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The things which will announce, accompany and follow the return of Christ

No. 5. "Signs in the heavens"

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken," Matthew 24:29.

According to the Saviour's listing of the order of events that will precede His return in great glory and power, given us in Matthew chapter 24, the setting up of the "Abomination of Desolation" will be followed by a period of intense persecution against the Jews. It is inevitable that Christians will also suffer since all who refuse to submit to Antichrist and receive his mark will be the target of his wrath and fury, but there will be a preserving of God's witness even though the Lord in His wisdom will permit many will die. "I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them," Daniel 7:21. It is clear from Revelation 20:4, that under Antichrist's persecution many believers in Christ will suffer a martyr's death. "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

But the Jews, chiefly in the land of Israel, will be given over to the power of the devil. This will be the time of Jacob's trouble.

Jacob's trouble

"The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: but they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them," Jeremiah 30:1-9.

Flight

During this time, the believers in Jerusalem will have fled into the wilderness, seeking shelter even as Christ has instructed. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened," Matthew 24:15-22.

That flight into the wilderness by believers in Jerusalem is depicted for us in Revelation 12:6, 14-17. "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days (three and a half years) And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her



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place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time (three and a half years), from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Signs

Immediately following the great tribulation, the signs we wish to consider in this study, will take place. The signs consist of the sun and moon being darkened, the stars falling and the power of the heavens being shaken and the earth quaking.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other," Matthew 24:29-31.

It is clear from these verses that the signs we will be considering will take immediately before the appearance of Christ.

I. IN KEEPING WITH GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO MEN, HE GIVES CLEAR WARNING OF THAT GREAT DAY OF WRATH

The heavens will serve as a notice board to declare the near approach of Christ. "And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come," Joel 2:30-31.

Nothing could be more plain than these signs. So it is with all of God's warnings. God has always dealt plainly with man.

1. God's first words to man were plain. "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," Genesis 2:16-17. Adam had no excuse for his disobedience of God's clear warning nor has any transgressor of God's law since that fateful day. The nations of the world have been told that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," Ezekiel 18:20. "For the wages of sin is death," Romans 6:23. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," John 3:36.

The list of texts of Scriptures just as plain as these is long indeed. Man is without excuse!

2. God spoke with plainness when He gave His law. What genius of succinct aptitude is displayed in the Ten Commandments!

"And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

* Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

* Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

* Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

that taketh his name in vain.

* Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

* Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

* Thou shalt not kill.

* Thou shalt not commit adultery.

* Thou shalt not steal.

* Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

* Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's," Exodus 20:1-17.

Who is it amongst us but knows what is here forbidden by God and what is required of us.

3. The ministry of Christ was plain and clear. "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen," John 20:30-31; 21:25.

Miracles without number attested the veracity of the person and the words of Christ. We have, in the New Testament gospel accounts, many of His words, divinely inspired and divinely preserved for mankind to peruse and embrace and thereby find everlasting life. The greatest attestation of the simplicity and plainness of the Saviour's words is found in the little phrase: "And the common people heard him gladly," Mark 12:37.

4. The whole word of God is characterised by plainness. It is book understood by children as well as the aged. "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," 2 Timothy 3:15.

The word "child" means "babe, infant". Multitudes of youngsters have come to faith in Christ when but babes. Timothy will have many with whom to share his experience in heaven. God's precious Word is so wonderfully simple that infants may understand its message.

Man's stubborn unbelief and rebellion alone blind him to its truths. Man will have no excuse on that day when God will call men to account, for the warnings of Scripture are plain enough for a child to understand.

II. GOD WILL EMPLOY THE CREATION TO DECLARE HIS GLORY

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork," Psalm 19:1.

1. There are many references to this end-time event in God's Word. Here is a display long foretold in God's Word. "Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine, Isaiah 13:9-10.

"The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously," Isaiah 24:20-23.

"The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come," Joel 2:10, 30-31.

"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel," Joel 3:14-16.

2. The earth which shook when the flood of judgment came, when the law was given and when Christ died, will shake even more to signal Christ's return. "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven," Hebrews 12:26.

How the whole of creation will shake in that great and terrible Day of the Lord!

"Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob," Psalm 114:7.

"And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth," Isaiah 2:19.

"And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts," Haggai 2:7.

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 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 of the mountains; and said to the mountains and 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?" Revelation 6:12-17.

Antichrist's army

Those who utter this great cry are the assembled ranks of Antichrist's army, gathered around Jerusalem and therefore in the immediate vicinity of the place to which Christ is to return in power and glory.

Is it not amazing that these who owned Antichrist as their god should speak so of Christ! "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?" They who denied His existence now own Him for Who He is and acknowledge that, despite their denials, they did know about the great day of His wrath.

In truth, there is no such things as a real atheist. All men have an irrepressible knowledge of the existence of God and furthermore, of a coming day of judgment. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse," Romans 1:20.

3. All that man has deemed omnipotent and self-existent will be seen to be subject to the Creator. Man has considered himself "Master of the Universe"! The most grandiose plans and schemes for space travel and colonisation are daily discussed. The solving of every problem that faces mankind is deemed within man's capabilities. He will conquer disease and death. He will achieve immortality. The fantasies of Hollywood films will soon be an every day reality. Such are the follies and self-delusions of men. Paul wrote of this many centuries ago. "Who changed the truth



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen," Romans 1:25.

Is this not what man has done? He has made himself his own creator! You read of it and see it in every article about the world around us. The creature, by the means of evolution, has supposedly made itself what it is today!

God's hand seen

What marvels there are in the natural world! The Christian rejoices and sees the mighty and all-wise hand of God, the Creator and Preserver, in the incalculable wonders of creation. "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast," Psalms 33:6-9.

In the days immediately prior to the Saviour's return, mankind will see that God holds the whole of creation in His hand and it submits to His will alone. The 8th and 9th along with the 15th and 16th chapters of Revelation record scenes of judgments with which God shall visit the kingdom of Antichrist which will reduce arrogant and defiant men to terrified and helpless miscreants.

In my book, "***The Shadow of the Antichrist***", I make the following comments on the scenes presented to us in Revelation chapters 16:—

"Some of the greatest blasphemies have been uttered by theological modernists and liberals. They have mocked the idea that the God portrayed in the Old Testament is anything other than a figment of an overheated and superstitious brain. Only recently, leading Church of England theologians denounced the idea of hellfire and damnation and accused those who preached it of psychologically damaging their hearers! What a lesson these scoffers have to learn about the Word of God and the God of the Word!

The scenes set before us in Revelation chapter 16 are straight out of the Old Testament. This earth shall see again the power of the God of Moses and Joshua and Gideon and Elijah. Here are scenes out of Exodus and Numbers and Deuteronomy and Joshua and Judges. As the scoffing scepticism of Pharaoh, *Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?* (Exodus 5:2) was answered clearly by the Lord, so shall it be again.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone, Exodus 7:19. And the LORD said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt. And they took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast. And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians, Exodus 9:8-11.

As the magicians of Egypt were confounded by the judgments of Jehovah, so it will be with the unbelieving *ecumenical magicians* of this age when God pours forth His wrath."

Where will the evolutionist be on that day? Where then the notions and follies of Professor Dawkins and his ilk?

It will be the day when the God of Creation, so long mocked and derided by mere creatures of the dust, will put to everlasting silence the arrogant mouthpieces of sin and depravity, of science falsely so called.

O Lord hasten the day of Thy glory and power!



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III. THE DARKNESS THAT WILL ENGULF THE WORLD WILL BE AN APPROPRIATE PREPARATION FOR THE RISING OF THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

1. Darkness has always preceded light in God's order. The order of events at the creation will be repeated at the end of this age. "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light," Genesis 1:2-3. Before the glorious light which will fill the earth during Christ's millennial reign there will be the spiritual darkness induced by the apostasy which will culminate in the full development of Babylonianism under Antichrist. This is made clear by Isaiah the prophet when he wrote of the spiritual darkness which will engulf the world. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising," Isaiah 60:1-3.

But as well as spiritual darkness there will be a physical darkness sent upon Antichrist's territory, sent as a judgment from God, a foretaste of the eternal darkness into which Antichrist and all who embrace his deceits will be cast. "And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain," Revelation 16:10.

2. The sun, moon and stars were created to be signs. "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years," Genesis 1:14. The sun and the stars will fulfil their purpose on that great day. They will herald the approach of the great and terrible day of the Lord. "And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come," Joel 2:30-31. The role of the sun and stars is referred to by the psalmist. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof," Psalm 19:1-6. Those elements of the creation which have silently and unflinchingly witnessed to the glory and power and wisdom of the Creator, will bear witness to the approach of the day of power.

3. The signs will terrify ungodly men. "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken," Luke 21:25-26. Where then the boasting and the mocking that have marked ungodly man's attitude toward God, His Word and His people since the fall of man into sin? The phrase "men's hearts failing them for fear" literally means to "faint or swoon away."

There will be no bravado or mocking by men when they face the dreadful reality of the wrath of the Lamb!

4. On the other hand, it will gladden the saints. "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh," Luke 21:28. So said the Saviour to His disciples. The joy of that day has long featured in the thoughts of God's saints. Psalm 98 is an example of this fact.

"O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth



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toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. Sing unto the LORD with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the LORD, the King. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together before the LORD; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.”

Are you looking forward to that great day or does the fact that you are yet in your sins cause you to seek to banish from your mind all thought of such matters as the day of Christ’s glorious return?