRACE**" used? When the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, a new era began for the world. The gospel began to be preached and the early Christians were heralds of a great day of blessing when God began to take out of the world, people that were saved and build them into His Church. (**Acts 15: 14**) The Church is the "**body**" of Christ and is built of all believers in the Lord Jesus, both Jew and Gentile. (**Ephesians 2: 11-22**) Look at these passages carefully. During the "**day of grace**" this work is going on. Evangelists and preachers, as well as ourselves in our individual witness for Christ, are gradually moving towards the end of this period. When CHRIST COMES "**the day of grace**" will end. The CHURCH - each individual member of it - will be caught up to be with the Lord forever. This PHASE of God's work will then be at an end. It is important that you keep the coming of Christ in its true perspective. Ours is an URGENT TASK, for Christ could come at any time.

When Christ does come there will be a great change in world events. Instead of GRACE, God will begin to deal with the world in JUDGMENT. It will be a sad day for those who are left behind after Jesus has come. Paul told the people of Athens that in God's time-table there was a day already appointed in which God would judge the world in righteousness by a risen Saviour. (**Acts 17: 31**) This is why today He calls people to repent and believe the gospel. We shall look at the implications of this in a later lesson. What will happen then to Christians when they are with the Lord? Perhaps you wonder if they will face judgment either with the world or in a similar way. One fact is clear - believers in the Lord Jesus will never experience the judgment we read of in **Revelation 20**. When Jesus died He paid the penalty for our sin - He was judged for it and we shall NEVER meet GOD as JUDGE. (**1 Thessalonians 1: 9-10**) It is important to grasp this fact, and it is very wonderful indeed!

For the Christians the first event that will follow the coming of Christ will be the JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST. Consider **2 Corinthians 5: 10**. Look at its CONTEXT. Paul has been speaking of the time when he would be no more in the flesh - when he would go to be with the Lord. Notice how beautifully he describes it. The "**earthly house**" would be dissolved, (**verse 1**) he would be "**absent from the body**". (**verse 8**) Death to Paul was not to be feared. "**We have a building from God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens**". (**verse 1**) He would be "**PRESENT WITH THE LORD**". (**verse 8**) There is TRIUMPH in these words and Paul was waiting for the time when he would be present with the Lord. But while he was in the body he wanted to make sure that he pleased his Lord and served Him faithfully. What was his goal? He knew that there was a DAY OF REVIEW coming when every Christian would have to give an account of his service for the Lord. This review would take place at the Judgment Seat AFTER Christ had come. (**verse 10**)

1. WHO then will appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ?
EVERY CHRISTIAN. "**That each one may receive the**

things done in the body". (**verse 10**) We see this again in **1 Corinthians 4: 5**. Every hidden thing connected with "**every man**" is going to be brought to light. We are God's servants. When we become Christians it should be our first aim in life to serve the Lord Jesus and to serve Him well. We are SAVED TO SERVE! So, the Judgment Seat of Christ is not related to SINS but to SERVICE - we shall ALL be there.

2. HOW will service be reviewed?

If you look at **1 Corinthians 3: 10-15** you will see how Paul viewed this. He thought of himself as a master-builder who laid the foundation in his service. Notice the FOUNDATION - Jesus Christ. He looks then at other builders; there would be many who would follow on after him. He calls for care in building. The SUPERSTRUCTURE will be tested. Some will build with gold, silver, precious stones; others with wood, hay and straw. (**verse 12**) At "**the day**" - the day of the Judgment Seat of Christ - each activity will be tested; every man's work will be revealed. The Lord Jesus will test the work Himself, by the fire of His purity. All unworthy material will be seen to be worthless - it will be burnt up. The worthy material - God-pleasing service - will endure and be rewarded. This is HOW it will happen. It could be that MOTIVES for serving the Lord will stand, while many METHODS of service will have proved of little worth. Let us bear in mind the perceptive understanding of the Lord Jesus when we work for Him. He is the One who reads the thoughts and intents of the heart.

3. WHAT will it mean to be rewarded? We must first realise that it is only by God's grace that we can serve Him at all. He has saved us - we owe everything to Him, yet He will reward us for service. It may be, as in the story of the talents in **Matthew 25: 21**, we shall be given POSITIONS of service greater than others. Rewards are also sometimes viewed as CROWNS, e.g. **2 Timothy 4: 8; James 1: 12; 1 Peter 5: 4**. Whatever "**reward**" means we can be sure there will be no MISTAKES in their distribution, and no work of devotion will be MISSED. "**Then each one's praise will come from God**". (**1 Corinthians 4: 5**)

The Lord Jesus is coming soon. Meanwhile make sure that you serve Him with these points we have studied clearly in view; and with the desire in your heart to hear Him say: "**Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your Lord**." (**Matthew 25: 21**)

Study 3

The Recompense of Unbelievers

Read

**2 Thessalonians 1;
Revelation 20: 7 - 15**

We have noticed that for all believers in the Lord Jesus, the Coming of Christ will be a wonderful event. It will mean the beginning of endless joy in the actual presence of the Lord in Heaven. But what about those who are left behind? It is these people that we are going to think about in our present study. God must JUDGE SIN. This fact lies behind all the events of final judgment in the future. God would not be God at all if He in any way evaded this issue. Look at **Genesis 3** - the account of THE FALL. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned they were aware of guilt and fear. They knew that God's reaction would be to judge. You will notice the ways in which God expressed His judgment, finally driving Adam and Eve out of the garden. Satan, Adam and Eve were all declared guilty, and judgment against sin was pronounced.

In between these events and the Second Coming of Christ, the ages take their course. A new dimension in God's dealings with men began when the Lord Jesus came into the world. His objective was to restore the relationship between men and God, and through His love give salvation and hope to those who had sinned. We often call this period of time the Day of Grace. It is important for all mankind to realise the value of this time, for it is only during these days that salvation can be obtained. God's offer closes at the end of the Day of Grace. In this sense Christ's death stands at the centre of history. It means that ALL who are left behind when Christ comes will be left behind for JUDGMENT. Bear this fact in mind as we continue our study.

The central verse of **2 Thessalonians 1** is **verse 7**. It speaks of the time when the Lord Jesus will be **"REVEALED FROM HEAVEN"**. We will want to ask WHEN this will happen. Is it a different event to that which we looked at in **1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18?** - IT IS! **1 Thessalonians 4** speaks of the coming of the Lord for believers. The events of **2 Thessalonians 1** come AFTER THIS EVENT. Notice that the revelation of the Lord Jesus here is **"in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"**. (**verse 8**) It is an action of judgment.

The SUBJECTS of this action are those who have refused to obey the Gospel. It is obvious from this chapter that the people who were causing the Thessalonian Christians so much affliction and sorrow come into this category. Paul's reasoning here is that it is only right for God to give tribulation to those that troubled them. (**verse 6**) The day of Christ's revelation will be the DAY OF RECKONING for them. It is important that you notice those who will be judged at this POINT in God's programme.

You may perhaps ask 'what will happen on earth between the Coming of Christ for His own, and His coming in judgment on those who have rejected Him?' This is a very large subject and you will have to study a lot of it for yourself. We call it the study of prophecy. The outstanding feature of this time will be that the world will be given over to unrestrained evil. The Church will have gone to be with Christ, and the Holy Spirit will have been withdrawn from the world. In **2 Thessalonians 2: 3-11** we read of a character called the **"MAN OF SIN"**. (**verse 3**) He will be revealed and he will be the centre of all kinds of wickedness and rebellion against God. Read this passage carefully. If you compare it with **Revelation 13** you will see that he will demand the worship of all the people of the earth. They will refuse only at their own peril.

Look now at **2 Thessalonians 1: 9-10**. The punishment of those who do not obey the gospel is **"everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord"**. This is an action of BANISHMENT from God forever. It is the climax of the events stemming from the garden of Eden. But those who are with Christ, **"His saints"**, will be the evidence of His glory. Notice that He will come to be **"glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe"**. (**verse 10**) It is evident that the Second Coming of Christ will be a time of division. He first of all comes FOR HIS PEOPLE, **1 Thessalonians 4**. Then He will be revealed WITH HIS PEOPLE when He comes to judge the unbelievers.

We close this serious study with the events of **Revelation 20: 11-15**. Here we have the PLACE of judgment - the place

where the final sentence will be passed. John is given the vision of **"a great white throne"**. (**verse 11**) Remember, no believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will be found there. God will occupy this throne, and so terrible will be His purity and holiness that even earth and heaven will not be able to stand before Him. There will be NO ESCAPE from this final event of judgment. The dead, small and great. even those who have been lost or buried at sea - all will be raised to stand before God. ALL will be called to stand before God at His Great White Throne.

There will be NO EVASION. The books are there with the record of deeds during earthly life. This RECORDER of all men's ACTIONS. Yet the basis of final judgment is found in **verse 15**. **"Anyone not found written in the BOOK OF LIFE was cast into the lake of fire."** When a person accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, their name is entered in Heaven in the Lamb's Book of Life. There it will remain forever. Let us conclude our study by noting that there will be NO END to the punishment of those who are found at the Great White Throne. Those who refuse God's love and obey not His Gospel will suffer for all eternity, the penalty which is so vividly described in this passage.

Study 4 The Renewal of All Things

Read Revelation 21 & 22

In this final lesson we will be studying events that will take place just before and after the Great White Throne judgment. Notice the voice from the Throne in **21: 5**. **"Behold I make all things new"**. This is the voice of God and it is linked with **verse 1** which describes John's vision of **"a new heaven and a new earth."** Read these two chapters carefully - there is an atmosphere of perfection and completion about them. We are going to try to understand something of what the end of all things will be.

We shall go back to the opening verses of the Bible to begin our study. Notice how the created world began, **Genesis 1: 2** speaks of a condition of chaos - **"the earth was without form, and void."** Out of this chaos God brought a NEW ORDER altogether. He brought into being the universe and our present world. When He had finished it, God saw that all was very good. Instead of CHAOS He brought ORDER, light and beauty. Now look at **Genesis chapters 6-8**, Noah and the flood. Because of the progress of sin and corruption in the world, God brought His judgment on it - repenting that He had even made man. (**Genesis 6: 6**) The flood came and the earth was submerged for 150 days. Just eight people came through to safety to witness the restoration of creation.

It is important to notice **Genesis 9: 8-17**. Here God makes a COVENANT with the earth. He promised that it would never be destroyed by water again. The beautiful rainbow in the sky was a token of God's promise. He will never break His word. Yet the world will be judged again for its evil. **2 Peter 3: 6-13** is important. These verses tell us of a day to come when the heavens and earth, which are **"reserved for fire"** will **"pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat"**. We can learn from this that God is going to purify His creation by fire. We do not know exactly what this will mean, but we do know that afterwards there will be brought into being, **"new heavens**

and a new earth in which righteousness dwells". (2 Peter 3: 13). So the story of the heavens and the earth will not be complete until "ALL THINGS" are made new by the power of God.

We can learn from this that the Bible is ONE book. Each stage in God's dealings with man and his world leads on to the final stage of perfection. Looking back we can trace a story of imperfection and failure in a universe spoiled by SIN. On every level of creation, sin and the influence of Satan, has marred the work of God. Only when this has finally been removed will a new state be possible. If you read **Romans 8: 21-22** you will notice that Paul speaks of a "GROANING CREATION" waiting for the day of liberty. Remember that SIN not only damaged people but it damaged the whole creation of God. It will only be at the end of all things that everything will be restored to its former perfection.

Something of this perfection will be experienced ON EARTH before the final restoration of all things, when the Lord Jesus REIGNS over the whole world. There is to be a time of peace and prosperity coming on THE EARTH. It is known as the MILLENNIUM - the thousand years. If you look at **Revelation 20: 1-6** you will find it mentioned there. It will follow on from a period of great tribulation during which the Beast and Man of Sin (**Revelation 13**) will hold sway. It is the time to which many Old Testament passages looked forward. See **Isaiah 2: 1-5, Zechariah 14: 4-9**. To the Nation of Israel it will be the coming of their Messiah.

Remember that when Jesus came as a Man to the earth they crucified Him; they refused to recognise Him as their Messiah. Today they still await His coming. During the 1000 years of peace Jesus will reign over the earth from Jerusalem, the Holy City. During this wonderful time you will notice that Satan will be bound. (**Revelation 20: 2-3**)

It is after this period that Satan is loosed and the final rebellion of man against God takes place. (**Revelation 20: 7-10**) It will certainly be a terrible time. Yet the victory is with God and His Christ, and Satan and his hosts will be cast into Hell forever. Notice that it is at this point that the GREAT WHITE THRONE is set up. It is impossible for there to be a NEW HEAVEN and NEW EARTH - everything restored and made new - until Satan has been finally defeated. Then it will be possible for all the glorious things of **Revelation 21-22** to be realised. Notice the wonderful language of **21: 3-4**. When God dwells with men every tear will be wiped away; there will be no more death; sorrow, crying and pain will vanish forever. This is God's plan for a glorious future.

You may have found this lesson rather difficult to fit together. On the other hand you may have got the sequence of events, yet wonder if it is all really true. If you are a Christian, **2 Corinthians 5: 17** says that you are "a new creation". God has made you anew. This is a miracle in itself and it happens every time someone comes to the Lord Jesus Christ and accepts Him as Saviour. Now a new heaven and earth needs NEW PEOPLE to dwell in them. Believers in the Lord Jesus will enjoy forever the tremendous blessings of Heaven. God will not be satisfied until this wonderful DESTINY becomes a reality. In closing this lesson, remember that what the Bible says about the future is VITALLY IMPORTANT. We can rejoice that one day He will make all things new.

Questions

Study 1

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

1. What extra dimension does Christianity give to life, and why?
2. Why is it useful to read all the Scriptures concerning Christ's coming?
3. What one fact is true about both the first and second advents of Christ?
4. Why was **1 Thessalonians 4** first written?
5. In what order will events take place when Jesus comes to the air? (according to **1 Thessalonians 4**)

Study 2

THE REVIEW OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE

1. What do you understand by the expression "the Day of Grace"?
2. Why is the Christian's task an urgent one?
3. What is the "Judgment Seat of Christ" and when will it be held?
4. What will take place at the "Judgment Seat of Christ"?
5. How should we serve the Lord in the light of the "Judgment Seat of Christ"?

Study 3

THE RECOMPENSE OF UNBELIEVERS

1. Of what significance is **Genesis 3** to our present study?
2. What is the difference between the coming of the Lord as viewed in **1 Thessalonians 4** and **2 Thessalonians 1**?
3. What will happen on the earth immediately AFTER the Church has been taken to be with the Lord? (Refer to **2 Thessalonians 2**)
4. What will take place at the Great White Throne of judgment?
5. Upon what will God base His final judgment of those who are there?

Study 4

THE RENEWAL OF ALL THINGS

1. What evidence have we seen, to show that the Bible is ONE book?
2. In what way has Satan's influence marred God's work?
3. What do you understand by the Millennium?
4. Say briefly when and how God's creation will be restored.
5. In what way has our study of Eschatology (future events) challenged your own life?