

The Sign of the Son of Man

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At sometime or other, most of us have pondered on the meaning of the expression *the sign of the Son of man in heaven* (Matt 24:30). This paper briefly explains its meaning. It also describes the sequence of events associated with the appearance of that sign as they affect people (as individuals) and culminates with the events that will affect the nation as a whole. Daniel, Jesus, Paul and John (in Revelation) are some who speak on this subject, so we will deal with their statements in a logical sequence.

Dan 12:1 completes the foretelling of the history of Daniel's people and states that at the time of Jacob's Trouble, *thy people will be delivered (it will be let escape or it will be delivered)*. The verb is Future, 3rd person, singular and refers to *people* which is defined as *the whole of the one (People) that shall be found written in The Book*. This identifies those whom God deems as members of His Kingdom (Rom 8:29,30; see also Acts 13:48). The Book is the same as the one Moses referred to in Ex 32:32,33 and it contains the names of those who will gain eternal life. We can infer it is The Book of Life because God told Moses He would blot out of that Book those who sin against Him. It contains the names of all those living Israelites who, by their constant attention to God's Word, escape becoming victims of the effects of Jacob's Trouble.

Having completed the history of the nation, Dan 12:2 moves on to a new subject - the resurrection of the dead, which does not occur until after the Time of Jacob's Trouble (Matt 24:21,22, Rev 7:14). It does not state when the resurrection will occur but covers what is the final outcome concerning the dead. Daniel is told there are only two classes of **his** people - those who will be woken to life everlasting and those who will be woken to reproaches and abhorrence. The expression *many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth* (Hebrew: many sleepers from a land of dust) refers to a vast number of God's people only, because Scripture refers only to **God's** people as *sleeping with their fathers* (it occurs first in Deut 31:16). No other nations will be woken from their sleep (Jer 51:39,57).

Dan 12:2 gives the impression there is only one resurrection but when we read Revelation, we can see this is not the case. Rev 20:4-15 describes two separate resurrections. The first consists of those who are to reign with Jesus for a thousand years and verse 6 states *over these the second death* (The Lake of Fire) *has no authority*¹. The second resurrection, which takes place after the thousand years, consists of *the rest of the dead* - those who did not take part in the first resurrection and those who died afterwards. Rev 20:13 states:

- a. The Death (delivers up its dead): at the second resurrection, the bodies of all who are still held by the first death are brought forth. We are told that many shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt 8:11). Thus even those who died before the Levitical Law came into being, when The Death reigned unopposed (Rom 5:14), can be resurrected.
- b. The Grave (delivers up its dead): the souls of all God's people sleep in The Grave during the state of death^(A). At the second resurrection, all whose souls are still in The Grave are brought forth for judgement. The Death and The Grave are then cast into the Lake of Fire because the cycle of birth, life and death is finished.
- c. The Greek text of Rev 20:13 also refers to *The Sea* as giving up its dead. We know from Scripture that The Death and The Grave are the names of places which possess the body and the soul of the dead, but why is there no apparent reference to a place for the third component, the spirit?

The Definite Article tells us this "Sea" has already been described in a relevant preceding context. Rev 15:2 refers to those of the first resurrection and associates them with *The Glassy Sea*. This in turn refers us to Rev 4:6 where we find *a glassy sea* which is before the Throne. This glassy sea is analogous to the Molten Sea in front of Solomon's Temple (2 Chron 4:9,10) and hence stands for the spirits of the Israelite people.

¹ All of us must die once, because of Adam's sin; this is the first death.

The spirits of those who believe God will come out of the The Glassy Sea at the first resurrection. This means The Glassy Sea will retain the spirits of those who do not believe God. At the second resurrection, their spirits, together with their corresponding bodies from The Death and their souls from The Grave, are brought together again - the three components for an Israelite to be resurrected. Once these spirits are brought out of The Glassy Sea, it is empty and with no more Death, there is no further use for it (Rev 21:1) ².

Paul tells us very clearly there are two separate parts to the first resurrection (1 Thess 4:16). In the first part, only the dead will rise (at the shouted command). Later, at the sound of a great trumpet, the angels will gather up those already raised from the dead and the ones amongst the living who have earned that reward, to meet our Lord in the air and go to the Marriage Supper. We will review what Jesus said on this subject in the same sequence as Paul's summary.

Most of the fine detail of the first resurrection was given by Jesus when the disciples asked Him (in the Greek text) *when shall these things be and what (will be) the sign of Thy Presence and of the completion of the Age* (Matt 24:3). In His answer, Jesus told them of events that would occur in their lifetime, and in the future leading up to His return. At the time just prior to His return He said *then shall appear* (shall be brought forth, shall be revealed) *the sign of the Son of Man in heaven* (Matt 24:30).

Jesus had, of course, already given three witnesses which identify that sign.

When Jesus threw the money-changers out of the Temple, the Judeans demanded of Him (John 2:18,19): *What sign shewest Thou unto us seeing that Thou doest these things?* Jesus answered and said unto them *Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up*. Similarly, He told the Pharisees and the Sadducees the only sign that would be given to them was the sign of Jonah (Matt 16:4). But Jesus gave Israelites a further insight. In John 11:25 He said to Martha: *I, alone, am the Resurrection and the Life*. Therefore the resurrection of the dead is, itself, the Sign of the Son of Man that we are to look for. Without His Presence there can be no resurrection.

In the Greek text of Matt 24:30, the word *heaven* is singular and we know from its use in Scripture that it is used of the physical sky and prophetically of The Sanctuary ^(B). The Sanctuary stands for the spirit aspect of the Israelite nation. Therefore, not only is *the sign of the Son of Man in heaven* no less than the resurrection of the dead but it will occur and be visible only within the Israelite nations. Furthermore, Jesus said in John 5:28,29...*for the hour is coming when all the ones in the tombs will hear His (the Son of Man's) voice, and will come forth. The ones having done good...* That is, **all the dead** will hear His voice but only the ones both hearing and understanding ^(C) what is said will come forth at the appropriate time for their own resurrection. **None of the living** will hear that voice!

Can we be certain that the dead do rise and are visible in Israel before they ascend to meet Jesus?

When Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead, some other Israelites also rose at the same time and *were made visible to many* (Matt 27:53). They were not made visible to everyone in Jerusalem at that time, otherwise the whole city would have been instantly converted and believed. But why were they raised at that time? Because they, together with Jesus, fulfilled the Wave-offering (Lev 23:10). The waving of the barley sheaf was part of the Feast of First-fruits and foreshadowed the coming harvest. The resurrection of Jesus together with a number of other Israelites thus forcefully foreshadows the *full* harvest of the resurrected Israel People which is now about to occur.

2 Rev 15:2 also refers to a sea, a glassy (one), having been mixed with fire. The absence of the Definite Article in this clause tells us this is not the same sea as Rev 4:6. It is a different sea that is associated with the final judgements of those incurring the wrath of God (Rev 15:1). The people of the first resurrection, standing beside The Glassy Sea, witness the final judgements.

The resurrection of those first Israelites demonstrates conclusively that Jesus not only had the power to raise Himself from the dead (John 10:18), but also any others, including ourselves. Jesus remained a full 40 days on the Earth revealing to the Apostles all that the Scriptures said concerning the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:1-3). The dead whom Jesus raised to eternal life would also have been present in Jerusalem for 40 days - they would not precede Him to Heaven. We can only surmise that they spoke to those who saw them and strengthened their belief and clarified their understanding of the tremendous events taking place at that time. This is why the Apostles and other disciples, such as Stephen, were so fearless in facing everything that befell them.

Similarly, those resurrected from the dead at the end of this Age will also be made visible. They, too, will be present among the living of that coming day - for a period of time. The impact of this miracle on Israel will be to turn the whole nation back to belief in the power of God - the One who had promised to raise to life all who believed in Him and had now fulfilled that promise.

According to Paul's summary, the next event is the transfiguration of the living.

Matt 24:31 states that the Elect are to be gathered by the angels:... *with a great sounding trumpet, out of the four winds and from heavens' ends unto their ends*. In Israel the sound of a single great trumpet was used to summon the *living leaders* of the people to assemble (before God) in front of the Temple. This is where we find the Elect in Rev 15:2, 5-6 - standing in front of the Temple. So the trumpet can only refer to the transfiguration of **living** Israelites. How are the Elect identified?

Paul (1 Cor 3:13) and Peter (2 Pet 3) tell us that our works (all of which stem from our beliefs) are to be tested by fire ^(D). The end result of this process is that those whose works survive that test will shine and their brightness will accord with the quality of their works (Dan 12:3). It is not clear if this process will be visible to the human eye (Jesus did not shine with light when Mary met Him in the garden after His resurrection, before He had ascended into Heaven) but it will clearly distinguish those who have appropriate beliefs from those who do not. Their sudden **transfiguration** takes place in accordance with Matt 24:40,41 and 1 Cor 15:51,52. These verses seem to imply that those left behind see nothing of what happens after that 'twinkle of the eye' has passed, until Jesus returns with the Elect.

We can be sure this test by fire is the mechanism involved because of what happens to those who are left on the Earth when Jesus comes down to establish His Kingdom. At that time, those still living (in Israelite nations only) will be separated into categories called sheep and goats (Matt 25:31-33). The separation is based on how they have treated their fellow Israelites (Matt 25:34,40); it is no longer a matter of belief - those who believed already have their eternal life. Those placed on His right hand will enter the Kingdom as ordinary human beings and will continue to live and die in the natural way, except that the life span will increase (Isa 65:20). Those placed on His left hand are banished from the Kingdom and are sentenced to the (Lake of) *Eternal Fire* (Matt 25:41).

This completes the details of the main events associated with the first resurrection. We have seen that the dead who believed God are raised and the living who believe are transfigured. Both groups ascend to Jesus in the air and attend the Marriage Supper. We have seen those who are left on the Earth but have treated their fellow Israelites kindly, are invited to enter and inherit the Kingdom to continue to live and die after the natural order of life. But what of those who were banished from the Kingdom?

A The second resurrection occurs after the Millennium and it accounts for *the rest of the dead*. It is the Judgement of the Great White Throne and it is based on the individual's works and whether that person's name is in The Book of Life. It uses the same criterion that was used for the living at Jesus' return - how they treated their fellow Israelites. All whose names are not in that Book will have their spirit taken from them and their dead bodies cast into the Lake of Fire ^(A).

The second resurrection includes all the Israelites who did not participate in the first resurrection; all those who were placed on the right hand of Jesus and were allowed into the Kingdom (they will gain eternal life because their names will be in The Book of Life); all those who were placed on the left hand

of Jesus and banished from the Kingdom (they will not gain eternal life because Jesus sentenced them to the Lake of Fire - their names will not be found in The Book of Life).

The Bible does not state how those who are born and die in the Millennial Kingdom will gain eternal life. Belief in Jesus is not an issue (because He is in their midst) and Satan is bound for a thousand years. However, although they will keep the Law (Matt 5:18) as Jesus did when He was on Earth, they will lose their human life, even as Jesus lost His, because Death is not destroyed until the second resurrection.

Thus we see that by the end of the events associated with the second resurrection, all of Daniel's people will indeed be in one of two categories - either enjoying eternal life or else condemned for their evil and destroyed because they are abhorrent. It is their very absence from the Kingdom that constitutes the Age-long nature of their reproach and abhorrence. There is no "eternal" punishment.

Now that the sequence of events is clearer, do we know when it will happen? The short answer is "no". However, we do know it will be sudden!

God states that Israel will yet require Him to save them, for the second time, out of a state of peril and adversity. On the occasion of the first gathering, God sent Moses to perform a series of miracles. This occurred suddenly, without any appeal to God by the people, even though they were living under very arduous conditions. When Moses had finished the miracles before Pharaoh, God sent His people on a journey and delivered them at the Red Sea. Later, in the desert, He formed them into His Kingdom.

The miracles were a prelude to their restoration to a higher status of life as God's People. Unexpected miracles also preceded Israel's restoration to a still higher status (the potential to become the Sons of God again) brought about by the death and resurrection of their Kinsman-redeemer, the Son of Man. It follows, therefore, that the miracle of the first resurrection will precede the full restoration of God's Israel People and will also occur suddenly; as a thief in the night.

A tremendous revival of strength and power will be generated in Israel by that resurrection. But it will also produce a world-wide reaction against her and all that she stands for. When it is clear that the resurrected and transfigured people have left the Earth and nothing else seems to be happening, the rest of the world will attempt to destroy Israel. She will not have time to re-organise herself after the shock of what has happened or to rebuild her depleted military defences which are the legacy of today's political powers. This attack will be led by the Russian forces of Gog and Magog in accordance with the prophecies of Ezek 38. The Israel peoples will realise they are about to suffer complete defeat and destruction by the sheer size and power of the opposing forces and will appeal to God to save them. God will then set His hand to recover His people a second time - as He promised in Isa 11:11-16.

In the north, the forces approaching Britain will be destroyed by those treasuries of snow and hail which God has reserved for that purpose (Job 38:22,23). In the south, the invading armies besieging Jerusalem will be scattered by the fear created by the sight and sound of the visible descent of the Lord of Hosts with His Saints as described in Rev 19:11-16. The great earthquake which is triggered by the touch of the Lord's foot on the Mount of Olives will complete the destruction of those armies and change the whole geographical face of the Holy Land for ever (Zech 14:4-10). All the nations who survive the Second Advent will serve Israel and obey God (Dan 7:27) or perish (Zech 14:18).



References

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- C.* Phillips, R.K., *The Families of The Ground*, Sydney, Reprinted: April, 1992.
- D.* Phillips, R.K., *The Prophecies of Jesus*, Canberra, 1974.

* Papers available by request or via some British-Israel World Federation bookshops.

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In a recent article, J. Gibson has re-opened the question of Jesus' refusal to give a sign.¹ His conclusion that such a sign would be an apocalyptic and triumphalist embodiment of the mighty act of God on behalf of Israel raises the question as to whether a general or specific sign was expected: Type. Articles. 39 Cf. Glasson, "Ensign of the Son of Man", 300. There is a tantalizing echo of the totem symbolism in the action of the popular Messiah Simon bar Giora, during the war of 66-70 AD (BJ 4.503-8). This Simon clearly made claims to kingship (אֲנִי מֶלֶךְ, אֲנִי מֶלֶךְ בְּיָמֵינוּ BJ 4. 510). Jesus said the Son of Man would come on the clouds and there were smoky clouds! It would be funny except many people actually believe this. They mix up various OT prophecies and scriptures about unrelated comings, and come to the awful conclusion that Jesus torched Jerusalem. Who's in heaven? Not the sign but the Son. And what is the sign? It is Daniel's vision come true. It is Jesus sitting enthroned at the right hand of God. It is heaven's vindication for the One rejected by the Jews. The Son in heaven is the sign. But how would the unbelieving Jews know that Jesus was sitting at the right hand of God? How would they see, as Daniel had seen, the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven? They would know because his prophecies were all coming true. Son of man is an expression in the sayings of Jesus in Christian writings, including the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation. The meaning of the expression is controversial. Interpretation of the use of "the Son of man" in the New Testament has remained challenging and after 150 years of debate no consensus on the issue has emerged among scholars.