

# **“I WILL COME AGAIN”**

**The Promise**

**How will Jesus come?**

**What shall be the sign?**

**Be ye also ready**

## PART 1. THE PROMISE

It was night. In the city of Jerusalem, the full moon, rising over the pinnacles of the temple, was chasing the dark shadows. Few in the city, crowded as it was for the Passover with a million pilgrims, realised that the most significant event in history was about to unfold.

A group of thirteen men was gathered in an upper room. Each sensed that something dreadful was about to happen. This was the last night of Jesus' life on earth. He had looked forward to this Passover feast, with His own chosen friends, His companions over the past three years. He knew the nameless fear in their hearts and He kept no secret from them. 'One of you will betray Me,' He told them. Then He spoke directly to Judas Iscariot, 'What you have to do, do it quickly.' Slowly Judas rose to his feet and strode towards the stairway. Pausing, he turned to look at Jesus. A long, awful look passed between them . . . Then he turned and was gone. And it was night . . .

It was not only a matter of a few hours before Jesus and His disciples would be separated as He went His lonely way to the cross, before their faith in Him would be tested to the uttermost. Jesus wished to fill those last hours of fellowship with words they would remember, words that would comfort and sustain them. The most heartfelt feelings are often expressed at the end of a letter, the tenderest caress comes before parting, the softest words before we turn away . . .

In the words of Jesus, we seem to catch the desire to bring comfort to desolate hearts. 'Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God. Believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again** and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.' {John 14:1-3}

Here is the precious promise from the words of Jesus, words of consolation and cheer for Christians in every generation. In the centuries since Jesus spoke these words, many of His faithful followers have trodden the path of suffering and death like their Master. Only God knows how many paid with their lives for their faith in Jesus. During the great tribulation foretold by Daniel, by John and by Jesus Himself, which lasted for 1260 years, at least 50 million laid down their lives rather than betray their Lord. Some historians estimate that the number of martyrs during that fearful time may have exceeded 100 millions. What sustained these men, women and children in their time of suffering? In the words of Paul, they were 'looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God our Saviour Jesus Christ.' [Titus 2:13] They trusted in His promise, knowing that He would never lie.

The disciples who first heard Christ's promise never forgot these precious words. In their desire to carry out Christ's final commission to go and teach to all nations the things He had taught them, they also shared Christ's precious promise: 'I will come again.' God has preserved for us today in what we call the New Testament the writings of these men and others who came to believe in Jesus. These writings were written by eight different men, Matthew, John and Peter who were present when these words were spoken, Mark, Luke, Paul and two brothers of Jesus, James and Jude, who became followers of Jesus. Each of these eight men speaks about the return of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke each devote an entire chapter of their gospels to what Jesus Himself said about His Second Coming. They record in detail Christ's answer to the disciples' question: 'What shall be the sign of Thy coming and the end of the world?'

**Matthew** records this in chapter 24 of his gospel. This chapter repays close study for it contains many warnings from the lips of Jesus Himself about the deceptions which could lead God's people astray, how some would try to impersonate Christ, how others would preach errors in order to deceive people about this most precious of promises, how some would try to sustain their claims by working wonderful miracles. Some would claim that Jesus had already returned in secret. To all these deceptions, Christ gave a consistent warning: 'Believe it not.' [Matthew 24:26] If we want to avoid being deceived, we'd better understand what Jesus and His apostles told us.

**Mark** too in chapter 13 of his gospel records these same words of Jesus, as does **Luke** in chapter 21. **John** records Christ's promise at that last supper Jesus shared with His disciples before His suffering on Calvary. [John 14:1-3]

What of the other New Testament writers? **Paul** devotes two entire chapters to this topic, 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. In these chapters, Paul answers a question that was troubling many believers at that time. By that time, some of the early believers had died and there was concern about this. There was no clear understanding in the pagan world about what happens when a person dies. Some thought that death was the end of everything. Even among the Jews, the Sadducees, who included among their number many of the priests and even the high priest, had no belief in an afterlife. Paul in these passages assures his readers of the certainty of the resurrection of those who sleep in Jesus. In Corinth, some Christians, who had recently come out of paganism, did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. 'Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?' [1 Corinthians 15:12] Paul assured them that the resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee that the dead in Christ shall be raised to immortal life at His coming. 'If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's **at His coming.**' [1 Corinthians 15:16-23] To the Thessalonian believers, Paul wrote words of comfort to those who were mourning the death of their loved ones. These words speak to the heart of every believer who has stood beside an open grave, to say goodbye. Listen. 'But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.' [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18]

**James**, the Lord's brother, who became a leader in the Christian church in Jerusalem, left us one short letter only. But he did not fail to mention the blessed hope. The true followers of Christ have always eagerly longed to see their Lord's return. But as time passed, some became impatient and others began to lose their hope. James was concerned to encourage them not to lose heart and he reminded them of the patience of the farmer who cannot hurry the harvest; instead he must wait patiently for nature to do its part in the ripening of the crop. 'Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold,

the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' [James 5:7-8]

**Jude** in the brief letter found before the last book of the Bible records a prophecy of Christ's return: 'Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgement upon all.' [Jude verses 14-15.]

**Peter**, who was present to hear Christ's precious promise, 'I will come again,' also was concerned to encourage those who were beginning to doubt the certainty of Christ's promise. In his day already, people were scoffing at the idea that Jesus would return. Peter responded in words of solid conviction: '**The day of the Lord will come.**' [2 Peter 3:10] He goes on to use language which he learned from Jesus Himself. 'Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up, Therefore be ye also ready: [Matthew 24:43] Unless you are ready, Peter says, the day of the Lord will be as unexpected as a thief in the night. [2 Peter 3:10] Many years ago, my family went to bed one night, not realising that we had left a little window unlatched. If only we had known that on that very night thieves would be prowling our road looking for opportunities to break in and steal. We had no warning that a thief would come **that night** and rob our home. But our carelessness was our loss. If only we had made the necessary preparation. Hindsight showed us all too clearly what we should have done. But we failed to secure our home and we suffered accordingly. To us when we went to bed that night, it seemed no different a night from any other. As we tucked the children into bed and switched off the light, we had no thought that they or we were in danger. The thief came and our carelessness left us unprepared. For many people, the return of Jesus Himself be just as unexpected as our experience that night. Jesus Himself and all the New Testament writers have given more than adequate notice that Jesus will come again and with that notice comes the repeated warning. 'Be ready for you do not know when He is coming.'

**John**, who wrote the gospel which bears his name, as well as three short letters and the prophetic Revelation which closes the Bible, was also concerned with the need to be ready for Christ's coming. In 1 John 3:2-3 he wrote of the personal preparation needed for those who will see Jesus at His appearing. 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.' In Revelation 6:15-17, he describes the despair of those who failed to make the necessary preparation. 'And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?' You may be rich, you may be one of the world's rulers, you may be famous, you may be a high-ranking officer, you may have great power in the world, you may be an ordinary working man, you may even be a slave. But if you are not ready for Jesus when He comes, it won't make the slightest difference what your social status has been. Being unprepared will be the only thing that matters then. No matter what your role in life has been, your reaction will be the same.

Conclusion: John, James, Jude, Peter, Matthew, Paul, Luke, Mark, every New Testament writer reminds us of the promise of Jesus, 'I will come again,' and warns us to be ready for that day when Jesus will fulfil His promise. Their words today are more timely than ever before. For each day that passes brings the whole world a day nearer to that appointment

with destiny. That day is a day of 'blessed hope' to the follower of Jesus, the day when we will meet our Saviour face to face, a day when our salvation will be complete. Paul's words are timely: 'Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.' [Romans 13:11]

**Lord Jesus, You promised that you will come again to receive your people to yourself. You do not break Your promises. May the promises we have read from Your Word convince each one reading this booklet that You will come again. Show each one who is bowed before you what is needed to be ready for the day of Your coming. Amen.**

## PART 2 HOW WILL JESUS COME?

A group of men are standing on a hill to the east of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, from which they could see the entire city spread out before them. But these men are not looking at the city, dominated as it is by the splendour of Herod's beautiful temple, which has already taken nearly fifty years to build and is not complete. Instead, they are gazing into the clouds above them, straining their eyes to try to catch one last glimpse of their Master.

As they stand there gazing into heaven, they suddenly become aware of two beings standing beside them dressed white clothing. '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]

Here is our first clue to help us answer the question: How will Jesus come? He will come in the same way that the disciples saw Him go. They watched Him as He went up into heaven. As long as they could, they watched until a cloud received Him out of their sight. [Acts 1:9-10] Men saw Him go and men will see Him return. We may be sure that anyone claiming to be the returned Christ whose coming has not been seen by men is an impostor. The words of these two angels to the watching disciples show clearly that Christ will not come in secret.

The question then arises: Who will see Him come? Will His coming only be seen by a few, perhaps those who believe in Him? Some people teach that Christ's coming will not be perceived except by 'the eye of faith.' In other words, they claim that only those who believe in Him will be aware of His coming. But the Bible leaves us in no doubt that this teaching is not correct. In the last book of the Bible, which opens and closes with the message of Christ's return, we may read. 'Behold He cometh with clouds **and every eye shall see Him....**' [Revelation 1:7] This reminds us of how He went, a cloud received Him out of their sight; and when He returns, 'He cometh with clouds.' '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.'

Jesus conveyed the thought that every eye shall see Him in vivid language. 'As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.' [Matthew 24:27] Perhaps you remember your childhood when there was thunder and lightning. Were you sometimes frightened? Did you ever put your head under the bedclothes to try to hide from those vivid flashes? But even there, it seemed that those blinding flashes could penetrate. There will be people trying to hide from the face of Jesus when he returns. They will even want the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of Jesus. But, like the lightning flashes, it will be impossible to hide from His face.

But John says more. 'Every one shall see Him **and they also that pierced Him.**' [Revelation 1:7] Those who pierced Him were certainly not believers. Jesus, when He stood before Caiaphas and the Jewish Sanhedrin on trial for His life, declared to those men, 'Ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.' [Mark 14:62] Though all these men to whom those words were addressed have been dead for centuries, they will be raised to life to look upon the face of the One they condemned to die. They had ample evidence to believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be. But they persisted in rejecting even the evidence of their own eyes and ears. When Jesus returns, they will have to face their Victim. As the prophet foretold, 'They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness

for his firstborn.’ [Zechariah 12:10] But there will be many others who will mourn on that day from all over the world. John wrote: ‘All kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.’ [Revelation 1:7]

But for those who are looking for Him, that will be a wonderful day. Isaiah foretold that joyful time and the cry that will come from their mouths when they see Jesus in the clouds. ‘He will swallow up death in victory and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth, for the Lord hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’ [Isaiah 25:8-9]

What else are we told about that day? Jesus told us that He would not come alone. With Him will come all the holy angels. [Matthew 25:31] We can hardly imagine the splendour of that scene. John describes a vision he was given of that tremendous day. ‘And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself. And He was clothed with a vesture dipped blood: and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.’ [Revelation 19:11-14]

It is very clear that Christ’s return will be no secret. There was a lady who had always been taught that Christ would return in secret and snatch His people away while the rest of the world went about its business, not realising what had happened. One day, the Lord put it into her head to ask a question of her husband who was a preacher and had taught this ‘secret rapture’ for many years. She asked, ‘Where is this taught in the Bible?’ Her husband answered, ‘Oh, you’ll find it in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18’ These were the verses he used when he was preaching this idea. She got down here Bible and read the verses. When she finished reading verse 15, she looked up with a puzzled expression on her face. Let’s read the verse. ‘For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven **with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and with the trumpet of God**, and the dead in Christ shall rise first.’ She said to her husband, ‘Why that’s not secret. It must be the noisiest event of all time!’ He read the verse himself and he had to agree this couldn’t be describing a secret coming! He never preached that idea ever again. The same event is described in Psalm 50. ‘Our God shall come and shall not keep silence. A fire shall devour before Him and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him. He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth, that He may judge His people.’ [Psalm 50:3-4]

It is a day that will shake the earth. Verses in the Bible describe the cataclysm that will take place when Jesus comes. In Revelation 6:14, John describes the heaven parting like a rolled-up scroll, while all the mountains and islands were moved from the places. Revelation 15:20-21 describes how every island fled away and the mountains were not found. A devastating hailstorm takes place. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 describes the flaming fire which will consume those who refuse to accept the Gospel, the good news that Jesus has power to save from their sins everyone who is willing to put his trust in that power. Many read the words of Jeremiah 4:23-28 as a vision of the devastated earth following the coming of Jesus, before He makes all things new again. ‘I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled, I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by His fierce anger. For thus hath the LORD said, The whole land shall be desolate;

yet will I not make a full end. For thus shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black: because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it.'

Another amazing event, which will take place at that day, is perhaps for many believers one of the most important things of all. It's more than a quarter of a century since I stood at my father's graveside and said goodbye. Some years later I saw my mother laid beside him. The stone above their grave says, 'Until the day dawn...' The day before my father died, I sat by his bedside watching his pain and distress as he lay dying of cancer of the liver. I remember too the pain and suffering of my mothers last illness. But when that day dawns, I am promised, 'The dead in Christ shall rise first.' [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17] Before anything else happens, Jesus will call the dead to life. He Himself said; 'The hour is coming in the which all that re in the grave shall hear His voice and shall come forth.' [John 5:29]

'Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.' I'm longing for that day when I see my parents again, when they rise from their graves where they have been sleeping for years. They won't be sick or in pain. My mother will have perfect hearing again. I never knew a time when my mother could hear my voice distinctly. It will be a life with no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.' Together we will go to meet Jesus in the air. No wonder Paul described the Second Coming of Jesus as 'the blessed hope.'

The Second Coming of Jesus will be as **literal** as was His going away. It will be **visible** as was His going away. In fact, every eye shall see Him. No one on earth will be able to hide from His face on that day. The Second Coming of Jesus will be **audible**. When Jesus calls the dead to awake, we will truly know what a voice is like that can raise the dead. That trumpet will be the loudest musical instrument that has ever been heard on this earth. It will be impossible to counterfeit the manner of Christ's Second Coming. Jesus warned continually that there would be many attempts to deceive God's people over the Second Coming. But for those who truly know the manner of Christ's coming as He has explained it in His Word, those who know that Christ's coming will be literal, visible and audible, that He will appear in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, that every eye shall see Him, that the dead in Christ will be coming out of their graves, and that together they and those who live to see Jesus coming will rise into the air to meet the Lord, those who know and believe these things will not be deceived, no matter how strong the deception.

Lord, we thank You that You have revealed so much in Your Word about the manner of Your Second Coming. I pray that each one reading this booklet may not be deceived but will look for that 'blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God, our Saviour Jesus Christ.' Amen.

### PART 3. WHAT SHALL BE THE SIGN?

**Introduction:** It was two days before Jesus was arrested and crucified. Jesus had just pronounced the doom of the Jewish nation as God's chosen people. He had said clearly that 'the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.' [Matthew 21:43] Jesus was deeply distressed as He spoke this prophecy of rejection and doom. Less than forty years later, the armies of Rome would come to Jerusalem and utterly destroy the temple and the city. Over a million pilgrims, crowding the city for the Passover would perish in the siege after appalling suffering. Jesus, groaning in spirit as He thought of such things, burst out in anguish, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings. And ye would not!' [Matthew 23:37]

The disciples could not understand His distress. They took Him on a guided tour of the temple. It was a wonderful building, one of the sights of the world in its splendid white marble and beautiful golden gates, the pride of the Jewish nation. It had already taken nearly fifty years to build and would not be complete for thirty more years. The disciples were proud to show off its splendour and beauty. How shocked they were to hear the words of Jesus: 'See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.'

The thought was incredible to the disciples. Jesus left the temple never to return and made His way to a favourite place, the Mount of Olives, where He could see the entire city lying before Him. The temple dominated the city in its glory. How could such an utter destruction come to it? To their minds, such a total devastation could be caused by only one thing. Hesitantly, they asked their Master the awful question which formed the only possible explanation to them of the Master's words of doom: 'Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy Coming and of the end of the world?' For them, the only thing that could cause such utter destruction would be the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of the world.

Jesus recognised the reasoning behind their question. They thought they were asking one question. But the Lord knew that it was actually two questions. The destruction of the temple and Jerusalem would take place in the lifetime of some of the disciples listening, but His Coming and the end of the world would not happen until many years later. In replying, the Lord answered both their questions but, in mercy, He did not show His disciples the long gap in time between the two events. When we read Matthew 24 and the parallel chapters, Mark 13 and Luke 21, we should be aware of these two questions and seek not to confuse them.

Jesus began His answers by giving a rapid overview of events. It is noticeable that He began by warning of deceptions and this warning was repeated throughout His answers to their questions. Next He described the warning sign for Christians to flee to safety from Jerusalem before its destruction by the Romans. Following this, Jesus described a long period of tribulation for God's people, the greatest in the whole history of the world. This period of tribulation is described many times in Scripture and its duration, a period of 1260 years is mentioned no less than seven times in Bible prophecy. Here Jesus describes how this period of tribulation would be cut short for the sake of God's people.

After repeating His warning against deceptions, Jesus began to give specific answers to the question: 'What shall be the sign of Thy coming and the end of the world?' The first sign He spoke of was a of a mysterious darkening of the sun and moon. This would take place

‘immediately after the tribulation of those days.’ [Matthew 24:29] The period of the great tribulation of 1260 years when at least 50 million Christians laid down their lives for the faith of Jesus lasted from 538-1798 but, as Jesus had foretold, the actual persecution was cut short for the sake of God’s people and the Inquisition which was responsible for so much suffering and death of so many faithful Christians had effectively ceased its activities fifty years earlier than 1798. Mark, recording the words of Jesus, describes the darkening of the sun and moon as being ‘in those days, after that tribulation.’ [Mark 13:214] May 19, 1789 dawned like any other day in the north-eastern part of the United States. But soon the lightning flashed and thunder began to roll. By mid-morning however the clouds had become thinner and the sky took on a brassy appearance. A few minutes later, between 10 & 11 a.m. a heavy blanket of unearthly darkness covered the land. Men returned home from work, unable to continue. Children were sent home from school. The cattle returned from the pasture. Even standing by the open windows, it was impossible to read the largest print. By 1 p.m. the darkness was total. Even horses could not see their way. The darkness lasted until about 1 a.m. next day when it began to lift. There was a full moon at the time and observers noted that, as the moon began to appear, it was deep red in colour. The darkness appears to have been longer-lasting and more widespread than the darkness which was over Judea at the time of Christ’s crucifixion. The poet, John Greenleaf Whittier recorded the effect upon many of the people:

*‘Men prayed and women wept; all ears grew sharp  
To hear the doom blast of the trumpet shatter  
The black sky, that the dreadful face of Christ  
Might look from the rent clouds, not as He looked  
A loving guest at Bethany, but stern  
As Justice and inexorable Law.’*

Footsteps of the approaching King. Fifty-three years later another footstep was heard. Jesus said, ‘The stars shall fall from heaven.’ [Matthew 24:29] John describing the same sign in Revelation 6:13 wrote, ‘And the starts of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind.’ On November 13<sup>th</sup> 1833, the greatest recorded exhibition of shooting stars was seen. The display lasted five or six hours and estimates suggest that at least 200,000 meteors an hour were to be seen. Several observers described them as being as thick as snowflakes in a storm. One newspaper correspondent, who clearly knew his Bible, commented, ‘The stars fell ‘even as fig tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind. Here is the exactness of the prophet. The falling stars did not come as if several trees were shaken, but from one. Those which appeared in the east fell towards the east; those which appeared in the north fell towards the north; those which appeared in the west fell towards the west; and those which appeared in the south (for I went out of my residence into the park) fell towards the south. And they fell not as the ripe fruit falls; far from it. But they flew, they were cast, like the unripe fig which at first refuses to leave the branch and when it does break its hold, flies swiftly straight off, descending; and in the multitude falling, some cross the track of others as they are thrown with more or less force.’

Jesus spoke of only one more sign in the heavens, when the powers of heaven shall be shaken. What that will entail, we must wait and see. But Revelation 6:14 describes the scene. ‘And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together.’

But there were to be signs on the earth too. Daniel was shown that, in the time of the end, ‘many would run too and fro and knowledge would be increased.’ [Daniel 12:4] Since the falling of the stars, we have seen ‘many run to and fro.’ When the stars fell, the fastest way to travel was by the newfangled railway trains at perhaps 30 miles per hour. Many people

never took a journey of a hundred miles in their entire life. Many indeed lived their entire lives in the same town or village. Since that time, an entire transport industry has grown up and we can run to and fro by car, bus, train, ship and aircraft in vehicles which could not be envisaged when the stars fell 165 years ago.

And surely knowledge has been increased. When I trained as a librarian, I learned how rapidly the sum of human knowledge is increasing. No scientist can afford to read only books today. Knowledge in books is out of date by the time it is published. Even periodicals only give the state of knowledge as it was months or years ago. Now by the internet, knowledge can be shared almost as it happens. The range of knowledge is so vast that men hoping to master a subject must become specialists in narrower and narrower fields of learning, if they are to grasp the scope of their subject.

What other signs did Jesus give to warn of His near coming? He spoke of wars and rumours of war. Our century has seen the most devastating wars in human history and even in times of so-called peace, war continues in our world. In every year since 1945, British servicemen have been killed on active service fighting in one war or another. He spoke of famines and in recent years we have become aware of the chronic famines in drought-struck areas of Africa. He spoke of pestilences and we have seen in this century terrible pestilences from the 1919 flu epidemic which killed 20 million people to the Aids epidemic which is at present destroying so much life in Africa and elsewhere. Jesus spoke of earthquakes and in recent centuries the number of earthquakes has risen dramatically. 45% in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 49% in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, 69% in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and 331% in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In our own century the increase has continued in number and ferocity. John in Revelation 6:12 foretold that before the sun was darkened, there would be a great earthquake and on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1755 occurred what may well have been the greatest earthquake on record. It destroyed the city of Lisbon in three shocks, the longest of which lasted six minutes and killed 30,000 people. Many drowned in the 20-foot tidal wave which flooded the lower part of the city. The shock was felt over an area four times the size of Europe, at places 1800 miles from Lisbon. Many at the time recognised the fulfilment of prophecy.

Many other signs of Christ's Second Coming are recorded in the Bible. Distress of nations, perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear of what is coming upon the earth, the sea and the waves roaring. But I'd like to read you Paul's prophecy of what social conditions will be like in the last days of this world's history. As you listen to these words, remember the news stories that fill the papers and broadcasts.

'This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy.

Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.' [2 Timothy 3:1-5]

There have always been earthquakes, pestilences, famines even in Bible times. There have always been selfish people, covetous people, boastful people, ungrateful people, arrogant, blasphemous. But are these characteristics becoming more prevalent today? Has there been a more pleasure-loving generation? When has God played such a minor part in the

lives of people? And when have the churches been so formal and lifeless? When has the gospel, the power of God to save men from their sins, been so little believed and preached by professed Christians? Yes, none of these things is unique to our day. But in our time, we see **all** the signs together being fulfilled. Not one of these signs is missing today. Jesus gave some sound advice: 'Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see **all these things**, know that it is near, even at the doors.' [Matthew 24:32-33] Past generations have seen some of these things. But today for the first time inhuman history, we can see **all these things** happening around us. Those who know fig trees see from the opening of leaf buds, the first signs of approaching summer. Those who know the signs Jesus gave us of His coming and see **all these things happening** can be certain that the coming of Jesus is very near, '**even at the doors.**' Jesus (and Peter) warned that many would ignore the signs. Like the fabled ostrich, they will stick their heads in the sand and deny that things are any different now. They will go on eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage and the Second Coming of Jesus will come to them as a terrible shock. 'But yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when **they** shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail [labour] upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But ye are not in darkness that the day should overtake you as a thief . . . Therefore let us not sleep.' [1 Thessalonians 5:2-6]

**Heavenly Father, you have given us many signs to help us to see when the coming of Jesus is near. Wake us up, Lord, so that we may not be taken by surprise when Jesus comes. Help us to be ready. Amen.**

## PART 4. BE YE ALSO READY

‘Therefore be ye also **ready** for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.’ Matthew 24:4 ‘Be ye therefore **ready** also for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.’ Luke 12:40.

‘They that were **ready** went in with Him to the marriage and the door was shut.’ Matthew 25:10.

What does it mean to be ready? What will it be like when those who are ready go in with Him and those who are not remain outside, and the door of mercy is forever shut?

In his story about the ten bridesmaids in Matthew 25, Jesus describes how the arrival of the bridegroom appeared to be delayed and, during the long wait, all the bridesmaids went to sleep. This is an accurate picture of the state of the Christian church, which for many centuries lost sight of the promise of Jesus, when He told His disciples, ‘I will come again.’ Instead of looking for the return of their Lord, many Christians began to believe that, instead, the church would triumph over all the earth and reign for a thousand years.

But God, in His mercy, reminded the church of this precious truth and, from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the church began to teach once more the promise that Jesus is coming again. Not every church accepted this view. But in nearly every church throughout the world, faithful Christians studied the Scriptures and especially the prophecies, and found this truth, that Jesus is coming again.

But it is not enough to know that Jesus has promised to come again. It is not enough to know how Jesus will return. It is not enough even to know the signs that Jesus is coming again. More than all these things, we must be **ready**. So what does it mean to be ready?

In Revelation 14:6-12, the Bible tells of the final warning that God is giving to the world to prepare them for Christ’s Coming. In the first of these messages, a worldwide warning is given to fear God and give glory to Him because the hour of His judgment has arrived. [Revelation 14:6-12] It is true that the church has always taught that one day God will judge the earth. Somehow, Christians knew that all men would one day be judged by God, according to what they have done with their lives. God is now telling mankind that the time for judgment has now arrived. Most Christians assumed that the judgment would take place **after** Jesus returned. But this is not what the Bible teaches. We can read the sequence in **Revelation 22:11-12**. First the decision of the judgment is announced: ‘He that is unjust, let him be unjust still, and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And behold I come quickly and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his works shall be.’ When Jesus returns, the judgment will be over, the decisions will already be made and He comes to ‘reward every man according as his works shall be.’ Not all those ‘rewards’ will be pleasant. The Bible principle is consistent; God will treat you as you have treated other people.

This gives us a clue about what it means to be ready [John 8:39-44] The Jews claimed to be children of Abraham. Jesus told them, ‘If you were really children of Abraham, you would act like Abraham did. (verse 39) He went on, ‘You are really children of the devil because you act like the devil.’ (verse 44.) If we act like the devil, telling lies, cheating, stealing, and all the other things that come from the devil, then we have chosen the devil for our father. IF we are children of God, we will be godly, godlike people. Does this sound too strong? Hear what John wrote about the Second Coming of Jesus. [1 John 3:2-3.]

‘Beloved, now are we the sons of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that, when He shall appear, **we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.’ The greatest desire of the Christian’s heart should be to be like Jesus, not like the devil.

The Bible tells us that long ago a war broke out in heaven when Satan rebelled against God. [Revelation 12:7] Satan was defeated in this war and God expelled him from heaven, isolating him in the earth. Here he has been able to continue his rebellion, showing exactly what sin really is and what it leads to. Anyone looking at the misery and suffering in this world, the sickness, the destruction, the war, the cruelty, the crime, need be in no doubt about what sin brings with it. The Bible tells us [Hebrews 2:14] that the reason why Jesus came to this earth as a man to die was to destroy the one who brought death into the world, that is, the devil. Some people think that God is never going to be rid of the devil, that the devil is immortal, just like God. But the Bible teaches Satan is going to be destroyed and with him, sin will be forever over. The Bible contains a wonderful promise. God is going to create new heavens and a new earth. [Revelation 21:1-5.] It will be a world with no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain. The things of this world will be gone forever. Everything will be new. God told John to write these words down because they are true. We can rely on them.

But how can God guarantee that, throughout the ages of eternity, sin will never arise again? This is His promise. ‘The former things are passed away.’ [Revelation 21:4] ‘He will make an utter end. Affliction shall not rise up the second time.’ [Nahum 1:9] How can we be sure of this?

In our country, we put criminals in prison for their crimes. We lock them up to protect the law-abiding community from them. This is similar to what God did by confining Satan to this world. But if a man has behaved himself in prison, he doesn’t have to serve the whole of his sentence. He can come out early to live in the community again. How many of these criminals re-offend? Enough perhaps to make people feel dubious about the system of early release. Suppose you had the news that quite a number of criminals were being released early and rehoused in your area. How would you feel about this? Would you feel utterly confident that none of these people would re-offend? Even if you were told that they had behaved themselves in prison and earned full remission? Or would you put secure locks on your windows and doors, start a neighbourhood watch scheme, make sure the children were escorted to and from school, ask for extra policemen on the beat?

This is how the angels might feel at the prospect of sinners being given eternal life. They already had a war in heaven and each of them was involved. They know what sin is like. More important, they know what you are like. They see the things you say, the things you do. Nothing is hidden from them. Can you imagine them saying to God, ‘Lord, are You sure You can entrust these people with eternal life? How can You be sure that they won’t start the same mess all over again?’

Then the Lord will say, ‘How did the trouble start?’ And the angel will talk about how God made man and woman, and gave them a beautiful world and a wonderful garden to live in. God gave them everything they could want for their pleasure. But He gave them a law. And it was because they broke that law that all the trouble started.

And the angel might ask, ‘Lord how can you be sure that they won’t break your law all over again and start the trouble once more?’ Then the Lord might say, ‘Why don’t you listen while I question these people and see what you think?’

So the Lord asks one Christian, 'Did you keep My Law?'

And the Christian answers, 'I don't need to keep Your law. I'm under grace.'

And the angel answers sadly, 'Lord, you can't trust him with eternal life. You showed Your grace to him and forgave him but he doesn't love You enough to obey You. He'll just start all the trouble again.'

So the Lord calls another Christian. 'Did you keep My Law?'

And this Christian answers, 'The Law was nailed to the cross. We don't need it any more.'

And the Angel says, 'Lord, you can't trust him. He doesn't know that Jesus was nailed to the cross because people like him wouldn't keep Your law.'

So the Lord calls a third Christian and asks, 'Did you keep My Commandments?'

This Christian has been a theologian and he answers, 'Well, I think the Ten Commandments are an ideal. We can't keep them but they do remind us what God's ideal is.'

And the angel says, 'No, Lord, you can't let him into heaven. He'll think it's all right to lie and cheat and steal. Before we know where we are, he'll probably be killing people.'

One more Christian is called and the Lord asks, 'Did you keep My Commandments?'

And this Christian answers, 'Your commandments are out of date. I believe in the new law of love. I don't need the Ten Commandments.'

And the angel says, 'Lord, you can't save him. He doesn't know that the Ten Commandments are the expression of love to You and to his fellowmen.'

Then the Lord says, 'I know some people who claim to keep My Commandments.' Would you like to look at them?' The Lord calls one of them. 'Did you keep My Commandments?'

'Yes, certainly,' this Christian replies.

So, the Lord takes him through them.

'We have a commandment that says, "Thou shalt not kill." Did you obey that?'

The Christian answers, 'Yes, I think that's a very good law. It makes sense to me. I'm happy with that.'

'What about "Thou shalt not steal"?'

'Well, yes, I can see the logic behind that one. I can see that the world would be a mess if we didn't respect each other's property.'

'What about not committing adultery?'

'Surely. Look at all the problems of divorces, one-parent families. Yes, I'll go along with that one.'

And so the Lord takes him through the Commandments. When He has finished, He asks the angel, 'What do you think? Shall We give him eternal life?'

And the angel answers, 'You can't possibly give this man eternal life. He's not obeying You. He's only agreeing with You, Lord. You couldn't trust him to obey You. What if there was something that he didn't agree with? What would he do then? This was a test You gave to Adam and Eve. You told them not to eat the fruit of one tree. The tree was a really attractive-looking tree. The fruit wasn't poisonous. It looked really good to eat. There was no logical reason for not eating it. This was their test of obedience. Would they obey You, even when there was no logical reason for obeying? And they failed and disobeyed. And this was what caused all the trouble. If you let this man in, he'll start the trouble all over again, just as soon as he finds something he doesn't understand.'

And the Lord says, 'You're right. Abraham had the same test. I told him to sacrifice his only son.' [Genesis 22:1-2] Abraham had no logical reason for obeying God. All his common-sense told him that it was wrong to obey God's voice. It was the supreme test of obedience. Would he obey even when it didn't make sense, even when he didn't understand God's will? And Abraham passed the test that Adam and Eve failed. He obeyed even when it didn't make sense. Like Jesus, he said, 'Lord, not my will but Thine be done.'

And so the angel might say, 'Lord, how can You tell if these people are really obeying you or just agreeing with you?'

And the Lord answers, 'I've got exactly the test for that one purpose. It's a fair test, exactly the same for everyone in the world. I can't use the same test as Abraham's because not everyone has a son. I can't use the same test as Adam and Eve's because not everyone in the world could get to a single tree. So the test must be based on something that everyone in the world has, something that everyone has exactly the same amount of. It can't be based on intelligence or beauty, or strength or courage. The only thing that everyone has exactly the same amount of is time. The test must be based on time. Everyone has sixty minutes in an hour, twenty-four hours in a day, seven days in a week. We'll tell people that they are to work for six days each week and rest one day.'

But the angel might reply, 'But that makes sense. Everyone needs work and rest.'

And the Lord said, 'We won't let them choose how much rest and how much work. And We'll tell them which one is to be the day of rest. It won't be based on logic but upon My Word, like Abraham's test and Adam and Eve's test. Then we'll see whether they are agreeing because of common sense or obeying because of love.' So God said, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all they work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work . . . For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.'

And so the Lord calls back the last Christian and says; 'Did you remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy?'

And the Christian answers, 'Well, I kept one day in seven, I don't see that it matters which one I keep.'

And the angel says, 'Lord, you can't let him in. He will only obey You if he agrees with You. If he disagrees, he will do whatever he wants to do.'

And the Lord says, 'You're right. We can't let him have eternal life.'

Another Christian comes forward. Same question. And he answers, 'I keep the first day of the week. That should be enough for you, Lord.'

And the Lord says, 'When did I command you to do that?'

And the Christian answers, 'It's what everyone does.'

And the angel says, 'No, Lord, he's not doing what You said, but what everyone else does. That's not obedience. You never told anyone to keep the first day holy.'

Another Christian. Same question. 'Well, I worship God every day of the week. That should be all right.'

And the angel says, 'He's doing what seems right to him, but he's not obeying You. He can't be trusted with eternal life.'

And the Lord says, 'You're right.'

Finally the Lord brings forward a group of Christians and says to them, 'Did you remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.'

And they answer, 'Yes, Lord, You asked us to remember it and that is exactly what we were willing to do. We love you and so we keep Your Commandments.'

And the angel says, 'Lord, you can let them in. They are safe to save. They are willing to do what You say because they love You, not because it appeals to their logic.'

True obedience is not about human logic. It's about love. Love doesn't demand logical reasons. It responds to the will of the Loved One. Jesus said, 'If ye love Me, keep My Commandments.' [John 14:15] The apostle John understood this and he wrote: 'Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His Commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His Commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him.' [1 John 2:3-4] 'By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God **and keep His Commandments**. For this is the love of God, **that we keep His Commandments**, and His Commandments are not grievous.' [1 John 5:2-3]

Jesus is looking for Christians who really love Him. They don't just say it. They demonstrate their love by the way they behave. One day soon Jesus is going to look down at this world and see a people who really do love Him. He will say, 'Here are they that keep the Commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.' [Revelation 14:12] Then He's going to keep His promise and come. Look how this chapter goes one:

'And I looked and, behold, a white cloud and upon the cloud sat One like unto the Son of man, having on His head a golden crown and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat upon the cloud, 'Thrust in Thy sickle and reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.' [Revelation 14:14-15]

This is when God's people will be ready. One writer put it this way: 'Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.'

The Lord is waiting for Christians to stop pretending to be followers of Jesus and to start being what they pretend to be. The purpose of the Gospel is to provide all the power of heaven to bring salvation from every sin to those who are willing to believe in the power of Jesus. [Romans 1:16] Paul explained it like this: 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.' The Good News is that God has enough power to save you from all your sins, so that you stop acting like the devil and start acting like Jesus. All He asks of you is that you believe that He has the power to do this. [Mark 9:23] 'Jesus said, If thou canst believe, that all things are possible to him that believeth.'

You can start getting ready today, this minute. You know you don't have the power to obey Jesus. You probably tried making resolutions at New Year. You probably tried making resolutions at New Year. And you learned that you don't have the power to carry them out. But Jesus has all the power in heaven and earth. You can make the choice and then you can call upon His power. When you are tempted to think a wrong thought, or speak a wrong word or do a wrong thing, you can choose to say, No. Then you can say, 'Lord, I don't want to do wrong. Give me the power to say, No, and mean it. Thank you, Lord, for hearing and answering my prayer.' It's as simple as that, just a minute by minute trust in the power of Jesus. Every time you are tempted to sin, you have a choice. Do I want this sin? Or do I want Jesus? Make the right choice and call upon Him for the power. Day by day, you can be like Jesus if you choose to be and depend on His power. And then He will be able to say of you. 'Here is one that keeps the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.' You will be ready when He comes.

**Lord, help each one reading this booklet to learn how to be like Jesus so that when you come, they may be able to see You as You really are. Even so, come Lord Jesus.**

**[Revelation 22:20-21]**

**Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever, Amen.**

**[Jude 24-25]**

