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

No 8. "The firstfruits of Christ's reign on earth"

"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD," Isaiah 2:1-5.

What the Saviour taught His disciples to pray for in Luke 11:2 — "When ye pray, say, . . . Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth" — will be answered when Christ comes again.

KINGDOM

It is then that the Kingdom will come. "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. This verse clearly indicates that there will be an establishing of Christ's Kingdom on this earth when all the kingdoms of this world will be transformed and brought under the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word "become" in Revelation 11:15 appears in Matthew 8:16. "When the even was **come**, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick." Its use illustrates for us the change that will take place. As the evening supercedes the day so the new time will supercede this present age. "And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one," Zechariah 14:9.

SATAN'S RULE

It may be argued that the Lord is presently King over all the earth, but it must be borne in mind that God is presently pleased to permit the devil to rule and reign to a great degree over this earth. He is not called "the god of this world," 2 Corinthians 4:4, for nothing! But Satan's dominance, long tolerated by the Lord for His own wise purpose, will end on that day spoken of in Revelation 11:15.

When the Saviour came to this earth at His first advent, He came as Israel's rightful King and this earth's rightful Governor. However, He was met by rejection as is epitomised in the words "We have no king but Caesar," John 19:15. But His Kingship could not be denied. The actions of Pilate, when he placed that inscription over the Saviour's head on the cross "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS," Matthew 27:37, proclaimed the royalty of the Saviour in three languages, Hebrew, Latin and Greek, the languages of the known world at that time.

What has been long denied by the Jewish nation and by the vast majority of Gentile peoples will be acknowledged on that glorious day of which John speaks in Revelation 11:15 "to the glory of God the Father," Philippians 2:11.

The consequences of Christ taking up the reins of power over the nations of the earth cannot be imagined. It truly is beyond our calculation. The degree of change that this world will yet see is immense indeed!

SAVIOUR'S MINISTRY

I have often pondered upon the changes that must have taken place in Israel during the three-year ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. John describes the events of those three years in this manner. "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 21:25.

Behind this understatement, as it may reverently be termed, lies a myriad of miracles of immeasurable dimensions, ushering unimaginable changes into the lives and families and communities of those affected.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

The Scriptures do not dwell on, indeed at times do not even refer to the scenes in homes such as that of the widow of Nain after the resurrection of her son or the homes of the lepers healed or blind made to see or the lame enabled to walk. The scenes in the prodigal's home after his return, so laconically described in that wonderful phrase, "and they began to be merry," Luke 15:24, perhaps suggest to us at least something of the joy and glory that visited many a poor grieving home in Israel following the visit of the Saviour's mercy. Those changes visited upon Israel, some 2000 years ago, foreshadow the even more glorious scenes which this earth will witness when Jesus comes again.

The changes will entail many of the things that men have sought, totally without success, to bring about.

There will be climatic changes. "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound," Isaiah 30:26. There will be a brighter warmer world when Jesus returns!

Humanity will live longer, "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed," Isaiah 65:20.

Security and calm will fill the earth. "And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them," Isaiah 65:21-23.

Blessedness and joy will be the atmosphere of the world in that glorious time. "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea," Habakkuk 2:14.

It is impossible to touch upon all the marvellous changes that will take place but we will mention some particularly.

I. CHRIST WILL REIGN IN CONJUNCTION WITH HIS SAINTS

When our Lord Jesus Christ comes with His angels to set up His kingdom, the Jews will then recognise their promised Messiah, and they will recognise Him as the One of whom all the prophets have prophesied. They will yield obedience to Him and unitedly proclaim Him King.

But before this happens, Jesus will have come in the air for His own, and the first resurrection will have taken place. All those that are His at His coming will have been caught up with Him in the air, according to the words that are given concerning His own people in many of the promises of God's Word, to reign with Him over the earth. There are several passages of Scripture which deal with the saints of God ruling and reigning with Jesus Christ on the earth. In Revelation 20:4, there is a distinct reference to those saints of God who have been called upon to be martyrs during this dispensation, and also the martyrs who have not worshipped the beast nor received his mark in their foreheads nor in their hands and we are told that these "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

If you come to verse 6 of the same chapter, you find there an explanation of verse 4. We are told that all who took part in the first resurrection and all who have been caught up with Him in the air shall reign with Christ for a thousand years.

In an early passage in Revelation, 5:10, we read, "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth".

Again in II Timothy, 2:12, we are told that "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him".

In His sermon on the mount, the Saviour taught us: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth," Matthew 5:5. Then in Matthew 19: 28, we find there the Lord Jesus talking to His twelve disciples and saying: "Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." There is another reference to the same thing in Luke 22:28-30. "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

In I Corinthians 6:2-3, we read there that "the saints shall judge the world."

The last passage to which I will refer is that in Daniel 7: 22. "Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom." These and other passages of Scripture speak of the saints of God reigning with Jesus Christ upon the earth.

II. CENTRAL TO ALL THE CHANGES IS THE PROPAGATION OF GOD'S WORD.

1. Jerusalem becomes the centre of the worship of God. "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation," Zechariah 2:10-13.

"Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I f it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness," Zechariah 8:1-8.

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD," Isaiah 2:2-5.

2. The nations of the earth will travel there to seek the Lord and to hear His Word. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD," Zechariah 8:20-22.

"For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts," Malachi 1:11.

3. The nations of the earth will hear the gospel with a power and effectiveness never seen before.

"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea," Isaiah 11:9. When was there ever such a fulness of knowledge experienced by the earth or any part of the earth before? Here are floods of blessing indeed. "Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the LORD'S; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel. Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God," Isaiah 44:1-6. And when will this be? "Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel," Isaiah 44:21-23.

It is at that time when He visits and redeems His ancient people, the time of Christ's return.

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you," Zechariah 8:20-23.

Jerusalem is to become the centre of a world-wide gospel crusade and the Jewish people will be the Lord's chief instruments at that time!

III. THE PEACE AND JOY OF GOD WILL FILL THE EARTH.

Then it will be seen that it was not Christ or His Word or His people which brought war into the world, as so many today contend. The Christian has long protested that the Truth of Christ is the fount of blessedness and joy and order and calm. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people," Proverbs 14:34. "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: and all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God," Deuteronomy 28:1-2.

This truth that the Christian asserts is substantiated every day in the affairs and circumstances of this gospel-rejecting generation. The proof of the benefits, while experienced and manifested in the lives of all who obey the gospel, will be seen in an unchallengeable and fuller fashion when Jesus, the Prince of Peace comes again.

1. The deceiver of men will be confined. "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," Revelation 20:1-3.

The rule and reign that Satan has exercised over the nations of the earth is replaced by that of Christ and His saints. "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," Revelation 20:4.

There is a negative and a positive aspect to the changes that will come about at Christ's return.

Negatively, Satan, the chief source of stirring men to rebellion against God, will be suppressed and his activities caused to cease. He will be able to "deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled." Positively, there will be a submitting to the rule of Christ and His Word. I do not believe that every being on the face of the earth will yield whole-hearted obedience to Christ. Indeed, there is a clear reference to disobedience in Zechariah 14:16-19. "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles."

It is to be remembered that at the end of the millennial reign, when Satan is released, there are those in the earth who are ready to respond to his call to rebel against the Saviour. "And when the thousand years



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. 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. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them," Revelation 20:7-11.

What a lesson in the total depravity of man! Seeing Christ's glory and the blessings of His Kingdom cannot change the human heart. That is why a man "must be born again!"

There will be swift and immediate punishment served upon rebellion. "They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust," Psalms 72:9. That does not happen today but it will in the millennial reign of Christ and it will promote obedience and submission with the resultant beneficial fruits.

KEY

Righteousness is the key to joy and peace. This is what the angels proclaimed in Bethlehem so long ago. "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," Luke 2:10-14.

The gospel truly is the key to peace and joy and good will amongst men. I hope, dear reader, you have found it to be so!

2. The general disposition of the nations will be changed. As I have said, I do not believe every person will be regenerated by the grace of God but, as is the case in all times of revival, there will be an elevating of the hearts and minds even of those who are not regenerated.

In the 1859 revival in Ulster, by no means was every inhabitant of the Province converted and yet, history records that court records attest to the fact that the general behaviour within society greatly improved and crime and lawlessness markedly declined for a time after the revival. The same was seen in the 1920s and 1930s in Belfast. Following the partition of Ireland and the establishing of Northern Ireland, serious and bloody rioting broke out in Belfast with many fatalities. The restoration of law and order was aided in no small part by the revival blessing enjoyed under the great meetings conducted by Rev W P Nicholson. So it will be, even more gloriously, when Jesus is King!

SWORDS TO PLOUGHSHARES

"And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more," Isaiah 2:4.

I never read this verse but I think of the United Nations. In 1959, a bronze statue, promoting the slogan: "Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares", was donated by the Soviet Union (of all nations!!) and erected outside the UN's New York headquarters. How arrogant and perverse that an organisation which has promoted falsehood and diplomatic deceptions, as the basis of its many utterly shameful "peace" agreements, contrived between warring nations since its inception, should lay claim to that symbol of peace which will mark the reign of the Prince of Peace!

3. There will be harmony between man and the animals. Man has "tamed" many of God's creatures, which, as a result of man's fall in the Garden of Eden, suffered under the curse which fell in consequence of the fall. However, the nicest cats scratch, the tamest dogs bite and the most domesticated creatures have been known to turn upon their owners. The attack upon the friend of the owner of Travis, a chimp that had lived with its owner for many years, serves to underline the utter unreliability of such "domesticated" creatures. But it will not be so in the Day of the Lord. The animal kingdom will be affected by what happens



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when Christ comes again. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea," Isaiah 11:6-9. "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD," Isaiah 65:25.
What a world is drawing on!

IV. THE EARTH WILL BECOME AS EDEN'S GARDEN.

Every Christian has wondered about the Garden of Eden and has desired to know just what it would have been like to walk amidst its beauties and glories, enjoying its tranquillity and idyllic scenes. The Scriptures tell us that its atmosphere will once again embrace this world.

"For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody," Isaiah 51:3;

"And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities *are become* fenced, *and* are inhabited." Ezekiel 36:35.

Do read the verses 21-38 of that chapter.

"Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen: but I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things. Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed," Joel 2:19-27.

"Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it," Romans 8:21-25.

A PATTERN TODAY OF THINGS TO COME

The pattern of how things will be in that wonderful reign of peace and blessedness may be seen today in the lives of any who come under the rule of Christ's Word through faith in Christ as He is set forth in the Scriptures. As with Israel, it begins with a sight of the wounded Saviour. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn," Zechariah 12:10.

"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen," Revelation 1:7.

This seeing of the crucified Christ is followed by repentance and trust and the entering upon obedience and



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

an enjoying of God's pardon and peace and the joy of salvation. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new," 2 Corinthians 5:17.

There is a day of "newness" unimagined by any of us today.

Sin turned Adam and all his descendants out of the earthly Garden of Eden. Christ, at His return, will recreate that Eden for the enjoyment of His people during His earthly one-thousand-year reign.