



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

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

No 2. "What the Christian waiting for Christ's return should look out for"

"Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors," Matthew 24:32-33.

"So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand," Luke 21:31.

The above texts refer to specific events which will herald the near return of Christ. I have often used the illustration of the directions given to a traveller becoming more and more detailed as he nears his destination to show that so it is with prophecy. I am convinced that God's people will be able to tell, with increasing confidence, the time of the Saviour's return as that wonderful event draws near.

There will come a time when true believers will know to look up for the time of Christ's return has come. "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.

There are four developments, four areas of activities, which are early harbingers of the approaching nearness of Christ's return.

The first of these developments is:

I. THE INCREASING WICKEDNESS OF THE WORLD

In Luke 21:25-26, Christ says, "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."

These are specific signs which will herald the imminent return of Christ.

However, I wish first of all to look at the general trends which will mark the age in which we live as the return of Christ draws on. The flood came a lengthy period after the creation. The number of years was some 1600 years, almost the same as that which has passed since Christ's ascension to heaven. During that period, there seems to have been a steady descent into wickedness. "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be," Matthew 24:37-39. The words of the Saviour describe for us the utter carelessness of the people just before the flood. They were totally unaware of their impending doom. Life went on as normal. That is what the reference to eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage indicates. These words describe the state of ease and security that existed back then.

However, this spirit of ease and carelessness existed in the midst of great wickedness. We are told of the spiritual and moral state of mankind in Genesis 6:5. "And GOD saw that the



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," Genesis 6: 5.

Wickedness and rebellion and bloodshed had become the norm amongst men and life carried on with its eating and drinking and marrying.

So it is with our age

Consider these scriptures which indicate an increasing wickedness breaking forth in the world.

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils," 1 Timothy 4: 1.

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived," 2 Timothy 3: 13.

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts," 2 Peter 3: 3.

There have always been wicked men and deceivers and false doctrine and departures from the faith. But surely we are being told here that these things will especially become prevalent in the last days.

These scriptures surely indicate that the world will get worse, certainly not better. It will get worse in three particular ways.

1. There will be days of increasingly unrestrained wickedness. There will be no thought at all of eternal and spiritual things. It will be an age of utter materialism. That is what our Saviour's words denote. "Eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." The word "marrying" may well refer to co-habitation rather than the honourable union ordained by God. It is quite common for an immoral union to be termed marriage, even as we have it today. "For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her," Mark 6: 17. Herod's union was immoral even though it is termed a marriage.

Note the little phrase "knew not" in Matthew 24: 39. "And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." They "knew not" or did not understand that judgment was about to fall, even though Noah had been preaching this very warning for 120 years and the Spirit of God had also been striving with men for this period of respite, granted in mercy by God in order that men might repent of their wickedness and turn from it! It is to this mercy Peter refers in 1 Peter 3: 20. ". . . when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water."

This age will be marked by increasing rebellion and bloodshed, as was the case in Noah's day. "And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth," Genesis 6: 12. Naturally, there goes hand in hand with such developments an increasing rejection of God's Word and the ignorance and darkness that that brings. Isaiah refers to the state of ignorance that will envelop the earth just prior to Christ's return to redeem and bless Israel. "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," Isaiah 60: 1-2.

Do we not see today this spiritual and moral decline? Every God-ordained restraint has



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

been lifted by man so that sin has been let loose upon the nations. We see the removal of capital punishment, the decriminalising and “normalising” of sodomy; the criminalising of proper parental restraints upon disobedience within the family by Biblical methods of discipline; the casting down of all standards of decency and modesty as decadence and debauchery are channelled into every corner of society by television and other media and by the internet! I do not believe that the world has ever been so universally affected by degeneracy as it is at the present time. Crimes of the most horrific nature are committed against children, the old and the weak and increasingly so, despite the efforts of governments and law enforcement agencies. Crimes of the most depraved nature are not only carried out against children but by children, as this extract from one of today’s news sites indicates. “An 11-year-old boy has faced court over a two-day spree of alleged rapes and sex assaults in Perth’s southern suburbs. In Perth’s Children’s Court today, it was claimed that between March 9 and 10, the child raped two women and molested three others, including a woman aged 67. The boy was the youngest of four boys charged with sexual offenses against six women in total, who were aged between 16 and 67.” (WAtoday.com.au, October 29th, 2011).

That news story can be duplicated from the courts of the nations of the earth every day of the week!

Yes, the world is sinking down into unimaginable wickedness and moral decay.

2. Violent evil fills the earth.

“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth,” Genesis 6:5, 11-12.

“The earth was filled with violence.” The phrase means “consecrated to violence, overflowing with violence.” The word “filled” is that used in Genesis 44:1. “And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put every man’s money in his sack’s mouth.” The brothers of Joseph had their sacks filled to capacity with grain. So the earth was filled to capacity with violence; it could take no more, when God intervened with judgment in the days of the flood.

All flesh had corrupted itself. It is not just sin but a corrupting sin that filled the earth. Have we not evidence of that every day? Can nations take much more of the decline into anarchy and lawlessness?

Lawlessness met by further lawlessness

There have been cases of vigilantism breaking out as citizens are stretched to breaking point by the feral behaviour on the streets of our towns and cities. Indeed, the day after writing the previous sentence, the BBC mounted a new article on its internet news site, the headline of which was: “**Children behaving like animals, Barnardo’s survey finds**”. The children’s charity says the research suggests society holds a negative view towards children despite the majority being well behaved.

* 49% agreed children are beginning to behave like animals

* Almost 47% thought youngsters were angry, violent and abusive

* One in four said those who behaved badly were beyond help by the age of 10



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

* Whilst 36% thought children who get into trouble need help, 38% disagreed (www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15568442) 3rd November 2011.

Anarchy

Such anarchy is likely to increase as governments fail to come to grips with the rising tide of crime. Such anarchy will set the scene for the emergence of the Antichrist. Just as Hitler, with his apparently strong and workable policies to combat the problems of Germany in the 1930s, seemed to many to be the man for the hour, so it will be with the Man of Sin. His policies and responses to the difficulties that will face the nations in coming days will win the support of the people and give impetus to his rise to power. He will meet the profile of the leader desired by unregenerate men in the midst of confusion and tumult. It is said of Antichrist that he "shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries," Daniel 11:21. That is exactly the manner of Hitler's rise to power. So it will be again with the rise of the Antichrist.

3. It is evil that becomes intolerable to God.

God is merciful and is patient with sinful man but there comes a time when He will endure no more of man's rebellion. "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man," Genesis 6:3. God set a boundary on the earth's rebellion. He set a time limit.

When that time comes again, then Christ will intervene to deal with the lawlessness personified in the person of Antichrist.

There is a warning in the gospel here for all who are not saved to note carefully. The words of Peter that I have already quoted, remind us of God's mercy at work in the days of Noah, but it was mercy limited by God's holy wrath against sin. "The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing," 1 Peter 3:20. God waited one hundred and twenty years and then came the flood. "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years," Genesis 6:3. The commentator, John Gill said of this verse: "yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years: meaning not the term of man's life, reduced to this from the length of time he lived before the flood; but this designs the space that God would give for repentance, before he proceeded to execute his vengeance on him; this is that 'longsuffering of God' the apostle speaks of . . . "

Sinner, there is a limit to God's mercy. Mercy will cease and judgment will begin. This the gospel warns you of and calls upon you to seek mercy while it may be found. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," Isaiah 55:6.

Please heed this warning if you are not saved.

The second of these developments is:

II. THE SPREADING APATHY AMONGST THE PEOPLE OF GOD

"And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved," Matthew 24:12-13.

1. The world's hatred will produce a spirit of treachery amongst God's people.

"Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one an-



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

other, and shall hate one another," Matt 24:9-10. This is the spirit of Judas, and of Peter when he denied the Lord. It is the spirit which was at work during Paul's trial as recorded in 2 Tim 4:16. "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." Backsliding makes cowards of the greatest Christian. Courage and boldness in the things of God come not of ourselves but spring from the grace of God bestowed on us as believers. A breach of fellowship with Christ will rob us of such a supply of grace and make cowards of us. The disciples at the hour of the Saviour's trial illustrate this truth. "And they all forsook him, and fled," Mark 14:50.

Today, there is only a tiny remnant amongst the many professing allegiance to Christ, who are willing to stand up boldly for Him and the old truths of the gospel. Compromise and retreat mark the denominations worldwide. The embracing of methods and schemes which meet with the approval of the world are advanced as the latest techniques and practices which guarantee success and popularity. One has only to peruse the internet sites of men like John MacArthur and those who associate with him to see the embracing of that which is termed "hip-hop" presentations of the gospel by "rap artists". These worldly and ungodly gatherings will not advance the gospel but rather advance a departure from the gospel and the embracing of the lie of the devil.

Anyone who opposes such activities and shows from the Word of God that they are evil will be met by a storm of abuse. There will not be any attempt to answer the criticism that is put forward from God's Word. No! Just personal insults and vile invective.

The e-mail folders of earnest and faithful servants of God will testify to the truth of what I am asserting.

2. The need of the hour is endurance.

"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved," Matthew 24:13. The word "endure" means to "patiently abide, remain still". It is illustrated in Luke 2:43. "And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it." When Mary and Joseph abandoned the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem, "supposing him to have been in the company", the Lord Jesus remained where He had been left and that is where they found Him three days later when they returned to the temple. He had remained steadfastly going about His Father's business, Luke 2:49.

That is what we should seek to do in these days of growing unfaithfulness and spiritual instability. Paul's word to the Corinthian church should be heeded and obeyed by us today. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong," 1 Corinthians 16:13.

3. It is the only path through the wilderness that lies ahead for God's people.

Moses sets us an example. "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible," Hebrews 11:27. This is what Paul urged upon the Hebrews to whom he wrote. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds," He-



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

brews 12:2-3. Endurance in faithfulness and obedience is the path to the “crown of life”. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him,” James 1:12. So shall we find acceptance with God. “For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God,” 1 Peter 2:20.

The third of these developments is:

III. THE DEEPENING APOSTASY WITHIN CHRISTENDOM

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day (the day of Christ’s return and our gathering unto Him) 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. Here is the event that signals the beginning of the concluding act on the stage of this age. The phrase, “a falling away” is a translation of the Greek word, “apostasia”. It is easy to see how we get the English word “apostasy” from this word, is it not? The drawing to a close of this age will be marked by deepening apostasy within Christendom. Has not this begun already? Was not the latter half of the twentieth century one in which the Christian could see what had been secretly carried on, for a very long time, emerge into the daylight of public scrutiny as the formation of the World Council of Churches was proclaimed in 1948. Its aim and objective was the undoing of the great Protestant Reformation and the gathering of Christendom under the rule of the Pope of Rome. Since then, the apostasy has deepened. The most wicked of men occupy high office in the denominations of Christendom. Those who acknowledge themselves to be sodomites, those who follow a practice God terms an abomination (“Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination,” Leviticus 18:22) have been ordained as servants of God. This is the apostasy which will mark the end of this age.

1. Apostasy is a falling away from God’s truth.

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils,” 1 Timothy 4:1. It is rebellion against God and His Word. That is why we protest against the ecumenical and modernistic doctrines of today and fear its inroads amongst us.

Who is there who would condemn the medical measures taken to protect us from contagious diseases? None surely. News reports on the recent outbreak of bird flu showed many wearing surgical masks in an effort to avoid contamination. How they looked or what others thought of them for wearing such masks seemed to matter little to these people. How much more should true Christians disregard what the world thinks of us, as we obey God and adopt the strictures He has instituted for our protection from the apostasy. Apostasy has much greater consequences than any disease of the body. Who in their right mind will object to the protective measures God would have us adopt to protect us from the eternal consequences of apostasy?

Those measures are plainly stated in God’s Word in many places, none more plain than in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." To enjoy the company of God and the blessings He bestows upon His children, we are required to "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing". In one word the measure is "SEPARATION"! That is our duty and ought to be our delight in these wicked days.

Good Minister

The mark of a "good minister" is the proclamation of such truths as these. "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, (the warnings about apostasy in the previous five verses) thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained," 1 Timothy 4:6.

God make His servants to sound out the warnings against the latter-day apostasy all around us!

2. Out of today's apostasy will emerge the Man of Sin, the Antichrist.

"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; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" 2 Thessalonians 2:3-5.

A veil will be lifted one day and he will be seen. In the manner in which Judas was hidden from the other disciples until the last, and then he was seen to be the wretched traitor that he was, even so shall it be revealed for all God's true people to see clearly who the Antichrist is. When the Saviour told His disciples that one of them was a traitor, they asked the question, "Lord, who is it?" John 13:25. They had no idea of the identity of that evil person. Likewise it will be at the end of this age. The Lord will reveal the Man of Sin and Son of Perdition. Today there are many antichrists. "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time," 1 John 2:18. It is folly to try and identify the Antichrist before God reveals him. The word "revealed" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 means "to uncover, lay open what has been veiled or covered up." Despite the fact that God has covered up the identify of the Antichrist, there are those who persist in attempting to identify him. Such guessing is most foolish and should be avoided until that day when he will be revealed, since man's guesses will always be utterly wrong and lead to error.

3. The emergence of the Antichrist will initiate the last three and a half years of this age.

"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months," Revelation 13:5. This verse gives us the clearest picture of the Antichrist in the Bible. It clearly tells us that he will be given power or "authority". The word is so translated in many places such as Matthew 7:29; 21:23. He will be permitted by the Lord to continue in power for a period called the



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

“great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21). The duration of this period is variously described as “forty and two months”, “time and times and the dividing of time” (Daniel 7:25) and “a thousand two hundred and threescore days” (Rev 11:2-3, 12:6, 14). A consideration of the texts I have just listed will show that these terms are interchangeable.

There are those who would allege that we are to understand each day to represent a year. Therefore the three and a half years (time, times, and half a time) are really referring to twelve hundred and sixty years.

But is that so? Is that how long Antichrist is to reign and the tribulation to last? The Bible answers us clearly and shows that it cannot be so. In Daniel 4:32 we read: “And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.” If the sentence of God upon Nebuchadnezzar of seven times is to be calculated by this bizarre method of a day equalling a year, then seven times or years would equal 7×360 , the number of days in the Jewish year, meaning that Nebuchadnezzar was deposed from his throne for a period of 2520 years, which means that he was restored to his throne around 1950!!!

Means what He says and says what He means!

When God states days, months and years (times), He means exactly that. We would be most foolish to adopt a method that employs a mystical code which has no basis whatsoever in the Word of God. Those who advocate this method of calculation must answer the question: “Are we to calculate all periods of time given us in God’s Word by this method? If we are, then the years of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness actually lasted some 14,400 years and they must be there still!

We need go no further. What God says is what God means.

I repeat, the Antichrist’s blasphemous reign will last three and a half years and then “the Lord shall consume (him) with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy (him) with the brightness of his coming,” 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

The fourth of these developments is:

IV. THE SPREADING OF THE GOSPEL WITNESS WORLDWIDE

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come,” Matthew 24:14.

The 18th century saw a surge in missionary causes. That duty to go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), which had been largely neglected for many hundreds of years, was once again addressed by men like the English Baptist pastor, William Carey (1762-1834). He became known as the “Father of modern missions”.

But the resurgence of missionary outreach was still very limited with regards to reaching “all the world” and “all nations” for the simple reason that all the world was not reachable, given the limitations on the means of transport up until comparatively recent times.

It was not until this age of the internet that communications beyond all national borders really became possible. The internet presently conveys the pure gospel into countries where gospel missionaries are outlawed and missionary activity is severely persecuted. Many regions such as Iran, Afghanistan, North Korea, China and many other countries in Asia where the preaching of the gospel is, at best, discouraged and, at the worst, utterly



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

forbidden, now have access to sound gospel preaching.

Internet sites like SermonAudio, founded by Free Presbyterian, Steven Lee, have pioneered this tremendous outreach. The commencement of this witness in 2000 is not without significance as we watch for the signs that signal the near return of the Saviour.

Since the launching of SermonAudio, nearly 100,000,000 sermons have been downloaded at a present rate of 1,000,000 each month. There are 470,000 sermons available for downloading.

These figures surely denote that in the last eleven years there has been a proclaiming of the gospel worldwide in a manner and to a degree never before achieved by the people of God.

These four developments we have considered will assist us, who are waiting for Christ's return, in determining that "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh," James 5:8.