

## Questions about The Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-37

*Luke 17:20-25: "Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The Kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the Kingdom of God is within you." Then He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' Do not go after them or follow them. For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.*

### Background Notes

In verse 20 the Lord once again turned His attention to the Pharisees because they asked Him about the coming of the Kingdom of God - specifically, when the Kingdom of God was coming to this earth. Jesus answered them, "The Kingdom of God does not come with signs to be observed."

The Pharisees may have asked this question improperly, in a challenging way, but the question itself was not improper. After all, John the Baptist and the Lord Himself had announced that the Kingdom was at hand, and the Pharisees certainly were aware of all the Kingdom prophecies in the Old Testament. These Kingdom prophecies indicated that "signs" would be associated with the coming of the King.

The Lord's answer, first to the Pharisees, and then His further teaching to His disciples, is very important for the interpretation of prophecy and the study of eschatology (the doctrine and study of future things). At first glance the two teachings seem to contradict each other. The Lord told the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was not coming with observable signs, and yet to the disciples He said that the Kingdom of God was coming with signs! How do we resolve this apparent discrepancy?

The answer to this apparent discrepancy is: at this point in our Lord's dealings with the religious leaders of Israel, the Kingdom of God had already come – in fact it was in their midst! It had been announced and offered, but Israel had refused the Kingdom because they had rejected the King. Luke 13:34-35: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'*"

We see in these verses that Israel had already rejected the King and the Kingdom and already the Lord was speaking about His second coming. Until that time when the Lord will return, the Kingdom of God on earth will be postponed.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. At the first coming of Christ, the Kingdom of God came without signs.

Verse 20 once again, *“Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The Kingdom of God does not come with signs to be observed.”* The Pharisees expected dramatic signs to be associated with the coming of the Kingdom, including freedom from the yoke and oppression of Rome. But the Lord said that the Kingdom of God, at this point, was not coming with those kinds of signs. In fact, He said that the Kingdom of God had already come and was in their midst - not within them, because they were unbelievers, but in their midst.

In what way was the Kingdom of God in their midst? Obviously it was in their midst in the person of the King Himself, and thus the Kingdom of God was within their reach. Certainly there was enough evidence available to prove to them that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Think of His birth and His miracles, for example. Anyone who received the King entered the Kingdom of God – and the same is true today.

But the Pharisees would not see the signs from heaven or the overthrow of Rome, because they rejected the King and His Kingdom. At the first coming of Christ, the Kingdom came without signs.

### 2. At the second coming of Christ, the Kingdom of God will come with signs.

Beginning in verse 22, the Lord explained to the disciples that the earthly Kingdom of God would be postponed until the second coming. In the meantime, He would be rejected and suffer (v25), and they would long for His earthly presence, but He would be absent for a prolonged period of time. Verses 22-23: *“The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them.”* But then He will return - and there will be no mistaking His return, because it will be as obvious as lightning flashing from one end of the sky to another. Verse 24: *“For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.”*

In our Lord’s Olivet discourse in Matthew 24, after making the same statement about the lightning, He added these words: *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. The stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear from heaven and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn for they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,”* (Matthew 24:29-30). So the second coming of Christ will be associated with signs.

The Second Coming of Christ is not the same event as the Rapture of the Church – it is the coming of the Lord to judge the ungodly at the end of the Tribulation Period. And then the Lord will set up His earthly kingdom.

The judgment days of His second coming are described in verses 26-37: *And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: 27 They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; 29 but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. 31 “In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. 32 Remember Lot’s wife. 33 Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. 34 I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. 35 Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. 36 Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.” 37 And they answered and said to Him, “Where, Lord?”*

The Second Coming of the Lord to this earth in judgment will be like the sudden onset of the global Flood in the days of Noah, and like the sudden destruction of fire and brimstone on Sodom at the time of Lot and Abraham. The judgment of the Second Coming will be sudden, unexpected, and catastrophic. People will be living their normal lives and going about their ordinary affairs, and not heeding the preaching about the coming Kingdom of God - just as the people ignored the preaching of Noah.

Now comes the question as to “who is taken” and “who is left” in verses 34-36. *“I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.”* Remember, this is not a Rapture passage for the Church; it is speaking of the return of the Lord to this earth in judgment at the end of the Tribulation Period. So the ones who are “taken” are taken away to judgment, just as the people were taken away in judgment at the time of the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The ones who are left are the believers who will be left to enter the Kingdom of God that the Lord will set up here on this earth at time of His return.

In verse 37, the disciples asked the Lord about what happens to those who are taken away. The Lord answered, *“Wherever the body is, there the eagles (or vultures) will be gathered together.”* The Lord was referring to His return in judgment, when a great number of unbelievers will die. We read about Armageddon in Revelation 16. Ezekiel 39:12 says at that time it will take seven months to cleanse the land and bury all the dead. This will precede the full establishment of the literal Kingdom of God here on this earth. At the second coming of Christ, the Kingdom of God will come with signs.

## **Practical Application**

### **Remember Lot's wife!**

In verse 32, the Lord said, "*Remember Lot's wife.*" The Lord was addressing His disciples here, not the Pharisees. Lot's wife lingered and looked back because her heart was in Sodom and in the things of Sodom - things that would all go up in smoke.

In the same way, if we set our hearts on the things of this life as Lot's wife did, we will lose our lives as to purpose, and fulfillment, and reward. Verse 33: "*Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life will preserve it.*" But we can preserve our lives as to purpose, and fulfillment, and reward if we separate ourselves from this ungodly world, and "lose our lives" as far as this world that is under judgment is concerned. Lot's wife was unwilling to do this, and she lost everything she valued – and her life.

Remember Lot's wife!