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Wicked and Adulterous Generation

By Elder Keith Ellis

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Matthew 24:30

Time and again the Jews sought Jesus to ask Him for a sign. They were much like people today. They seek after an experience of the supernatural. They place more emphasis on the sign than on the sign giver. To these people the truth matters not. Just let them speak in tongues or **experience** something else. The Jews of Jesus' day were the same way. They could have cared less about the truth, they only wanted a sign or to have an experience. They pretended they wanted proof He was the Promised One. Yet even when they witnessed one of these events they did not believe. The miracles and signs they did witness were used by them to accuse Jesus before the established religionist of the day. They cared nothing for truth.

Yet they were incapable of perceiving or understanding the Spiritual nature of Jesus and His kingdom. (see John 14:17) Their inability to discern the Spirit blinded them from perceiving the true origin of the multitude of signs and wonders which Jesus had already performed. Before the completion of Jesus' earthly ministry only the sign of the prophet Jonas was to be given to wicked and adulterous generation. (see Matthew 12:39-40) The judgment was set. The Jews had been judged unworthy and unprofitable stewards of the kingdom of God. All that remained was for God to carry out the sentence. So much evidence was displayed right before the eyes of that wicked and adulterous generation. Yet they could not see. This was the generation of people which Isaiah spoke of hundreds of years before.

"And he said, Go, and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

Isaiah 6:9-10

Many think this was the mission of Isaiah. However we know God only possesses the ability to change the heart of man. This is evidently speaking of Jesus. The Jews thought they could accomplish righteousness by the works of the law. They did not understand grace in any wise. This is why Christ withheld the grace of God from them. To show them their inability to attain to righteousness by their own deeds. Christ would show them what their deeds deserved in the destruction of the city and their religion. The best of mans works deserve death. (This should teach us not to cry for justice, but rather for mercy.) It also is in keeping with the rending of the kingdom from the Jews and giving it to the Gentiles nations. (see Romans 11) So the kingdom was to be taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles, who would bring forth the fruit of it.

Remember, up to the time of Christ' death, burial and resurrection only the sign of the prophet Jonas, would be given to this generation. Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, Christ was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. **Perhaps the 'sign' which Jesus refers to in our title text is the empty tomb where He was placed after His death on the cross.**

After this time the disciples were to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentile nations. To the majority of the Jewish nation this fact coupled with its following signs only served to further harden their hearts. The preaching of Jesus Christ was said to have "cut" them to the heart. They would not receive this news. It was a threat to **their** religion and **their** way of life. Yet those who believed the message of the Apostles were pricked in the heart. They received conviction from the Holy Spirit concerning **their** religion and **their** way of life. They were *granted* repentance and were converted to Christ and **His** way of life. And the signs given were to confirm the word and afford comfort to the believer. (see Mark 16:20) These were not signs which were sought after by the unbelieving. They were confirmation of God's inspired word to the multitudes of believers. They served to bridge the gap (so to speak) until the foundation of the new testament church was laid in all the world. Once the foundation was laid and the word was confirmed to those who believed the report, it was time to start building the building. (see Acts 13:48) God was in charge of this reformation and was behind all these massive and sweeping changes upon the face of the earth. These signs were temporary measures. Once the events took place which would comprise the new testament letters, these signs and wonders were to cease and vanish away. (see 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 with 2 Timothy 3:16-17) What consolation to know what Jesus had promised He would also fulfill.

In Matthew twenty-four verse thirty, our title text, it says the '*sign*' of the Son of man shall appear. As to what this actually was there is some difference of opinion.

The angelic host which proclaimed the birth of Christ to the shepherds was a sign from heaven. The star which guided the wise men to the young child Jesus was a sign in the heavens. When the sun was darkened on the day Jesus was crucified was a sign in the heavens. These are just a few of the signs in the heavens evidenced the life and ministry of Jesus.

I take the word "*sign*" to mean "*evidence*." What Jesus was telling the disciples in Matthew chapter twenty-four verse thirty was the fact many would "*see, or perceive the evidence*" Jesus was seated at the right hand of God. This is in fulfillment of an another promise of Christ.

"Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

Matthew 26:64

This was in answer to those who inquired if He be the Christ during His trial before the high priest, scribes, elders and all the council of the Jews. This is consistent with other statements which Jesus made at other times. The very generation which was alive during His earthly ministry would witness the great power of God before they would pass away. They would know for certain Jesus was who He said he was. So the '*sign*' would evidence this fact.

This could have been similar to the experience of Stephen. He was being stoned to death and saw the heavens opened and beheld Jesus Christ standing on the right hand of God.

Also the story of the thief on the cross lends help in considering what this sign could have been. We all know the thief was converted to see Jesus as King in his dying hour. The same must have been true concerning those Jews who had earlier rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Yet during the final hours before the total consummation of Jerusalem, the elect of God who were still left in the city probably had a similar experience as the thief on the cross. During the final hours of their lives it was revealed to them Jesus was the promised One of God. No doubt they also were shown the darkness and depravity of their selves. The combination of realizing Jesus is the Son of God and having your depravity discovered to you is the experience that every child of God goes through at conversion. Knowing also the gravity of their external circumstances would cause them to mourn greatly on account of their sins. Hence the saying "*all the tribes of the earth shall mourn.*" Of course the phrase "*all the tribes of the earth*" is better translated "*tribes of the land.*" This certainly restricts these events to the context of Matthew twenty-four, the destruction of Jerusalem. No doubt there would have been private experiences of the people and also general public experiences. However it was perceived, they would know it was the same Jesus whom they crucified who was executing judgment upon them.

Josephus, when relating the events which immediately followed the burning of the temple and the holy place speaks of the false comfort spoken by the many false prophets among the Jews. He goes on to mention the certainty of the destruction of the Jerusalem and the signs thereof were so evident and plain. He states:

"Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year. Thus also before the Jews rebellion, and before those commotion's which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread, on the eight day of the month of Nissan, at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone round about the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day time; which lasted for half an hour. This light seemed to be a good sign to the unskillful..."

The light of a sword in the sky for the space of a year to me seems a wonderful sign indeed. The majority of uses of the word 'sword' in the new testament are from the Greek word 'machaira' which means 'war' or 'punishment.' So the sign of a great sword in the heaven for the space of a year could have very well been the sign which Jesus told the disciples would appear. And no doubt the Jews knew what the sword represented.

I am persuaded those Jews, who were about to die actually saw Jesus in the clouds of heaven before they breathed their last. Just as Stephen saw the heavens opened before his death. However their experience of seeing Jesus may or may not have been a comforting experience. Again I say, for the elect of God who remained in the city, the sight of Jesus at their dying hour was probably one of conviction then of comfort. But for the non-elect, the vision was more than likely one of great horror when they perceived the great wrath which was upon them. However we may want to view this, Jesus did not literally come in the clouds in the destruction of Jerusalem. This was a spiritual return of Christ. This I believe was shown in a previous section.

In the books of Acts chapter one, the subject context deals with the restoration of the kingdom of God to Israel. Again be reminded that the Jews did not yet understand the nature of the kingdom. They were hoping for the physical throne of David to be restored to relieve them from the oppression of Rome. The nature of the kingdom under the law was outward, in types and shadows. The throne of David was a type of the throne which Jesus now sits upon in the spiritual kingdom. The nature of God's kingdom was about to be revealed to the disciples on the day of Pentecost.

In Acts chapter one, Jesus reminds the disciples that they would receive power and would be witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth. After this He was taken up in a cloud before their eyes. Two angels or men in white apparel proclaim this same Jesus will come again in like manner. Remember the context is the restoration of the kingdom, the reformation. (see Acts 1:6-11) I believe this which was spoken by the two angels is the same thing Jesus Himself said in our title text. This actually took place.

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

Revelation 1:7

Remember the time context of Revelation which is set forth in verse one and verse three. “...*Things which must shortly come to pass.*” And “...*For the time is at hand.*”