

When studying the events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua, one can see that God graciously moved heaven and earth so that His people would come to a saving knowledge of the Messiah. By looking at Yeshua's final hours on the cross and at the period until the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, one can count at least 14 significant signs God allowed to happen to stamp the time. There are those mentioned in the Scriptures, and they will be studied here. But there were other signs recorded in a very unlikely source, the Talmud. It is unclear if the rabbis realized the impact of the things they wrote down, but regardless, the Lord was in full control even of their writings. The Son of God was not to die quietly.



By Jacques Isaac Gabizon

When Yeshua died, several significant events took place. It is hard to deny that they were signs. The signs were not threats, but signs of grace, signs of warning. God was not angry. He was sad. He was not sad for His Son; He was sad for His people. While His Son was experiencing all the pains of the past, present, and future sins of the whole world, our merciful God was still pleading for them to

repent. “Wake up!” He was telling them, “Wake up! Do you realize that I gave you My own Son so you may live?” He is still telling us this today.

The signs studied in this article are found both in the Scriptures and in the rabbinic writings. The first set is in Matthew 27:50-53:

⁵⁰ And Yeshua cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. ⁵¹ Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, ⁵² and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; ⁵³ and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

Six major signs took place when Yeshua yielded His Spirit. The first sign, the torn veil, was to the priesthood. This curtain was not like the curtains we have on our windows at home. According to Josephus, the veil was 60 feet by 30 feet and about four inches thick. It separated the Holy of Holies representing the presence of God from the rest of the Temple. No one could enter this place but the high priest, and he could only do so once a year, during the Feast of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*. Hence, access to God was limited, and what limited it were our sins. But as the Son of God was taking all the sins on Himself, the veil of separation was torn in two so that those who believe in Him now have full access to God (Heb. 10:19-22). The veil was torn from top to bottom because it was God’s doing. If man had to tear a curtain, he would start at the bottom, but this one was torn from the top down, showing that the whole plan of salvation is God’s doing.

The second sign, the earthquake, was a call to all the people.

As a third sign, rocks were split. This miracle resembles the judgments of the end times. In Revelation 6:16, the people are asking the mountains and the rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of God and the wrath of the Lamb. On the cross, Yeshua was taking all the wrath, and so it was as if a choice was given to the people who witnessed His crucifixion: You take Yeshua as your Savior now or He will be coming back as a judge.

As a fourth sign, graves were opened. It is not surprising that most Bible commentators mention this event and go on to the next verses. They fail to see the irony here. After Yeshua died, the religious leaders were in a hurry to get His body off the cross in order to avoid desecrating the Sabbath. Yet, here we learn that during the whole Sabbath, tombs stood open. The Sabbath and the whole land were desecrated. The religious leaders must have noticed the open graves but could do nothing because it was the Sabbath. Yet, these open tombs reminded them that any idea of consecration and holiness could not exist apart from God. They had just crucified the Son of God, and they wanted to be consecrated and holy. They wanted to have religion without God.

After the Sabbath ended on Saturday evening, when the first day of the new week began, the religious leaders may have sent people to cover these tombs. Yet, the graves were empty because the dead had risen. This is the fifth sign. It is significant that only tombs of believers were opened. They were raised from the dead at the same time as Yeshua rose from the dead, and they began walking through Jerusalem. What a great sign that must have been! How many were there? To whom did they go? Did they stay alive for a long time? We do not know, but what we do know is that our God was moving heaven and earth for the salvation of the people.

It is surprising that only 3,000 people came to faith at Pentecost (Acts 2) despite all these signs. According to Josephus, more than 3,000,000 people were in Jerusalem at the time to celebrate Passover and Pentecost. That is a sad 0.1%!

The sixth sign was different than the previous signs, as it stretched over a longer period of time: At noon, when the sun was at its highest, a darkness fell over all the land. It lasted for a long time. This was not a simple solar eclipse. A total solar eclipse can last a maximum of seven and a half minutes. This darkness lasted for three hours. It was miraculous and was yet another call on people to reconsider the One they were crucifying.

But why did the darkness strike at the sixth hour? In Exodus 12:15, God ordered the Israelites to remove the leaven (representing sin) from their houses. They were to do this *on the first day*, the 14th of Nisan. In the Talmud, the rabbis decided when exactly on this day the leaven was to be removed and burned: “Both according to R. Jehudah and R. Meir it is prohibited to eat leavened bread from the sixth hour, and further, of the fourteenth of Nissan, let the time for searching commence at that hour.”¹ At the sixth hour of the 14th of Nissan, when the Messiah was taking all the sin of the world upon Himself, the Jews were busy cleaning the leaven from their homes. However, at this very time, a darkness fell over all the land, so they could not see where the leaven was. It was all on the cross, on the Son of God. This is the seventh sign.

The eighth sign pertains to the timing of Yeshua’s death. The Messiah breathed His last at the ninth hour, the very time the last sacrifice of the day was offered.²

Imagine you are an Israelite living in Jerusalem at that time. As a good Jew, you are searching for the leaven in your home, and perhaps as you are holding some of this

¹ *b. Pesachim* 1 (Rodkinson, Vol. 5, p. 3).

² Josephus, Ant.14.4.3.



leaven in your hand, the floor underneath your feet begins to shake. As you are bounced left and right by the earthquake, the leaven slips from your hand into the air. At that moment, complete darkness strikes.

Suddenly, you hear a tremendous noise you have never heard before, and someone yells, “The rocks are splitting open!” A little later, you hear people outside yelling that the tombs were opened. Others are yelling that some of the dead were spotted walking the streets of Jerusalem. Think about it! This must have been the most terrifying time ever for an Israelite. Did you think for a minute that God was to let His Son die on the cross without moving heaven and earth and without making any noise?

The miracles were even more powerful for the priests who were at the Temple. Unlike the rest of the population, they experienced additional signs described in the rabbinic writings. The Talmud confirms that Yeshua was crucified on Passover: “On the eve of Pesach they hung Jesus [the Nazarene].”³ Then it goes on to explain what happened at the Temple after the veil was torn: “During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘For the Lord’] did not come up in the right hand . . . nor did the westernmost light shine.”⁴ This passage reveals that forty years before the destruction of the Temple, meaning at the time of the crucifixion, the lampstand in the Holy Place went out by itself. This candelabra was called “westernmost” because it was placed on the westward side of the Holy Place.

³ *b. Sanhedrin 43a.*

⁴ *b. Yoma 39a.*

The light of the lampstand was very significant for the priests because to them, it represented God's presence: "But it is a testimony to mankind that the Divine Presence rests in Israel. What is the testimony?—Said Rab: That was the western branch [of the candelabrum]." ⁵ The rabbis saw the light as a sign that the *Shechinah* rested over Israel. As the holy place became completely dark, the high priest must have rushed outside, and there was darkness as well. At the same time, the veil was torn from top to bottom. All these things must have had a great impact on him and the other priests. This was the ninth sign.

The tenth sign must have been a very noisy one. The Talmud in *Yoma* says: "The doors of the Hekal would open by themselves." ⁶ These are the doors of the Temple. There were eight of them, and while it is not clear from the Talmud which doors opened, it was probably the main doors, the Eastern Gates. Josephus speaks of these doors and reports as well that they opened by themselves: "Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner [court of the] temple, which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night." ⁷ This must have been quite loud. The poor priests who were in this Temple found themselves without lights, the veil was torn, the door mysteriously opened, and the earthquake shook them. Acts 6:7 says that many of them came to believe in Messiah Yeshua.

The remaining signs did not occur right at the sixth hour of the crucifixion, like the others, but in the years leading up to the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. There

⁵ *b. Sanhedrin* 22b.

⁶ *b. Yoma* 39a.

⁷ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* VI, v. 3 (Whiston)

was a period of grace of forty years, an awakening phase God allowed above and beyond what He had already given, and the years did not go unnoticed in the history of Israel, as the next sign will show. This sign is directly connected with the tearing of the veil and lasted until the end of the Temple era. It began on the Yom Kippur following the crucifixion. There, the rabbis noticed a drastic change. Among the many sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, two goats had to be presented to the high priest; one was sacrificed, and the other, the scapegoat, was let go (Lev. 16:7-10). The Hebrew word for “scapegoat” is *Azazel*. The Talmud says that the rabbis used to tie a red ribbon on the neck of the Azazel, and as it went away into the wilderness, the red ribbon turned white. This was a yearly miracle which happened every Yom Kippur. The rabbis interpreted this miracle as a sign of God that their sins were atoned for (Isa. 1:18). At the first Yom Kippur, in the year of the crucifixion, something began to happen: “During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘For the Lord’] did not come up in the right hand . . . [and] the crimson-coloured strap [did not] become white.”⁸ The “lot for the Lord” refers to the scapegoat of Leviticus 16, and the red strap did not become white as it miraculously did for many years before.

Notice how God spoke directly to the religious leaders of Israel, through their own writings, bringing them to realize that something extraordinary happened when Yeshua was crucified. The words cannot be clearer. The time could not be clearer. Search, then, and seek who the Messiah is!

The twelfth sign is equally significant. Right after mentioning the Azazel, the Talmud links the scapegoat with the very name of God: “The rabbis taught: Six times the high-priest pronounced God’s name, as it is written (Jehovah), during the Day of

⁸ *b. Yoma 39a.*

Atonement: three times in the first confession and three times in the second confession, and the seventh time when he had drawn the lot.”⁹ Once a year, during the time of the Azazel, the high priest pronounced the name of God. We have lost the pronunciation of His name. “Yahweh” or “Jehovah” are fairly new pronunciations. The last time the very name of God was pronounced in its original form was the year of the crucifixion. The Talmud reports that forty years prior to the destruction of the Temple, the priests ceased to pronounce the name.¹⁰ The Jewish Encyclopedia reports: “From that time on, the pronunciation of the name was prohibited: ‘Whoever pronounces the Name forfeits his portion in the future world.’”¹¹

This was a drastic change. From this time on, God had a new name, and the first one was graciously transformed to the name Yeshua, which itself means “salvation.” This is the name of the Messiah. According to Acts 4:10-12, there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

The thirteenth sign pertains to the Sanhedrin, the revered court of Israel whose chief was the high priest. This organization, for unknown reasons, was fired out of the Temple ground: “Forty years before the destruction of the Temple the Sanhedrin went into exile and took its seat in the trade halls.”¹² The fact that both Talmuds report this event shows what a blow it was to the Sanhedrin. Right after the crucifixion of Yeshua, the Sanhedrin, who for many hundreds of years gathered in the Hall of Hewn Stones had to move out of the Temple to a place called “Hanuth” on the Mount of Olives. “Hanuth” means “market.” Hence, the seventy members of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *b. Yoma* 39b.

¹¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 9, p. 162, citing *Sanh.* xi. 1.

¹² *y. Sanhedrin* 12; *b. Shabbat* 15a.

the Sanhedrin became like the vendors driven out of the Temple by the Messiah. Through this move, the influence of the court diminished.

The last sign also shows the loss of the Sanhedrin's power: "Forty years before the Temple was destroyed, the right to judge capital cases was taken away from Israelite courts. In the time of R. Simeon b. Shatah, the right to judge property cases was taken away from Israelite courts."¹³ Not only was the Sanhedrin removed from the Temple compound, but they were also no longer allowed to judge certain cases. After misjudging the Son of God, they were demoted.

From that time on, things were not the same in Israel. Between the crucifixion and A.D. 70, insurrections and wars filled the land. Over 50,000 Jews were slain in Seleucia, and 20,000 died in Caesarea in a different battle. Constant rumors of war kept the Jews in an unsettled state. In A.D. 70, the Romans entered Jerusalem under Titus and killed 1,300,000 Jews and took many into captivity. Jerusalem was plowed up as a field. This marked the beginning of the Jewish dispersion, and history testifies of the continuous unrest within the Jewish population. According to the Scriptures, the time of unrest will not stop until the second coming of the Messiah.

God still uses miracles today to save people. The one sign He uses over and over again is found in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, where it says: *You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Messiah, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.* Putting the verses in very simple terms, believers are the miracle today. In many ways, they are God's walking letter to this world, and their presence, which is filled by the Spirit of the Living God, is the means through which these signs are kept alive. From the Holy of Holies,

¹³ y. Sanhedrin 7:2.

God moved to take residence in the hearts of believers, who are now His Temple (1 Cor. 6:19).

This article was first published in Ariel Magazine Spring 2019, Vol. 1, Number 30. It is republished on this website with permission from the publisher and copyrights owner: Ariel Ministries USA, San Antonio, TX. All rights reserved.