

SIGNS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

FIFTH SIGN (6:15-21)

Deliverance During a Storm

By Arlen L. Chirwood

The fifth sign in John's gospel, in John 6:15-21, has to do with:

Christ's departure into a mountain (v. 15).

The disciples, in a boat out on the sea (vv. 16, 17a).

Nighttime, when a great storm arose on the sea (vv. 17b, 18).

Christ walking toward the disciples on the sea (vv. 19, 20).

The disciples' receiving Him into the boat with them (v. 21a).

The disciples then immediately finding themselves "at the land whether they went" (v. 21b).

These events foreshadow:

Christ's departure from Israel into the heavens two thousand years ago (v. 15).

Israel scattered among the nations, supernaturally protected (vv. 16, 17a).

The coming Tribulation at the end of the dispensation (vv. 17b, 18).

Christ's return (vv. 19, 20).

The nation receiving Him (v. 21a).

The nation's subsequent restoration to the land covenanted to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 21b).

This is the only sign not providing a specific reference to particular days, but the chronology in this sign must be understood in the light of the other seven signs and the remainder of Scripture.

In the Mountain, Alone

This sign, as the previous sign, has to do with Christ departing into "a mountain," which signifies a *kingdom* (cf. Ps. 2:6; Isa. 2:2-5; Ezek. 28:16; Dan. 2:35, 44, 45; Matt. 16:28-17:5). Christ departed into a mountain on this occasion because He perceived that the crowd following Him was about to, through force, attempt to make Him a King.

The signs being exhibited had to do with *Israel and the kingdom*, they were being performed by *the King of the kingdom Himself*, and they showed that *which Israel could have if the nation would repent*.

The people apparently understood the nature of the signs and the identity of the One in their midst performing the signs. But, *without repentance on the part of the people*, matters relative to the King, Israel, and the kingdom could not progress beyond the signs.

Thus, when the people were about to bypass repentance and attempt to forcefully make Christ a King — seeking to, themselves, bring in the kingdom through a means other than that ordained by God — Christ is seen moving aside into a *mountain, alone*.

The kingdom was still in view. *The kingdom* could be seen through the signs being performed, God's dealings with the Jewish people, and the mountain into which Christ had moved. Nothing really changed in this respect, but Christ's actions at this point spoke volumes about something which occurred in Israel almost 2,000 years ago as well as something quite similar which is also occurring throughout a large segment of Christendom today.

Many Israelites at Christ's first coming sought to bypass God's ordained and revealed way in which the kingdom was to be established, and many Christians today are doing something very similar, immediately preceding Christ's return (involving themselves in *Kingdom Now* ideology [apart from the presence of the King], often erroneously called "Dominion Theology"). And, relative to the whole of the matter, Christ can be seen in *exactly the same position* both times.

In time past, Christ separated Himself from that which was occurring among the people; and, during the present time, with something very similar having made its appearance in Christendom, Christ's position relative to the matter could only be *exactly the same — separation from that which is occurring*.

Whether past or present, Christ's position relative to anything contrary to the revealed Word would, of necessity, have to be the same. *God simply will not countenance that which is contrary to His revealed Word*.

In the Evening, Darkness, on the Sea

While Christ was *in the mountain, alone*, the disciples entered into a boat and ultimately found themselves out on a *tumultuous sea*.

The disciples, in a boat, on the sea, found themselves *in the evening part of the day; then, when it had become dark, the sea became tumultuous, with Christ still absent*.

Within the symbolism seen in the sign, the darkened evening part of the day places the timing of events about to transpire *near the end of the dispensation*, with the Israelites separated from the One Who said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

And the dispensation in view is not the present dispensation but the preceding dispensation, which has seven years yet to transpire — the dispensation in which God has dealt and will yet deal with Israel. Events surrounding this sign have to do with *Israel during and immediately following these final seven years, during and immediately following the Tribulation*.

(The present dispensation will end with the removal of the Church, comprised of all Christians, both the dead and the living [I Thess. 4:13-18]. Then God will turn back to Israel and complete His dispensational dealings with the Jewish people during Man's Day, which will occur through the fulfillment of seven remaining years in Daniel's Seventy-Week prophecy [Dan. 9:24-27].)

"The sea" in Scripture is used in a dual metaphorical sense, signifying:

a) *The place of the dead* (Ex. 14:13-31).

b) *The Gentile nations* (Dan. 7:3ff; Rev. 13:1).

And, with respect to Israel, *both* would apply during *the time* surrounding events in the sign — *the time* foreshadowing events occurring at the end of the dispensation, which would be *the time* foreshadowing events during Daniel's unfulfilled Seventieth Week.

During this time, *the Jewish people are seen not only scattered among the Gentile nations but are viewed as in*

the place of death while out among the nations. But, as the disciples in the ship or as Noah in the ark, the Jewish people in that day will find themselves in a place of safety from the surrounding storm, during a time of darkness (not a place of safety extending to individual Jews, for millions of Jews will be slain during this time, but a place of safety having to do with the nation as a whole [Zech. 13:8, 9]).

1) A Time of Darkness, A Great Wind, A Tumultuous Sea

The coming Tribulation, covering time which fulfills the last seven years of Daniel's Seventy-Week prophecy, is seen in Scripture as *a time of trouble without parallel in human history* — a period "such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." And this period will be of such a nature that "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved" (Matt. 24:21, 23).

This is how approximately 2,600 years of Gentile world dominance and rule will end on the one hand; and this is also how the continued stubbornness and rebellion on the part of the Jewish people, over an even longer period of time, will end on the other hand.

God will allow the Gentile nations under the final world ruler during Man's Day, under Antichrist, to bring about conditions of this nature. And history during Man's Day will end with this type climax in order to bring the Jewish people to the place of repentance so that God can, in turn, place Israel in the position where the Gentile nations can be blessed through God's restored wife, through His firstborn son.

The darkness of the evening, a great wind blowing upon the sea, and the disciples in immediate danger because of that which was occurring are all seen in the sign, with the latter also seen in the Books of Daniel and Revelation as well (*cf.* Dan. 3:19ff; Rev. 13:11-18; 17:16, 17).

All these things together are necessary as one begins to form a word picture, as depicted in different places in both Testaments. God gave the complete picture through different individuals, using different means, at different times. And Christians reading and studying the matter today can be certain of two things in the preceding respect:

a) God has given everything necessary to see and understand the complete picture.

b) There is nothing superfluous in that which God has revealed.

Everything which God wants man to know regarding His plans and purposes is in His revealed Word. Everything in this Word exists for a divinely designed and revealed purpose.

2) Then, Deliverance

Deliverance in the sign occurred when the disciples were alone, in a boat, out on a tumultuous sea. It was then that they saw Jesus "walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship." The disciples, seeing Jesus, "were afraid." Then, making the disciples aware of His identity, Jesus said, "...be not afraid." And following this, the disciples "willingly received him into the ship" (*cf.* Gen. 45:1ff).

This fifth sign in John's gospel foreshadows conditions and events exactly as they will exist and occur yet future. Israel will be alone, out on the tumultuous sea. That is, the nation will be separated from their Deliverer and scattered among the Gentile nations at a time when the tumultuous state among the Gentile nations reaches an apex. And this, as seen elsewhere in Scripture, will occur immediately before Gentile world power is utterly and completely destroyed.

It will be at such a time, after Israel has cried out to the Lord for deliverance, that Jesus will appear the second time to the nation. God will have used Gentile dominance and rule, extending over 2,600 years of time, with matters being brought to an apex at the end of this period, *for one central purpose*: to bring about repentance on the part of the Jewish people, in order that God's plans and purposes for His people, which include the Gentile nations, can be realized.

It will be at such a time that *deliverance* will occur, for reasons which God has clearly revealed in His Word.

Then, Immediately at the Land

And all the preceding will be with a view to that which can be seen occurring in the sign after the disciples had received Jesus into the boat (*cf.* Ex. 15:1-19; Num. 13, 14; Joshua 1ff).

The text reads:

"...and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went" (v. 21b).

After the disciples had received Christ into the boat, they not only found themselves delivered and removed from the tumultuous sea but they also found themselves in the land of their calling, the land of Israel. And their Messiah, Who had brought these conditions to pass, was present in their midst.

Exactly as seen in the sign, after the Israelites have received Christ, they will be removed from the Gentile nations (be removed from the sea) and be placed in the land covenanted to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, within a theocracy, as the restored wife of Jehovah and as God's firstborn son. And their Messiah, Who will have brought these conditions to pass, will be present in the nation's midst (Deut. 30:1-3; Joel 2:27-32; Matt. 24:29-31).

In that day the Jewish people will realize their calling as God's witnesses to the Gentile nations (Isa. 43:1-10). They will go forth with the message of Isaiah chapter fifty-three:

"Who hath believed our report?..."

And occupying the position of God's firstborn son among the nations, Israel will possess the rights of primogeniture, with the nations ruled by and blessed through Israel.

In that day, completely different from today:

"...ten men shall take hold out of all the languages of the nations ['ten,' *the number of ordinal completion*, textually pointing to *all among 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" (Zech. 8:23; *cf.* v. 13).

The future for both Israel and the Gentile nations is as bright as the promises of God, but that which God has revealed about the future must be brought to pass God's way, in God's time.

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