

Lesson 10

- The world of the Old Testament
- God liberates his people
- Jesus will return

Lesson 10a

The world of the Old Testament

In the next five lessons we will take a further look at the Old Testament. This lesson is an introduction and aims to give an impression of the country and the people of Israel in the time of the Old Testament. We will start with an overview of the history of Israel and then we will go on to tell something about the country itself and the way of life of its people.

The history of Israel

The history of Israel as it is described in the Old Testament covers a period of nearly two thousand years. We can divide this history into a number of periods.

1. *A people without a country* (± 1928–1423 BC)

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and his sons live in the land of Canaan but never actually possess the land. When there is a famine in Canaan, Jacob and his sons move to Egypt at the suggestion of Josef. Jacob's descendants the Israelites live there for about four hundred years.

2. *Slavery and liberation* (± 1423-1383 BC)

A difficult period begins for the Israelite people when the Egyptians start using them as slaves. However, God liberates his people and brings them back to Canaan. During the journey to Canaan God makes a covenant with the Israelites and gives them the Ten Commandments* as well as other rules and regulations.

3. *The battle for Canaan* (± 1383-1331 BC)

When the people of Israel have entered Canaan they conquer it under the leadership of Joshua and divide the land amongst themselves. God commands the Israelites to drive out all the Canaanites that are left.

4. *The time of the judges* (± 1331-1030 BC)

The Israelites do not drive out all the Canaanites from the land. They allow them to live in Canaan and they even take over their religions. Many Israelites start to worship the god Baal*. God punishes them for it. Neighbouring peoples continually attack them. When the Israelites return to God, He liberates them. He provides men who lead the people in the battle against their enemies. Those men are called judges.

5. *The first kings* (± 1030-930 BC)

When the Israelites demand a king, God gives them one. However, the reign of the first king, Saul is disappointing. Under the leadership of the next king, David, many enemies are defeated: the Philistines, the Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Syrians. Because of these victories, Israel becomes a rich and powerful nation. Jerusalem becomes the capital where king David builds an enormous palace. Later his son Solomon builds a temple for God in Jerusalem. Israel flourishes in this period.

6. *Israel disunites* (± 930-586 BC)

After the death of Solomon, Israel is divided into two parts. In the north ten tribes form a nation that keeps the name Israel and that the prophets sometimes refer to as Ephraim. In the south the two other tribes form a nation called Judah. The two nations have different kings. Because the inhabitants of both nations turn their backs on God and refuse to repent, both are eventually punished. The Israelites are sent into exile to Assyria; the Judeans are sent to Babylonia about a century later.

7. *The time of exile* (± 586-536 BC)

Although the Israelites are forced to live in Assyria and Babylonia, they are not imprisoned in camps. They have their own houses and pieces of land and they can live their own lives. They even have a certain amount of religious freedom.

8. *The time of return* (from 536 BC)

When the Babylonian empire collapses and the Persians take over, the Israelites receive permission to return to their own country. Some of them do so. However, many of the people who have been born and bred in Babylonia are living a good life there and prefer to stay. The Israelites who have returned rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

Surrounding nations

An overview of Israel's history shows that they have regularly been involved with other nations and peoples. The most important ones are:

- *The Egyptians*

They play an important part in the early history of Israel. The Egyptians first give a warm welcome to Jacob and his sons and even give them a part of their land to live in but later they oppress the Israelites very severely and for a long time.

- *The Philistines*

In the time of the judges, Israel suffers a great deal under the oppression of the Philistines. They live in the southwest of Canaan and regularly attack the Israelites. In the time of king David they are eventually defeated.

- *The Arameans*

The Arameans live in the territory to the northeast of Canaan that would later be called Syria. In the time of the kings they form a threat to the Israelites. Damascus is an important Aramean city.

- *The Assyrians*

Assyria is a mighty empire in the time of the kings. The Assyrians live in the northern part of present day Iraq, to the west of the river Tigris. They take the Israelite nation as captives.

- *The Babylonians*

The Babylonians live along the southern parts of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. In the seventh and sixth centuries BC they are a world power. They take the nation of Judah as captives.

- *The Persians*

The Persians conquer the empire of the Babylonians. They give the Israelites permission to return to their homeland.

So much for the history of Israel as we find it in the Old Testament, let us now look at the land that God gave to the Israelites.

The land

The land of Canaan or Israel is a small territory that stretches along the east of the Mediterranean Sea on the border of the Syrian-Arabic desert. It consists of four strips of land that all run north to south:

1. The coastal plains along the Mediterranean Sea.
2. A long and narrow mountain ridge next to it.
3. The valley of the river Jordan with the Sea of Galilee to the north and the Dead Sea in the south.
4. The mountainous area to the east of the river Jordan.

The climate in Israel is more or less sub-tropical. The country's summers are hot and dry and its winters cool and wet. The dew that comes over the land every night protects the coastal plain from severe draught in summer. Further inland, to the southeast the land becomes a desert.

Israel is strategically located. There are several important trade routes across the country. For example the one that runs from Egypt to Mesopotamia. Because of this route Egypt has ruled over Israel for such a long time.

Before the Israelites possessed the land of Canaan, several different nations inhabited it. Apart from the Canaanites and

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the Amorites who were the most powerful, there were the Pherisites, Jebusites, Kenites and the Philistines. The members of these nations lived in small city-states. Although these nations fell under the reign of Egypt, they functioned independently.

The nations that lived in the land of Canaan in this time worshiped several gods. The most important one was Baal, the god of fertility. Besides him, the goddess of fertility, Asherah, was widely worshiped.

The cities

Generally, a wall would surround every city in Israel. The wall would give the inhabitants of the city a sense of security. After the gates of a city were closed at night, no one would be able to enter or to go out. This way enemies and wild animals were prevented from entering the city and at the same time the livestock was safely kept inside. Most cities were built on a hill, which made it even more difficult for the city to be taken. The gate of a city played an important part; it would be the heart of the city. Everyone would pass through it several times each day: the men on their way to their fields or vineyards and the women when they went to get water from the well.

The market would be held close to the gate and some of the craftsmen would be based there. Moreover, it was the place where justice was spoken. If anyone would have a conflict with his neighbour, he could come to the gate where the elders, the heads of the families, could be found. They acted as judges in that time.

Agriculture

Israel was an agricultural society. After the land had been divided, every family had received its personal piece of land. On their land they mainly grew grains, pulses, olives and flax. Many people would also have a vineyard.

Most families would own a livestock. In parts of the country that were not suitable for growing crops, people would keep sheep and goats for their milk, wool and meat. After the harvest the animals would be driven onto the fields so that

they might eat the stubbles and fertilise the ground. Except sheep and goats people would keep donkeys, which were used for the transport of goods and people. Some rich Israelites would own an ox. Oxen were mainly used for pulling ploughs.

Family life

Especially in the time before the Israelites lived in Canaan, family ties were very important. A son would often continue to live with his parents after he got married; his wife would become part of the family. Servants and strangers who had come to live with the family also became part of the family. The bond of the family was very important because the different members of the family could protect and help one another. When the Israelites moved into Canaan, the protection of the extended family became less important and the focus was more on the close family.

In Israel the husband was the head of the family. He had authority. His wife would have an inferior position, although in that time, it would still be comparatively good. Some men would have two or more wives. However, most men would only have one wife, the way God intended.

Marriages were organised by parents. Often this would happen when children were still very young. People would get married at an early age. In some cases girls would be only twelve and boys thirteen.

Although parents would usually arrange a marriage for their children, there would also be some marriages for love. Besides, marriages that were arranged by the parents could be very happy marriages.

Children were very important for Israelite people, especially sons. They could help their father with the work, carry on the family's name and inherit the family's possessions. Children were moreover important because they could take care of their parents in their old age, when they were too old to work. One reason why a family would be concerned to carry on its name

was to make sure there would still be someone around from the family when the promised Saviour would come to the world.

Children would mainly be raised by their mothers in their early years, but boys would very soon come under their father's authority. They were to help their father with the work out in the fields or the vineyards or they would watch over the sheep or otherwise help out in the workplace.

A father would have the important task to educate his sons. He would teach them about the history of Israel and about God. He would tell them about everything God had done and said and about the laws that He had given to Israel.

There is much more to say about daily life in Israel in the time of the Old Testament. However, because of a lack of space we will leave at this introduction.

Questions

1. Did the Israelites build their own cities in the land of Canaan? Why do you think so?
2. The lessons 7b and 8b are about Isaac and Jacob. In this lesson you read about the way marriages were made in Israel. How would you characterise the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca? And the marriage of Jacob and Rachel?

Lesson 10b God liberates his people

The people of Israel are being oppressed in Egypt and face the threat of extinction. However, God provides a man who will lead the Israelites out of Egypt and bring them back to Canaan: Moses. God tells him to go to Pharaoh and ask him to let the Israelites go.

Moses' fears

Read: Exodus 4:1-17

Moses tries to convince God in all sorts of ways that he is not the right man for such a major responsibility. He is afraid the Israelites may not believe that God has indeed appeared to him. God gives him therefore a number of proofs to show to the people: a staff that can change into a living snake, Moses' hand will turn leprous when he puts it inside his cloak and when he touched water with his staff it will change into blood. Every Israelite has to believe that Moses cannot do such things in his own power. It must be clear to everyone that God has sent him.

Moses has more excuses: he is not a good speaker. He has difficulty finding the right words to say. God promises that He will help. He will put his words in Moses' mouth.

Moses is still not convinced. He begs God to send someone else. God gets angry about this lack of trust in Him.

Nevertheless, He is willing to make one more concession for Moses. Moses will not have to go alone. His brother Aaron, who is a very articulate man, is already on his way. He will speak for Moses. The way a prophet speaks in the name of God, Aaron will speak in the name of Moses.

God punishes the Egyptians

Eventually, Moses and Aaron go to the Pharaoh. Moses asks him to let the Israelite people go. Obviously, the Pharaoh refuses to let his cheap labourers go. He does not have any

respect for the God of his slaves and makes them work even harder.

However, God forces the Pharaoh to let his people go. He brings one punishment after another over the Egyptians until they take Him seriously. Just one look at the heads over the passages in Exodus 7-11 shows how many horrible things need to happen before Pharaoh gives in: God changes all the drinking water in Egypt into blood; He causes a plague of frogs; the whole harvest is destroyed by hailstones; locusts come to eat everything that is left.

Every time a plague hits the country, the Pharaoh promises to let the people go, but every time the plague is over, he changes his mind.

The tenth plague

Finally, God announces a tenth plague, far worse than any of the previous ones. All the firstborn boys and all the firstborn animals in Egypt will die.

Moses tells the Israelite people what is going to happen. He tells them that in the night of the punishment they will finally be able to leave the country. It will surely happen and the Israelites are even told to celebrate it before they leave. The evening before God punishes the Egyptians all the Israelites will have to celebrate the Passover.

That night every family will have to kill a lamb. They can roast the meat and eat it. With the blood of the lamb, they have to paint the doorposts of their houses red. When God carries out the punishment, He will pass by the houses with the red doorposts. That is why the celebration is called Passover.

What God announced, happens. In the night after the Passover every firstborn son and every firstborn animal in Egypt dies. Every Egyptian family is mourning. The Egyptians now beg the Israelites to leave and even give them precious gifts to get rid of them.

During the departure of those thousands of people, God shows the Israelites that they are not alone. He himself goes ahead of

them and shows them the way in the form of a cloud. At night the cloud shines to give light to the people.

The pursuit

The Pharaoh had begged the Israelites to leave but soon enough he changes his mind again. He cannot understand how he has ever allowed them to go and now he decides he wants to catch up with them with his army.

The Israelites are trapped. Behind them are the Egyptian soldiers and in front of them the Red Sea. They have nowhere to go. However, God makes a path right across the Red Sea. The Israelites can walk across it to the other side. To their right and to their left are walls of water.

The Egyptians are behind them with horses and chariots but when all the Israelites have reached the other side, God makes the waters of the sea return to their place. All Pharaoh's soldiers and horses drown in the sea.

The road to Sinai

The Israelites do not take a straight route to Canaan. They go via a detour through the desert because their first destination is mountain Sinai where God spoke to Moses.

During the two months of that journey the Israelites soon show a lack of trust in the God who liberated them from Egypt. When they run out of bread and meat after two weeks they tell Moses: 'If only God had let us die in Egypt! At least we had enough to eat there. Now we have to die of starvation in the desert!'

On the very same evening of their complaint God causes a flock of birds to come down into the camp of the Israelites so that they can eat the meat they so longed for. The next morning the camp is covered in a thin layer of little flakes that look like frost. With the flakes the Israelites can make bread. Every morning for the remainder of their journey God gives them these flakes.

Jehovah appears to the Israelites

Read: Exodus 19

19:1 *the desert of Sinai*: the area of the mountain Sinai

19:3 *the house of Jacob*: the descendants of Jacob

19:7 *the elders*: the heads of the families. They functioned as representatives of the people

19:10 *to consecrate*: in this case, to prepare for a meeting with God

19:21 *to perish*: to die

19:22 *the LORD will break out against them*: the LORD will punish them

God had promised Moses that He would lead the Israelites out of Egypt and that they would worship Him at mount Sinai. God has kept his promise. When Moses returns to mount Sinai, he is accompanied by all the Israelites.

Moses climbs the mountain. God speaks to him and gives him a message for the people. He reminds the Israelites what He has done for them. Like an eagle catches its young on its wings when it is about to fall, so God has saved Israel and taken care of it. If the Israelites obey God and remain faithful to the covenant, He will regard them as his own people. The Israelites will be to God like priests: all their lives they will be consecrated to God. Israel will be a holy* people, a people dedicated to God.

Moses brings God's words to the Israelites and they want to belong to God. They respond: 'We will do everything the LORD has said'.

Now that God has declared Israel to be his own people, He also wants to appear to them. He will descend onto mount Sinai. The Israelites are told to thoroughly prepare themselves for his coming. They do so by washing their clothes and to abstain from sexual intercourse for three days.

A barrier is put around the mountain, so that no one can touch or climb it when God appears. After three days God descends

God liberates his people

on the mountain. The Israelites cannot see Him, but what they see and hear of Him is terrifying: lightning, thunder, fire, the sounds of trumpets. Mount Sinai is completely covered in smoke and shakes on its foundations. God's words sound like thunder.

The Ten Commandments

Read: Exodus 20:1-17

20:5 *jealous*: God does not allow any other gods beside Him

20:8 *Sabbath day*: the seventh day of the week

20:16 *false testimony*: an unjust accusation

God addresses the Israelites. First of all, He tells them who He is: Jehovah, the God who liberated them from Egypt. God reminds the people how much He loves them as his deeds have shown.

Then God tells his people what He desires from them. In ten basic rules, He explains how the Israelites should behave towards Him and towards one another. By obeying these rules, they can show Him their gratefulness for their salvation.

The covenant between God and Israel

Hundreds of years earlier, God had made a covenant with Abraham. At the time He did not bind himself just to Abraham, but also to all his future descendants. When God appears to Israel and declares them to be his people, He renews this old covenant and at the same time He makes a new covenant with the whole of Israel to show them that they will be his own people forever.

After the covenant has been made between God and his people, Moses climbs the mountain to speak to God. God tells Moses that He wants to live with his people. The Israelites are to make a big tent, the tabernacle, in which God will be present in a special way. Moses receives detailed instructions about how to make the tabernacle and the objects that will be in it.

In the forty days that Moses spends on the mountain, God also tells him more over the way Israel has to worship Him, for example how they should bring sacrifices.

The tent of God

God's instructions for the building and decoration of the tent are neatly obeyed. Every one of the Israelites helps out. They bring gold, silver, goatskins, different colours of wool, lamp oil, wood and precious stones. The women spin the wool and the hair of goats. Two artists make large tapestries with angels on them.

When the tabernacle is ready, it looks absolutely wonderful. However, most people will never get to see its interior. Only Aaron and his sons are allowed to enter, because God set them apart as priests.

A whole range of objects has been made to go with the tabernacle. They are symbolic for the relationship between God and his people. On the square in front of the tabernacle, is the Altar of Burnt Offering. Every day, the priests have to sacrifice animals on it. It is a sign that show that blood needs to be shed in order for the relationship between God and man to be good.

The tent is divided into two parts. The largest part is called the Holy Place. In this part, where the priests do their work, there is a large golden lampstand with seven branches. The priests need to make sure that the seven lamps of the lampstand are burning day and night. The light of the lampstand is a sign of God's presence. The bible often compares knowing God to living in the light.

In the Holy Place there is also the Altar of Incense, which is completely overlaid with gold. On it, the priests need to burn incense twice a day. It is a sign of prayer. The prayers of the Israelites rise up to God like the smoke of the incense.

A small part of the tabernacle is separated from the Holy Place by a large curtain. This part is called the Most Holy Place. The priests are not allowed to enter this place. It is the place where God lives.

In the Most Holy Place, there is the Ark: a wooden chest overlaid with gold and on it a cover made of solid gold. The two stone tables that God gave to Moses are kept inside the chest. God himself wrote the Ten Commandments on those tables.

The ark is the sign of God's presence. God regards it as the footstool of his throne.

When the tabernacle is finished, the Israelites can see that God is there, because the cloud that has gone before them day and night now covers the tent. Although the people cannot see God, they know that He wants to regard the tabernacle as his house and wants to live close to them.

Questions

1. a. In what way do the Israelites prepare themselves for their liberation?
b. Why in this way?
2. How do the Israelites react when they have safely crossed the Red Sea and the Egyptian army has drowned? Read Exodus 14:30-31, 15:1-3 and 15:20-21. 14:31 *to fear*: to be in awe of, 15:2 *the LORD is my song*: the LORD is the source of my song, He makes me sing, *exalt*: lift Him up, praise Him, 15:20 *Miriam*: Moses' sister.
3. How does God show that He cares for his people during their journey?
4. God gives his people Ten Commandments. What is the main theme of the commandments? Look at Matthew 22:34-40. 22:34 *Sadducees, Pharisees*: religious leaders, see list of vocabulary, 22:36 *teacher*: a title used for Jesus, 22:39 *neighbour*: whoever happens to come into your life, 22:40 *the Law and the Prophets*: The Old Testament.

Lesson 10c Jesus will return

Jesus went to heaven to continue his work from there. However, He will not stay in heaven forever. The Creed says that Jesus will come *'to judge the living and the dead'*. In other words, one day Jesus will return to earth. He will judge over all people regardless of whether they are alive at that moment in time or whether they will have died already.

In the same way

After Jesus had gone to heaven, two angels told his disciples:

'This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven'

Acts 1:11

Immediately after Jesus' ascension the disciples heard that He would not stay in heaven for good. In the same way that He left, He would return one day to earth.

When?

Jesus Christ will return to the earth. The New Testament reminds us of this over and over again. But when will He come back? In the beginning, shortly after the ascension many Christians thought it would happen very soon. However, from several places in the New Testament we can tell that people soon realised that it might be longer.

Peter, one of Jesus' special followers, wrote two letters to the Christians of his time. They are part of the New Testament. In one of the letters He writes about Jesus' return. He predicts that there will be people who will mockingly ask: 'Hasn't Jesus promised to return? What has happened to Him?'

Peter reminds his readers that for Jesus one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. When Jesus promises to return soon, He will. However, time is not the same to Him as it is to us. He is the Son of God. He is eternal.

Peter also explains why Jesus does not return immediately: He is patient. He wants to give man the chance to repent and believe in Him.

This is fortunate for us. Because Jesus has not yet returned we have been able to hear about Him. Jesus has waited for us.

Despite the fact that we cannot say from the New Testament when Jesus is coming back, many people have tried to figure out the date of his return. The Jehovah's Witnesses are an example. They were convinced that Jesus would return in 1914. Several other sects* have also tried to find out the date of Jesus' return. However, they always turn out mistaken. It cannot be otherwise. Jesus told us that only God knows the day of his return. It is impossible for man and even for the angels to find out the day.

Like a thief

Jesus' return will be totally unexpected. The New Testament uses the image of a thief. Like a thief who comes at night when no one expects him, Jesus will return when people are the least expectant.

Jesus will come back on an ordinary day. Life will be just the same as ever. Everyone will be busy with their daily routines: eating, drinking, working in the field or at home. Nothing will be out of the ordinary but all of a sudden Jesus will return from heaven.

No one will have expected Jesus' return except the people who believe in Him and have been looking forward to his return. They will not be surprised by it. For them it will be a day of joy.

With the sound of trumpets

When Jesus ascended into heaven only eleven men were there to see it. However, on his return everyone will see Him. Jesus' return will be very impressive. You could compare it to God revealing himself on the mountain of Sinai.

The appearance of the LORD on mount Sinai to the people of Israel was a good thing. The LORD wanted to show the Israelites that He cared about them and wanted to be involved with them. At the same time it was a frightening experience. When the LORD appeared thunder and lightening accompanied Him and the mountain was covered in smoke. The LORD came down in fire. The mountain trembled and there was the sound of trumpets. The people were trembling in fear as they realised their smallness before a mighty God and their sinfulness before a holy God, who does not tolerate sin.

It will be similar when the Son of God returns. We can look forward to Jesus' coming if we believe in Him but it will be a very powerful and overwhelming moment. A trumpet will sound and an angel will call out. Then Jesus will appear in the clouds like a great King. He will be awesome. Everyone will see Him – also the billions of people who have already died. They will all be raised to life on the sound of the trumpet. Believers will see Him and non-believers will see Him. The people who belong to Jesus will meet Him and welcome Him in celebration and then Jesus will judge everyone who has ever lived.

The judgement

When Jesus lived on earth He used parables to explain certain things. A parable is a story about everyday life with a deeper significance. A few days before He would be arrested Jesus told his disciples a parable about his return.

Matthew 25:31-46

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and

you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me”.

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me”.

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me”.

They also will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?”

He will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me”.

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.’

On his return, Jesus, who calls himself the Son of Man* in this passage, will judge over all people of all nations. He will separate them. The people on his left will have to face destruction. Like the devil and his accomplices they will be removed from the presence of Jesus forever. They will end up in what Jesus calls ‘the eternal fire’. Jesus uses this imagery to express that it is a terrible place where people have to live without God forever. This place is also called hell.

The people on Jesus' right hand side, will face a wonderful future. They can take possession of the kingdom of God. They

can life with God forever. Their life will be an everlasting celebration.

Faith is all that counts...

So what exactly is the difference between the people on Jesus' left and the people on Jesus' right? Why do some people receive eternal punishment and others the kingdom of God?

Would it be right to say that all is well as long as you live a good life and are helpful to other people?

If that were true it would not be so much of a problem if you do not believe in Jesus. Then anyone who cared for other people would be able to enter the kingdom of God. It would not matter whether you are a Christian, a Muslim or whether you would believe in something else. However, this is not true. Jesus was unmistakably clear when He said:

John 3:36

'Whoever believes in the Son (of God) has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him'

So, Jesus will not give absolution to just anyone who has regularly visited ill people or given monthly donations to whatever aid programme. Faith in Jesus is the only way for people to be saved from death.

... faith will need to show

Our faith is all that matters when it comes to our salvation. But in the parables of Matthew 25 Jesus shows that our faith needs to be visible in our lives. Our faith in Jesus is not just a passport that we can show on the border of heaven. It is not just there for emergencies. Our faith should control our lives. You could compare faith to yeast. A little bit of yeast affects a whole batch of dough and causes it to rise. In the same way, faith should affect a person's whole life and change it. Our love for Jesus should automatically result in a love for the people around us. Jesus has given his life also for those people. How can we ever let them down?

Scary thought?

Should we be afraid of Jesus' return? Jesus comes to judge the living and the dead. The thought of that judgement might seem something to dread rather than to look forward to. However, if we believe in Jesus Christ and show it in our lives, we can look forward to Jesus' return without fear. Even if we have made many mistakes in life and continue to do things wrong and say things we regret, if we believe in Jesus Christ, He will let us go free when He returns. He will place us at his right hand.

You might wonder if this is fair. Are people who believe in Jesus better than people who do not believe in Him? The answer is no, they are not any better of themselves. The only difference is that they belong to Jesus and love Him.

And that makes all the difference. Whoever belongs to Jesus does not need to be condemned because Jesus has already been condemned by his Father. Jesus underwent eternal punishment in his place. Whoever believes in Him counts therefore as innocent to God.

This is why people who belong to Jesus do not need to fear his coming. They can look forward to it. For them everything will be good when Jesus returns to the earth. Finally, the power of Satan will come to an end. Satan will be condemned by Jesus and thrown into the eternal fire of hell. Evil will no longer exist on earth and the people who believe in God will live with Him forever.

Questions

1. Jesus will come like a thief in the night and He will come with the sound of trumpets. Do these two things not contradict one another? Explain what each of the statements means.
2. Faith without works will not save a man (James 2:14-17). Explain.
3. When you read the parable about the last judgement (Matthew 25:31-46), it can make you fear Jesus' coming. Is it right to fear his coming?