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

Study 3: Why the Saviour warned of deception in the last days.

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you," Matthew 24:4.

A wonderful conversation took place between the Saviour and His disciples in a most significant location just days before His crucifixion. That place was the Mount of Olives. It was from this mount that the Saviour would ascend some forty days after His resurrection and it will be to this same mount that the Saviour will return one day soon (Acts 1:9-12 and Zechariah 14:3-4).

The subject of the conversation between Christ and His disciples is given in Matthew 24:3. "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Undoubtedly the question posed by the disciples was prompted by what the Saviour had said to them just a little earlier when they were showing Him around the temple. "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, 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," Matthew 24:1-2.

It is to be noticed that the Saviour answered the questions put to Him by His disciples on the subject of His coming again and the end of the world. The word for "world" is "aion" which is on occasions translated "age". The disciples are asking about what signs will mark the end of this age and of the Saviour's return.

Is this a proper subject for the followers of Christ to be concerned about? Some may think that there are more important matters for the Christian to be considering. We should remember that the climax of the Saviour's first advent is approaching - His death upon a cross at Calvary for the sins of His people. If the disciples were improperly concerned about a matter of no real consequence, then surely this is the time when they would be told so. But no, the Saviour with all the burdens and distresses of His betrayal, arrest, trial and cruel death surely pressing upon Him, takes up their questions and answers them most fully indeed!

The study of the end-times and the signs which will indicate the approach of Christ's return are most appropriate matters for the child of God to give attention to. This passage surely indicates the timeless importance of the questions asked by the disciples.

Furthermore, it is of vital importance to note the fact that the Saviour began His answer by issuing a warning about deception. That indicates the link between the subject of Christ's return and the devil's attempts at deceiving believers regarding it. The very fact that the Saviour so prominently issues a warning, thereby indicates the priority that the devil attaches to deceiving the people of God in this matter. The devil's attack serves to highlight the importance of this subject and the care that must be taken in our considerations of it. The substance of the warning then is *deception*! The word "deceive" means "to lead astray". Many have been led astray by accepting false teaching on the subject of the Lord's return. The word is translated "wandered" in Hebrews 11:38. "(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." How many have wandered around in confusion and darkness as a result of the error taught by men, and the foolish theories put forward regarding the second coming of Christ. These follies have engendered indifference to this holy subject at best and Scripture-twisting falsehoods and theories at worst, where the simple terminology of God is replaced by man's supposition of what he believes God meant. Thus prophetic references to "Zion" or "Israel" are, we are told, references to the "Church". Again, "Babylon" becomes "Rome" and all this is on the basis of no Scriptural authority, merely an interpretative theory launched by Origen in the third century. He contended that practically all Scripture should be seen as allegorical. The meaning of plain and simple terms inspired by God is denied and man's alternative substituted. Up until that time, the Church of Christ had believed the apostolic doctrine of the Millennial reign of Christ. This theology of denial largely replaced the plain and straightforward literal interpretation of God's Word and robbed the people of God of the joy and comfort of a scriptural hope of the return of Christ.

May the Lord be pleased to end this wandering and straying and gather His people to His feet and to a simple



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embracing of the plain statements of Holy Scripture.

Study encouraged

The Saviour does not say to the disciples: "Do not study this subject. Leave it alone." No, rather He says "Be careful not to embrace and believe all that is taught in my name on this subject." He repeats this warning in verses 23-26. "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not." This same warning is issued by the apostle Paul in his writings to the Thessalonian church. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition," 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

Let the people of God beware then of falsehoods and false teaching about the return of Christ and the events that mark its near approach.

As we give thought then to this warning from the lips of our Saviour, let us consider the sources of the danger of which He warns us.

I. THE NEED FOR SUCH A WARNING COMES FROM THE INCREASING ACTIVITY OF THE GREAT DECEIVER

There is a verse in the writings of Ezekiel which illustrates the spirit of deception that will be manifested in the days prior to the Saviour's return. "Which say, It is not near; let us build houses: this city is the caldron, and we be the flesh," Ezekiel 11:3. The opening phrase of this verse is a direct denial, by the people of the land, of that which God had directed Ezekiel to proclaim to Israel. "Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Also, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD unto the land of Israel; an end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations," Ezekiel 7:1-3. What these doubters and deniers were saying was that the destruction of the city of Jerusalem was not near, as the prophet had foretold, and therefore they encouraged the people to build houses, and rest themselves secure, as being safe from all danger, and having nothing to fear. So it will be in the days approaching the return of Christ. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they ere from the beginning of the creation," 2 Peter 3:3-4. We may expect, indeed we see all around us, a spirit of indifference regarding the second advent of Christ, even amongst believers.

This is the work of the great deceiver.

1. The Devil is the great deceiver. "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him," Revelation 12:9. He is **the** deceiver, the source of all deception and especially so on the subject of the Saviour's return. The reason for this is that it is just before the Saviour's return that the devil will launch his final and great attempt to deceive the nations and frustrate the purpose of God. He has ever sought to accomplish just that, but God, by His sovereign power and for the outworking of His all-wise purpose, has curbed and limited the devil's activities. The Lord has held back the flood-tide of satanic scheming in order to accomplish His purpose to redeem a people unto His glory through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Restraint

The power of God to restrain the devil is seen in the story of Job. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD," Job 1:8-12.

This is further demonstrated in Job chapter 2. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my



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servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life," Job 2:3-6.

Satan has ever been under the restraining power of God, otherwise the world would have been hurled into chaos and catastrophe long ago! The Bible is filled with instances in which we see the hand of the devil reaching out to destroy God's pre-ordained plan of redemption. The attempt to wipe out the seed royal from whom Christ would come, in the days of Athaliah, is but one example, 2 Kings 11:1. The same evil and malicious intent may be seen in the attack by Herod upon the children under the age of two years in Bethlehem, Matthew 2:16. "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men."

The wicked intent of Ahithophel against David epitomises the intent of the devil regarding the Lord Jesus. "And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only," 2 Samuel 17:2:6-8. "Smite the king only." Every attack of the devil has at its heart, an attack upon the Lord Jesus. It is the King that Satan hates and His Kingdom and cause that he seeks to overthrow.

Restraint lifted

But he is kept in check by God until, in the all-wise counsel of God, the time arrives for Satan to be released from restraint in order that he might fulfil his role in the foreordained plan of God. It is to this that Paul refers in 2 Thessalonians 2: "And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming," 2 Thessalonians 2:6-8. Let us remember that the Lord "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11) and that includes even the wicked activities of the devil.

2. The devil is ever engaged in his trade. He was at his deceiving from the beginning. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression," 1 Timothy 2:13-14. He is deceiving people today. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," Ephesians 6:11. The word "wiles" means "deceit, trickery." This activity of the devil will continue until the Saviour's return and the binding of the devil at the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ and then his final damnation in the Lake of Fire. "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever," Revelation 20:1-3, 10.

There are those who believe that the devil is presently bound in fulfilment of Revelation 20:1-3. Such a contention is, I believe, part of Satan's ongoing deception and attack upon the truth of God's purpose in the end-times as revealed in the prophetic scriptures. Peter's statement regarding the devil's current activities precludes any idea of him being bound under lock and key. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," 1 Peter 5:8. The imagery suggested by the phrase "walketh about" is very akin to that found in Job chapters 1 and 2. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it," Job 1:7. "And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it," Job 2:2. As he walked up and down in Job's day to waylay and attack, so he does still today.

It is true to say that there is a breaking of the devil's power in the life of the sinner converted to Christ. Deliverance by Christ of the sinner from his sins also entails a delivering from the power of Satan. Paul sums up the gospel duty that was committed to him in these words: "to open their eyes, and to turn them from



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darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me," Acts 26:18. As was the case with the man of Gadara, so it is with all who experience the saving grace of the Lord Jesus. What a change the people of Gadara saw in the man delivered from the power of the devil! "And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid," Mark 5:15. He was no longer in the thralldom of Satan but was enjoying the liberty of a child of God. This is the liberty the Ephesian Christians enjoyed. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)," Ephesians 2:1-5. Released from the bondage of the devil. This is the lot of the redeemed sinner. However, the unsaved world still endures the chains of satanic bondage and slavery.

3. His deceitful activities in this world will increase as we near the end of this age. His activities will be seen increasingly amongst men as Paul and Peter warned. "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived," 2 Timothy 3:13. "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," 2 Peter 3:1-4.

Satan's activities will increase, for God, to further His own all-wise and holy purpose, will release His restraints upon the devil. Consider what we read in Revelation 12:7-12. "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."

When?

There are some clear indications of when this event will take place. His knowledge of the little time left to him spurs the devil on in his evil campaign. This is an event near to the end of this age when the devil will be brought under complete constraint at Christ's return in power and glory. The reference to "a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads" in Revelation 12:3, is indicative of the devil having obtained the fullness of power, in the Roman earth, through his control over the ten nations that are subordinate to Antichrist. The devil is in absolute control through his agent, the Antichrist.

This, therefore, is a scene at the end of this age.

Furthermore, this is borne out by the reference to the length of the trial experienced by the woman, "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars"; symbolic, I believe, of the remnant of true believers that will be found in Jerusalem at the end of this age and subjected to great persecution by the devil. It is said in verse 6: "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." That period of time, "a thousand two hundred and threescore days" is frequently referred to in conjunction with the return of Christ and the activities of the Antichrist, just prior to His return. Consider these verses: "But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months," Revelation 11:2. "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and



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two months," Revelation 13:5.

The first reference is to the time of Jerusalem's subjugation under Antichrist's final persecution and the second refers to the period of Antichrist's exaltation and pride and declaration that he is God, 2 Thessalonians 2:4. Both these events take place just prior to Christ's return to make "the kingdoms of this world" to become "the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever," Revelation 11:15.

Another measurement of this period is given in the form of "time, times and half a time." This is a period of $1+2+1/2$ a year, that is, three and a half years or 42 months or 1260 days. "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent," Revelation 12:14.

These references are all linked to the final three and a half years of this age just prior to the return of Christ and clearly indicate that Satan will be very active indeed as he persecutes the people of God and seeks to bring about the establishment of his dominion and the overthrow of God's Kingdom and His purpose.

As ever, his chief instrument will be lies and deception for "when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it," John 8:44.

II. THE NEED FOR SUCH A WARNING COMES FROM THE DECREASING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WORD AMONGST MEN

Irrespective of what increases in certain branches of knowledge there may be amongst the nations, it is indisputable that the world is sinking down into spiritual darkness and ignorance. The darkness that engulfed the world before the flood will descend again upon mankind as the end of the age draws near.

Darkness, of course, breeds ignorance, folly and superstition.

In the midst of such shadow, how God's people should remember the Saviour's words: "Take heed that no man deceive you."

1. Apostasy tends to darkness and ignorance. Nothing proves this simple truth more than what Paul writes in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans. He links departure from God's truth with intellectual darkness and moral decline. Here is an inseparable trinity, evil conjoined triplets. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them," Romans 1:21-32.

In the midst of this "mist of darkness", it is essential to cling to the Saviour's entreaty - "Take heed that no man deceive you."

2. At the end of this age, great darkness will have engulfed the earth. When speaking of the time when Jerusalem will once again enjoy the Lord's favour and become the centre of earth's glory in the midst of millennial blessing, the prophet Isaiah indicates that it takes place at a time when "the darkness shall cover the earth." "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. This chapter stands in contrast to the chapter which precedes it, like the brightness of the morning sun after the gloominess of the night. Notice the phrase: "the darkness"! The previous chapter describes the moral and spiritual darkness then prevalent. "And judgment is turned away backward, and



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justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment," Isaiah 59:14-15. Ignorance will increase to a great level indeed. *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased,* Daniel 12:4. The knowledge spoken of by Daniel is not, however, the knowledge of God which enlightens the soul and mind and leads to righteousness and godliness. I believe that this is a knowledge of the physical energies within creation and a harnessing them to some degree. This is something we see in abundance in this age of technological expansion. Surely we have that combination today — technical advance and spiritual decline.

3. It is in the midst of such darkness and declining spirituality that deception will abound. *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil,* John 3:19. Spiritual darkness is fertile ground for deception. Evil deeds and darkness are companions. "The murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief," Job 24:14. For many years, we in Ulster listened with horror to the early morning news reports of the wicked crimes of terrorists in the hours of the night just past. Such will be the nature of the times that are coming upon the world. "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth," Luke 21:26.

In the midst of such iniquity keep the Saviour's words of warning close to your heart, dear Christian.

III. THE NEED FOR SUCH A WARNING COMES FROM THE GROWING DISTRESSFULNESS OF THE TIMES

1. The judgments of God will fall upon the earth. God has visited the earth with judgments many times in the past, but there will be something most dreadful about the judgments that will fall just prior to the Saviour's return. In Revelation 7, a command is issued to four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth. "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads," Revelation 7:3.

In the two chapters which follow, we have a description of the smiting of the earth, or the land of Israel, for the Greek word translated "earth" can refer to just a section of the earth and is often used specifically of the Holy Land. All those that were sealed, before these judgments fell, belong to the tribes of Israel, Revelation 7:4. This surely indicates that the sphere of these judgments will be the land of Israel.

But the Gentile nations, especially those affiliated with Antichrist, will not escape. If the trumpets initiate judgments against Israel (chapters 7-11), then the vials of wrath are directed against Antichrist and his allies, chapters 15-16. Both these visitations end on the eve of Christ's coming in glory. "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever," Revelation 11:15. "And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done," Revelation 16:17.

So then, just before the Saviour returns, Israel and the Gentile nations in confederacy with Antichrist are visited by unparalleled divine chastenings. We can but imagine what consternation will fill the hearts and minds of godless men as these divinely generated and supernatural events take place!

It is in such circumstances that God's people need to hold fast to God's Word and not be swept along by the wild views and theories of men, bereft of the wisdom and guidance and comfort of the Holy Scriptures.

2. Heavenly phenomena will add to the distress of 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," Luke 21:25. How open is the distressed mind and heart to deception. Panic breeds misconceptions and magnifies the perceived dangers. False hopes and empty comforts will be clutched as a drowning man would clutch at straws.

Today, the barely perceptible rise in the temperatures of the seas seems sufficient to generate quite a level of anxiety and fear amongst the nations, and that despite those who would say that such a rise has happened before and is part of a recurring cycle.

How much more then will be the fear generated by the scenes the Saviour says will take place! "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of



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heaven shall be shaken," Luke 21:26.

Bishop J. C. Ryle said of these verses: 'We see, firstly, in this passage, how terrible will be the circumstances accompanying the second advent of Christ. Our Lord tells us that "there will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

This is a singularly dreadful picture. It may not be easy perhaps to attach a precise meaning to every part of it. One thing however, is abundantly plain. The second coming of Christ will be attended by everything which can make it alarming to the senses and heart of man. If the giving of the law at Sinai was so terrible that even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake," the return of Christ when He comes to earth in power and great glory shall be much more terrible. If the hardy Roman soldiers "became as dead men," when an angel rolled the stone away and Christ rose again, how much greater will the terror be when Christ shall return to judge the world.'

It is in such circumstances that the child of God must cling to the Rock of God's imperishable Word, study the words of the prophets and their message for this age and not be deceived by men's speculations. It is only those conversant with the prophecies in God's Word which relate to such times who will understand what it is that is happening and find comfort.

3. The sense of the approaching Day of the Lord will greatly trouble the nations. Remember what Matthew wrote concerning the first advent of Christ. "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him," Matthew 2:1-3. The word "troubled" means "agitated, a taking away of the calmness of mind". Nothing troubles men more than manifestations of the power and workings of God. Let me give you a few examples. "And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear," Matthew 14:26. "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid," Matthew 17:5, 6. "And when Zacharias saw him, (the angel of the Lord) he was troubled, and fear fell upon him," Luke 1:12.

The world has some knowledge of that which will precede the day of the Lord's return. Present-day Hollywood and the entertainment industry have produced a crop of "apocalyptic" films with a featuring of the imaginary "battle of Armageddon"! Perhaps we could emphasise afresh that there is no "battle of Armageddon" mentioned in the Bible. Rather, Armageddon, that spot in the valley of Jezreel near to Mount Carmel, is to be the assembly point for the armies of the Antichrist before he marches on Jerusalem to destroy it. "For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon," Revelation 16:14-16.

The confrontation between Christ and Antichrist takes place just outside Jerusalem, as Zechariah the prophet clearly tells us. "Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south," Zechariah 14:1-4.

The great day of His wrath

There is an interesting statement found in Revelation chapter 6 where there is given us a preliminary view of the return of Christ and the destruction of the forces of Antichrist. "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



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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. Please note the cry of these ungodly men as they see these tremendous events taking place before their eyes. "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?"

These followers of Antichrist KNEW that the great day of the wrath of the Lamb had come.

It matters not how loudly and vehemently men may deny the truth of God's Word or the existence of God, man in his heart KNOWS that there is a God and there is "appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead," Acts 17:31.

Likewise, I believe that mankind will have a dark and dreadful foreboding as the Day of the Lord draws near and oh how troubling and distressing that will be! Man may have no knowledge of the "day or the hour" "wherein the Son of man cometh," any more than did the poor passengers of the Titanic know the hour and the minute of its sinking, once it had struck the iceberg, but they did know its doom was near. Likewise mankind, in their hearts know that the Day of the Lord is coming and that knowledge will especially trouble them as that day with its attendant judgments draws near.

In the midst of such fear, lies will take on the appearance of truth and truth will be discarded as lies. It is then, dear Christian, that we must act as the Psalmist instructs us to act.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah," Psalm 46:1-11.