

## AN INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 24—25

Part XXVI  
by Thomas Ice

*“and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.”*  
—Matthew 24:30

The second coming of Christ will be an event that has multiple aspects and phases to it. Jesus will not just appear in the sky and that is it, but there will be a multitude of specific events that will take place in the process of this advent. Christ, in Matthew 24:30 continues to note some of the sequencing that will take place at this time in history. One of the important events that will transpire will be “the sign of the Son of Man” that will appear in the sky.

### SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN

Earlier in Matthew 24:3 the disciples of Jesus ask Him, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” This passage answers the question about the sign of Christ’s coming. So what is that sign?

First it should be noted that the sign and His coming are separate events. Based upon what has preceded this verse, we know that the stage for his dramatic return begins in verse 29 with a shaking of the sun, moon and stars. This produces a blackout of the sky preparing the way for the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man, followed by the response of human mourning and fear, resulting in the second coming of Christ.

Second, this sequence of events will unfold in Jerusalem Israel. This is the location on planet earth in which these things are scripted to unfold, even though they will have a global impact.

Third, I believe that the sign of the Son of Man will be some form of the manifestation of the Shechinah Glory. Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains as follows:

As this sign is coupled with God’s glory, it is obviously the *Shechinah* Glory light that will signal the Second Coming of the Messiah. The answer to the second question, “What will be the sign of the Second Coming?” is the *Shechinah* Glory. *But immediately after the tribulation of those days, there will be a total blackout with no light penetrating at all, followed by a sudden, glorious, tremendous light that will disperse the blackness. This Shechinah light will be the sign of the Second Coming of the Messiah. The light will be followed by the return of the Messiah Himself.*<sup>1</sup>

### THE SHECHINAH GLORY

What is the Shechinah Glory? Why do I think this is what Christ has in mind here? The Shechinah Glory is the visible manifestation of the presence of God, often showing up in the form of a cloud, light, fire, or combinations of these. The Hebrew word Shechinah does not appear in the biblical text. The Jewish rabbis coined this extra-biblical expression called the “Shechinah Glory,” in order to distinguish those biblical passages where they believe that a physical glory cloud or light was present when the Hebrew word for “glory” was used. Shechinah is a form of a Hebrew word that literally means “he caused to dwell,” signifying that when God’s glory appeared in this way it was a Divine visitation of the presence or dwelling of God in the glory cloud. Fruchtenbaum

tells us that “the *Shechinah* Glory is the visible manifestation of the presence of God. In the Old Testament, most of these visible manifestations took the form of light, fire, or cloud, or a combination of these. A new form appears in the New Testament: the Incarnate Word.”<sup>2</sup> In order to see the significance of the Shechinah Glory for future Bible prophecy, a survey of past appearances are necessary.

The following events are believed to be manifestations of the Shechinah Glory in history:

- The Garden of Eden—the Lord’s presence in the Garden and the flaming sword (Gen. 3:8, 23-24).
- The Abrahamic Covenant—the flaming torch that passed between the sacrificial pieces (Gen. 15:12-18).
- The Burning Bush—the burning that did not consume the bush (Ex. 3:1-5; 13:21-22; 14:19-20, 24; 16:6-12).
- The Exodus—the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Exodus).
- Mount Sinai—the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God; thunders, lightnings, and a thick cloud (Ex. 19:16-20; 24:15-18 Deut. 5:22-27).
- The Special Meeting with Moses—the afterglow of Moses’ face as a result of his meeting with the Lord (Ex. 33:17-23; 34:5-9, 29-35; 29:42-46; 40:34-38).
- The Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant—the glory-cloud presence often associated with these items (Exodus).
- The Book of Leviticus—the authentication of the Law and residence in the holy of holies (Lev. 9).
- The Book of Numbers—the Shechinah Glory rendered judgment for sin and disobedience (Num. 13:30—14:45; 16:1-50; 20:5-13).
- The Period of Joshua and Judges—the continued dwelling of the Shechinah Glory in the tabernacle (1 Sam. 4:21-22).
- The Solomonic Temple—the transfer of the Shechinah Glory from the tabernacle to the Temple (2 Chron. 5:2—7:3).
- The Departure in Ezekiel—Ezekiel watches the Shechinah Glory depart the Temple in preparation for judgment upon the nation (Ezek. 1:28; 3:12, 23; 8:3-4; 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23).
- The Second Temple—the Shechinah Glory was not present, but a promise was given that it will be greater in the future than in the past (Hag. 2:3, 9).
- The Appearance to the Shepherds—the glory of the Lord shone round about them (Luke 2:8-9).
- The Star of Bethlehem—the star or glory-cloud that guided the Magi to Jesus (Matt. 2:1-12).
- Jesus: The Glory of the Lord—the incarnation was a manifestation of the Shechinah Glory (John 1:1-14).
- The Transfiguration—the Shechinah Glory appears to the three disciples (Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36, Heb. 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:16-18; Rev. 1:12-16).
- The Book of Acts—the cloven tongues of fire on Pentecost and the blinding light shown upon Paul at his conversion (Acts 2:1-3; 9:3-8; 22:6-11; 26:13-18).
- The Revelation—Jesus Christ is dressed in the Shechinah Glory in Revelation 1 (Rev. 1:12-16).

The following is an overview of future events relating to the Shechinah Glory:

- The Tribulation—the Shechinah Glory is connected with the Bowl judgments (Rev. 15:8).

- The Second Coming of Christ—the Shechinah Glory is the sign of the Son of Man and the cloud upon which He returns (Matt. 16:27; 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27).
- The Millennium—the Shechinah Glory will be present in its greatest manifestation in history because of Christ's physical presence on earth (Ezek. 43:1-7; 44:1-2; Isa. 4:5-6; 11:10; 35:1-2; 40:5; 58:8-9; 60:1-3; Zech. 2:4-5; 11:10)
- The Eternal State—the Shechinah Glory will provide light for the new creation where sin will be totally removed and God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit will dwell in fullness with man (Rev. 21:1-3, 10-11, 23-24).<sup>3</sup>

### THE SIGN

The word order of the Greek in verse 30 is as follows: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in the heaven." The Greek supports the probability that the intent of the passage is that the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heaven or sky. To take it as a humanly visible sign in the sky, as I would, preterist Kenneth Gentry says, "requires a restructuring of the text."<sup>4</sup> It does not *require* a restructuring, even though many who take a futurist view do put forward translations that do not retain the original word order. When rendering a passage from Greek to English (or into any language), maintaining the original word order is not as important as providing an accurate translation. Gentry inserts a red herring at this point in his attempt to change the true intent and sense of this passage. The difference amounts to whether "in heaven" refers to an invisible sign that takes place in the throne room of God in heaven or does it occur as a sign in the sky that is seen by humanity. Grammarian Nigel Turner says, "Mt 24:30 ambiguous, either *the sign which is the S.M. (appos.)*, or *the sign which the S.M. will give (possess.)*."<sup>5</sup>

I believe the context argues in favor of the futurist interpretation that the sign is visible to the human eye in heaven, which is the sky. First, the Greek word can mean either "throne room," or the visible heaven or sky that can be seen by the human eye, as understood by futurists. The majority of New Testament uses fall into this latter use.<sup>6</sup> The major Greek Lexicon of our day classifies it as the latter and says "*then the sign of the Son of Man (who is) in heaven will appear*; acc. to the context, the sign consists in this, that he appears visibly in heavenly glory Mt. 24:30."<sup>7</sup>

Second, surrounding verses focus upon heavenly meteorological disturbances (cf. verse 27, 29, 30b, 31) that are visible to humanity. The appearance of a sign in the sky would certainly fit the contextual theme of a heavenly focus.

Third, "It must, in the nature of the case, be *luminous*. This is indicated by the original word for *appear*. But it must be luminous from this single consideration: it will appear, or shine, at a time of *total darkness*," declares Rev. Buck. "The sun will be previously turned to darkness, and the moon and the stars will have withdrawn their shining. All the great sources of light being thus totally obscured, whatever shall *appear* must be luminous in its nature."<sup>8</sup>

Fourth, the time relationships of the passage support a visible, and thus, a future understanding. Matthew 24:30 begins "and then" referring back to the meteorological events of verse 29 which will occur "immediately after the tribulation of those days." Thus, verse 30 tells us that "the sign . . . will appear;" "and then" there will be human mourning in response to the sign; followed by Christ's glorious return. Amazingly, Gentry says that the sign of verse 30 means that the Jews "must flee the area if they are to preserve their lives."<sup>9</sup> How can this happen if the sign is the Roman conquest of Jerusalem. It will be too late. Such folly does not fit an A.D. 70 sequence of events as noted by Rev. Shimeall:

Yes, reader. This is the theory of our Lord's *second* coming, . . . Briefly, then, as it respects the *first* branch of this theory, its inconsistency, we submit, will become apparent, from the following arguments and facts:

(1.) *If* the coming of the Lord at the time here specified was merely “the coming of the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem and the unbelieving Jews,” then it will follow, of necessity, that it occurred at the same time, since, in fact, it is affirmed to be the *same event*.

(2.) Again. The destruction of the Jewish Church and State, and city, and people, resulted from the coming of the Romans, and must, of course, have been *after* that coming, because results must be subsequent to the causes which produce them. Accordingly, as our blessed Lord delivered the whole of this remarkable prophecy with special regard to the *chronological* order of the events,

(3.) He describes the appearance of the “sign” of His coming, of the mourning of all the tribes of the earth, and of His actual coming in the clouds of heaven, as being “*after* the tribulation of those days,” and subsequent, in the order of time, to the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars.

Reader, which shall we believe—the comments and opinions of men, or the teachings of Christ?<sup>10</sup>

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Revised Edition (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), p. 643.

<sup>2</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 599.

<sup>3</sup> Adopted from Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, pp. 599–628.

<sup>4</sup> Gentry in Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Vol. III, *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 214.

<sup>6</sup> William F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 598–600.

<sup>7</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 599.

<sup>8</sup> D. D. Buck, *Our Lord's Great Prophecy* (Nashville: South-Western Publishing House, 1857), p. 292..

<sup>9</sup> Gentry, *Great Tribulation*, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Cunningham Shimeall, *Christ's Second Coming: Is It Pre-Millennial or Post-Millennial?* (New York: John F. Trow and Richard Brinkerhoff, 1866), pp. 159–60.