

THE EIGHT SIGNS OF JOHN

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EIGHT

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JOHN



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Preface

We first published a brief set of notes upon this subject in 1962. In response to a continuing demand, the notes were republished several times; though they have been out of print for some years.

Demand for the work has continued; but we have been reluctant to republish until time permitted a further, closer contemplation of the subject. We have now revised the work, and expanded considerably upon the earlier exposition. It is thus reissued with additional matter, but with the same objective: that it may prove of some assistance to those who desire to study the lofty and majestic themes which may be profitably explored throughout the eight signs of the gospel of John.

— J. Ullman
Perth, Western Australia.
January, 1981.

Introduction

It will be our attempt in this present study to draw nearer to the glorious character and personage of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who would be true disciples of Christ will strive to know their Master intimately; and in so doing they will become strengthened in their upward struggle towards the perfection of character which was revealed in the life of God's Son, when he walked among men.

Critics have accused the four gospel writers of inconsistencies and inaccuracies. The much-laboured charge has repeatedly been laid that the four books do not harmonise with each other. The truth is that the four divinely-inspired gospel writers are in perfect harmony upon the subject of Christ's life and works, and that they are diverse from one another only inasmuch as their respective objectives were to represent a four-fold aspect of Christ's ministry. The relationship between the four faces of the cherubim (Lion, Ox, Man, Eagle) and the ministry of Christ is too clear to be missed by the diligent student.

Matthew described the Son of God as the Lion of the tribe of Judah: the great *King*, heir to David's throne and the kingdom of Israel. Mark revealed the Messiah as the suffering *Servant* of Yahweh (the Ox). Luke wrote of Christ as the perfect *Man*, in that he was a reflection of the perfect moral excellence of his Father's character. John presented him as the *Son of God* (the eagle from above), revealing with beautiful and intimate insight the divine characteristics by which Yahweh's perfect character was set before the nation of Israel in the personage of His only begotten Son.

John's gospel permits us to follow, step by step, eight miracle-signs by which the Son of God set before his people the purpose of his mission, revealing how they could become reconciled to God.

A miracle has been defined as "an exhibition of divine power to accomplish a specific purpose." But in John's gospel a particular word has been used in relation to the eight signs. The Greek word *semeion* (Rendered *miracle* in the A.V.) occurs significantly, 77 times in the N.T. And in 51 of these occurrences it has been more correctly rendered as *sign* or *signs*. The word literally signifies a *sign, mark, token* (Vine); "... a signal; an ensign, a standard, a sign by which anything is designated, distinguished, or known; hence used of the miracles of Christ, as being the signs of which it might be known that he was the Christ of God. . ." (Bullinger) The word applied to the eight signs of John's gospel could thus represent a series of flags or ensigns which could be read, or a series of directional signs, pointing the way. This, we suggest, is the way in which the word should be understood in relation to John's "signs". In the R.V., the word *semeion* has always been rendered *sign* or *signs* wherever it appears in the gospel of John.

Preparatory to considering the eight signs, it is useful to recognise that there is a distinct relationship between the first and second chapters of John. They are linked in a quite dramatic way. The first chapter shows that John had clearly established the credentials of Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God. There is set forth a declaration acknowledging the majestic identity of Israel's Messiah.

Christ's discourse with Nathanael reveals that the Master searches the heart of every individual who would seek him, and that it must be acknowledged by the Seeker that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Son of God, the promised Messiah and Redeemer.

But there are three further factors which unmistakeably link the first chapter of John with the second. The first is the final phrase of chapter one: "the son of man . . ." The title is significant. John clearly identified Jesus as "the only begotten Son" of God; and Nathanael acknowledged him as the Messiah, "the Son of God" and "the king of Israel". But there is a vital aspect of Jesus of Nazareth's life which has to be clearly understood; namely, that he was "the word made *flesh*" (John 1:14). As the Son of God who would provide atonement and reconciliation for the human

race, it was essential that he be a representative of Adam's race; hence he was Son of Man as well as Son of God.

The signs and miracles wrought by the Lord can never be understood either in purely divine or purely human terms. He was, though Son of God, a human being. And his primary objective was to "glorify" God as "the word" made "flesh" (John 13:31). Christ was flesh. Yet, as his disciples observed him labouring in the service of his Father, they witnessed something which had never been evidenced upon earth before: a descendant of Adam in whom the "Word" became the totally dominant influence. He lived his life, bearing the nature of sin's flesh, yet permitting his mind and body to be ruled only by the will and word of God, to the total exclusion of the will of the flesh. Thus he became "the fellow" and "equal" of "the Deity" in that "perfection of character" was manifested in his life, so that he "was faultless before the Deity" (*Eureka*, Vol. 1, p. 101, 107). Christ's life and works were a true and perfect example — the only one in human history — of the word and will of God so ruling over sin's flesh as to bring him, mentally and morally, into total and complete submission to the will of God.

Thus, Christ glorified God — or manifested God's glory — in all that he did and in all that he said.

The Son of God appeared as the Word made flesh (John 1:14); and that claim had to be endorsed with appropriate displays of miraculous power. Through this power, "the Father" who had "sent" His Son into the world, bore "witness" of him (John 5:37).

Yahweh had not given His Son the spirit "in sparing measure" (John 3:34, Wey.); therefore, he was able to manifest a degree of miraculous power not previously revealed in any of Adam's race. But such power was to be used *only* to the glory of God. And although he was tempted to do otherwise (Matt. 4:1-11), any enticement to accept or perform that which was contrary to his Father's will was always rejected by him.

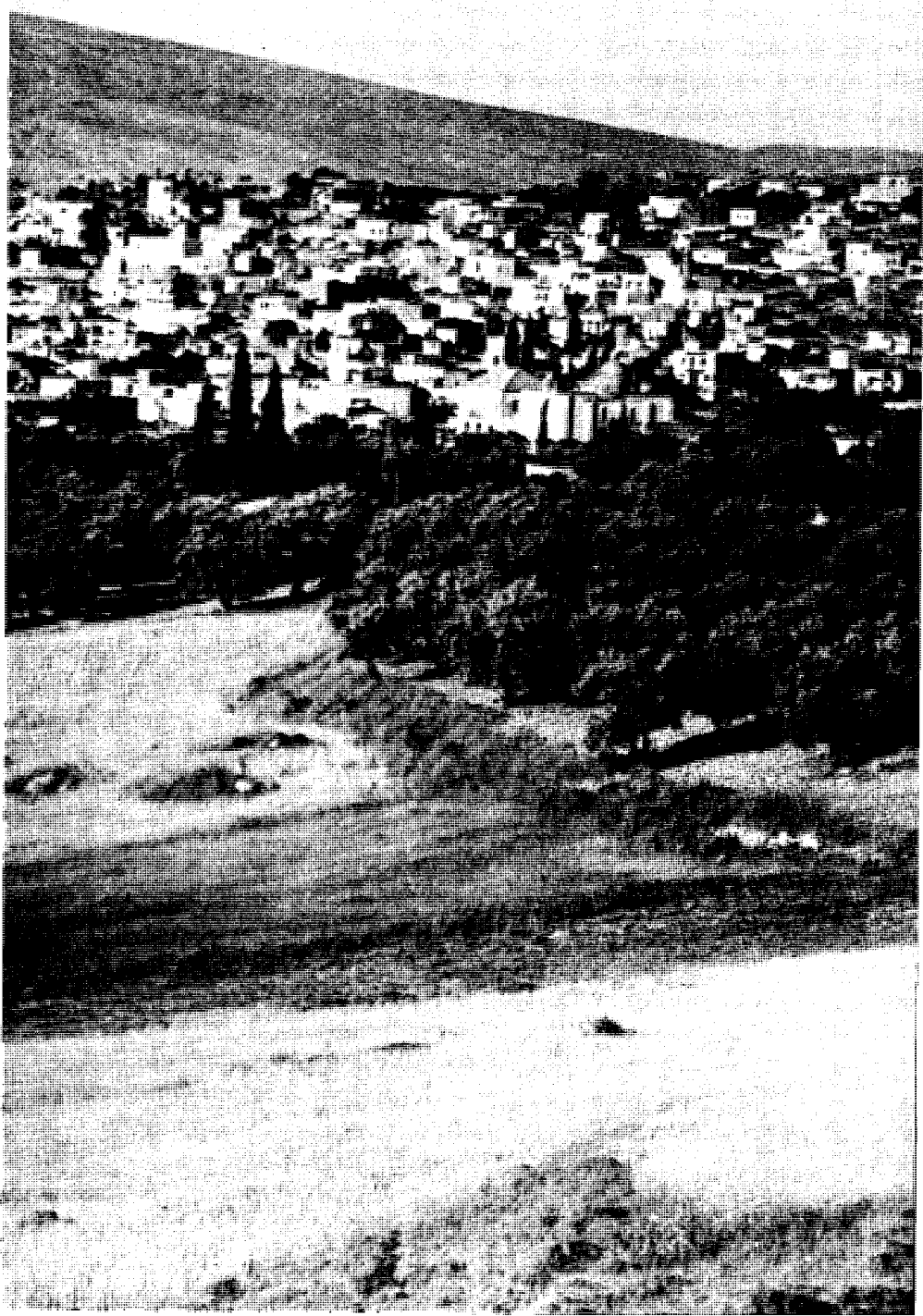
Upon this foundation we commence our consideration of the Eight Signs.

There was definite order and arrangement in the way the

Lord performed these miracles, which were to be understood also as *signs*. This fact may be established from John 2:11, which states carefully: "This *beginning* of miracles (signs) did Jesus in Cana of Galilee . . ." This "beginning" or "first" sign should be compared with the meticulous wording of John 4:54, which says: "This is again the *second* miracle (sign) . . ."

In a consideration of John 2:1-11 we begin to follow a set pattern of divine revelation, each sign conveying to us a particular aspect of Christ's ministry and God's purpose.

This series of eight signs was intended to convey special meanings to the people of Israel, at the time of Christ; but they were also intended to impart deeper and more profound messages to those who have received Jesus of Nazareth as "the word" made "flesh", "the Son of God" and "the king of Israel".



THE FIRST SIGN

Water Changed into Wine
John 2:1-11

THE PURPOSE TO ISRAEL, NATIONALLY: *To show that Israel were spiritually bereft, and that only the Son of God, their Messiah, could supply their spiritual needs and restore them to Yahweh.*

THE MEANING TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL: *To show that if we drink the "wine" of his doctrine, and become covered with the blood of his sacrifice, we can find joy in his service — a joy which will be fully realised at the glorious marriage supper of the Lamb.*

JOHN began his second chapter by providing points of connection between it and the first two chapters. The first link was his reference to "the third day". It was actually the seventh day of John's narrative (cp. John 1:19-28 with John 1:29,35,43; 2:1). This was the third day after John 1:43.

The number three is most significant for its symbolic or typical meaning in scripture. It speaks of *resurrection* through the making of a *covenant* which has been ratified through *sacrifice* (Gen. 22:4; Jonah 2:9; Exodus 2:2; 3:18; 23:17; Genesis 40:12,18). The number has a particular relationship to Christ's personal resurrection to divine nature (Acts 10:39-40). He was the "firstfruits" of those who shall be raised to receive eternal life. The number three therefore also aptly symbolises the resurrection to glory of the mystical Body of Christ, the vast concourse of Believers

Can of Galilee in a valley north-east of Nazareth. Here was exhibited the first sign.

who will become "glorified together with him" at the Judgment Seat.

That occasion will become the greatest marriage celebration of all time, when Christ and his Bride become conclusively and completely united (Rev. 19:7-8).

The fact that the marriage in Cana actually took place on the *seventh* day of John's narrative is also deeply expressive of a strong spiritual lesson: for it will be on the seventh one-thousand year-day, after six one-thousand year-days of sin's reign, that the final union between the Lamb and his Wife will take place.

It is thus apparent that the basic principle being conveyed in this first sign was that of joyful union with Christ.

A further point of connection is the revelation that the marriage which featured in the "sign" took place at *Cana of Galilee*. This was the native town of Nathanael. It appears, therefore, that the notable and inspiring interlude which took place between Christ and Nathanael was designed, by virtue of its chronological insertion in John's gospel, to provide a suitable foundation and introduction for the unfolding of the *eight signs*. It should therefore be appreciated that a careful study of John 1:43-51 will prove most rewarding, prior to a detailed study of John's *eight signs*.

John chapter 2 introduces the reader to a notable and joyous occasion. The setting was a most happy one: the uniting in marriage of a man and a woman, with their family and closest friends present to witness the occasion, and to celebrate the event in an appropriate way.

Cana, not a large town, was situated some fifteen miles to the west and slightly north of Tiberias, and six miles north-east of Nazareth.

Mary, the mother of the Lord, "was there". The implication is that she was either a friend or relative of those involved in the wedding. Joseph, her husband, is not mentioned. It is difficult to account for his absence from such an important event, unless, perhaps, he was already dead. Certainly Joseph had died by the time the Lord completed his ministry (John 19:27). The fact that Mary, at the moment of need, turned to her eldest son for assistance lends

weight to the supposition that the Lord had become, in effect, the head of the family.

"Both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage." The second verse is brief, but profound. The Greek word, *kaleo*, has been used in the New Testament consistently to express the invitation which God has extended in calling men and women to the gospel (Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 7:15; Eph. 4:1, 4; etc). It is also, most significantly, the same word used to represent the summons which Christ will extend to those who are found worthy to attend the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9). Neither would it be mere coincidence that Christ chose this same word when setting forth the parable concerning those "that were bidden to the wedding" (Matt. 22:3).

The Lord's disciples have been called (*kaleo*) unto the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). And they have been "called (*kaleo*) with an holy calling . . . according to his own purpose and grace" (2 Tim. 1:9 cp. 1 Pet. 1:15; 2:9,21; 3:9; 5:10).

It should be observed that at this stage the Lord's immediate followers were termed *disciples* and not apostles. An apostle is "one sent" whereas a "disciple" (Gk. *mathetes*) means "a learner". These men typify all who have been called to the gospel. Summoned to obey the gospel, and eventually to appear at the marriage of the Lamb, Christ's followers must firstly become "learners". These men were in the process of receiving the spiritual education which the Lord would provide for them. These "learners" had accepted the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah; but now they were to begin a dedicated walk, in the footsteps of their Master, to eventually become apostles, whom he could "send" forth in his name. In the sense of the meanings of these two important words, the disciples gathered with Christ at this marriage feast, typify all who would seek to gain a place at the Marriage of the Lamb: such must first become "learners" and then go forth as witnesses representing their King, teaching and leading others towards the inheritance which God has prepared for those who love and obey Him.

A marriage feast among the Jews was commonly con-

tinued over a period of seven or eight days; and under normal circumstances it would be most improbable that a shortage of wine — a basic commodity — would have occurred in the early stages of the feasting. It could therefore be assumed that the Lord and his disciples arrived at the marriage feast after the festivities had been in progress for perhaps some days. But in view of the clear wording in the second verse this explanation is not altogether satisfactory. Would the Lord be inclined to arrive some days late for a pre-arranged appointment? This leaves only one other reasonable explanation for the shortage of wine: and it is simply that those responsible for the conduct of the wedding were so poor that they were unable to provide for the needs of either themselves or their relatives and friends.

This explanation for the lack of wine is most fitting, since those gathered together at the marriage feast typify, in the primary sense, the nation of Israel.

The absence of wine thus becomes the focal point in the "sign."

In the Scriptures, wine was often used as a symbol for doctrine (Isa. 29:9-11, etc.). It also typified blood, which is "the life" (Matt. 26:28; Lev. 17:11). Thus, in this "sign" absence of wine represented *lack of spiritual life*. And this was the state of the Jewish nation when the Son of God walked in their midst; a state of affairs which he had come to alleviate, if Yahweh's people would receive his teaching. They were, undeniably, "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). Religion, as understood and practised by the nation generally, was corrupt (Isa. 1:22; Mark 7:8-13). Whether they appreciated their true needs or not, these people were in desperate straits for the saving influence of the "wine" of sound doctrine and spiritual enlightenment. And only the Son of God could have provided them with the spiritual "wine" which could fill them and satisfy them, and bring them spiritual rejuvenation (Mark 2:22; Luke 5:39).

But the nation of Israel stood in an untenable position before their God. The "wine" in which their religious leaders had taught them to trust, had, like the wine at the feast,

failed.

In view of the discomfort and embarrassment brought upon her hosts by this unfortunate situation, it was not surprising that Mary should call upon her eldest son to consider the situation. "The mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine."

The Lord's reply to his mother's observation has often been misunderstood, and has been regarded as a rather harsh response to the bewilderment which Mary had expressed. "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."

The Lord's rejoinder was really quite dignified and gentle, if somewhat formal. This form of address, in the times of Christ, would correspond approximately to the more modern term: "Madam". Certainly there was nothing acrimonious in his reply. He used the same word in speaking to his mother when he was dying on the cross (John 19:26), and it is the same word he used with great tenderness when addressing Mary Magdalene, after his resurrection (John 20:15).

His probing question: "What have I to do with thee?" was not uttered as an indictment. He was endeavouring to show his mother that until this period of his life he had been known as the son of Mary, but now he must be manifested as the Son of God. Clearly, these were not words of reproof, for it is quite apparent that the Lord fully intended to supply the needs of the people (vv. 7-8). Nor was there any question of him being persuaded to perform a miracle against his will. Perhaps the Lord's meaning is best conveyed in this rendering: "Your concern, mother, is not mine" (N.E.B.) Mary's solicitude was for the embarrassment of her hosts, and the actual needs of those gathered at the wedding feast. But her son had his mind firmly fixed upon loftier ideals. He was about to perform a miracle which would teach a profound spiritual lesson, to those with eyes to see and ears to hear. In this act he would glorify his Father. In effect, he was saying: "My ministry has now commenced; I am no longer subject to my mother. I am now subject directly only to my Father which is in heaven. Nothing must be permitted to interfere with that

which I am about to do; and my actions now must not be in response to my mother's desires, but that the glory of the Father might be revealed in me."

The phrase "What have I to do with thee" was, basically, a Hebraism. It indicated a firm stand on the part of the one using the words. It is interesting to compare other passages where the phrase has been recorded: cp. 2 Sam. 16:10; 19:22; 1 Kings 17:18; 2 Kings 3:13; Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34. Hebraisms of this type sometimes permitted the existence of an interrogatory inference which was not intended to be taken literally as a question, but rather to be treated as a statement of fact (cp. Psa. 35:10, etc.).

The expression "Mine hour is not yet come" should be understood as signifying "my time has not yet arrived" (Diag.). A "set time" had been established to "favour Zion" with the presence of the Son of God — even as it shall be so divinely ordered in the future (Psa. 102:13). The Lord would begin to glorify his Father, through the exercise of miraculous power, precisely at the right moment. It may even be implied from the wording of verse 3 that Mary, and doubtless others, were aware that the supplies of wine had ceased. But perhaps all others gathered at the feast were not yet aware of the situation. It would be necessary for all present to be aware of the circumstances, and to witness together the display of miraculous power which the Son of God would manifest.

Mary did not interpret her son's words to be a rebuke. To the servants she said: "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it". She had understood the Lord to mean that he would assume responsibility for the needs of those assembled, and that at the appropriate moment he would do whatever he thought necessary. She could, of course, have no knowledge of the remarkable miracle which was about to be demonstrated. She had accepted the words of her son in the same spirit in which they had been uttered. She had every confidence that, whatever he might do, he would act wisely.

The Lord observed that there were "six waterpots of stone" which stood nearby, empty. Six is the Biblical number to symbolise flesh, and "stone" speaks of the earth;

our "earthen vessels" being the Adamic nature which we bear (2 Cor. 4:7). The waterpots referred to here were jars used in purification rites associated with the Jewish religious practices of the day. They therefore typified the legalism of Jewish religious life, manifested in the flesh.

So far as the significance of this sign was concerned, it was not inconsequential that the Jewish ceremonial cleansing practices which were in evidence in Christ's day were but loosely based upon the Mosaic Law. Such rituals were more closely related to tradition. The waterpots, then, provide a stark allusion to the processes by which Israel had drifted from a true understanding of the Truth, and how they had come to place more reliance and confidence in "tradition" than in truth. Their religious life had largely become perverted through fleshly philosophy (cp. Matt. 15:2; Mark 7:8-15).

The Lord did not attempt to "change" the waterpots, thus stressing that to receive the Truth does not mean an immediate change of nature. Men and women who receive the gospel must live it and manifest it in their "earthen vessels", until a change of nature is granted at the Judgment Seat. But he could most certainly change the *contents* of those six waterpots, even as he could change the thinking and way of life of men and women who would receive the gospel of Christ into their hearts. The Lord was now commencing a ministry which would reveal the Jewish concept of religion for what it really was: a perverted, formal, ritualistic philosophy, in which the real power and meaning of divine truth had been submerged. On the positive side, he would *change* the hearts of men and women who would receive him, even as he was about to change the contents of the stone waterpots.

He told the servants to "fill the waterpots with water" and they obeyed him, as Mary had counselled them. Here, then, was an example of the first principle of discipleship: "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it".

The servants "filled" the waterpots "to the brim". It should be observed that this action was not performed either by the Lord or any of his disciples. The latter remained in ignorance of what was about to happen, and so stood

well clear of the proceedings, as keenly attentive as the rest of the assembly. The Lord would have made quite certain that no allegation could be established later that either he or any of his disciples had touched the waterpots, and by some devious sleight-of-hand trick managed to convey the *appearance* of a miracle having been performed.

The filling of the waterpots "to the brim" established the principle that there would never be any shortage of that which Christ would provide, for the eternal well-being of all who would truly draw near to him. He would supply all their needs, so that they would lack nothing. There would be no holding back on the Lord's part when it came to providing for the needs of sinful, suffering humanity — even to the giving of his own life.

Calmly and solemnly, he gave the servants a simple instruction: "Draw out now . . ." The phrase was an allusion to the compelling and joyful message of Isaiah: "Therefore with joy shall ye *draw water out* of the wells of salvation . . ." (Isa. 12:3). The vessels displayed before the assembled people, and now miraculously filled to the brim with the best possible quality wine, took on a new significance: the waterpots now typified the Lord himself. As "the word" made "flesh" he was filled to the brim with the essence of Yahweh's Truth, and he called upon men and women to "draw out" from him the "wine" of life.

Quoted from Isaiah's prophecy, these words speak of the time when all Israel shall bow before their Great King, appreciating the glorious presence and divine authority of their Messiah. And no doubt, as the Lord uttered these moving words from Isaiah his mind would have been upon the future when the prophecy will become a living reality. Isaiah continued: "*In that day* shall ye say, praise Yahweh, call upon His Name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His Name is exalted. Sing unto Yahweh; for He hath done excellent things; this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the holy one of Israel in the midst of thee." As he contemplated this awesome prophecy of Isaiah, the Lord would have been conscious of the fact that other prophecies made it quite clear that, from the beginning of his ministry

and the performance of this first "sign", the nation of Israel would reject him. He knew that the nation would pass through many dark, bleak, agonising centuries before finally accepting him as their Redeemer, "in truth and in righteousness" (Zech. 8:8). Then they would learn to "draw out of the wells of salvation . . ."

The miracle had been performed. The power of Yahweh had been manifested through His Son.

The "ruler" of the feast (the same word as "governor" in the previous verse — in effect, the Master of Ceremonies) was understandably impressed. "Thou has kept the good wine", he said warmly, "until last". Without appreciating the spiritual significance of his words, he was revealing Christ's superiority over the religious traditions which the Jews had now espoused. "God", wrote the apostle, had spoken "in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, but now, at the end of the Mosaic Age, He had spoken unto them "by His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). At a wedding feast in those times the best wine would be presented first, when the guests, with fresh and expectant palates, would most appreciate the quality of good wine. Later, with much food and wine having been consumed, appreciation of quality would diminish. But this was the power and wisdom of God at work, not man. God had waited until the end of the Age to produce the "good wine" of His own perfect character manifested in a Son. Such was set forth to perishing humanity in the perfect teaching and moral excellence of one who was "the word" made "flesh".

Everything about this "sign" provided positive evidence that there could have been no collusion between the Lord and others to effect the miracle. No person or persons at the feast could have in any way contributed to the practise of a deception upon those assembled. The servants had merely filled the stone pots with water — thus symbolising clearly that Jewish religious leaders could provide nothing but water for their people, whereas the Son of God could produce pure wine of the very highest quality. The true wine of sound, life-giving doctrine.

No human power could have performed this deed. Thus, the Lord's responsibility for this miracle was to demon-

strate that he was able to provide that which no other man could supply, because he was "the *only* begotten of the Father" (John 1:14). He was therefore teaching the word of God with a power and authority never previously embodied in any other man (Matt. 7:28-29).

This was the "beginning" — or "first" — in a series of miracles John was to record, which were also to be understood as "signs" setting forth a series of divine principles by which the nation of Israel might be restored to Yahweh, and by which true spiritual Israelites might be encouraged in the way which could lead them to life eternal. In this respect, Christ began to "manifest forth his glory". In comparing this statement (John 2:11) with John 17:5, it is evident that the same word is used to describe two differing manifestations of glory. Whilst the latter passage obviously represents the Lord as praying for the glory of divine nature, the same may not be said for the former passage. The glory which he now began to manifest (2:11) was not one of physical but moral perfection. From this time onward, the glorious character and infinite purity of Yahweh was revealed to Israel in the personage of His own righteous Son.

The final comment is both touching and profound: "And his disciples believed on him". They had, of course, believed on him before witnessing the performance of this miracle (John 1:37,41,45). But now they believed on him in a fuller sense, and upon a basis other than simply words which he had spoken to them. Now they saw that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, had been invested with miraculous power which could only be of divine origin. Their belief in him was therefore established more firmly. They were able to bear witness to the fact that "light" had indeed come "into the world" (John 1:9; 3:19).

THE SECOND SIGN

Healing the Ruler's Son
John 4:46-50

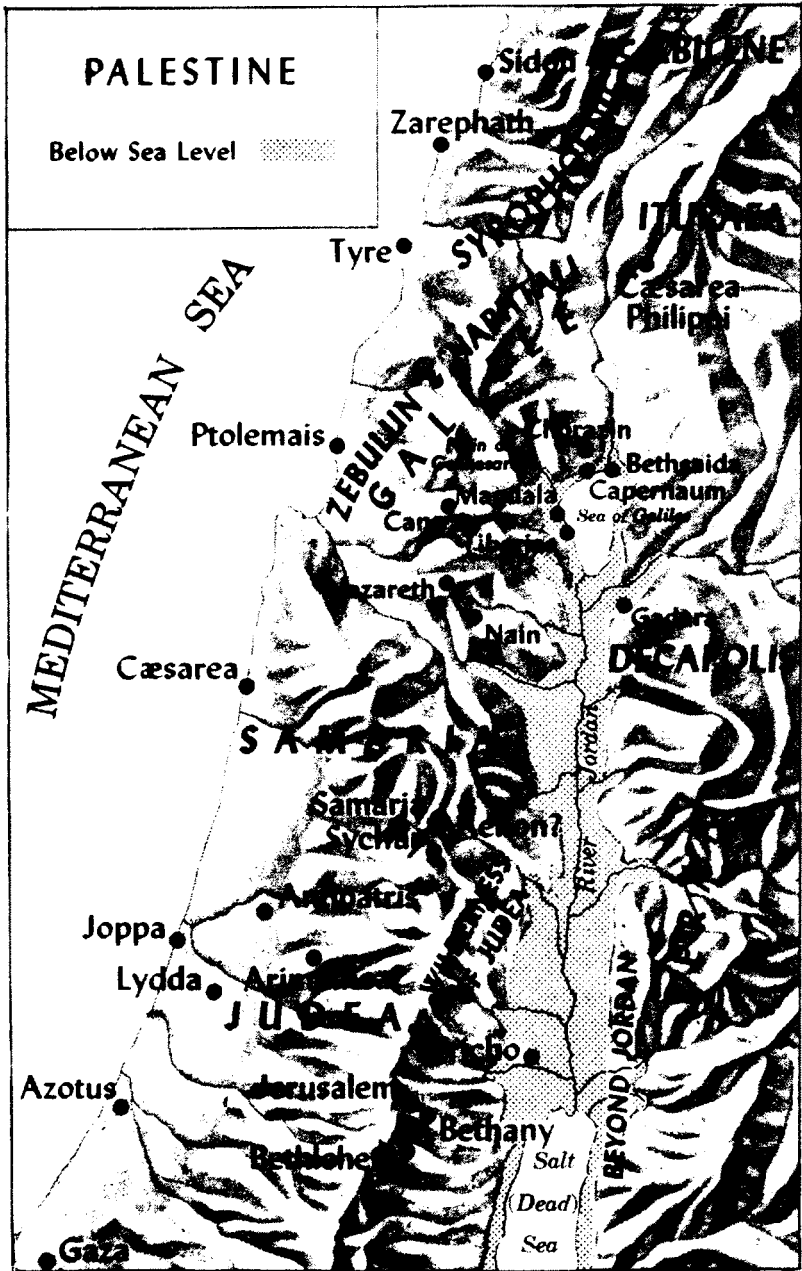
THE PURPOSE TO ISRAEL, NATIONALLY: *To show that only its Messiah could raise it to national and spiritual life.*

THE MEANING TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL: *To demonstrate that it is possible to receive the power of a new life only through the Son of God.*

THE Lord had been in Samaria, but had now returned to Cana of Galilee (John 4:43-45). A question arises as to why the second 'sign' should be performed at the same locality as the first. The answer is, simply, that where God sows His word He seeks fruit (John 15:8). The Lord having set powerful spiritual lessons before his contemporaries in the first sign, it is understandable that he should now return to see if his miracle, with its spiritual message, had made some impact upon the people. He desired to find hearts and minds at Cana that would be ready to receive further enlightenment and instruction.

There were also those from Galilee who had witnessed the Lord performing miracles in Jerusalem. They had now returned to their homes, enthusiastically proclaiming the fame and excitement the Lord had generated through his exercise of divine power (v. 45). There would, then, have been a climate of interest and eager curiosity in Cana, when the people learned that Jesus of Nazareth had returned to their city.

Although comprising only five verses of scripture, this second sign touches matters of deep and profound importance; for, as the first sign revealed that Israel was destitute



of all national and spiritual life, so the second sign emphasised that their 'sickness' was to the point of death. The nation had become enmeshed in the formal ritualism of the Mosaic Law, as interpreted by "the tradition of the elders" (Matt. 15:2). They were therefore in a tragic state, spiritually, for they had bound themselves with "the ministration of death" (2 Cor. 3:7). Had they understood the spirit of the Law, and recognised it as a "schoolmaster", they could have been in a prepared state of mind to receive their Messiah (Gal. 3:24).

Before returning to Cana the Lord had spent two days with the Samaritans, at their request. The Jews regarded Samaritans with the same contempt they normally reserved for Gentiles. Yet the significance of Christ's brief sojourn among the Samaritans should not be overlooked. At his first advent, the Lord had visited the Jews and performed wonders, thus establishing his credentials as the Son of God (See the first 'sign', John 2:1-11). He then left his people and has been among the Gentiles for two one-thousand-year "days" — at the end of which period he will again return to his nation, to restore them. At his coming they will be "at the point of death" (v. 47). "After *two days* he will revive us", prophesied Hosea. "In the *third day* he shall raise us up, and we shall live in his sight" (Hosea 6:2).

The second 'sign' revolved around a man and his seriously-ill son, and the man's appeal to Christ.

The son who was so desperately sick typified God's 'first-born son', the nation of Israel (Exod. 4:22). The son had been stricken with a serious infirmity, but was not yet dead. This taught that the Jews still had hope of both a national and spiritual revitalisation, providing they would permit the life-giving words of Christ to permeate the nation.

"There was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death."

Palestine in the days of Christ, showing the localities where the various "signs" were performed.

THE EIGHT SIGNS OF JOHN

The nobleman was a "king's officer" (R.V. marg.). He was no doubt a man of authority attached to the court of Herod Antipas, the then tetrarch of Galilee and commonly looked upon as a king. The journey from Capernaum to Cana was 16 miles. It was an excursion which would only have been undertaken under these circumstances by a man in a desperate state, and with some conviction that his efforts would not prove fruitless.

What had prompted this king's officer to take such action? News that the Lord had performed a miracle at the wedding feast had obviously been spread abroad. And some had believed. The first 'sign' had thus begun to bring forth fruit. The fact that John specifically mentions that Cana was the place where the Lord had "made the water wine" indicates that the miracle had been remembered by the townspeople and by many in Galilee to whom the incident had been related.

In requesting that the Lord "would come down" to his house, the Nobleman doubtless had in mind the manner in which the earlier miracle had been performed. The Lord had been present *in* the house when changing the water into wine.

Had the Lord "come down" as the nobleman desired him to, he would have *descended* from the lofty plane of the divine purpose to the level of mere fleshly understanding and consideration. The nobleman was called upon to *raise* the concept of his spiritual vision rather than expect the Lord to lower his. The nobleman, at this point, typified those prominent men in Israel who would have admitted to the appalling spiritual condition of the nation, yet without being able to recognise the true significance of Christ and his mission. The Lord knew — and constantly demonstrated — that only the power of God's word could provide the efficacious influence to transform his people into true spiritual sons and daughters of Yahweh.

Believing that the Lord could provide a cure for his son, the nobleman had gone forth to seek the Lord. Men and women who would receive the goodness and mercy which Christ is able to extend must act in the same way. Yet this man — in common with all others who would set out upon

a similar search — had to learn that Christ must be sought in the correct manner and with true understanding. The question of distance had no relationship to the power Jesus was able to call upon, to glorify God. The nobleman erred in assuming that the Lord would only be able to heal the boy if present at his son's side. Divine power is not related to proximity, nor is it in any way restricted by man's conception of accessibility. All Christ's servants must learn to accept, in faith, the principle he was to so clearly enunciate: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18).

The king's officer was certainly not a sceptic, else he would never have undertaken such a journey. Yet, he lacked a full and wholesome faith, having certain reservations about the way in which the Lord may have been able to perform miracles. He typified the "fathers" or "elders" of Israel, who, down through the ages, had claimed to be worshippers of Israel's God, and had looked for the time when Yahweh would restore the nation to favour and greatness (John 8:56; Luke 2:29-30). But they had become so hardened in their traditions that they found it difficult to exhibit and cultivate faith. The phrase "signs and wonders" occurs only this once in John's gospel, and the Lord was alluding to the ritualistic, materialistic approach of the Jews to their religious worship. This rebuke, though directed at the nobleman in particular, was intended as an indictment upon the Galileans. The Samaritans — typifying the Gentiles — had believed, *without witnessing any clear display of miraculous power*; but the Jews would not do so.

It was unnecessary for Christ's personal touch to be administered to the ailing boy who lay near to death at Capernaum. His word was sufficient. Similarly, it was not necessarily for the Lord to *personally touch* every Israelite to cure them of their spiritual malaise. His power lay in the fact that he was "the word made flesh". It was the power of his gospel and his sacrifice which could have healed and transformed the nation. In this respect the king's officer was displaying the same characteristic as the nation of Israel: they would believe and accept only that which they could establish through the sight of their eyes. The simple

exercise of faith was an aspect of divine worship which they could not grasp. For them, conviction required tangible evidence. But, to become cured of their spiritual sickness the nation needed to *hear* the word of God and become moved by it. Yet faith, as the outworking of belief, was beyond their limited spiritual vision.

The knowledge that many were following him purely upon the grounds that they had witnessed his miracles would have brought deep grief to the Lord. His primary objective was to heal his people, nationally and spiritually, and not simply to cure their physical ailments. And for his work to become effective it was necessary that men and women should understand and acknowledge a deeper spiritual significance in the miracles he performed.

It was necessary, at this point, to demonstrate to the nobleman and those present that this lesson was to be clearly understood. So the Lord did *not* go "down" to Capernaum. Instead, he said: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe . . ."

The unfortunate and distressed nobleman did not readily grasp the import of these words. And no doubt other witnesses found Christ's simple and direct statement puzzling and disconcerting. The king's officer, doubtless, was in a state of desperation, fear clutching at him like a devouring fire. It was action he was pleading for. Not words.

"Sir," he pleaded, "come down ere my child die!"

Again, he asked the Lord to "come down". He had not understood the Lord's retort to his initial request. Still, his cry of anguish did not fall upon deaf ears. The Lord was moved at the man's obvious need, and his conviction; even if the pathetic fellow did not really understand the full requirements of faith. Here, the Lord knew, was a man who was teachable and who would learn.

With a quiet confidence which was designed to relieve the distraught man from his torment and misery — and to implant firmly in his mind the principle of faith — the Lord said: "Go thy way; thy son liveth . . ."

The man did not know whether to believe his ears or not. Could this gracious, impressive man effect a cure without even seeing the one in need? Then realisation began to

dawn. He had received a reply which far exceeded his humble expectations.

He was convinced. He had been given an assurance that the Lord could certainly heal. And if his power was from God it was not necessary that the Master should be personally present in a particular situation before being able to demonstrate that divine power.

The Lord dispelled his doubts, countered his fears, and encouraged his faith. Thus, the king's officer began to grasp the principles of faith, and responded to the Lord's words with submissive acceptance of his solemn pronouncement. Faith, absolute and uncomplicated, began to ripen within him.

"And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him. . ."

Faith had become grounded within him, and now rose to those majestic heights so pleasing to God and rewarding to man. He accepted the Lord's assurance without any supporting evidence. There was simply the conviction which he now held within his heart.

Having become convinced of the power which could be manifested through the Son of God, the king's officer provided proof of his faith: Eventually "he went his way . . ."

He "believed". He did not display any element of uncertainty. Quite simply, he "believed".

The nobleman was to learn from this incident that although God may answer our prayers and provide for our needs, He might not necessarily do so in the precise way we desire or anticipate. In His greater wisdom, His judgment as to how our needs should be met is far superior to ours. This was precisely the case with Israel. They looked for a Messiah to come and deliver them; but when he came, it was to save them from their sins rather than their Roman overlords. And because they could not recognise those qualities in his character and purpose they rejected him. But at the Lord's second advent the national and spiritual deliverance of Israel will become an accomplished fact. And, needless to say, deliverance will be effected in a way not anticipated by the Jews themselves, as was the case with the nobleman's son in this second 'sign'. God is will-

ing to save all mankind; but it must be upon the principles and methods He determines, not man.

The Lord pronounced the boy healed at "the seventh hour" which was 1 p.m. It was quite conceivable that the king's officer should desire to return to his home immediately, and he could well have managed the journey that same day. But he did not do so. That he did not rush obsessively to his house is indication in itself that he had accepted the Lord's word with calm, sublime, confident faith.

What was it that would have delayed him in returning to his family? One inducement which may have kept him at Cana is obvious: having been relieved of his anxiety, and now possessing a profoundly changed attitude of mind, it is more than probable that he sat respectfully at the feet of Christ, to hear and learn more of the truth from the lips of this most gracious of men. In view of the fact that he was able, upon his return home, to persuade all his household to accept the gospel it is evident that he must have learned a great deal from the Lord before leaving his presence.

A further question is most interesting to contemplate: why were his servants coming to meet him, as he finally made his way homeward? Probably, before departing from his home, he had announced to his household the purpose of his mission; where he was going, the man he hoped to contact, and the objective of his journey. In this most likely event, is it not ironical that his servants would have gone forth to meet him to convey the news that there was now no longer need for a miracle, as his son had unaccountably regained his health?

The astonishing news of his son's recovery was made known to the nobleman. He then felt that he should seek positive proof that his faith in Jesus of Nazareth had been well-founded. He enquired carefully as to "the hour" when the cure had become effective. Their reply served only to confirm his faith. He had believed *without* seeing "signs and wonders" (v. 48) and his belief had been rewarded.

He asked the time when the boy had *begun* to amend. But the answer was more positive: "At the seventh hour the fever *left him*". It had happened suddenly, completely.

There had been a total restoration to health.

His faith now proven under trial, the king's officer demonstrated his faith by his works. He preached the gospel to his household. And such was the power and conviction of his preaching that "his whole house" accepted the truth. It is not difficult to imagine the way in which the nobleman would have joyfully and movingly explained to those of his household the astonishing train of events which had occurred. And how eloquently and richly he would have expounded to them the significance of a living faith in the Son of God, and that such faith would unquestionably be rewarded. The nobleman and his household thus learned another profound and humbling truth: that Yahweh may permit trial and suffering that eventual good might result. And so it shall be, in the case of Israel. For, "*all* Israel shall be saved . . ." (Rom. 11:26).

It should be noted that the word "son" occurs repeatedly throughout this section of John's narrative (v. 46, 47, 50, 51, 53). In all cases, except v. 51, the word has been rendered from the Greek "huios" which means "a son, with particular emphasis upon the relation of offspring to parent". The word has been used of the nation of Israel (Matt. 27:9; Acts 7:37, etc.). The word in v. 51 is from the Greek pais, "a boy" — a word used by Luke to affirm that God "hath holpen his servant (Gk., paidos, a diminutive of pais) Israel, in remembrance of His mercy" (Luke 1:54). The nation, then, has been represented in the New Testament as not simply the servant and son of Yahweh, but the *young child* of God. It should be noted that the word "paidion" occurs in John 4:49 — thus making it clear that the nobleman's son was a child. Significantly, this word has been used to describe those who are deficient in spiritual understanding (1 Cor. 14:20).

Israel, at the time of Christ, was spiritually and nationally "sick" to the point of death. And the Son of God walked among them. As Yahweh's Son and servant, he alone would be able to provide the cure they so desperately needed. But only those who responded to his teaching were healed of their spiritual ills.

There is significance in the fact that the son was cured at

THE EIGHT SIGNS OF JOHN

“the seventh hour” — for it will be at the beginning of the millenium — the seven thousandth year — that Israel will be restored. The number seven also has the meaning of “completeness”, so that in the second ‘sign’ it speaks of the ‘complete’ time cycle for the regeneration of the nation. Throughout his ministry the Lord indicted the Jewish nation for their lack of faith and spiritual perception; but at the “seventh hour” he will intervene to reveal his power to Israel. Israel’s trials and sufferings have been brought about through weakness of the flesh; but the day will dawn when they will finally acknowledge that the only remedy for both spiritual and national diseases is to turn in faith and humility to the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

In their hour of opportunity the nation of Israel rejected the physician who could have healed them. But individual men and women who seek a way of escape from sin and its consequences must humbly recognise their needs. There is sufficient power in the gospel of Christ to cure the spiritual ills of mankind. As his spoken word resulted in the healing of the nobleman’s son, so his words can provide the only cure for the spiritual sickness of death-stricken humanity.

We remain “dead in trespasses and sins” unless we intellectually understand God’s word and obey His voice, in which event He will cause us to rise “to walk in newness of life” (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 6:4).

THE THIRD SIGN

The Impotent Man made to walk

John 5:1-16

THE PURPOSE TO ISRAEL NATIONALLY: *To show that their Messiah was superior to their concept of Law, and that only through the power of his influence could they be cured of their national and spiritual impotence.*

THE MEANING TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL: *To demonstrate that Christ can strengthen those who recognise their helplessness, and obey his voice.*

THE third 'sign' unfolded a remarkable drama, the culmination of which may well have resulted in the Lord's death, had the unrelenting hatred of the Jews been permitted to run its natural course.

The incident centred upon the Lord's meeting with an impotent man. Christ's action in healing the man resulted in the charge being brought against him that he was a sabbath-breaker, and therefore guilty of death (Exod. 31:15). But this unjust accusation led the Lord to present an awesome exposition of the relationship which existed between himself and his Father. In this, he asserted that both the miraculous works he had performed, plus the evidence of the Word of God, supported his claim to be the Son of God.

The third "sign" was founded upon words and phrases which contain significant symbolic implication.

"Jerusalem" means "habitation of peace", and the pool of Bethesda was "by the sheep gate". This was almost certainly the gate through which the sacrificial animals were brought, to be offered in the Temple (Neh. 3:1,32;



12:39). Thus, before the drama began to unfold, attention was drawn to the idea of seeking to attain to a "habitation of peace" through means of sacrifice. This foundation for the "sign" is reinforced in that Bethesda means *house of mercy*, and it had "five" porches. Five is the Biblical number to symbolise "grace" and "restoration" (Gen. 43:34; Num. 18:16; Lev. 26:8, etc.). The symbolic meaning of these words and phrases forms a sentence, upon which the events of the third "sign" were founded: "By coming into the house of mercy, through the sacrificial means Yahweh has provided, we may find grace and restoration, and eventually become eternally established in a habitation of peace."

According to the Emphatic Diaglott, five of the ancient manuscripts reject wholly or in part the words commencing in verse 3 with the word "waiting" through to the end of v. 4. The R.V. and others reject this passage as being a later interpolation. "The New Testament from 26 Translations" states: "The last phrase of verse 3 ("waiting . . . water") and verse 4 are now recognised as not adequately supported by original manuscripts". Bloomfield says: "The whole narrative savours of Jewish fancy". Meyer calls it "a legendary addition". It is omitted by Mill and Tischendorf, and marked as spurious by Griesbach.

However, in spite of the impressive evidence in favour of rejecting this section of the narrative, a perfectly reasonable explanation of that section of the text may be advanced. The pool appears to have been fed by an intermittent spring. It is alleged that the waters contained certain medicinal qualities which were most effective after a movement of the water. It is not difficult to appreciate that such an activity below the surface of the water, being invisibly generated, might have been attributed to the work of an angel. The Companion Bible has suggested that verse 4 could be more reasonably understood as: "for (it was said) an angel went down from time to time . . ."

The pool was surrounded by a closely-packed "multi-

The Pool of Bethesda was not far from the Temple courtyard. There the Lord cured the lame man. The miracle became the basis for the third "sign".

tude" of "impotent folk" — a word which signifies "to be weak, infirm, feeble". It is an apt word to describe the inherent weaknesses of human nature and that which it produces. Eusebius described the waters of the pool, in his days, as "marvellously red", which would indicate that the pool drew attention, in symbol, to the hopeless state of those who trusted in human nature or human endeavour, to heal their ills.

The Lord came to the pool. He looked upon "a certain man" who was "there" and who had suffered from a severe "infirmity" for "thirty and eight years".

The unfortunate man had suffered miserably for a long time. Yet, discomfort or distress will not purify a man from sin, or its inevitable effects, unless such suffering is seen through the light of divine truth. The word "infirmity" is related to the word rendered "impotent" (v. 3), and therefore has a similar meaning. The anguished cripple lacked strength, and manifested only weakness and feebleness. He was unable to walk, thus typifying those who do not know how to walk in the way of the truth.

The period of his suffering was significant. The allusion to the length of time Israel wandered in the wilderness is quite striking.

And in view of the long time this man had suffered from his infirmity, it is of no small import that the nature of his case and the extent of his disability would have been very well known in Jerusalem. The cure, then, when effected, would have made a tremendous impact upon all who could vouch for the previously-hopeless condition of the man; and such valid witnesses, in their turn, would certainly have raised their voices impressively in relating the circumstances of the miracle to others.

The Lord regarded the pathetic scene. He saw a course of folk, representative of suffering humanity. There were the paralysed, the maimed, the diseased, the deaf and the blind. The inherent weaknesses of human nature were unmistakably on display at the pool of Bethesda.

The Lord could readily have healed all those individuals, had it been God's will that he do so. But there would have been little point in curing bodies whilst the minds of those

persons remained diseased with the thinking of the flesh. The Lord demonstrated his power through one man only, at this time, to illustrate a vital divine principle. Yahweh desired that people should learn to think in terms of eternal deliverance and redemption. Merely the healing of physical ailments would, inevitably, still lead spiritually unenlightened men and women to eternal death.

The Son of God looked upon the impotent man with compassion. But he also saw an opportunity to convey a spiritual lesson to men and at the same time glorify God.

It should be observed that this man did not make an appeal to the Lord. The Master simply acted. This will be the manner of the national and spiritual healing of the nation of Israel; for, in the early stages of their deliverance they will be unaware of the true identity of their Saviour. And he will act on their behalf without waiting for them to recognise him or his authority as the Son of God.

The Lord faced the afflicted man. "Wilt thou be made whole?" he asked. The question was not an exercise in rhetoric. The serene, unruffled approach of the Lord was intended to encourage this man to consider his position and examine himself. The suffering cripple may well have replied to the Lord in a most contemptuous. It is to his credit that he did not do so. He carefully considered his answer before replying. The question implied that the paralysed man should arouse himself from the apathy and listlessness into which he had fallen as a consequence of his long and apparently hopeless illness. The Lord's words had been thoughtfully chosen. They were designed to awaken within the man an awareness of his true state and his real need, and to kindle within him a spark of hope. Hope and faith are intimately related.

Those who would seek the God of Israel as the means of their redemption must see themselves in the same situation as this unfortunate soul who now lay wonderingly at the feet of the Son of God. The Lord's words here were really directed to every man and woman who would seek eternal salvation. His questing words must evoke a response in all of us. We must become aware of our state and our needs. We must desire to be made "whole" in the eyes

of God.

As the Lord had anticipated, this man reflected upon his sad and pitiable state.

"Sir", he answered respectfully, "I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me."

He was paralysed, helpless, and friendless. "I have no man . . . to put me in . . ." God alone can be sufficient of a friend to men, to help them in their spiritual infirmities, and strengthen them to know His Son and walk in the way of the truth.

The crippled man had waited and waited for his turn to come to enter the pool. But his turn never came. But he had sought help in the wrong direction. And such was the state of the Jewish nation when their Messiah was sent unto them. They sought God, "but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:2).

The impotent man admitted that his plight was hopeless. "Someone else gets there before me", he said (v. 7, J.B.). Unconsciously he was confessing that he had no shepherd to lead him and care for him. Those with whom he associated fed "themselves". He therefore remained "lost" and "driven away". No one thought to strengthen this "diseased" man. Others "fouled the waters" whilst caring nothing for the pitiable state of this dispirited individual (Ezek. 34:2,3,4,18).

He was the subject of poverty and disease. And in these respects he personified the Jewish religious temperament with remarkable clarity; for 38 years he had suffered, and had confusedly sought help from an avenue which had consistently proven fruitless. Confounded and nonplussed, it never occurred to him that assistance might come from some other quarter. Thus the Jewish nation, by and large because of lethargy and indifference and blindness of heart, were unprepared for the gospel of the Son of God which he patiently strove to set before them. And they will be found still in that state when they assemble in unbelieving fear, at the return of the Lord, to ask him: "What are these wounds in thine hands?" (Zech. 13:6).

The Jewish nation, like this man, was the subject of

poverty because they were spiritually bankrupt. They suffered disease because they had no answer to the weakness of human nature. But all this will change when the Lord returns and commands the nation to "rise" and cast off their spiritual penury. He will teach them the truth concerning sin and death and the way of escape therefrom.

Like the Jewish nation, this man had a limited vision. He expected to be healed only through being placed in the waters of the pool. But Yahweh provided him with the strength to obey His Son. Similarly, the voice of Jesus Christ has gone forth to bring redemption to suffering humanity. He has called upon men and women to "rise" from the state of weakness in which they would otherwise remain and which would bring them inexorably to the darkness and nothingness of eternal death. The voice of God's Son calls upon "all men everywhere to repent". And Yahweh will provide the necessary strength for all who would exert themselves to obey. Men and women who earnestly desire to be healed from the malaise with which they are afflicted through the weaknesses manifested in human nature have only one course open to them: they must hear the voice of Christ and respond to his call, no matter how weak or enfeebled they may be. "My grace is sufficient for thee" are words of encouragement and exhortation. The message of the gospel is unambiguous: trust in Yahweh, believe and embrace the words of His Son, and walk in the way of the truth. By these means men and women may be cured from the effects of human weakness and be brought in due time to inherit divine nature.

The Lord, then, issued a call to the impotent man which required an active response: "Rise! Take up thy bed, and walk!"

And the man rose.

The call of the gospel should inspire a comparable reaction. Men and women must exert themselves. They must permit Christ to set their feet firmly in the path of the truth. Paul exhorted: "*Walk* as children of light. . . *Arise* from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light . . ." (Eph. 5:8,14). Peter's words were equally direct: "Make *every effort* to be found of him spotless, blameless, and at

peace. . .” (2 Pet. 3:14, T.C.N.T.).

From the human standpoint, how effortlessly the miracle was performed. And how swiftly. If only Israel had learned from this incident that there is a far shorter and more totally efficient way of attaining to sound spiritual health than doggedly pursuing an endless mechanical ritual.

Christ’s words were uttered in the form of a simple and direct command: and the helpless, crippled man recognised that he possessed no capability to rise and walk. But he found himself staring up at the one who would dispense to him the grace of God. He made the attempt; and found that hope and faith were rewarded.

The instruction to “rise”, was virtually the key word in the sign. The implication in the command carries not only a physical connotation but a spiritual one: “Rise from corruptible earthly things to higher spiritual things . . .” This lesson was stressed in words recorded later in the same chapter: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, *and now is*, when the dead shall *hear* the voice of the Son of God, and they that *hear* shall live . . .” (v. 25). In similar language, the apostle Paul wrote: “You hath he quickened, who were *dead* in trespasses and sins . . .” (Eph. 2:1).

“And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked . . .”

The Son of God planted within this man’s mind the will to be made whole. The wretched, anguished man reacted trustingly; and by doing so he identified himself with the will of Christ. He stood upon his feet, then bent to roll up the quilt-like bundle to which he had been effectively shackled for so long. He showed no sign of doubt or disbelief. He acted at Christ’s command and was healed. Joyfully, incredulously, he found himself convicted of a truth which was later to be expressed by the apostle Paul: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. . .” (Phil. 4:13).

But the elation experienced by this man was short-lived. He found himself promptly challenged by the Jews. They said: “It is the sabbath-day. It is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.” The direct words, “it is not lawful” reveal the extent to which the Jews would strenuously condemn that

which they believed to be forbidden. But in so doing they failed to discern that they were straining out a "gnat" whilst swallowing a "camel". Such misguided zeal was due to the fact that they were omitting "the weightier matters of the law", such as "judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matt. 23:23-24). Scrupulous observers of outward ritual, the Jewish religious leaders remained largely untouched by the spirit of the Law they claimed to uphold. The mere practise of external acts of religion do not necessarily indicate that the mind of the individual is being exercised upon that which is being performed. Use of the intellect, or the outworking of faith, may not be present in relation to the ritual of conforming to mechanical commitments. But the Jews remained impervious to these principles of truth.

How was the man to answer, in the face of such intimidation?

"He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk."

This was a carefully considered reply. He reasoned that if the Master had had the power to work so mighty a miracle he surely would have known whether or not the Law of God had been broken. What else could he do but acknowledge his obedience to a man who could perform so prodigious a miracle? His answer, so sublime and without any element of guile, was tantamount to saying: "If you believe the law concerning the Sabbath has been broken, it would be best for you to debate the question with the one who healed me".

The retort from the Jews came in the form of an astonishing question: "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your mat and walk'?" (v. 12, J.B.). These spokesmen for Jewish religious life were more concerned with uncovering the identity of the Healer than with acknowledging the effects of the actual miracle! Spiritually, they remained undiscerning. Rather than investigating the miracle, they occupied themselves in manifesting a smouldering resentment at the apparent infringement of their Law concerning the sabbath. The attitude of these Jews reveals the extent of perversity which men will willingly manifest in opposition to divine truth and wisdom. They refused to candidly

and honestly examine the facts. Their deepseated prejudices caused them to reject an unbiassed appraisal of the evidence which had been placed before them.

A great many people had assembled to silently witness the discourse between the healed man and the Lord's adversaries. In the general crowd, the Lord found little difficulty in surreptitiously removing himself from the scene. His enemies remained temporarily frustrated at being unable to lay hands upon him.

Later, the Lord met the man again. This time he was in the Temple. Why had the healed man gone to the Temple? It is implied that he had gone to offer praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh. He was not lacking in spirituality, as his presence in the House of God surely indicates.

The symbolic significance of this is quite impressive: for 38 years this man had been unable to make his way into the House of God because of his disability. Like Israel of old, who began a new era after a similar period of wandering in the wilderness, this man desired to make a new beginning in his spiritual life. He typifies the nation of Israel who, after acknowledging the healing power of their Messiah at his second coming, will become recipients of spiritual health and will become reconciled to their God. The type is not without its application to these present times. All who will acknowledge the Lord's power to give them spiritual health now and to eventually change the death-stricken nature they now bear, will "rise" and walk "in newness of life".

It should also be observed that in his second confrontation with this man, the Master stressed the lesson he should have learned from his experience: it is just as important to become mentally and morally cleansed as it is to be healed of the physical weaknesses in the flesh. "Thou art made whole: sin no more . . ." To be effectively and lastingly healed by Christ, it is necessary to repudiate sin.

Inevitably, the identity of the Lord was made known to the Jews. It was not that the healed man knowingly betrayed the Son of God; he was so full of wonder at the power which the Lord had manifested that he thought it only right to speak well of his benefactor. And had the Lord not warned him to "sin no more"? But to his amazement and

confusion, his open commendation of the Lord was received by the Jews with a cold fury which erupted into an earnest attempt to murder God's righteous Son. The Jewish religious leaders were indignant at the infringement of their concept of the Law; thus they became determined to destroy this Jesus who was able to heal on the sabbath day. If he was not removed he would influence the people to the point where control over the masses of Jewry would pass from their hands. Thus they remained impervious to the miracle which had been performed. Though they were the religious leaders of Jewry, these men failed to understand that, spiritually, they remained as impotent as the man who had now been healed. They needed to "rise" and take up their beds — spiritually speaking — and walk in the way of the truth. But they were self-satisfied in such matters, and deadened by the slumber of ignorance. Yahweh, as "the house of mercy" could have manifested His grace unto them, through His Son. But they remained totally indifferent. They were scandalized at the conduct of the Lord rather than awed by the tremendous power he had manifested.

Reproachful and virulent, their passion was kindled against the Son of God, bursting into tempestuous violence. They persecuted him, and "sought to slay him . . ." The Greek word which has been rendered "persecuted" (dioko) means to cause to flee, or to pursue after. But it also has the idea of pursuing in a malignant sense (See Bullinger). Which means that, whilst they tried to take the Lord's life, they were determined to ruin his character and undermine his standing with the people. How lamentably they failed to honour the very Law they claimed to uphold: for Moses' Law required that the Lord's claim to be the Son of God should be tested, and the evidence thoroughly examined. But blind bigotry in these men did not permit the light of truth to shine.

In seeking to bring about the Lord's death these men believed themselves to be heartily endorsing the Law of Moses (Exod. 31:15). They thus provided a tragic example of deluded religious zeal. Divine truth cannot be perverted without bringing disaster upon those so deceived. Rather

than humbly seeking the origin of Christ's power, which the Lord exercised for the benefit of mankind, they persecuted him for performing a miracle! They duly paid the price for their folly (Luke 21:20-22).

The most significant feature of the sign is that Christ wrought this miracle on the sabbath. Surely the Lord would have been aware that his actions in this regard would have brought upon him the enmity of the Jews? And there is no question but that this man's case could have waited until the following day. The Lord, therefore, must have quite deliberately chosen the sabbath to demonstrate this particular sign.

The word "sabbath" means "rest" — and whilst the Law required the Jews to cease from their labours on that day, they were to remember God's ceaseless work on man's behalf. After the six days of creation, Yahweh by no means discontinued His activities. On the sabbath, God makes the sun to rise and the earth bring forth its fruits. Yahweh has never suspended control over His creation on the seventh day of the week. He continues to labour unceasingly, and will do so until His purpose is brought to fruition. It is only fitting, then, that the intent of the Son of God should have been in complete harmony with that of his Father. The Son had, in fact, now come into the world to fully co-operate with his Father in the divine objective for the Ages.

"My Father has never yet ceased His work, and I am working too" (v. 17, N.E.B.). If, then, the Jewish religious leaders were to find fault with the Lord's activity of healing a man on the sabbath, they would also have had to condemn the principles by which Yahweh had unremittingly laboured through the centuries, to redeem and restore His creation from the effects of sin. The Jewish concept of the sabbath was restricted to mere formal observances, and therefore failed to recognise the spirit of the Law.

It could not be argued that Christ had broken the sabbath. He had stressed that "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath". Moreover, as Yahweh worked on the sabbath, why should His Son not do likewise? And, in any event, Christ was "Lord" of "the sabbath" (Mark 1:27; John 5:17; Matt. 12:8). He would therefore

correctly interpret how God's laws would or would not be transgressed.

Whilst in verse 16 John records that the Jews "sought to slay" Christ, the eighteenth verse is even more emphatic: a further development had occurred in the Lord's confrontation with these Jews which made them "*even more* intent on killing him" (J.B.). His reference to Yahweh as his "Father" roused the Jews to additional heights of frenzy. They understood that this Jesus of Nazareth was now claiming equality with God. Which, of course, he never did. Rather, he consistently denied such allegations (John 5:19-20; 10:33-34). But his answer to the charge of blasphemy fell upon deaf ears. The influential Jews had become utterly intolerant of him. Impartiality was beyond them. Thus this incident resulted in a tragic turning-point in the life of the Master. From this time onward he became the object of sustained attacks and persecution which continued virtually unabated until the hour of his death.

It would be unwise to conclude a contemplation of this sign without pondering the Lord's words which occur later in this chapter: "Search the scriptures", he warned his adversaries, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life . . ." (v. 39). The sign has revealed that Yahweh was "the house of mercy" Who would provide "grace and restoration" for all who would draw near to Him in the spirit of the truth, through the sacrificial means He had provided. Such men and women would, eventually, be established "in a habitation of peace" for ever. But Yahweh could only manifest His grace in this way to those who would make a careful appraisal of Christ's credentials, and his claim to be the Son of God. Thus, in commenting upon the two key words in this 39th verse ("search" and "think") Bullinger has made the observation that "the Jews *read*, but did not *search*". Their influential leaders gave every appearance of being soberminded scholars, but being motivated by pride in their own achievements, and in the religious dogmas and rituals they had established, they were not genuinely seeking "the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). For this reason, the teaching of Christ did not penetrate the veil of their fleshly, self-centred minds.

THE EIGHT SIGNS OF JOHN

It is fitting that a consideration of the third sign should be concluded with the following comments:

“Let us summarise the Sign of the Impotent Man. His dire state dramatises Jewry’s condition and its need, as it does ours today, thus:

1. The man recognised his need — the Jews did not! Do we?

2. The man had a desire to be cured — the Jews did not recognise that they were spiritually sick! Do we?

3. The man acknowledged his poverty, he had none to help him — the Jews thought they were rich! Do we?

4. The man was strengthened by the word of God — the Jews rejected it! Do we?

5. The man, once healed, sought to proclaim Jesus’ power — the Jews rejected it! How do we act?

The miracle was a sign teaching that the Lord can strengthen us to rise above our weaknesses. Paul recognised this need, and testified to it in the following words: “When I would do good, evil is present with me . . . O wretched man that I am! . . . Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:21-25). “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).

Let us learn the sign of the paralysed man who was made strong, and find in Christ a strength in weakness that will enable us to conquer the flesh” (*Story of the Bible*, H. P. Mansfield; Vol. 8, p. 184).

THE FOURTH SIGN

Feeding the Five Thousand
John 6:1-14

THE PURPOSE TO ISRAEL, NATIONALLY: *Only the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, could provide it with that spiritual food which would enable Yahweh to redeem the nation.*

THE MEANING TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL: *If spiritual Israelites continue to partake of the food which the Lord Jesus has provided, he will sustain them unto life eternal.*

AT the hour of his temptation in the wilderness the Lord had answered his tempter by showing that the making of "stones" into "bread" would not provide the answer to man's needs. "Man shall not live by bread alone", he had said, "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". The Father had sent His Son into the world to become the saviour of humanity and to deliver unto them "the form of sound words" whereby they might be spiritually nourished until the coming of the kingdom (Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 1:13). The foundation principle of the one true faith requires men and women to acknowledge that the Father has provided for the needs of mankind through His Son (John 5:30).

This incident has been recorded in all four gospels (cp. Matt. 14:15-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:11-17).

The death of John the Baptist had recently occurred (Mark 6:27-28). The tragedy had brought sadness and heaviness of heart to the Lord, touching him deeply. The event served as a reminder to him of his own impending death. He now had twelve months of mortal life remaining



to him; for this was the third Passover since the commencement of his ministry (cp. 2:13; 5:1; 6:4).

Exhausted and grave, the Lord felt the need to draw his disciples closer to him for a period of solitude, that they might commune quietly and prayerfully and meditate together (Mark 6:31).

In the company of his disciples, the Lord made his way by boat across the Sea of Galilee to the eastern side, near the area of Bethsaida (Luke 9:14). They came to a quiet and secluded place, not far from Capernaum. "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile" had been his counsel (Mark 6:31). Here was the humble servant of Yahweh — for Mark especially depicted him as such — showing loving consideration and tender sympathy for his friends. He was indicating that there is a need for those who are Servants of God to seek time alone that they might give themselves to quietly ponder and prayerfully deliberate upon their needs and their relationship with their Heavenly Father.

The movements of the Lord and his friends did not, however, pass unnoticed. The people "saw them departing" and "many knew him", or "recognised them" (Mark 6:33, A.V., N.E.B.).

"And a great multitude followed him . . ." (John 6:2). A further example was now recorded of the Son of God fulfilling his responsibilities to God and man, without thought of Self. He had sought to be alone with his closest friends, yet permitted this intrusion by the people because he was "moved with compassion toward them . . ." (Mark 6:34).

He recognised the need of the people. Men and women must be prepared to "follow" the Lord that they might be "fed" with "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Of the word rendered "followed" in this verse, Bullinger suggests that it was particularly used of "soldiers, servants, and pupils". And those who would faithfully follow Christ must become all three.

The northern tip of the Sea of Galilee, looking towards Bethsaida and the hill country where the five thousand were fed — the fourth "sign".

The fact that such a multitude “followed” the Lord indicates that they were not moved by compulsion. God does not force His saving truth upon the unwilling. He must be sought willingly and with the whole heart, in an attitude of submissive trust.

It was close to Passover time — a feast which, since the days of Moses, had typified the coming of the One through whom Yahweh would provide redemption for the human race. John described the Passover as “a feast of the Jews”. It was, of course, a feast of Yahweh. But the Jews had now so corrupted the original teaching concerning the Passover that it was more appropriate to describe it as *their* Feast rather than God’s. This expression also draws attention to the exclusiveness which the Jews associated with their feasts and religious practices. Such a state of affairs, when John wrote his gospel account, was seen to be in direct contrast to the “feast” of the Lord Jesus: the commemorative bread and wine, which was to be received by men of *all* nations, providing they accepted Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of mankind, in the appointed way. Whilst the Passover was a feast “of the Jews”, in Christ there is “neither Jew nor Greek”, for they are “*all* one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). This divine ideal for the salvation of the human race had been embodied in the terms of the Abrahamic covenant: “In thee shall *all* nations of the earth be blessed . . .” (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8-9).

The Lord continued to teach the people “because they were as sheep not having a shepherd” (Mark 6:34). All humanity must inevitably remain in that state, apart from those who learn to follow the “good shepherd” (John 10:14).

The hour became late. The evening sun was sinking behind the hills on the western shore, with dark silver shadows deepening across the Sea. Men and women who learn of the true shepherd’s ability to “feed” them with words of life confess that their lives are waning. They acknowledge that, apart from what Christ is able to do for them, the sun is setting over their lives, as they see the light of mortal life slipping away from them. They learn that except the Sun of Righteousness arise upon them, the long

dark shadows and chills of night will enfold them for all eternity. From those of such a disposition he will withhold no good thing, and will strengthen and sustain them (Mal. 4:2; Psa. 84:11).

The people had become hungry. The need for providing sustenance for the multitude had become alarmingly evident to the disciples. Lack of food saps men of their vitality and exposes the flesh in all its weakness. This principle applies to spiritual "food" as well as to the need for natural nourishment.

What could the disciples do? Their most practical advice was that the people should go and "buy themselves bread" (Mark 6:36).

But the Lord had something more profound in mind. The type of "bread" he was striving to offer the people could not be bought with money (Isa. 55:1).

Men and women must listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, and learn to "hunger and thirst after righteousness". Because if their need is genuine "they shall be filled" (Mat. 5:6). These words indicate that there is a need to maintain a continuing desire to seek after righteousness. Men and women of such a disposition qualify for an especial divine blessing: through their "hunger" and "thirst", they shall eventually find the "righteousness" they seek. Righteousness comes only from God, and His righteousness has been revealed in the perfect character of His Son.

Only John recorded the special conversation which took place between Philip and the Lord (John 6:5-7), although Mark refers to the discussion in a general sense (Mark 6:35-37).

Particular note should be taken of the contrast between the suggestion of the disciples that the people should "buy" food, and the Lord's more positive recommendation that the disciples should "give" the multitude the food they required (Mark 6:36-37). "Give ye them to eat", was the bold challenge issued by the Lord to his disciples. Did they not have the "words of life"? Therefore they were in a position to "feed" the people with spiritual "food" (John 6:68; 17:8). But the disciples were perplexed at the Lord's

words, and failed to understand his meaning.

The Lord put the question to Philip to "prove" him (John 6:6). The basic idea of the Greek word (*peirazo*) is, "to put to the test". The Lord will surely "test" all his followers in this same way. The words the Lord preached constituted the nutritive properties of the spirit-word; so that his life-giving and life-sustaining words are able to maintain men and women in a state of spiritual "health" they would otherwise find impossible to attain unto. Once Believers have reached a sound understanding of the true gospel message, they are in a position to act as mediators through whom the Lord may continue to work among men. They can respond to the Lord's challenging demand: "Give ye them to eat . . ."

The disciples were in a position to "feed" the multitude with spiritual "food"; but they failed to understand the deeper meaning of the Lord's words. It was left to the Son of God to demonstrate to his friends the way in which Yahweh was to be glorified, on this occasion.

Philip could have answered unequivocally: "We have neither the means nor the ability to feed this multitude, but thou hast!" But he did not do so. Yet, in effect, the disciples were forced to admit their inadequacies. All Philip could say was: "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. . . ." This was an enormous sum, in those days; a labourer's hire being worth only one penny for one day (Mat. 20:2).

From whence could the disciples find such an astonishing amount of money to meet the needs of this moment? The position, financially, was quite hopeless.

But the Lord was to demonstrate that *he* could provide for the needs of the people, *through* his disciples; for they were to distribute to the people (v. 11).

Yet, the lesson to be drawn from the financial aspect of the 'sign' should not be lost. Philip's words served as a reminder that the needs of the people could only be met by the payment of a great price. The "price" to be paid was the life of the Son of God (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

The bewilderment of the disciples began to vanish as the Lord took charge of the situation and instructed them as to

what should be done.

He commanded that the people should be seated "by companies" (Mark 6:39), or "in groups" (N.E.B.). It is quite evident that they were seated in anticipation of receiving a substantial meal and not a mere light repast which they could readily have consumed whilst standing.

The disciples carried out the Lord's directive, and arranged the people in such a way that they would face one another to be served from the inside, as was the custom of the day.

But from whence was such a meal to come, to satisfy such a multitude?

The people reclined. And waited.

To such, who come humbly to sit before the Lord, he will freely distribute the "bread" of life (v. 35).

In effect, the people were treated as though they were guests who had been invited to a meal. Thus was represented a type of the Lord's table, and therefore a wonderful picture of men and women sitting together, as the Ecclesia of God, to humbly receive that spiritual "food" which their Lord will provide. "O *taste* and see that Yahweh is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him" (Psa. 34:8; cp. 1 Pet. 2:3).

Only Mark and John record that the multitude were seated "upon the green grass" (Mark 6:39). John was quite explicit: "Now there was much green grass in the place" (6:10). Why such a careful reference to the scene? Rich green grass, in that part of the world, appears only for a short season in the spring, after which the brown earth is largely bare. Green grass is indicative of "fruitful growth" — and the lesson to Israel was that this was the "spring" of Messiah's ministry, and that he would be in their midst for only a short time. His presence would be withdrawn from them. "Behold, the days come, saith Adonai Yahweh, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the *words* of Yahweh . . ." (Amos 8:11).

Mark recorded that, at this point, the Lord "looked up to heaven, and blessed and break . . ." (6:41). How dramatically these words appear as the forerunner of that which he

would state on a later occasion: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body . . ." (Matt. 26:26). As he performed this solemn act on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, crying out to his Father as the light began to fade and the bleak gloom of darkness drew on, his mind was doubtless twelve months hence when, on the last night of his mortal existence, he would institute the Communion by which his disciples — down through the ages — would regularly remember his death.

The five loaves and two fishes, before him at this time, provided a striking symbol for the Lord's coming death.

What was the significance of the five loaves?

Firstly, they represented the Lord — and his teaching — as "the bread of life" which could give eternal "life" (v. 35, 58). "Five" is the Biblical number to represent *grace* and *restoration*. Travelling through the wilderness, the Israelites were taught that "five" was the number of sheckels they were to give, in relation to redemption. Joseph gave Benjamin "five" times more than he gave to his other brethren at the time of their "restoration" to the brother whom they had wronged — a type of Christ. And at the time of Israel's restoration, "five" will chase one hundred enemies. The "five" stones David took from the brook resulted in the defeat and humiliation of Goliath and the Philistines. Thus, through the perfect life and sacrificial death of Christ, we are able to find "grace" and become "restored" to our Creator (Num. 18:16; Gen. 43:34; Lev. 26:8; 1 Sam. 17:40).

The symbolic significance of the two fishes is also important. Archaeologists have discovered that a secret sign used by first-century Believers was that of the fish. It has been suggested that the sign became commonly used in some parts of the world because of the first Greek letter in the word "Christ" — "X". By linking one end of this letter with a semi-circular line, the letter was given the appearance of a fish. But there is something even more significant: The five letters constituting the word "fish" in Greek provide the initial letters for the five words, "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour".

The linking together of fish, or meat, with bread has numerous important connotations. There is surely a reminder of the food miraculously produced in the wilderness: manna in the morning and quail at even. Christ is both bread and meat which "endureth unto everlasting life" (v. 27, 35, 55). "Two" is the Biblical number to denote *difference*. On the second day of creation a *division* of the firmament took place. It is interesting to compare the usage of the word "double" in relation to the "heart", "mind", "tongue", etc. The linking together of the "five" loaves with "two" fishes is therefore not without implication. Whilst the former number indicates that God will extend to us the hope of receiving "grace" and "restoration", the latter number serves as a reminder that in accepting or rejecting the conditions God has established for the salvation of men and women, only *two* decisions are possible: either compliance and obedience, or repudiation and disobedience. In the day when this dramatic 'sign' was manifested, the decision was one which was to be made by the people of Israel. Today, that choice rests largely with us. Whom will we serve? Christ? Or the flesh?

The fact that there were "two" fishes also draws attention to the two-fold origin of those who will ultimately be redeemed: for they shall be drawn from Israel and the Gentiles. This idea was firmly established in the prophecy of Zechariah, in the vision of the *two* olive trees, through which would be manifested the light of divine truth (Zech. 4:1-3; cp. Rom. 11:17-20).

Barley loaves and fishes provided the staple diet of the poorer classes in the days of Christ. The symbology is thus most apt to represent the needs of those who are "poor" spiritually (cp. Mat. 5:3; Isa. 61:1-2). Barley was associated with the Mosaic ritual (Num. 5:11-31, etc.). It provided the lowliest variety of flour. It was the barley harvest which provided the "firstfruits" offering, typifying the resurrection of Christ as the "firstfruits" of those raised from the dead. The Passover came too early in the year for wheat to be sufficiently ripe for harvesting, so the first of the corn harvest was always the barley, an earlier ripening grain. In anti-type, Christ — like the barley — was the firstfruits of a

greater and more far-reaching harvest.

The scene, then, was set for the performance of the miracle.

Earlier, the Lord had told his disciples: "I have food to eat of which you know nothing" (John 4:32, N.E.B.). He was now to show them a type of "food" they had not yet learned to fully appreciate. In the third 'sign' the Lord had healed by giving strength; now, he was to strengthen by providing food.

"And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would" (John 6:11).

All who gathered before the Lord at this time, to be sustained, received exactly the same food, whether they were men or women, young or old. Such is the gospel which Christ taught. There is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5), and therefore only one message which carries the power of salvation. All must "eat" of this one faith if they wish to be redeemed. The Lord will provide us with spiritual food which is able to sustain us unto life eternal, but we must "eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood" (v. 53). This command is not related directly to the Lord's communion, introduced to the disciples in the upper room; at this time it more fittingly applied to the need for men and women to absorb the teaching and character of the Son of God into their lives. It is necessary to know intimately "all the heart" and "all the life" and "all the mind" of Christ, so that these qualities may be manifested and imitated by his disciples (Matt. 22:37). The goodness embodied in the food we eat becomes a part of us, the effect of its goodness permeating the entire body, giving strength to the arm, vision to the eye, building up and renewing the physical body in so many different ways. And so it must also be in a spiritual sense, when feeding upon the spiritual food provided by the Son of God. The teaching and character of Christ must become a living part of the life of every Believer.

It is not without significance that the food was "distributed" through the disciples (Gk. *diadidomi*, from *dia*,

"through" and didomi, "to give"). After the ascension of the Lord into heaven, the Bread of Life was still distributed to all who would "eat" of it, through the activities of the disciples. On the day of Pentecost, the word of the gospel was preached for the first time "in the name" of Jesus Christ.

The power of the miracle was witnessed by all present. They saw the five small loaves divided many, many times, until there were sufficient pieces to feed a great multitude. Similarly, through the sacrifice of the Son of God, the Body of Christ has been multiplied. The mystical, multitudinous Body came into existence, and has continued to increase numerically, through the ages.

All the needs of the people were fully provided for. "They had as much as they wanted . . ." (N.E.B.). There will be no shortage of that which the Lord has provided to sustain his people unto life eternal. They need never go short of spiritual food. Should they do so, the lack will be due to their own indifference, not to any dearth of supply on the Lord's part.

The people having been filled, the Lord issued a further command to his disciples: "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost".

The fact that so much remained provided further, unmistakeable proof as to the reality and veracity of the miracle. This instruction has been omitted in the other gospel accounts of this miracle. John's account, therefore, stressed the full import of one of the major aspects of the 'sign': there will be ample spiritual food for all who desire to be filled with the teaching of Christ, yet no such food shall be wasted. The bountiful goodness of a Loving Heavenly Father is not to be treated lightly, or squandered thoughtlessly. Yahweh, though generous to all who seek Him, guards His Word jealously. And He will call to account all who have been blessed to partake of the goodness of His blessings.

The fact that the remains of the feast "filled twelve baskets" is of some consequence. These were wicker baskets, a different word being used here to that used in relation to the feeding of the 4,000 on a different occasion

(Matt. 15:37; Mark 8:4). It is almost certain that each of these wicker baskets was owned by one of the twelve disciples. And this illuminates a major point of significance: the disciples had permitted others to be fed with that which they might originally have anticipated putting to their own personal use. Thus, in sacrificing for others they were not the losers. In fact, by declining to commandeer these meagre items for themselves, and willingly permitting the Lord to share them with others, the disciples had gained much more than they had possessed at the beginning. This principle, of God rewarding those who sacrifice for others, had been clearly established long before: "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Prov. 11:24-25).

The number "twelve" is readily identifiable as the number for *government* and a symbolic number to represent the united tribes of Israel. Thus, in this number there is discernible the formation of the true spiritual Israel, to be revealed in glory in the Age to Come.

By linking together the verses describing the feeding of the people (vv. 11-13) with the message of v. 27, the full meaning of the 'sign' is explained: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you . . ." Such "meat", unquestionably, is the spiritual food, or teaching, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The reaction of the people, to the performance of this wondrous miracle, was not surprising. "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (v. 14).

Their reference to Deut. 18:15-19 was understandable. The similarity between the giving of the Manna in the days of Moses, and the Lord's feeding of this multitude, caused the people to equate a parallel.

It is sobering and sad to observe that this 'sign' concluded upon a note of stark tragedy. The people, on the basis of their understanding of the words of Moses, ack-

nowledged that the Lord must have been their Messiah. Yet, how superficial was their recognition. "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled . . ." (v. 26). They identified him with the promise made by Moses, from a purely carnal conviction. The miracle which Christ had wrought provided clear evidence that he had been sent by God. And therefore the people should have sought him upon a higher spiritual plane than the mere gratification of their fleshly desires.

The Lord urged the people to examine their consciences (v. 27). Had they pondered this event from a spiritual motive they would have desired to learn more concerning his mission to the nation. But they failed to do so. They followed him only because they were stimulated by physical craving. They saw only the loaves and the fishes, and not the power which had transformed those modest items into sufficient abundance to feed a multitude.

The power in Yahweh's word could have caused the people to glorify God in their lives. But they were not prompted by spiritual ideals.

Christ told them that "God the Father" had "sealed" him; or, had "set the seal of His authority" upon the Son (v. 27, A.V., N.E.B.). There could be no question but that the Lord's miracles attested convincingly that the seal of divine approval rested fully upon him. Therefore the words which he taught should have found a ready acceptance in the hearts and minds of the people.

For a time the people listened in silence as the Son of God strove to explain to them the significance of what they had seen the previous day. And, for a brief moment, it would seem, they made a conscious effort to respond to the challenge of his words. "What shall we do", they asked, "that we might work the works of God?" (v. 28). The Lord immediately noted their deeply ingrained concept of attaining to salvation through the works of law.

He answered their query by telling them clearly that the "work" of God which they should endeavour to perform was to exercise *faith*. "This is the work of God, that ye *believe* on him whom He hath sent . . ."

THE EIGHT SIGNS OF JOHN

In short, the true food which he had to offer was himself. And they were to learn from the lesson of nature: firstly, that the act of eating is an individual matter, something which no one else can do for us; and secondly, that the desire to eat is an experience governed solely by need and appetite. Salvation is an individual matter. They needed to develop a hunger for things which are eternal.

Would they determine the real import in these words, so graciously addressed to them?

They had acknowledged that Moses' words of prophecy had been fulfilled: "This is *of a truth* that prophet that should come into the world . . ." (v. 14). But they did not determine a clear comprehension concerning the purpose of his mission to them. A calamitous end for the nation was thus inevitable.

A similarly disastrous state is evident in christendom, as we draw nearer to "the time of the end".

In this present age, Christ's appeal reaches out to individuals, as it did on that hillside, so long ago. Will men and women learn to "hunger and thirst after righteousness"? If they do so, and seek their Creator "in spirit and in truth", they "shall be filled".

THE FIFTH SIGN

Christ calms the Sea
John 6:15-21

THE PURPOSE TO ISRAEL, NATIONALLY: *To show that Yahweh has the power to redeem it, and that all laws are subject to His will.*

THE MEANING TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL: *To demonstrate that God, through Christ, will care for such, bringing consolation and comfort amid the storms of life.*

ONE of the shortest of John's eight 'signs', the fifth must certainly rate as one of the most dramatic. The picture presented is that of raging, turbulent seas, and men struggling for their lives against the elements. The disciples are depicted as experiencing the terror and panic of contemplating near-certain death by drowning. But the final scene is one of peace and tranquility, as their Lord and Master conquered the forces which would have destroyed his friends, and brought them unharmed to a haven of safety and refuge.

The fourth and fifth signs are significantly linked. The day was "far spent" (Mark 6:35). The people had been fed and the Lord had, symbolically, offered himself as a sacrifice for the people. Having accomplished these things "he departed" (John 6:15). This process of events was to be literally followed, in due course of time: the Lord "fed" the people with the word of Truth and instituted the commemorative emblems of bread and wine by which his disciples were to remember his death "until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16). Then, having been raised from death to life eternal, he ascended to the right



hand of his Father.

The typical significance of these developments has been further stressed in the link between the fourth and fifth signs, in that he "departed . . . into a mountain" whilst his disciples toiled upon the Sea — a type of his absence in heaven whilst his brethren travail through the storms of life amidst the "sea" of nations.

After the performance of the miracle which had resulted in the feeding of the 5,000 the multitude reacted decisively and adamantly. The Lord very quickly understood their mood. He saw that they would "come and take him by force, to make him a king" (v. 15). An atmosphere of seething enthusiasm was soon generated among the crowd. And nowhere is it suggested that the disciples offered any resistance to the headstrong eagerness of the people to make their Master a king. In fact, Mark recorded that the Lord "*constrained* his disciples to get into the ship". Perhaps they became caught up in the general excitement of the moment. The scene certainly provided an impressive lesson to all disciples throughout the ages: they must always be governed by an intellectual appreciation of the principles of the Truth, and never permit the emotion of the moment to rule them.

With the performance of the fourth 'sign' the Lord's ministry reached its zenith, so far as the people were concerned. From this time onward his popularity began to decline. One of the prime reasons for this would have been a realisation on the part of the masses that the Lord rejected the heights of materialistic fame which the people desired him to pursue. He was, in short, beginning to disappoint the people — in much the same way as he had disappointed his tempter in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). The multitudes, as they listened to the Son of God and observed his exercise of miraculous power, envisaged him calling upon even greater manifestations of power and leading them in warfare against the Romans that the kingdom of Israel might become re-established in all its

Christ calms the sea — the fifth "sign". The Sea of Galilee is susceptible to sudden, unexpected squalls that churn up the waves and make sailing dangerous.

ancient glory. But the Lord remained completely aloof from such political objectives. He failed to respond to the ambitious demands which his people would have made upon him.

Rather than reacting favourably to the wishes of the people, the Lord sought absolute privacy that he might commune with his Father in prayer. This action on his part teaches a profound lesson: the praises and esteem of men mean very little to a spiritually-minded man, whose first consideration is to serve Yahweh in all humility. Throughout his life the Lord remained totally dedicated to one objective only: self-sacrificing obedience to the will of his Father. And in that regard, he was fully aware of the enormous dangers involved in trying to remain committed to such an aim, whilst at the same time becoming ambitious in things pertaining to this present life. He avoided the pitfalls by keeping Yahweh "always" before him. For this reason he was never "moved" from the course his Father had set before him (Psa. 16:8). He appreciated that all the honours this world could heap upon men are nothing compared with the wondrous joy and peace of mind which may be experienced when all things which are out of harmony with the divine mind are shut out of one's life, and God reigns supreme in the heart of the individual. This was the mind of the apostle Paul: "All that was gain to me, for Christ's sake I have reckoned as loss. Nay, I even reckon all things as pure loss because of the priceless privilege of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of everything, and reckon it all as mere refuse, in order that I may win Christ . . ." (Phil. 3:7-8, Wey.).

Had the Lord accepted the veneration which the people were prepared to thrust upon him, he would have set aside the purpose the Father had determined for him, and he would have become subject to the human weaknesses of pride, arrogance, and vain-glory. He avoided all such possibilities. His principle for life was profound yet sublime: "How precious also are *thy thoughts* unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" (Psa. 139:17). And again: "There is *none* upon earth that I desire beside thee . . ."

(Psa. 73:25).

Thus, he had "constrained" his disciples to board their vessel and set off across the sea, whilst he departed "into a mountain himself alone" — and Mark added, "to pray" (John 6:15; Mark 6:46). This aspect of the 'sign' features a sobering element of symbology. "No man hath ascended up to heaven", except the Son of God (John 3:13). He has risen from the earth and passed into the presence of his Father. And during his absence his disciples are striving to remain "afloat" on the sea of life. From his position at the right hand of the Father, the Lord observes the struggles of his brethren and is not impervious to their needs and their travails. He is not indifferent to the trials of Yahweh's suffering saints, as this 'sign' so clearly demonstrated.

It was of no small consequence that this 'sign' occurred at "even" (John 6:16). This represented the beginning of the Age of Gentile darkness when "the light of the world" would no longer be seen upon earth (John 9:4-5). During his absence there would be a long period in which Believers would become enshrouded in the "dark" of a Gentile environment, hostile to the Truth (v. 17). But, from generation to generation, they are to take heart in the sure and certain knowledge that eventually the Lord will return, to save them — as he did in this fifth 'sign'.

The destination for which the disciples were bound was the city of Capernaum — which means "city of consolation", and therefore provides an apt symbol for the Kingdom of God. All Christ's faithful brethren are striving earnestly to reach that "city". And in due time, if they "faint not", and persevere resolutely and determinedly until the Lord's coming, they will be brought to that "city of consolation" whose "builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

The disciples in the vessel, crossing the treacherous Sea of Galilee, did not find their journey effortless or without complications. On the contrary, their progress was fraught with every conceivable danger associated with the sea and the elements. And such is the lot of all who press forward towards the Kingdom of God.

The "seas" are a symbol for peoples and nations (Isa. 17:12; 57:20; Rev. 17:15).

THE EIGHT SIGNS OF JOHN

Once embarked upon their journey, the disciples found that the "sea arose" and the "wind blew" (v. 18), indicative of an environment hostile to the well-being of God's servants. The "wind blowing" represented the insidious, destructive influence of the doctrines of men in contrast to the commandments of Christ, and they serve as a symbol for one of the greatest dangers confronting God's saints; for such an element as a strong doctrinal wind may well blow the unprepared disciple "off course" from their intended haven, so that they "miss" their destination and eventually find that they do not arrive at the Kingdom of God (Eph. 4:14, cp. v. 13). Faith in Yahweh, together with the qualities of courage and determination, will prove to be the only effective counter to the evil winds of false doctrine and philosophy, which "blow" continually upon the "sea" of nations. But even then the Believers will not attain to their destination apart from the help that Christ is able to render; not only as an intercessor with the Father but also in his actual coming, to deliver and redeem them. It is evident that the disciples would have been shipwrecked and destroyed apart from Christ's help; and so it is also in the every-day affairs of life (Matt. 11:28; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 2:12; 1 Tim. 1:9).

Faced with such perilous and difficult circumstances, John stated that it was "dark" and "Jesus was not come to them . . ." — or, "Jesus had *not* yet joined them" (Wey.). The wording appears to indicate that they were anticipating his coming! And although the saints of God, down through the ages, have been called upon to embark upon the "sea" of spiritual life in the absence of the Lord's literal and physical presence they have nevertheless set off upon their "journey" firm in the conviction that he would eventually return to them.

The Sea of Galilee was noted for sudden, violent storms, which would strike without warning. Almost magically, howling winds would whip the waves into a foaming frenzy. The safety and well-being of small craft were gravely endangered under such tempestuous conditions.

Thus, in spite of being without the Lord's presence, the disciples had "rowed" their boat (v. 19). The lesson is

clear: they gave themselves wholeheartedly to their responsibilities, labouring diligently and fervently, in expectation of his coming.

They rowed because the winds were too wild and violent to risk the use of sails. But no matter how hard they strove, the men in the boat made little progress (Mark 6:48). The storm shrieked and thundered all around them. The boat was lifted and tossed and hurled about, upon the raging sea. And fear clutched at the hearts of the disciples.

Their voyage was to cover a distance of only six or seven miles. About seven and a half Jewish furlongs equalled one mile, so they had covered a distance of not more than about four miles. In view of the width of the Sea at that point, they were almost literally in the midst of the Sea. But after some nine hours they had progressed only a relatively short distance, and they began to despair of ever reaching their "city of consolation".

A further compelling lesson had now to be learned by the disciples: although their trials were great and the difficulties fearsome, relief did not come to them speedily. There can be no doubt that the Lord could have provided immediate aid to his struggling friends. They were thus to learn — as must all Believers — that the storms and tempests of life must be borne with unwavering faith, courage, and determination. Until the Lord appears.

It was not until the "fourth watch" that the Lord came to help them (Matt. 14:25; Mark 6:48). No mention has been made in the Old Testament concerning "four" watches, for the Jews had devised only three. The Romans divided their watches into four: 6 to 9 p.m., 9 p.m. to midnight, midnight to 3 a.m., and 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. It was therefore between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. — just before the dawn — that the Lord came walking upon the sea towards the disciples.

Fatigued and apprehensive, still fearing for their lives, the disciples were distressed and dispirited at the plight in which they found themselves. The wind still shrieked and howled, singing crazily through the rigging of the ship; and the raging sea hurled mountainous waves at the vessel, foaming white caps being whipped from the surface and carried away by the wind. The men struggling helplessly

within the boat would have been soaked with spray and numbed by cold and fear.

Then they saw the Lord "walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship . . ." The fact that the disciples were able to "see" him approaching indicates that light of a new day was beginning to appear — a wonderful type, for it will be at the end of the long night of Gentile darkness and at the dawn of the new millennial day that the Lord will appear to effect the salvation of his brethren (2 Sam. 23:3-5; Psa. 110:3; Isa. 60:2; Mal. 4:2). As the light of the new Messianic day begins to diffuse the political horizon, the Lord will be seen, walking upon the "sea" of nations, exerting his power and his will over them, and going forth for the deliverance of those who have served him "in spirit and in truth" (Hab. 3:12-13; Rev. 10:1-2; 11:15, cp. Job 9:8).

The Lord had spent most of the night communing with his Father in prayer, whilst the disciples strove for survival against the fury of the sea. Again, the symbology is quite clear: at the present time — and continuing until his Father sends him back to the earth — the Son of God acts as the Mediator between God and men (Psa. 110:1; 1 Tim. 2:5).

The disciples in the boat found it difficult to believe the evidence of their own eyes. John stated: "they were afraid . . ." Matthew and Mark used the same word, stating that the disciples were "troubled". And so it shall be at the coming of the Lord, when his followers are called to assemble in his presence for judgment. Those gathered at that time will appreciate the principle stated by Paul: "No *flesh* shall glory in his presence . . ." (1 Cor. 1:29). A well-known Christadelphian hymn is adequately expressive of the emotional feelings which Christ's brethren and sisters will experience at that time:

"Go, meet him as he cometh,
With joy if yet with fear . . ."

So far as true Believers are concerned, when contemplating the Judgment Seat of Christ it is necessary that they avoid the two extremes current in "Christian" thinking: the one suggests that the Believer is virtually already saved, and will therefore boldly go forth to meet the Lord that he might be suitably rewarded. The other is an outlook moti-

vated by a sense of personal failure, to the point where there is such a complete sense of deficiency that the individual is fully persuaded that he will be rejected by Christ.

Neither of these positions represent sound, scripturally-based reasoning. Salvation is a continuing process ("For the preaching of the cross is to them that *are perishing* foolishness; but unto us which *are being saved* it is the power of God . . . Ye *are being saved* if ye hold fast what I preached unto you . . ." 1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2, lit. Gk.). But it will not be revealed whether this process has been satisfactorily completed until the individual stands before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Brother Robert Roberts warned: "Self-congratulation is a dangerous luxury on the part of either individuals or communities. Be thankful for privileges and attainments, but make no boast."

Job said: "I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." And upon that statement, brother Roberts commented: "Here we have one of the first principles of the kingdom of heaven. Remember who Job was. God said of him, 'There is none like him in the earth, an upright man that feareth God and escheweth evil.' Yet he says, 'I abhor myself in dust and ashes.' He had just had a glimpse of the divine majesty, and as in the similar case of Daniel (10:8) all his beauty in him turned to corruption. He was overpowered by the sense of the inferiority and uncleanness of human nature created within him by his vision of the glory of the divine nature. Now, though we are not permitted to see this glory with the eye, we have so much recorded pertaining to it, that with due attention to what is written, we may easily attain the same profound sense of worthlessness and insignificance. We must attain to this if we are to enter the kingdom of God . . . It is written, the *fear of the Lord* is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of the Lord produces a strong sense of self-abasement where it is effectual . . . The mind that is equal to the grasping of the glory of God will readily feel the dishonour of man. This sentiment is the first characteristic of the family of God."

Yet, at the same time, this spirit must not lead to

defeatism. As the disciples learned in those cold, dangerous, early-morning hours upon the sea, it is needful for disciples to develop an implicit faith in God's willingness and ability to save them. A disposition in which rejection has already been assumed to be inevitable is virtually a declaration of God's inability to save us. So brother Roberts counselled: "If we come short in this matter . . . let us not give way to dejection and hopelessness. Let us rather take courage from the other fact exemplified . . . in all the scriptures continually — that 'there is forgiveness with God.' 'He that confesseth his sins and forsaketh them shall have mercy'." (*Seasons of Comfort* pp. 134, 101, 103).

The disciples eventually learned the power of these divine principles. After the Lord had brought them deliverance from the mighty elements, they became more fully aware of the inadequacy and weakness of human nature. Ultimately, they knew that the Lord had come to save them as an act of divine mercy, and not due to any special merit on their part. They were not to "boast" of their "works", but rather to humbly acknowledge the loving grace of Almighty God as manifested through His Son (Eph. 2:8-9).

However, it took time for them to appreciate that their entire faith was to be based upon an understanding of "the fear of Yahweh".

The disciples stared out from the boat with unbelieving eyes. In the indistinct light of the early morning, with misty vision and against a background of leaden skies, they could see the form of a man. They were terrified. What man could walk upon the waters of a tempestuous sea?

Then they recognised their Lord.

With his calm, clear voice he addressed them, his words carrying unmistakeably above the shrieking of the wind and the roaring of the sea.

"It is I. Be not afraid . . ."

Peter cried out to the Lord, shouting to make himself heard above the thunder of the storm. "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water!" To which the Lord responded with a single word of command: "Come!"

Characteristically, Peter rushed forward, clambering out of the ship. He acted rashly and incautiously, with more

zeal than thoughtfulness. He gave little thought to the fact that the Lord's faith far outweighed his own; nor did he consider the limitations of his own faith at that point in time.

Peter began boldly enough, but soon wavered. He certainly had faith, else he would never have made such an attempt. But he learned, in a most humiliating way, that his faith was no match for that of the Son of God. He suddenly found himself dependent upon the power which his Lord could exercise to save him. He discovered that he was unable to meet his Master upon the water as an equal.

The brave yet impetuous disciple found himself beginning to sink beneath the turbulent waves. In an agony of terror, he cried out: "Lord! Save me!" (Matt. 14:30).

It would be most unwise for any weak and erring man to condemn Peter for his fallibility at that time. His sudden exhibition of frailty symbolised the feeble infirmities of the flesh experienced by all Christ's disciples. Where will the Lord's disciples stand at the Judgment Seat? Who shall feel justified when called to come before the presence of the Son of God? Will not every disciple, of true and humble disposition, cry out — like Peter upon the sea — "Lord! Save me!"? Peter should not be looked upon disparagingly for his humiliating performance on this occasion, for he typified every Believer, in his weakness and dependence upon the greater power and strength of God's righteous Son.

The angry sea, as previously stated, symbolised the nations. The lesson was obvious: in spite of weaknesses and failures, true disciples must not doubt or lose faith, or they may sink eternally among the sea of nations. The pressures and enticements of an evil and Godless environment must not be permitted to undermine and destroy the faith of Yahweh's servants. With the eye of faith, they must continue to gaze steadfastly upon their Lord, refusing to permit their vision of the coming glory to become clouded by a corrupt environment which would otherwise seduce them from the path of true faithfulness.

In spite of this moment of weakness, Peter had integrity in the Lord's eyes. Peter loved the Lord, and would learn to

devote his life in humble service to the Son of God. And as Christ "knew what was in man" he could correctly read the heart of Peter, and so put forth his hand to save him and bring him safely into the boat (John 2:25). Yet Peter was not saved without receiving a suitable rebuke from his Lord: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31).

Peter was saved — but "scarcely" (1 Pet. 4:18). The Lord's invitation to Peter to "come" and join him upon the sea was no doubt intended to impress upon Peter his own weakness. He was to learn that he could not presume that he would be able to walk unaided to the kingdom. There can be little doubt that Peter was a competent swimmer (John 21:7). But he now learned that human merit or resources will not assist the man or woman whose faith fails.

His safety threatened, Peter found himself revealed in weakness. Thus, when the Lord stretched forth his hand to his perishing friend, all elements of self-confidence vanished from Peter's mind. Thankfully, humbly, he acknowledged the Lord's divinely-given saving power. And so it will be with all who are delivered, once and for all, at the Judgment Seat.

Peter learned the joyous feeling of being delivered through surrendering his will to the Son of God. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Yahweh. Lord, hear my voice . . ." (Psa. 130:1-2, R.V.).

"It is I; be not afraid . . ." are words from the lips of the Lord which must be remembered by all Believers, during their experiences of the trials and tribulations of life. In spite of Peter's weakness — and because of it — the Lord extended a firm hand and held him up and guided him safely into the boat. The Lord is faithful. And he has the power and the willingness to reach out and save all who cry out to him, in the spirit of the truth: "Lord! Save me!"

The disciples in the vessel now fully recognised the Lord. And they "willingly received him into the ship . . ." This brief expression contains two impressive lessons for Believers in every age. The first is that the Son of God does not force himself upon men. They must accept him willing-

ly and humbly. “*Choose* you this day whom ye will serve . . . Therefore *choose* life, that both thou and thy seed may live . . .” (Josh. 24:15; Deut. 30:19). Men and women must be disposed to acknowledge their need of Christ and his saving power. “Whosoever shall *call on* the name of Yahweh shall be saved . . .” (Joel 2:32; cp. Acts 2:21; 1 Cor. 1:2). The second point to be taken from this statement will be appreciated when it is observed that the phrase may be more literally rendered: “they *willed* him into the ship . . .” This represents not only their action, but the desire of their hearts. They earnestly and gladly wished for the Lord’s presence among them. And such will be the disposition of all who, down through the Ages, have longed for the coming of the Just One, being assured that he would deliver them from their fears and trials, calm and comfort them and bring them safely to the haven of the kingdom.

The disciples in the boat typified the joyful saints who will learn one day that their Lord has come, to terminate their warfare against the forces of sin and to deliver them into his kingdom. They will reach their sanctuary, and the approved saints will experience an elation such as they have never known.

There is a power in the universe great enough to overcome the weaknesses inherent in human nature. It is a power which emanates from the One Eternal Spirit, self-styled Yahweh Elohim of Israel, “He Who Will Be Mighty Ones of Israel”. The Creator was also known as “El Shaddai” — “The Strength of Powerful Ones”. He will provide the strength which is able to transform men and women into Mighty Ones and Powerful Ones, because they will become manifestations of what He now is and always has been. The process of drawing upon this power begins with an intellectual enlightenment concerning the Truth of His revealed word. Thus the development towards perfection begins with a change in the mental processes, so that the individual learns to think in harmony with Yahweh. The operation of the power of the Word then begins to work when the new-found intellectual understanding is converted into spiritual and moral actions. Thus, the pattern of the divine characteristics begins to ripen and mature in those

who have been called to become sons and daughters of the Living God.

Men and women who have been moved by these truths, to respond to the saving power which Yahweh has extended through His Son, will be of a disposition to "willingly receive" the Lord at his return, and to "will" that he should return as speedily as his Father will permit. This is an attitude of mind which reflects a longing for the bringing to fruition of the divine purpose: that "all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh" (Num. 14:21; Psa. 72:19).

Thus it is not surprising that this 'sign' concluded upon a note of triumph and victory. After the Lord joined his disciples in the vessel, "immediately the ship was at the land whither they went". Some have interpreted this statement to mean that a further miracle occurred to transport the men and their boat to their destination. But this assumption is not necessary. Bullinger points out that the Greek word (*eutheos*) also means "directly" or "forthwith". The word has been derived from an adjective which means "straight" so that the implication of the word is, simply, that there was no further delay. All impediments to the disciples arriving unhindered at their destination had now been removed; and in the company of their Master they arrived at the "city of consolation". And so far as God's faithful saints are concerned, the labours they have wrought in struggling to survive upon the "sea" of nations will come to an end when they are united in the physical presence of their Lord and King.

The disciples finally arrived at their destination, safe and sound. And so it shall be in the future. Christ will return; for his faithful brethren the storms of life will be stilled for ever, and they will all rejoice together in the Kingdom of God.

The fifth 'sign' was followed by a significant sequel. The next morning, baffled and bewildered, the multitude began to search for the Lord and his disciples (Vv. 22-24). The events typified those subsequent to Christ's return. For, at his coming the responsible dead will be raised and those "which are alive and remain" shall be caught away to "be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:14-17). The saints who are alive in the day of Christ's return will therefore suddenly be

removed from their normal daily environment. Their contemporaries will be puzzled at the sudden disappearance of Christ's brethren, and will search for them. And as was the case in this incident involving the Lord and his disciples who "disappeared" in the ship, those who search for Christ's brethren after the Lord's return will search in vain. But only for a time. In the sequel to the fifth 'sign' the people eventually "found" the Son of God and his disciples "on the other side of the sea" (v. 25). Similarly, after the saints have been arraigned before Christ for judgment, they will go forth to manifest themselves to the nations. Thus, those mortals who, in that day, are prepared to "search" for the Lord — in a spiritual sense — will surely "find" him, as did this multitude, so long ago. And they shall find the Truth; not upon the "sea" of nations, but on "the other side of the sea". Many mortals, shocked and stunned at the extent of the divine judgments at Christ's return, will be moved to seek their Creator. "Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity and things wherein there is no profit" (Jer. 16:19). With the coming of the new millennial "day" the Lord will be sought and found by many survivors among the nations, who will become incorporated into his kingdom as his mortal subjects.

The fifth 'sign' therefore concluded upon a note which emphasised the triumph of faith. In contrast to the storms of life, upon which man remains helpless if left only to his own resources, there will come a time of peace and well-being and tranquility for all who are prepared to place their trust and confidence in the Mighty Creator and his glorious Son.

In that day many will express the fervent prayer: "For Thou, O God, hast heard my vows: Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy Name . . ." (Psa. 61:5).



THE SIXTH SIGN

Curing The Blind Man
John 9

THE PURPOSE TO ISRAEL, NATIONALLY: *To show that sound spiritual vision is more important than physical sight; and that only the Messiah has been given the power to enable Israelites to discern the Truth and heal their ills.*

THE MEANING TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL: *To show that Christ will graciously open the eyes of believers to the full richness of the Truth.*

THE sixth sign presents an account of the Lord's meeting with a man who had been blind from his birth. His life had been pitiable and his future appeared to be hopeless. In view of the sad and pathetic spiritual condition of Israel, as revealed in John's previous 'signs', the blind man of the sixth 'sign' stood before the Lord as an appropriate person to symbolise the nation of Israel.

The Jews, like the man in this sign, had been "blind" from "birth", in that their fathers had failed to enlighten them and educate them in an understanding of the Truth. By and large, the greater part of the nation had remained spiritually blind since the birth of the kingdom, which might properly be said to have been in the days of Moses (Exod. 19:5-6). Moses had warned that terrible judgments from Yahweh would come upon the nation if divine Truth was not respected by the nation. "Yahweh shall smite thee with madness, and *blindness* and astonishment of heart . . ." (Deut. 28:28). It is evident that the powerful adjectives used

The Pool of Siloam showing the entrance to Hezekiah's tunnel. Here the blind man was told to wash his eyes as a basis for the sixth "sign".

by Moses were to be understood in a symbolic as well as a literal sense. The word for "blindness" has been used figuratively elsewhere in Scripture: Isa. 42:7,19; Lam. 4:14; Zeph. 1:17, etc.

There can be little doubt that the wondrous miracle performed by the Lord in this sign was in direct fulfilment of the remarkable prophecy recorded in Isaiah's 42nd chapter. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold! . . . I Yahweh have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to *open the blind eyes* . . . And I will bring *the blind* by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known . . . Hear, ye deaf; and *look, ye blind*, that ye may see!" (Isa. 42:1,6,7,16, 18).

Had Israel understood this prophecy they would have received their Messiah in the spirit of the Truth. Isaiah had described the One who was to come as being gentle and non-violent (v. 3), and therefore the very antithesis of the type of hero-warrior-Messiah the Jews had come to expect. His mission, Isaiah also stressed, was to be sacrificial (v. 6). Through the sacrifice of Messiah, a covenant could be made between Yahweh and His people (cp. Isa. 49:8; 53:10). But in the time of Christ, the Jewish concept of a Saviour, at very best, was that they were "hoping that he was the coming deliverer of Israel . . ." That is, as a powerful King-warrior (Luke 24:21, T.C.N.T.).

He was certainly the promised Saviour and Deliverer. But not, at that time, in a military or political sense.

The scriptures made these aspects of his first advent perfectly clear. And one of the most significant features of Isaiah's 42nd chapter was the manner in which he contrasted the *singular* "servant" (Christ) — who would accomplish all that his Father set before him, with the *national* servant — the people of Israel (v. 18), who would remain both "deaf" and "blind" to the message of the One who would come to give them spiritual "sight" and spiritual "hearing" (cp. Prov. 4:18-19).

In presenting himself to his nation as the One able to cure their spiritual blindness, the Lord Jesus informed

them that it was necessary for him to work "while it is day" for "the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4). In this respect, "night" indicated more than the period of Gentile supremacy; it also had the important significance of that period in Jewish history when there should be no open vision to the people of Israel (Micah 3:6; cp. Isa. 60:20).

In the same verse the Lord affirmed the necessity for him to do the works of the One who had sent him (cp. John 17:4). That the Lord should state: "I must work the works of Him that *sent* me" had a special meaning in relation to the miracle he was about to perform. He was preparing to demonstrate to the people that he had indeed been "sent" by Yahweh to restore spiritual vision to Israel. Thus, the healing of this blind man was to be seen as conveying a profound spiritual lesson to the nation. The Lord was to send this man to the Pool of Siloam — a name which signifies "sent" or "sending". The name Siloam originally applied to the aqueduct through which the water from Gihon was "sent" to the Pool inside the city. Gihon was on the east, outside the city walls, so that Hezekiah's aqueduct caused the water of Gihon to flow into the city, to sustain life. The simile became expressive if men and women remembered that Yahweh's glory had departed from the city by way of the east (Ezek. 11:23), and that the same prophet had indicated that when the glory returned it should also be from the same direction (Ezek. 43:2; cp. Zech. 14:4). Before the divine glory returned to Yahweh's city in a physical sense, it would return in the perfect character of God's Son (John 1:14).

The man who featured so prominently in this sixth 'sign' had been blind from birth (v. 1). This was a physical state which this man had always experienced, and not one with which he had become afflicted in later life. He thus typified not only those who are spiritually blind from their birth, but also the entire human race, all of whom are subject to the inherent weaknesses and corruptibility of human nature; a state in which they must inevitably remain, unless the Great Creator should provide the means for their redemption. This 'sign' was intended to lift the veil of obscurity which

clouded the spiritual vision of Israel. God had sent his own Son, to bring sight to those who were spiritually blind.

The disciples raised the question as to whether this man had been born blind as the direct result of sin or sins committed. Was this man in some way personally responsible for his condition? This question may have arisen because the current pagan doctrine concerning the transmigration of "souls" — of Egyptian and later Grecian promulgation — had been accepted into certain of the Jewish religious philosophies. But if the man himself was not directly responsible for his condition, what of his parents? Was it possible that they were to blame? This belief was based upon a conception that sins committed in a previous "existence" were somehow atoned for when the "soul" was transferred to a new-born body.

The Lord's reply was positive. Not only did his reply indicate his repudiation of pagan theories concerning the transmigration of "souls", but his positive answer contained the essence of an exhortation: it is not wise to uncharitably scrutinise the lives of others in an endeavour to self-righteously pinpoint their failings which have led them to disaster. Under such circumstances, the positive and productive qualities of compassion and patient forbearance are to be encouraged — as the Lord was to graciously demonstrate at this particular time.

The words of verse 4, which set the background for this 'sign', carry a poignant sense of urgency: "I *must* work the works of Him that sent me, *while* it is day: the night cometh when no man can work . . ." The Lord was granted only one mortal life, and he saw it as his opportunity to give himself in total dedication to his Father. At this point in time he saw his mortal life rapidly slipping away, as the hour of his impending death drew nearer. In this, the Lord's personal example provides an impressive exhortation to every Believer. All disciples must "work the works" of He who chose them. Before the Lord's return the "night" of death will claim most of them. Then, "no man can work". And none of Christ's disciples can discern when death might face them or come quickly upon them. There is granted but one opportunity for mortal man to serve his Creator. And,

like the Lord Jesus Christ, we must endeavour to do so with *all* our "heart" and *all* our "soul" and *all* our "mind" (Matt. 22:37).

The Lord then called upon those assembled to witness his actions. "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. . ." As such, he was able to bring "light" to those who dwelt in darkness (cp. Isa. 5:20; 9:2; cf. Luke 1:79; Isa. 42:7, etc.).

He began to work. "And it was the sabbath day" (v. 14).

With silent incredulity the people watched his actions. Mixing his own spittle with the clay of the earth, he "spread the clay upon the eyes of the blind man" (v. 6, marg.). The Jews regarded spittle as a form of medicine, to be applied to diseased eyes — but certainly not in anticipation of miracles! They had, in fact, become so superstitious regarding any possible breach of their laws relating to the sabbath, that the preparation of any medicinal treatments on that day was strictly forbidden. Thus, in performing this miracle, the Lord not only revealed a vital 'sign' to his people, but also showed the ludicrous nature of their concept of the sabbath. That Yahweh might be glorified and his people taught the truth the Son of God ventured, on the sabbath, to do that which the Jews deemed unlawful.

Clay was a symbol for flesh (Job 33:6; Isa. 64:8; Jer. 18:6). And the spittle issued forth from the Son of God. So that by mixing together the clay of the earth with that which came forth from Christ, a miraculous result was produced. Thus before the Lord had touched the blind man, the first fundamental lesson had already been clearly set forth: flesh (clay) must be made pliable, and become moulded, by that which proceeds from the Son of God.

His eyes anointed with the mixture of clay and spittle, the blind man was sent away by the Lord with the instruction that he should "wash in the Pool of Siloam".

As to those who had silently watched the Lord's activities, they doubtless grew more and more bewildered. His actions had certainly appeared strange and unusual. Some may even have thought him to have acted the part of an eccentric, behaving in a most bizarre way. And such is the

common reaction of the natural man to the things of God. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). One who would become spiritually-minded must learn that God will do His own work in His own way, and not after the manner that men *think* He should work. In this instance, it would have been both possible and uncomplicated for the Lord to simply address the man with the words: "Receive thy sight". But there were awesome divine truths to be taught in addition to the healing of a man.

Brief mention has been made concerning the historical details of the Pool of Siloam. It gave the appearance of a fountain, and was situated near the wall of Jerusalem towards the east and the Kedron Brook. The Pool had been constructed on the orders of Hezekiah to supply water for the city from without, at a time of seige (cp. 2 Kings 18:17; 20:20). It was to Siloam that the Levite was sent, with the golden pitcher, on the last and great day of the Feast of Tabernacles. From the Pool he brought water which was poured over the sacrifice in memory of the water from the Rock of Rephidim. The Lord had already made an impressive allusion to the significance of this when, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, he had stood in the Temple saying: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink!" (John 7:37).

In following the ritual of pouring the water upon the sacrifice it was customary for the priests to recite from Isaiah: "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (12:3). And it was the Son of God who stood before the nation as the One from whom flowed the water of life.

Responding to the bidding of the Lord, the blind man obeyed. As is often the case in Scripture, a few brief, simple words speak volumes: "He went his way . . ."

Why, it may well be asked, did this man react agreeably, without murmur or dissent? Being blind from birth, he had never set eyes upon any man. Throughout his life, therefore, he had carefully learned to judge men by the tone and sound of their voices. In the voice of the Son of God there

was something which engendered in the blind man a willingness to comply, and to submit in faith. The Lord's speech must have exuded a calm, clear, gentle confidence; such that this man found he could exercise faith in this One, whom he had heard to claim: "I *am* the light of the world . . ."

How did the pathetic creature make his way to the Pool? Groping his way. Blindly. Feeling his way forward, hesitantly, into the impenetrable darkness that always surrounded him. In this moving and dramatic picture, a sobering lesson was demonstrated: the "light" of the Truth does not come to men instantaneously, through being physically touched by the Son of God — but rather, through hearkening to his commandments and obeying his will. "If any man will *do* His (God's) will, he shall *know* of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). With that utterance the Lord had challenged his antagonistic contemporaries. But now he had found a man who would respond to the exacting requirement of those words.

In the unfolding of this drama the significance of the 'sign' began to be manifested. In effect, the blind man — symbolising all who do not understand the identity, power and authority of the Son of God — was told to wash away his blindness in the One whom God had "sent".

The Pool of Siloam clearly typified Christ himself. He was the great "apostle" (Lit. "one sent" — Heb. 3:1; cp. Mat. 15:24; Luke 4:18; John 17:3; 20:21; Isa. 61:1).

Tragically, only a small number within the nation of Israel received the "water of life" from their Messiah. And this blind man certainly stood emblematically for that minority. The majority preferred to treat the Son of God with contemptuous disdain. In this, it was a case of history repeating itself; for Isaiah spoke of the attitude of the greater number of his nation towards true spirituality, in his own days: "For as much as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah (Siloam) that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son" (8:6). Which is to say, that the people of Israel preferred to rejoice in the arm of flesh rather than trust in the strength of Yahweh. Inevitably in the days of

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Isaiah, the nation suffered grievously and severely, because they rejected their God. And they were to suffer similarly in A.D. 70. Their audacious and scornful words, "His blood be on us and our children" were to come down upon their heads with horrifying execution (Matt. 27:25; cp. Deut. 19:10).

But in contrast to the nation at large, the pitiable figure of the blind man moved off, in his darkness, to obey the Son of God. How foolish he would have appeared had his efforts to obey Christ proven a vain gesture. With what ribald sarcasm his contemporaries would have railed against him. Aware of these factors, he still exercised faith in this man whom he had not seen. Heedless of possible scorn, he set off towards the Pool with firmness of mind.

There can be no suggestion that the Pool of Siloam contained any magical or miraculous propensities. It was simply a question of a blind man being called upon to perform a simple act which required faith. The power to effect the healing lay within the Son of God, not the Pool.

The blind man washed his eyes in the Pool. And he saw.

The result of the miracle was immediately apparent to all who had known this man. As in the case of the impotent man (John 5:1-16) this particular case was widely known, thus making any attempt at imposture or deception quite impossible (v. 8). Having "washed" the man "came seeing" (v. 7). His neighbours were incredulous. Word spread quickly that a miracle had taken place. When some, who were highly sceptical, suggested that the seeing man only resembled the blind man, he quite forthrightly established his identity: "I am *he*", he said, with purposeful determination (v. 9).

But still his friends and neighbours were not satisfied.

"Therefore said they unto him, how were thine eyes opened?" (v. 10).

In response to their question, he simply stated the facts of the matter: "A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the Pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight". Typifying all who will seek salvation through Christ, in spirit and in truth, he explained to his hearers the

process of redemption: He had listened carefully to the Lord's commands, he had obeyed and washed, and was restored. The act of washing, associated with this 'sign' symbolised the "washing of water by the word" and the act of baptism (Eph. 5:26; Mark 16:15-16). Here was a man who typified those who have "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine" which has been delivered unto them through the preaching of Christ and his disciples (Rom. 6:17).

Where was the man's benefactor? Obviously, the neighbours of the cured man wished to question the one who had wrought such a miracle. But the Lord was nowhere to be seen. He had quietly disappeared.

But then the situation took a sudden, fearful turn. A tense scene of intimidation developed when the healed man was brought before the Pharisees.

Significantly, as in the third 'sign', the miracle occurred on the sabbath. And as in that case, the healing work of Christ could have been performed the following day. The sabbath, therefore, must have been related to the meaning of the 'sign'. Primarily, the Son of God showed that his people's religious leaders had little understanding of the true significance of the sabbath. As with the third 'sign', the Jews were so obsessed with their perverse views concerning the sabbath that they had omitted "the weightier matters of the law", such as "judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matt. 23:23-24). They had become meticulous in their undivided attention to the performance of outward ritual, with little appreciation for the spirit of the law.

The healing of the blind man on the sabbath points forward to the Future Age. Those who have "washed" in the "one sent" will find true rest and peace, and an immortal inheritance in the Kingdom of God: a sabbath-rest of one thousand years (Rev. 20:4-5). But this man also typified the mortal survivors of the divine judgments upon the nations. If they will hearken unto the teaching of Christ and his immortalised brethren during the Millennial period, they will have their "eyes" opened to the Truth, and receive spiritual sight. And they shall say, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in

His paths . . ." (Isa. 2:3).

Once again the delusory blindness of the Pharisees was illustrated. Instead of investigating the miracle, and testing the credentials of the one who had performed the feat, they were more concerned to ask "how he had received his sight . . ." (v. 15). The once-blind man, although the subject of a bitter interrogation, would not succumb to intimidation.

The Pharisees were alarmed at talk of a "miracle" having occurred. Yet, it had been publicly performed, and there were many who could be brought to testify to the authenticity of the miracle.

What were they to do? The answer appeared obvious: concentrate attention upon the apparent breach of their laws regarding the sabbath.

The ground for their rejection of the evidence was — they alleged — that only a "sinner" would heal on the sabbath; and God would not give His power to a sinner.

But "there was a division among them" (v. 16). The Lord's enemies among the Pharisees did not have things all their own way. Some were impressed by the simple, clear-cut explanation offered by the man who had been healed (cp. John 3:1-5; 7:50-51; 12:42, etc.). No doubt Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea would have been numbered among those who refused to accept the belligerent judgment passed against Christ.

Relentlessly, and seething with hostility, the majority of the Pharisees pursued their investigations.

Again, they questioned the healed man. This was necessary because the Council had been unable to agree on a satisfactory verdict. They now, once more, centred attention upon Christ; probably at the insistence of those who sincerely desired to see a just decision proclaimed. "What have you to say about him?" they asked the healed man of his benefactor (N.E.B.). His answer came forth unhesitatingly, and with unshakeable conviction: "He is a prophet". This man was not ashamed to confess Christ, and argued that if the Lord had been able to exercise miraculous power, such was sufficient proof that he had indeed been "sent" by God. The attitude of this man, in the face of such

fierce opposition, provides a wonderful example for all who have received spiritual "vision" from Christ.

Still, the Pharisees would not accept the evidence.

The controversy continued, and the investigation was broadened to include the healed man's parents.

The Pharisees posed three questions to them, by which they hoped to disprove the miracle and discredit Christ: Was this man their son? Had he been blind from birth? Did they know how he had now gained his sight? The questioners hoped for at least one inconsistent answer, thus establishing a case to their own advantage. How sad that these religious Leaders could not bring themselves to accept the simple truth, instead of struggling so desperately to disprove it.

The reply of the parents — like that of their son — was unpretentious and to the point: "*We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind . . .*" (v.20).

Although fearful of the eventual outcome, the parents answered the first two questions unhesitatingly. But they treated the third question with great caution. They were not unaware of the Pharisees' bold use of intimidation: "*Whom ye say was born blind . . .*" The hapless parents readily discerned that the vital third question required them to make a personal commitment.

They had not been eye-witnesses to the miracle. They therefore thought it best to remain resolutely non-committal. "*But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes we know not . . .*" Whilst they feared the power of their interrogators, they did not at this point seek to recognise the power of God. This is a common human failing.

It must be conceded that although frightened at the possible outcome of this incident, within the bounds of their limited understanding they did not deny the truth. "*We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind . . .*"

They lacked courage, avoiding any personal commitment toward endorsing the evidence given by their son. An ungodly fear had been engendered in them by those who should have been "the shepherds" of the flock of God (v.

22). True shepherds exercise a voice of authority upon the basis of love and compassion, that Yahweh might be honoured, and His flock strengthened and comforted and encouraged (cp. Ezek. 34). But these Pharisees were not moved by such ideals.

In shelving all accountability, the parents revealed a shred of defiance. Turning the whole question back upon their examiners, they asserted: "He is of age! Ask him! He shall speak for himself!"

The man who had once been blind was thus called before the Council a third time.

The Pharisees now appeared to cajole. "Give God the praise", they intoned piously, "we know that this man (who had performed the miracle!) is a sinner . . ." (v. 24). The term: "Give God the praise" is an expression which demanded absolute truthfulness on the part of the individual being questioned. In effect, it was similar to calling upon a person to swear an oath (Josh. 7:19; 1 Sam. 6:5). But the incredible absurdity of the position which the Pharisees had now taken was almost beyond belief. They suggested to the healed man that if he were to condemn Jesus as a sinner, he would be glorifying God!

The once-blind man, who now saw — and who was "seeing" with increasing clarity at each succeeding confrontation with Christ's enemies — was purposeful, independent, and a man of integrity. He keenly felt the pressure which was being mounted against him. Yet, resolute and courageous, he could not bring himself to deny the truth, even though it had already been agreed among the Pharisees that anyone confessing Christ should be "put out" of the synagogue. Or, excommunicated (v. 22).

He refused to be pressured into denying the one who had wrought such a wonderful miracle upon him. Yet he still did not know the identity of his benefactor. Because he had not, to this point, *seen* the Son of God.

It should be observed that he did not endeavour to match the merciless belligerence of his adversaries. He carefully refrained from arguing, and simply stated the facts: previously he had been blind — a condition he had known since birth. But now he could see (v. 25).

Had he been fainthearted or weak in character, he may well have bowed beneath the strain and tension. But, clearly, he was a man of integrity. He would neither disown nor "disfellowship" the one who had helped him. Quite movingly, this man typified those who will inherit the kingdom: a class of humanity who, in all humility, will never lose their faith in the Son of God, nor forget their indebtedness to him.

But still the Pharisees remained aloof. Their position was unchanged: "Do not confuse us with facts!"

Relentlessly, they continued to harangue their victim. "What *did* he to thee? *How* opened he thine eyes?"

Without realising the significance of his words, the healed man then pronounced, unknowingly, a terrible judgment upon Christ's adversaries: "I have told you already, *and ye did not hear . . .*" Down through the changing generations this had been the great gulf which had separated Yahweh from His people; God's constant endeavours to set the way of life before His flock, and their consistent refusal to *hear* the words of life. From the days of Moses the Law had contained a warning for the entire nation: "But if ye will not *hearken* unto me. . . I will set my face against you . . ." (Lev. 26:14,17). Yahweh had chosen this nation that they might be "for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not *hear*" (Jer. 13:11). It was true to assert that "Yahweh God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against His people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:15-16). Now, "in these last days" of the Mosaic dispensation, God had spoken unto His people through His own "Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). Indeed, *last of all* He sent unto them His Son . . ." (Matt. 21:37).

This was the final hour of opportunity for the nation. "I have told you already", said the once-blind man to the Pharisees. "Wherefore would ye hear it again?"

But they did not wish to hear it again. They had not really

been listening the first time.

In defending his faith, the healed man gained a renewed confidence. He decided to take the initiative: "Why do you want to hear it all again? Do *you* want to become his disciples too?" (v. 27, J.B.) Now, he openly confessed that he had become a disciple of a man he had never seen! And — with heavy irony — he challenged his accusers as to whether they were asking so many questions because they, too, were considering becoming followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

In effect, he was challenging them to obey the same commandment from the Lord which he had done: "Anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest *see*!" (Rev. 3:18). Paul stated clearly the results which would come from obeying such a command. "The *eyes* of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may *know* what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his *power* to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power . . ." (Eph. 1:18).

At this question, which the Pharisees chose to interpret as sheer impertinence, their last vestiges of self-control deserted them.

"At this, they hurled abuse at him . . ." (v. 28, J.B.). Conduct which would hardly identify them as "Moses' disciples". In any event, their sanctimonious claim to be disciples of Moses was patently false. Had they been followers of that great man of God they would have tested the claim concerning the miracle, and pronounced righteous judgment. The fact that these religious Leaders simply lost their tempers when confronted with statements which they could not answer, was proof enough as to the weakness of their own case.

The contrast in disposition between Christ and his adversaries at this time has been emphasised by the Lord's reference to "the works" of the Father, whilst his opponents referred to the authority of Moses — an authority which they did not correctly understand.

The Pharisees then pronounced a judgment against Christ, which, in the ultimate, proved to be the pronoun-

cing of doom upon themselves: "We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from" (v. 29, J.B.).

The man who had been healed had been blind from birth. And so had these Pharisees — in a spiritual sense. But now, the judgment which they had just unwittingly declared against themselves, compounded their "visionary" defects and their culpability; for it had been made evident to them that, like the once-blind man, their spiritual vision could have been restored. They therefore now suffered a form of blindness for which they alone were responsible. They had but to "open" their "eyes" to the Truth, and accept the Son of God in faith.

An impressive transformation was now taking place in the thinking of this individual who had been born blind. His three verbal conflicts with the Pharisees had induced him to use his intellect carefully and honestly. He therefore proceeded to deliver a wonderful and guileless confession of faith (vv. 30-33), concluding with the irrefutable statement: "If this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing . . ." (J.B.). A gradual spiritual awakening had come to this person; not only had a man (whose identity he did not know) performed a miracle upon him to give him sight, but his spiritual vision had continued to develop as he became increasingly aware of the spiritual blindness of his interrogators. The truth, he knew, must be upheld. Thus, in these verses, he outspokenly and courageously defended the character of the Son of God, whilst at the same time delivering a forthright attack upon the foolish and absurd reasoning of his questioners.

He was brought, finally, to the point where he was so definitely convinced as to what was truth, that he no longer cared whether these men excommunicated him from the synagogue or not.

"We know that God heareth not sinners", he argued (v. 31) — yet, God had obviously heard the Lord Jesus, giving him the power to work a wondrous miracle. How could such a man be classified as a sinner? He then appealed to history. Where, in the Old Testament writings, was there a record of any similar cure ever being effected? The answer,

as his opponents well knew, was that no such evidence existed.

Here was the once-blind man's fuller confession. His belief in Christ and his power had crystalised to the point where he could not be dissuaded. He had, in effect, expanded upon and amplified his answer. His initial reply to their question: "What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes?" had been: "He is a prophet" (v. 17). But now, with deeper conviction, he added, virtually: "He has come from God".

The powerful simplicity in his reasoning was unanswerable. The inconsistent and purely negative argument of his adversaries was demolished. The basis of their disputation lay in ruinous disarray. And at the hands of a simple, sincere man, who lacked any theological education.

Perhaps it was this last fact which they found hardest to bear. They were defeated. And they knew it.

"Are you trying to teach us," they replied, 'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!'" (J.B.). Thus, in a furious rage, they "cast him out". The Greek word, *ekballo*, means "to throw out", and therefore implies, in this case, an act of violent, physical removal from the precincts of the synagogue. It is most impressive to consider that this word was used in the Lord's Discourse on the Mount: "How wilt thou say to thy brother, let me *pull out* the mote out of thine eye; and behold a beam is in thine own eye? thou hypocrite, first *cast out* the beam out of thine own eye . . ." (Matt. 7:4-5). The parallel is astonishing. These Pharisees had "cast" this honest, innocent man out of their synagogue on the grounds that he had never been anything other than a sinner; the clear implication being that *they were not!* They had endeavoured to "pull out" a mote from the healed man's eye; but had utterly failed even to attempt to "cast out" the beam that was imbedded in their own eyes, which prevented them from *seeing* the Truth.

And so, literally, they "cast him out", thus fulfilling the solemn prophecy of Isaiah: "Your brethren that hated you, that *cast you out* for my name's sake, said, Let Yahweh be glorified" (Isa. 66:5).

The Lord, having heard of this dreadful sequel to the performance of his miracle, went in search of the healed man. Why? Not simply to console him for the unjust treatment which had been meted out, but to show further compassion upon one who had courageously and fearlessly spoken the Truth.

He found the man, and gazed upon him with calm gentleness. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

The voice!

As a person blind from birth, recognition of human voices had been a vital factor in his constant struggle for survival. He had lived in a world of darkness, where sound meant so much.

Hesitantly, respectfully, he responded: "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?"

He had never *seen* the Son of God, with physical sight. But in his answer to the Lord's penetrating question he showed a willingness to be directed and guided towards a deeper recognition of divine truth.

And the Lord, having heard of this man's resolution and fortitude in the face of the pressure brought upon him by the Pharisees, desired to hear a confession of faith from his lips. The Son of God recognised him as a grateful man — one who was prepared to accept truth and acknowledge it.

In this, his disposition was the exact opposite of the Pharisees. Their attitude had been: "Dost thou teach *us*?"

"Tell me who he is", the man entreated the Lord, "so that I may believe in him" (J.B.) The word "might" in the A.V. may give the impression that the man's mind was wavering, and that he was thinking "may be" or "perhaps". But this was not so. He would gladly believe in the Son of God, once he could be sure of his identity.

"And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee" (v. 37). It may be fairly assumed that in revealing himself in this way the Lord was implying that the once-blind man had "seen" the Son of God on two occasions: firstly, with the eye of faith, when he had permitted the Lord to anoint his eyes with clay and spittle, and had then, without question, obeyed him by washing in the Pool of Siloam. And now, with both physical

and spiritual vision, the man was able to look upon God's Son.

The simple conviction which then came from the heart of the healed man was both awesome and conclusive: "Lord, I believe . . ."

How dramatically his confession stressed the vital aspects of faith. It is necessary to both "see" and "believe". And belief must be based upon reason, not *blind* faith.

This man, once enlightened, displayed the disposition and qualities of character which the Lord requires in all who would believe on him: he obeyed the Lord without question and without delay; he believed in the Lord's power and ability to give him "sight"; he was faithful and courageous in the testimony he gave in the Lord's defence; he resolutely upheld the Truth; he wholeheartedly wished to meet the Son of God face to face, that he might identify himself with the Christ; and, once acquainted with Jesus of Nazareth, he became a devoted and dedicated disciple of his new-found Master.

He showed his gratitude and humble subservience to the Son of God by worshipping him (v. 38). The word rendered "worshipped" (Gk. *proskuneo*), has the idea of prostrating one's self "after the eastern custom, to do reverence or homage to any one . . ." (Bullinger). This act indicated total surrender to the person, power, and authority of Christ.

During this conversation a number of the Pharisees had congregated at the scene. No doubt still hoping to secure some evidence against one or both of these men, they had listened intently to all that had been said.

The Lord pronounced a final summary of the incident for the benefit of all present. "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." His words were more direct and challenging than appears from the A.V. His statement contained the Greek words: *eis krima*, which would require the expression to be more literally rendered: "I am come into this world with the end in view that a correct decision might be arrived at, and sentence pronounced" (i.e., concerning those who have spiritual sight and those who do not).

The Son of God thus contrasted the seeing, believing man whom he had both healed and enlightened, with the blind, unbelieving Pharisees. The once-blind man had given his verdict upon Christ, clearly and unequivocally: "Lord, I believe". But the "eyes" of the Pharisees remained besmeared with the clay of fleshly perversity. They refused to "wash" from their intellect the fleshly reasoning which provided the barrier between themselves and Christ. The effect of Christ's teaching upon them, therefore, was to reveal their blindness to all who could "see". (cp. Isa. 29:13-14; 45:18; Mat. 15:7-14; 2 Thess. 2:10-12).

The Lord's words brought a prompt response from the Pharisees: "Are we blind also?" or: "We are not blind, surely?" (J.B.) It was as though they could hardly believe their ears.

Their question should be carefully noted. There is a difference between *being* blind, and being *made* blind. They were virtually trying to goad the Lord into stating that they, like the man whom Christ had healed, had been "blind" from "birth" in a spiritual sense (v. 1).

How was the Lord to answer?

In effect, he replied to them with the parable of the Good Shepherd. But before beginning that feature of his answer he presented a candid appraisal of their spiritual condition, which threw the challenge right back upon the Pharisees: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, *We see*; therefore your sin remaineth."

If the Pharisees claimed to be spiritually enlightened and educated people, they were not without responsibility before God. After all, they claimed to "sit in Moses' seat" (Matt. 23:1-2). And if they were able to "see", they would distinctly observe the brilliant, shining light — which was the Son of God. They would, through their "vision", acknowledge him as "the light of the world" (v. 5).

These prominent religious Leaders all had the God-given ability to distinguish truth from error, and to obey truth — providing only that they were willing to exercise their minds upon principles of righteousness. In the evidence which had been set before them through the now-healed man — not only the evidence of the miracle, but also the

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sound spiritual reasoning he had presented to them — they should have discerned, at the very least, a thread of reasoning which could have led them to a recognition of the Truth concerning the Son of God.

His final judgment upon them would have been uttered without rancour, for it was simply the truth: “Your sin remaineth”.

They would die in their sins, blind to the saving power of the Son of God. Apart from an acknowledgment and acceptance of “the things concerning the kingdom of God *and the name of Jesus Christ*” all men remain without hope. “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” than the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12; 4:12).

But these Pharisees could not see “the light of the world” for they were spiritually sightless.

The discourse which now followed (John 10) revealed, sublimely and majestically, that submission to the Son of God must be total and absolute. Complete union with Christ can only come to those who are able to say: “We see!”. In spirit and in truth.

He is the Good Shepherd. And the voice and authority of the Shepherd must be recognised and obeyed if the sheep are to follow him. Without deviation. All the way to the Kingdom of God.

THE SEVENTH SIGN

Raising the Dead
John 11

THE PURPOSE TO ISRAEL, NATIONALLY:
To show that only by God's power, manifested through His Son, could it be raised to national "newness of life."

THE MEANING TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL: *To show that Christ will raise from the dead and grant eternal life to all who walk faithfully in the way of the Truth.*

ONLY John's gospel provides a record of the raising of Lazarus. In view of the importance of the event, this does not represent notable omissions on the part of the other gospel writers. Rather, it provides a graphic illustration of the province of John's work: who but the glorious Son of God could be given power over the grave? Raising the dead is not the work of a *King* (Matthew), nor of a *servant* (Mark), nor of a *man* (Luke). Hence, the other gospel writers have totally omitted any reference to this particular event, whilst John has recorded the incident in such dramatic detail that it is unquestionably one of the great highlights in John's gospel.

Bethany, the scene of this most momentous miracle, was a village situated on the south-eastern slopes of Olivet, a little less than two miles from Jerusalem. The name signifies "the house of the poor or afflicted ones" and in this village dwelt a family deeply loved by the Lord: two sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother, Lazarus. The house in which they lived was also known as "the house of Simon the Leper" (Mark 14:3; cp. John 12:1-3). The home



was also said to have belonged to Martha (Luke 10:38-42). It is probable, then, that Simon had been the husband of Martha, and she was now widowed. Simon (Heb., Simeon) means "hearing". Lazarus was the Greek form of the Hebrew name Eleazar, and means "God is my help". In large measure, the significance of the 'sign' which was about to be unfolded could be discerned from the key names mentioned or implied in the opening verse of the chapter: "The Son of God will come to raise those who are in *the house of the poor and afflicted ones*, if they realise that *God is their only help*, and if they *hear* in faith the message of the gospel of the Son of God".

The background to the seventh 'sign' has been given in the closing section of John 10. The Lord had quietly removed to the place beyond Jordan where John had begun baptising. The need for such a move had become necessary because of the growing hostility of the Jews in Judea. As the Lord's "hour" had not yet come, it was needful for him to act with caution so as not to promote open confrontation with his adversaries before the due time.

It was whilst the Lord was in Bethabara (cp. 1:28) that news reached him that Lazarus was seriously ill. If his condition had not been critical the sisters would not have sent a message of such urgency to the Lord concerning their brother.

The message he received was both simple and profound. "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." They did not say: "He is sick. Please come and heal him." Pointedly, they merely acquainted the Lord with the relevant facts and trusted him to act in the matter as he saw fit. Any question of appropriate action was left entirely in Christ's hands. This provides a touching insight into the degree of trust and confidence that this small family placed in the Son of God.

Having considered the message, the Lord desired only that his Father's Will might be done in regard to the matter.

Even death was conquered in the seventh "sign" as Lazarus was brought to life. The illustration shows a sepulchre in Jerusalem with the rolling stone at the background ready to seal it off.

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Hence his initial verdict: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby". It might be argued that the statement was incorrect, for Lazarus certainly did die. But the Lord's meaning was that death for Lazarus was not to be the finality at this time. The word "for" has been rendered from the Greek *huper*, with the genitive. A more literal meaning would be "on behalf of". Thus, "This illness is not to end in death, but is to promote the glory of God" (Wey.). The purpose of this incident was to cause men and women to acknowledge the glory of God. And they were to discern that God's glory does not necessarily require a dazzling manifestation of a divine personage: the glory alluded to here was divine power revealed through the perfect character of God's Son.

In uttering these words, the Lord had in mind not merely a message which would benefit his disciples. He knew that this statement would be reported to the two sisters. This, they would be told, had been the Lord's response to their call for help.

How would they have reacted to such a reply, as they gazed upon the form of their dead brother? They would have wondered at the Lord's attitude. Disappointment and bewilderment would have been emotions added to the burden of numbing grief which they felt at their brother's death. The words of Jesus would have been incomprehensible to the sisters. It was not an answer they would have anticipated. They may have expected the messenger to return with the comforting advice: "The Lord is coming! He will arrive as quickly as possible!" But Lazarus had died. And the Lord had not even expressed his intention of coming to them.

However, the Lord had not forsaken them. Like all Believers, they were to wait in faith during his physical absence. It is quite significant that, having received the news of Lazarus' critical condition, the Lord remained another two days 'in the same place'.

The two days typify the two one-thousand-year "days" that the Son of God will remain physically separated from his brethren. Until the time when he returns he sits at the

right hand of his Father in the heavens. His disciples mourn his absence, and await his coming. Like Lazarus, the vast majority will have passed into the article of death. At the end of the "two days" Christ will return to the company of his disciples upon the earth, and revive them. And whilst the greater number of Believers will be sleeping in tombs when the Lord comes, some will "remain alive" — as did those who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus. The Lord will return that he might relieve his friends from their sufferings and their struggle against the forces of evil and sin. He will thus come and find his beloved friends in "the house of the poor or afflicted one" — an apt term to describe the environment existing in a Godless world, which is hostile to the principles of faith and righteousness.

Mary and Martha typify those who will be earnestly awaiting the return of Christ. Together, they represent the qualities which must be developed in Believers to prepare them for their Lord's coming. Martha was a most active person, who would attend to her responsibilities promptly and efficiently. Mary was deeply thoughtful and meditative, composed and yet responsive. Both were lovingly dedicated to the ideals of Christ and his teachings, and exhibited unquestioning faith towards him.

With the passing of two days the Lord was ready to move. "Let us go into Judea again", he told his disciples. They were alarmed and more than a little apprehensive. The idea of returning to Judea did not hold much appeal for them. The Lord's position there, it seemed to his friends, had now become untenable. He was extremely vulnerable, they feared, and open to physical attack at the hands of his antagonists. They remembered the wrath which had been revealed by the Sanhedrin, and their two attempts to destroy the Master (10:31,39). Understandably, the disciples feared for the safety of the Lord and themselves.

But the Son of God desired to reassure his friends. "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (Vv. 9-10). The "twelve"

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hours in the Jewish day were from sunrise to sunset; and Jesus himself was the "sun" of righteousness in the Jewish "heavens" disseminating the brilliant light of divine truth (cp. Mal. 4:2; John 9:4-5). Use of the term "day" spoke of life, whereas "night" could be related to death. In effect, the Lord was saying to his disciples: "I have not yet completed my day — my hour has not yet come; and I must not stumble, but continue my Father's work until my hour does come." As long as it remained needful for the Son of God to continue his ministry, no power of man could bring his life to an end. Yahweh would carefully oversee the contingencies required to ensure the survival of His Son, until the time came for him to offer up his life as a sacrifice for the sins of men.

From these words, disciples in every age should acknowledge the necessity for them to follow the example of their Master. "Life is the time to serve the Lord." When death strikes, such opportunities cease. In death there is "no remembrance" of the living God. And the possibility of offering Him service has ceased. Taking advantage of these important principles, the Lord clearly described the death state (cp. Eccles. 3:16-21; 9:5; Psalms 49:12; 88:10-12; 146:3-4; Isaiah 38:18-19, etc.).

There was never any suggestion that Lazarus — or anything that had ever formed a part of his being — was anywhere other than in the grave.

Jesus explained to his disciples that Lazarus was "sleeping". He told them that he planned to return to Bethany to "awake him out of sleep". The reaction from the disciples was predictable. Why should they all return to the house of Lazarus for such a trifling matter? The disciples quite clearly disagreed with the Lord's decision. Not only did they consider it a risk which need not be taken, but they differed with the Lord on medical grounds! "If he sleep, he shall do well." The disciples felt it would be wise for the Lord to stay away from Bethany. In any event, a man who has suffered severe illness is better off sleeping than being disturbed. So they reasoned, not yet understanding the significance of the Lord's earlier words: "This sickness is . . . for the glory of God . . ."

Although the reason for this pending miracle was that God might be glorified (v. 4) there was a further aspect of the matter which was of associated importance: that the disciples of Christ might "believe" (v. 15). God cannot be glorified before men unless they are prepared to believe in what they see and hear, and humbly acknowledge the divine power which has been manifested. Hence, the Lord made it clear that he had "been glad" for *their* sakes, that he had not been "there" at Bethany when Lazarus was ill. Under those circumstances it would hardly have been reasonable for the Lord to simply stand by until Lazarus had died. But the course of events which duly unfolded provided an appropriate setting for such a miracle to be performed. Had the Lord been present at Bethany whilst Lazarus had still been alive, there would have followed many disputes among the Jews — both Believers and non-Believers — as to whether a miracle had actually occurred, or whether Lazarus had simply been extremely fortunate in making a remarkable recovery. But now, there could be no real argument. Proof of the actual death of Lazarus was not wanting. The matter of his miraculous resurrection could not be denied.

Lazarus was dead. When the Lord returned to Bethany the body had been in the grave four days. Thus, God would be glorified in the miracle of resurrection, not only through a display of divine power, but through the belief implanted upon the minds of the true Believers. This incident, and the way in which the Lord spoke about it, provides a further example of the way in which he constantly nurtured the spiritual development of his friends.

When it became clear that the Master was firm in his decision, the disciples readily agreed to accompany him. They lacked neither zeal nor courage. Appreciating the danger which lay before them, Thomas voiced a conviction with which his companions were in full agreement: "Let us also go, that we may die with him . . ." They would stand by Christ. Because of their devotion to him. But they could not have undertaken this journey in the same frame of mind as their Lord, for they could have no comprehension of the remarkable and dramatic events which

were to follow.

It appears that Lazarus may well have died the same day the Lord received the message from the two sisters; which would mean that Christ and his disciples took two days to complete the journey to Bethany, a distance of some 25 miles. It is clear that the Lord did not hasten unduly, thus permitting the expiry of the time needed before appearing at Bethany to effect the miracle. All this was done deliberately, so that the authenticity of the miracle would be beyond question.

As the Lord made his way slowly towards the grief-stricken household, Mary and Martha mourned the death of their brother (v. 19). It was the Jewish custom for close relatives to mourn for seven days, with at least ten other Jews present to mourn with the family. Some authorities suggest that the period of mourning was at times extended to thirty days. The period of mortal probation for God's saints is a period of mourning. "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mat. 5:4). Jacob, when presented with the bloodstained garment, purported to have come from the body of Joseph — and typifying the sacrificial "vesture dipped in blood" (Rev. 19:13) — refused to be comforted. He vowed that he would go down to the grave still mourning the loss and absence of his son (Gen. 37:32-35). In like manner, true spiritual Israelites of today mourn for the anti-typical Joseph. And their mourning cannot turn to joy until their Saviour is united with his faithful disciples, and grants them their eternal reward.

The Lord drew nearer to the house in Bethany. Martha "heard that Jesus was coming" and "went" to meet him.

How was she notified in advance that the Lord was coming? The narrative provides no answer to this question. The most likely explanation is that the disciples who accompanied the Lord were becoming increasingly curious, perhaps with some degree of mounting excitement. One or more may have run ahead with news of the Lord's impending arrival. Similarly, the signs of the times today herald the near-return of the Lord. Advance "news" that the Lord will shortly appear — such as is in evidence in these times — should cause Believers to be in a state of

expectancy and renewed spiritual vigour.

Martha greeted the Lord, unable to hide her anguish. "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!" Her hope that Lazarus might have remained alive until the Lord's coming had not been realised. But her faith had not departed; and with his perfect ability to readily prove the worth of an individual, the Lord provided the opening whereby Martha could declare her faith. Gently, firmly, and with great assurance, the Lord spoke to her: "Thy brother shall rise again". Here was a statement, clear enough, yet inviting Martha to express her understanding of what Jesus meant. Her confession, uttered from a grief-stricken mind, flowed forth easily and beautifully: "I *know* that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day . . ." Groping for a richer faith, she elevated her mind from the heartbreak of the present to ponder her true hope for the future.

The Lord graciously acknowledged Martha's confession of faith. "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live . . ." No person can appreciate the truth of God's word, and the power that He has manifested through His Son, apart from an understanding of these words. Through his own sacrificial life and death, Christ gained from his Father the power to abolish the effects of sin and death over God's faithful servants (1 Cor. 15:15-25; cp. Eph. 2:12; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8-10).

The hope of a bodily resurrection from the dead has been the firm hope and conviction of all true Israelites down through the ages (Exod. 3:6; 2 Sam. 7:16; Psalms 16:9-10; 71:20; Isaiah 26:19). Inspired New Testament writers fully endorsed this concept of redemption and eternal salvation (John 5:28-29; Acts 4:1-2; 23:6; 24:15; 26:6-8; Romans 4:17, etc.).

In v. 25 the word "in" should be literally rendered "into". It is necessary for an individual to believe *into* the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus become — spiritually and idealistically — a part of his person. The Believer, previously "dead" in sins, becomes "quickened" by the word; thus the process leading to salvation has begun (Eph. 2:1; 1

Cor. 15:1-2, see lit. Gk.).

The Lord now sought confirmation from Martha of her recently uttered confession (vv. 21-24). What had she meant by this statement? Certainly she was not implying that Jesus might now, at that very hour, raise Lazarus from the dead (cp. v. 22, 23, 39). She meant to convey to the Lord that she had every confidence in him, because he was from God. Though, to her, it had been bitterly regrettable that the Lord had not been present whilst her brother had been alive, she now felt certain that Jesus would act wisely and compassionately, providing for their needs. And there was no doubt in her mind concerning the doctrine which proclaimed a resurrection from the dead for all the faithful "at the last day".

"And no one who liveth again and believeth on me shall in any wise die unto times age-abiding" (Roth.), said the Lord — meaning that belief of the truth and obedience thereto is not something which can be destroyed by physical death, so long as a person continues to "live" *in Christ*, patiently permitting the influence of the divine word to develop the Godly characteristics which were seen in Christ. Whether they live or die they have hope of a resurrection to eternal life.

As Martha pondered these words, her Master looked for a response: "Believest thou this?" Did she discern in the Lord's words an allusion to the Abrahamic covenant? (cp. Rom. 15:4). The patriarchs were dead and buried — and yet they had been accounted faithful. They had died in hope of a resurrection from the dead.

Martha gazed upon the one who would, eventually, raise from the dead such worthies as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and a host of others. The Son of God would bring to fruition all that had been promised in the scriptures of truth.

Yes. Martha believed it all. How could she best answer, conveying the true conviction of her heart? "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world . . ." She recognised him as the one promised to the Fathers of Israel, and hence the one who would fulfil the ancient promises: this man who stood

before her, comforting her with his warm words and gentleness of manner. Indeed, he was the son of Abraham, and the son of David; and also the son of God (2 Sam. 7:14).

Meanwhile, "Mary sat still in the house . . ." Why? She had not yet heard that the Lord had come (v. 28) — but there was another reason: she sat quietly, nursing her grief. She was a deeply thoughtful person. The message which had come from the Lord had said: "This sickness (of Lazarus) is *not* unto death . . ." Yet, Lazarus was dead! How could the Master have been so wrong upon a matter of such importance? And the message had also stated: "This sickness is for the glory of God . . ." Yet, she wondered, how could the glory of God possibly be seen amidst the tears of sorrow and atmosphere of deep grief which pervaded the house in Bethany? Family and friends were in a state of shock, trying to adjust to the reality of Lazarus' death.

Martha now came to get Mary. She spoke to her sister "secretly". Why should she have done so? Doubtless they appreciated the possibility of danger. To publicly make such a dramatic announcement concerning the Lord's presence might be unwise. Like the disciples, the two sisters feared for his safety. "The Master is come", breathed Martha, "and calleth for thee!" They were remarkably well-chosen words, and may well be uttered quietly at the time of the resurrection to all who must be gathered into the Lord's presence.

Despite Martha's good intentions concerning the Lord's safety, the meeting between Mary and Jesus was not to remain secret. The Lord did not arrive at the house. Instead, the mourners who had been with Mary followed her when she left the house, presuming that she was intent upon making a further visit to the grave.

Mary came face to face with Jesus. The emotion of the moment was too much for her. Overcome, she sank to the ground at the feet of the Lord — surely an attitude of humble submission which will be manifested by all his faithful disciples when they are called before him at the time of the resurrection of the dead.

"Lord!" she cried, "if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!" Although some texts indicate that the wording is slightly different from v. 21, it is evident that the initial outburst of grief which each of the sisters addressed to the Lord was almost identical. Thus, they must have discussed the question and both agreed with this assessment of the circumstance of their brother's death.

The humanity of the Son of God was then manifested. Deeply touched and moved to see the depth of Mary's suffering, he "groaned" (v. 33). The same word occurs again in v. 38. It means "to be greatly perturbed in mind, deeply moved . . ." (Bull.). Thus, "Jesus wept". Known as the shortest verse in the Bible, it is one of the most profound in its implication. The Son of God was of human nature, and subject to the strong emotions experienced by humankind. Though the man Jesus was indeed the Son of God, and was able to exercise a full measure of the holy spirit, such attributes did not replace the legitimate feelings which were common to his nature. "He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore, in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren" (Heb. 2:16-17). Whilst every evil propensity in his nature was crushed, his humanity was always in evidence in his dealings with his fellows. He was "touched with the feeling of *our* infirmities" (Heb. 4:15). Emotions which were expressive of sorrow or compassion or love were especially in keeping with the feelings which his Father manifested, in His desire to exercise mercy and redeem humanity from the effects of sin and death (cp. Heb. 5:1-2).

It should be especially noted that a knowledge that God would become glorified through this present set of circumstances did not make the Lord indifferent to the feelings of those who suffered and mourned.

The fact that the Lord suffered personally, *before* raising Lazarus from the dead, is also obviously significant (cp. Phil. 3:10-11).

The deep affection the Lord had felt for Lazarus was obvious to all. "Behold, how he loved him!" And as Lazarus was a type of all those of whom it can be said that "God

helpeth" them, all true Believers might fervently pray that this statement may also be said of *them* when the resurrection and judgment day has become a reality.

Inevitably, there were scoffers and doubters. Some sneered at what they felt was an ironical situation. "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" Some saw the Lord's tears and distress as a sign of weakness and frustration. But they were soon to be confounded.

The Lord demanded that the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb be rolled away.

Those nearby were stunned at the suddenness and unreasonableness of the command.

Martha, practical as ever, stated the obvious, candidly: "Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day" (J.B.). It is not difficult to imagine the bystanders nodding vigorously in support of this positive assertion.

Was there any particular significance in the fact that Lazarus had lain *four* days in the grave before his resurrection? "Four" is a scriptural number repeatedly associated with the multitudinous Christ-Body. On the *fourth* day of creation the heavenly bodies were directed into relationship with the movements of the earth. Similarly, in the Kingdom Age, Christ and the glorified saints will constitute the sun, moon and stars which will be appointed to "give light upon the earth". There were the *four* standards under which the nation of Israel marched; the *four* "living creatures" of Ezekiel's prophecy; the *four* "carpenters" and *four* "chariots" of Zechariah; the *four* "beasts" or living creatures of the Apocalypse, identified with the *four* faces of the Cherubim (Gen. 1:14-15; Num. 2; Ezek. 1:5; Zech. 1:20; 6:1; Rev. 4:6).

The student will discover further examples of this symbolism, indicating that Lazarus typified the multitudinous Christ-Body, which will be resurrected to stand before the Son of God at the Judgment Seat.

It should be observed that, whilst Lazarus typified those faithful servants of Yahweh who will be raised from the dead to receive life eternal, he also typified the coming *national* resurrection of Israel under their Messiah. Jesus

wept over Lazarus. But he also wept over the city of Jerusalem and her people (Luke 19:41-44). Yet, after many long centuries of spiritual death, even as Lazarus was raised to life again so shall the nation of Israel emerge from relative obscurity to become chief among the nations, upon the basis of a faith and belief in their Saviour and King. "So all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob . . ." (Rom. 11:23-26, cp. Isa. 59:20).

Despite Martha's vehement objection, the Lord remained adamant: the tomb was to be opened. However, the basis for his insistence should be understood: "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest *believe*, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

Martha's earlier confession now was to be awesomely put to the test. Earlier she had said: "I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee . . ." (v. 22).

She recognised the point of the Lord's challenging words immediately. The narrative states, simply: "Then they took away the stone . . ." It is an impressive statement. They could well have argued and refused, in view of the apparent truth in Martha's blunt assessment concerning the state in which they could expect to find the body. But they obeyed the Lord. No doubt partly at Martha's insistence. But the fact that they did obey the Lord in this matter speaks volumes in revealing the trust and confidence they placed in him. Whilst the Master appeared to be acting quite irrationally, they co-operated, realising that he had some profitable purpose in mind, which they did not question. Such faith would be rewarded. They were about to see "the glory of God" revealed.

Desiring that there be no doubt left in the mind of any of the witnesses as to the source of the power by which the miracle would be performed, the Son lifted his eyes and prayed aloud. "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me . . ."

When, it might be asked, had the Father "heard" His Son in regard to this matter? From the time the Lord had begun

to consider the implications in this situation (v. 3) he would have thoughtfully contemplated all that was involved, and would have sought the strength and guidance of his Father.

And he could say that he "*knew*" the Father had heard him because his prayers were always in harmony with the perfect will of Almighty God.

The moment had come. Bystanders stood, waiting and wondering what the Lord would do. "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth!" His action was in complete contrast to the activities of sorcerers and magicians, who were noted for their dark mumbling and muttering, and incantations. The voice of the Son of God — like his cause — was distinctly audible and recognisable at all times (cp. John 10:14,16). He spoke loudly, so that all witnesses should clearly hear. His call, brief and unmistakeable in its meaning, was a cry of triumph. Similarly, after the great resurrection, when all the faithful will be raised from their resting-places to become elevated to divine nature, the reality of the event will be voiced abroad to a wondering and unbelieving world.

The Lord's words — brief and dramatic as they were — would have caused every eye to become rivetted upon the entrance to the tomb. Then, before their incredulous gaze, Lazarus stepped from the grave. But he was still "bound hand and foot with grave clothes". And in like manner, the saints of Christ will emerge from the grave still bound with the shackles of mortality. As in the case of Lazarus, so it shall be with all who are found worthy at the Judgment Seat: the command shall go forth from the King of glory, "Loose them!" And the corruptibility of mortal nature will fall away from them.

Those who had witnessed the miracle stood, momentarily silenced. They were stunned, hardly daring to believe the evidence of their eyes. But, gradually, realisation of the truth came upon them all.

Among those who had witnessed the miracle were men and women who loved the Lord deeply. Some were friends of Lazarus' family; whilst others were cynical unbelievers who became ardent disciples of Christ after witnessing this

miracle. But others, inevitably, were enemies. They remained untouched by the power which they had seen manifested through Jesus of Nazareth. They remained blind to the spiritual significance of that which they had witnessed. These were the individuals who hurriedly made their way to seek out members of the Sanhedrin. They set their evidence before the Pharisees.

It is astonishing that these betrayers of the Son of God never attempted to deny the miracle. It was incontestable. They simply told the Pharisees "what things Jesus had *done . . .*"

Those who had witnessed the miracle were of differing dispositions and attitudes. They typify those who will be gathered before the Lord of Glory at the time of the great resurrection. Some will be revealed as true disciples of the Lord; others will be identified as betrayers or traitors; whilst still others will be numbered among those who blatantly rejected the Son of God, having been given the opportunity of accepting him as Saviour and King.

A meeting of the Council was immediately arranged. For three and a half years the religious leaders of the Jews had observed, with growing concern, the activities of Christ. Their sense of uneasiness now developed into unrestrained anxiety.

They assembled the 71 members of their highest Court: the Sanhedrin. The atmosphere of the meeting was extremely tense. Urgent action had become vitally essential. But what should they do? Their objective was to destroy the influence of Jesus — but they desired to bring about his end by a means which could be regarded as "legal", both so far as the Law of Moses and Roman authority were concerned. No more evil nor infamous conspiracy was ever devised in all history.

Had they acted as the Law of Moses required, they would have carefully examined all the evidence available covering the period of the Lord's ministry. As a result, they would have ultimately had no choice but to endorse him in every respect. They would have announced to the nation that this man was indeed the promised Messiah.

But no intent could have been further from their evil

minds.

In their discussions, most of the members of the Sanhedrin appeared to be generally agreed on one thing: "This man doeth many miracles . . ." They thus stood condemned out of their own mouths. They confessed his miraculous power, but would not admit his claim to be the Son of God.

These leaders were concerned with only one contingency: their own survival, and the continuance of their superior influence over the religious lives of the Jews.

With what simplicity the Lord had demonstrated the power which comes from his Father. He had called for no pomp or ceremony, no fanfare of trumpets or impressive showmanship; the Son of God had spoken, and the dead had been raised. The Jewish people should have been filled with elation. Lively and joyous support for this Jesus should have been widely in evidence. The Son of God was surely in the midst of Yahweh's people, and had shown his ability to exercise a power greater than death. But, tragically, the leaders of these people did not wish to acknowledge the truth. They had become obsessed with the danger he represented to their own survival. Enraged at his words and actions, incensed to the point of fury, they were determined to destroy him.

Through the grace of Rome the priestly class and other religious leaders had obtained certain privileges. They did not wish to lose the prerogatives they enjoyed, nor did they wish to see their power over the people diminish in any way.

There can be no doubt that, with the performance of such an incredible miracle as had just been witnessed, the Sanhedrin feared a popular uprising in favour of Jesus. "If we leave him alone like this", they determined, "the whole populace will believe in him. Then the Romans will come and sweep away our temple and our nation" (v. 48, N.E.B.). "Our", they said, pompously and possessively; not "Yahweh's temple and Yahweh's nation".

Ultimately, the high priest rose to speak. Caiaphas was the President of that nefarious Council. As a Sadducee he did not believe in the doctrine of bodily resurrection; and was therefore deeply humiliated and mortified that such a

miracle should have been attested to. With a domineering arrogance which brooked no opposition, he refused to allow any manifestation of mercy or tolerance towards this man who had confounded the teaching of the high priest of Israel. The entire question was far more serious than the Council had yet been able to grasp. The President addressed those assembled: "You know nothing whatever; you do not use your judgment; it is more to your interest that one man should die for the people, than that the whole nation should be destroyed" (v. 49-50 N.E.B.). The Greek text contains a double-negative. Literally, it could be rendered: "You know nothing! Nothing!" — which shows the force and vehemence with which the high priest hammered home his argument. His intention was clear; it was not enough that their adversary be simply neutralised in some way — he must die. The members of the Sanhedrin were to become fully awakened to the *ultimate* fate which could befall them all, unless this Jesus was put to death.

The President's final words were profound and significant, far beyond his own comprehension — "It is more to your interest that one man should die for the people, than that the whole nation should be destroyed . . ." John's inspired comment upon these words indicates that, unknowingly, the high priest had become a divinely-inspired prophet! "He did not say this of his own accord, but as the high priest in office that year, he was prophesying that Jesus would die for the nation — die not for the nation alone but to *gather together* the scattered children of God" (vv. 51-52, N.E.B.). What could this mean but that, through the death of Jesus, the bodily resurrection of an innumerable host of God's true saints would eventually take place — of which the resurrection of Lazarus was but a type? Perhaps, with awesome preciseness John's inspired mind was being directed to a particular Psalm which foretold the resurrection of such a multitude: "*Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice . . .*" (Psa. 50:5).

"One man should die for the people", said the high priest. But he had no comprehension of the incredible truth contained in his words. The appalling tragedy was

that "one man" *did* die for the people, but the nation largely perished because they denied themselves the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice.

Multitudes, multitudes, died without a covering for their sins.

The Son of God, from this time on, lived as a hunted criminal. He had become a "wanted" man. And his days were numbered.

He continued to avoid any rashness of conduct which could have brought him an early demise; for he knew the very day and hour he must die. And he knew that his Father would provide all necessary protection for him, until his "hour" came when he would be offered for the sins of many.

The Council had issued a "commandment" that Jesus was to be taken. There existed, then, no form of pretence among these evil men. They had openly declared their judgment upon the Son of God: arrest him, convict him, destroy him.

In due course, with the Lord's death it appeared that the seed of the serpent had triumphed over the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). But he who had so unwaveringly proclaimed: "I am the resurrection and the life" came forth from the tomb to be elevated to the wondrous glory of divine nature, and to remain deathless throughout all eternity.

He had "abolished death" in his own body and had brought "life and immortality to light" — in prospect and in hope — for all who, in spirit and in truth, anticipate and "love" his "appearing". His true disciples, down through the ages, have waited in faith for him to "appear" the "second time", bringing "salvation" for all who have served him faithfully. And the faithful have uttered their hope with one voice: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (2 Tim. 1:10; 4:8; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 22:20).



THE EIGHTH SIGN

The great harvest of fish
John 21:1-14

THE PURPOSE TO ISRAEL, NATIONALLY: *To show that only the Messiah would be able to unite it in harmony with God, effecting a national and spiritual resurrection after his second coming.*

THE MEANING TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL: *To demonstrate that every faithful disciple will be gathered into Christ's kingdom, to receive divine nature as a reward for faithfulness; and to see the increase of their labours in the kingdom of God.*

THE closing words of John's twentieth chapter indicate the conclusion of his gospel. The twenty first chapter has, therefore, been added by John — writing under divine inspiration — as an epilogue. For reasons which become apparent when the final chapter is studied carefully, it became necessary for John to record certain events and words which occurred subsequent to Christ's resurrection.

And in view of the fact that the miracle recorded in John's final chapter took place after the Lord's resurrection, it is evident that the miracle points — like a 'sign' — to events which will have their fulfilment subsequent to the general resurrection of all faithful Believers, after the Lord's return to earth.

The feast of unleavened bread having been completed, seven of the apostles journeyed together from Jerusalem to the Sea of Tiberias. They had been instructed to meet

A catch of fish from the Sea of Galilee. Known as Peter's fish (musht) it is the tastiest to be found in the Holy Land. Christ fed the five thousand with five loaves and two such fishes. The eighth and last "sign" comprised the great haul of "great fishes" brought to land without the net breaking.

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the Lord there, at a "mountain" (Matt. 28:16). The fact that "seven" of them travelled in a group is not without significance. This is the scriptural number to symbolise *fulness* or *completion* which is attained through fulfilment of a *covenant*. This company of disciples, then, typified the complete number of the redeemed who will be received by Christ at the Judgment Seat.

Whilst both Matthew and Mark recorded the Lord's instruction to the disciples that they should meet him in a particular place, it was only John who penned an eyewitness account of what actually occurred.

John began his account with words which unmistakably linked the first and last 'signs'. He wrote that Jesus "*manifested* himself on this wise" (v. 1, R.V.). The word is the same as that used in relation to the first sign: "This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory" (2:11, R.V.) In both passages the word is *phaneroo*, "to make manifest, visible, reveal, show one's self openly". This key word, obviously connecting the first and final 'signs', illustrates the purpose of them all. The Lord manifested "his glory" (2:11) — which was the perfection of the Father's character in flesh. In so doing, the Son also "manifested" the "Name" of the Father (John 17:6). As the "word made flesh" he showed that "Yahweh, Yahweh Ail" is "merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" and that He will "by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children . . . of them that hate" Him (Exod. 34:6-7; 20:5).

It is abundantly clear that in his ministry the Lord manifested the "glory" of the divine character, in clear contrast to the extreme spiritual poverty of the Jewish nation. Thus, from beginning to end, the 'signs' of John's gospel were designed to show Israel the steps that they should take to find reconciliation with their God, through the Son whom He had provided. The Son of God was to be "a light to lighten the *gentiles*" but he was also to bring "glory" to God's "people" — "Israel" (Luke 2:32).

The Lord had been revealed as a manifestation of "light"

and "glory" in the eight 'signs' of John.

John listed the names of the seven who journeyed together to Tiberias, with two exceptions. In doing so, John recorded two further peculiarities which sets his gospel apart from the synoptics: the phrase "Thomas called Didymus" is found only in John; similarly, "Nathaniel" is mentioned only in John's gospel.

The names — including their meanings and the order in which they appear in the narrative — provide a most illuminating message concerning the meaning of this sign. Simeon means "hearing" and Peter means a "stone" (cp. Psa. 118:22; Isa. 28:16); Thomas and Didymus both mean "a twin"; Nathanael means "gift of God". The two sons of Zebedee were James and John, whose names, respectively, mean "supplanter" (James is the Greek form of Jacob), and "grace". Thus, in establishing the background to the miracle, or sign, John provided a message: "Hearing the Stone, the twin Believers — Jew and Gentile — will receive the gift of God, and as supplanners will receive their inheritance, dispossessing those who are unworthy, because they will have received the grace of God".

Peter, characteristically, saw himself as the leader of this group of disciples. Impetuous as ever, he could stand waiting about no longer. Also, they were hungry. And this provided as good an excuse as any for the commencement of some action to replace the inactivity they had experienced while awaiting the coming of the Lord. "I go a fishing", he announced peremptorily. There was no argument. Cheerily and readily Peter's companions responded to his initiative. Their zest and enthusiasm for their old way of living — seeking their livelihood upon the sea — had not deserted them. Familiar with the sea — and loving it in a way that only dedicated men of the sea can understand — they found themselves immediately in an environment which produced within them a contented frame of mind. With a boat beneath them, and the feel of the sea, they moved out over the water.

As experienced fishermen, they were unable to resist the lure of the sea. The spiritual implication is significant: they had been called by their Master to become "fishers of

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men" (Matt. 4:19). The "sea", in Biblical symbology, represents the nations (Isa. 17:12; 57:20; Jer. 6:23; Luke 21:25; Jude 13; Rev. 17:15). Thus, the apostles, their understanding of the truth strengthened and developed *after* Christ's resurrection, went forth among the nations to forthrightly and vigorously preach the gospel. Because the conviction of the truth burned so strongly within them, they found that they could not resist the challenge of carrying the gospel of the risen Christ to the "sea" of nations. Fearlessly and courageously they went forth among many peoples and nations to proclaim the message of the Son of God. The results of their efforts, accompanied by Christ's blessing, will be seen in the ingathering of a vast concourse of Believers into the Kingdom.

The preaching of these faithful apostles in the name of Jesus — the risen Lord and Christ — would begin on the day of Pentecost. And Peter, as spokesman for the others, would be the first to say: "I go a fishing — in the sea of nations!" — preaching firstly to the Jews. Later, he was to "go a fishing" when he unlocked the power of the gospel to Cornelius. In view of his great confession concerning the identity of the Son of God, Peter was to lead the way in these matters (Mat. 16:16-19). After Christ had ascended into heaven, the apostles laboured diligently in their work of "fishing" among the nations. Their work completed, they now sleep in the dust of the earth till the coming of their Lord and King. In the meantime, as their followers — not their "successors" — it is the duty of all faithful disciples in every age to continue the work. A great harvest will eventually be manifested to the glory of Yahweh the Great Creator (Jude v. 3, cp. 2 Tim. 4:2).

But those things remained in the future. For the moment, the darkness of night had drawn on, and the apostles were searching the depths of the sea for fish. Their efforts proved fruitless. "That night they caught nothing" (v. 3). There was a reason for this, as can be seen when the meaning of this 'sign' has been understood. They were fishing without divine help; and they were still to learn that their activities as "fishers" of "men" would prove unsuccessful unless the blessing of their Lord rested upon their

labours. It is impossible to bring forth fruit to the glory of God, either by personal character building or by gaining converts to the Truth, without the blessing and favour of Yahweh.

Thus, throughout the night, the apostles laboured without gain. All the well-known places would have been tried; every device and art they knew would have been employed to try and bring them success. But in vain. Time after time they drew the net into the boat. And every time the net proved empty.

Weary from the arduous activities and frustrations of the night, they moved shorewards.

The first light of early dawn crept over the hills on the eastern side of the sea. They were able to make out the figure of a man standing upon the shore. But it was not sufficiently light, and they were not quite close enough to recognise him.

A voice, firm and loud enough to carry across the water, reached the apostles in the boat. "My children, have you any fish?" (T.C.N.T.). The Greek word *paidion*, means "a little or young child" (Vine). Why should the Lord thus address seven of his apostles? Because they had shown their immaturity. They had been told by their Lord where they should meet him; but like small children they had readily become diverted from their original purpose that they might take up some new or different interest. At the time, no doubt the rebuke passed unnoticed; but later the apostles would have looked back upon this incident, and would have appreciated the way in which the Lord had drawn attention to their lack of spiritual maturity.

The word which has been translated as "meat" in the A.V., (Gk. *prosphagion*) was a word especially applied to cooked fish. The Lord's question, therefore, not only contained an element of rebuke, it also carried a rather pointed allusion to their night-long failure: "Have you caught, cooked, and eaten a meal?"

Their answer was short and somewhat sharpish. "No!" they called across the water. A brief syllable was all the Lord received in reply, expressing the frustration of his apostles at their consistent failure.

The Lord "knew what was in man" and therefore had no need for any to tell him the feelings which were being experienced by his friends at this time (John 2:24-25).

He knew that later they would appreciate the lessons they were now learning.

He had compassion upon them.

"Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find!" he called to them.

They cast their net in accordance with the instructions given from the shore, and were not able to draw the net into the boat "for the multitude of fishes". Once again, the apostles were shown that with the Lord's blessing upon their endeavours they could accomplish many wonderful works. The multitude of fishes symbolised the great harvest of men and women who would hear the Truth and become drawn forth from the "sea" of "nations" to be numbered amongst the redeemed in the day of Judgment. Those who will be on "the right side" will be the approved, who will inherit the kingdom. They will be the "sheep" of Matt. 25:33, and not the "goats" who will be set on the *left* hand.

All the fish in the net were described as "great", in contrast to the haul of fish prophesied in the Master's parable (Mat. 13:47-49) in which some fish were good whilst others were bad and fit only to be cast away. The contrast between this event described by John and Luke's description of an earlier similar occurrence is quite marked. Whereas Luke stated that the net "brake" John particularly recorded that the net did *not* break. There must be a reason for the differing results stemming from two comparable miracles. The incident related by Luke appears to suggest that, during the period before Christ's second coming many who are "caught" in the "net" of the gospel will break away therefrom and return to an evil world, having renounced the Truth. But in John's account the allusion is obviously to *all* the redeemed, not one of whom will be "lost" (Luke 5:6; John 17:12). The 153 "great" fish thus suggest the ingathering into the kingdom of all who are approved by Christ.

The mood of the men in the boat changed dramatically.

There would have been a sudden awareness that the net was full. Excitement and wonderment at the unexpected change in their fortunes would have quickly replaced the air of gloom and despondency which had reigned throughout the long night. They were "not able to draw" the net into the boat because of the weight. Other disciples came out from the shore in a smaller boat, and between the two vessels the heavy net was dragged to the shore. The smaller craft had to travel only a little more than 100 yards to assist in the drawing-in of the net. This means that the larger boat was close enough to the shore for a conversation to be conducted between the ship and the shore, but not sufficiently close to identify an individual standing upon the bank against a varied background in the vague early light of dawn.

With the beginning of this new train of events, John and Peter reacted characteristically. The one, keenly perceptive in spiritual matters; the other, impulsive, and yet dedicated in his love and affection for Christ. John's discernment was quickly in evidence. That a miracle had occurred was plainly evident to the mind of John. And if a miracle had taken place, there could be only one person capable of exercising such power: the man upon the shore had to be the Son of God. Peter's reaction to John's pronouncement was immediate: clad only in his undergarments, he flung himself heedlessly into the sea — as he had done on a previous occasion (Matt. 14:29). But this time he was anxious only to be with the Lord and did not desire to walk upon the water. This was a similarly impulsive action as on the occasion when he had run, together with John, to the sepulchre; and it had been Peter who had rushed headlong into the tomb.

How sublime that whilst the apostles had been fervently and unsuccessfully striving to catch fish to satisfy their hunger, on the shore the Lord was calmly preparing to provide for all their needs. Later, the apostles would consider this incident more deeply. They would come to realise that the best results are achieved when the Lord's instructions are carefully understood and applied. Had they simply obeyed him without question he would have

fulfilled their needs.

Whence the Lord procured the fish we are not told. John's omission of this detail appears quite pointed. It is not for mortal man to question divine power, but merely recognise it, and accept it in faith.

At the command of the Lord, Peter brought of the fish which the apostles had caught. Thus is illustrated that through a combination of the Lord's power and blessing, and the efforts put forth by his disciples, fruit will be brought forth to the glory of God. The result of such action at that time was that the Son of God sat down to a meal of fellowship with his friends. The exercise of men eating together has been used symbolically in Scripture to indicate sweet fellowship among men, based upon a mutual submission to divine precepts. "I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16). "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom" (Luke 22:29-30). "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37). Ezekiel, in his prophecy concerning the Temple of the Future Age, made special mention of the eastern section of the Temple. The prophet stated that that portion of the Temple would be "for the Prince; the Prince, he shall sit in it *to eat bread* before Yahweh . . ." (Ezek. 44:1-3).

Inevitably, a query must arise as to the reason why John should record the exact number of fish caught. Obviously there is a particular significance in the number 153.

The number is divisible by three. That is to say: $51 + 51 + 51 = 153$. Similarly, the number 51 is also divisible by three, thus: $17 + 17 + 17 = 51$. "Three" is therefore the dominant feature of the number. It is profoundly significant that both the *first* and *last* 'signs' feature this number so particularly. It is a number which speaks of the hope of *resurrection*, through the making of a *covenant* which has been confirmed by a *sacrifice*.

The number "three" is strongly associated with cove-

nanting, in that God made three great covenants of promise: the Edenic, the Abrahamic and the Davidic. The Abrahamic covenant was given to the *three* great patriarchs of Israel: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

If all numbers from one to seventeen are added together, they total 153. Further: the Hebrew phrase, *Beni ha-Elohim* — meaning “sons of God” — has a numerical value of 153. And it has been asserted that if all persons who are mentioned in the gospel narratives as having received a direct blessing from Christ are tallied, the total comes to 153.

The numerical value of the name “Simon” is 118, and that of “Jonas” is 35; so the two names together have a numerical value of 153 (cp. v. 15). It was “Simon, son of Jonas” who became the leader of the “fishermen” whose task it was to commence the great work of preaching the gospel of salvation in the name of the risen Christ — and to use the “keys” given to him by the Son of God, that the gospel might be “unlocked” to both Jew and Gentile (Acts 2:10).

Seven is the number which represents divine perfection and completion. Ten is the number which denotes fullness. Thus, 7 + 10 speaks of the fulness of the divine perfection, manifested in a glorified multitude (cp. Exod. 3:14; Heb. 2:10; 1 John 3:2).

It is also significant that the number seventeen is the *seventh* “prime” number. A “prime” number is one which cannot be divided. The others are 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13.

The number 153, then, symbolises all the redeemed.

The Lord invited his disciples to come and eat with him. “Come and break your fast”, he said (R.V.), calling the disciples to partake of their first meal at the dawning of a new day. The typical significance of this simple act is quite apparent: when the *Sun* of righteousness arises, to dispel the darkness after a long night of Gentile gloom, it will be the dawn of a new era which will continue for 1,000 years (Mal. 4:2). At that time the Lord Jesus will gather around him those who have served him faithfully during the period of their probation and together they will celebrate the establishment of the Kingdom. “I will not drink henceforth

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of this fruit of the vine", he had earlier told them, "until that day when I drink it new *with you* in my Father's Kingdom" (Matt. 26:29).

As these men gathered around the Lord they were a silent, thoughtful group. They were filled with awe at the presence and power of the Son of God. This was a type of the atmosphere to be in evidence at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Surely, "no flesh shall glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1:29).

None of those assembled attempted to speak. Their minds were busily trying to digest the significance of the events of that night. The Lord had taught them that they would not prove successful as "fishers of men" upon the basis of their own efforts. They were to understand the divine principle: "Except Yahweh build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psa. 127:1). They were to grasp the fact that a divine blessing must rest upon their labours before fruit could be brought forth to the glory of God. Mere human effort would prove unproductive — as they had learned that night upon the sea.

At the same time, it is needful to acknowledge that the apostles had shown in this incident that the work of drawing men and women to the gospel will not be successfully undertaken by armchair theoreticians. These men had gone hungry. They had toiled long and hard throughout the night. They had endured deprivation and weariness. In their life they did not seek sumptuous luxuries which are pursued greedily by people whose main object is self-attainment, self-indulgence, and self-gratification. When the Lord's blessing had been added to the dedicated and workmanlike disposition of the apostles astonishing results had been produced.

Surely, in this respect, the attitude of consistent perseverance displayed by the apostles should provide an example of encouragement to all who would strive to imitate these men, who were to prove so wholly devoted to the cause of their Lord and King.

One of the most impressive lessons to be learned from this incident is that the Lord blessed the labours of his disciples even though they were unaware of his presence.

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name", he had earlier taught them, "there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). This promise does not necessarily require the Lord's physical presence. He has assured his friends: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee . . ." (Heb. 13:5).

Those who would set their hearts to follow in the footsteps of the faithful apostles should find comfort and encouragement in these assurances. If they labour diligently and in a spirit of self-sacrifice in the service of their Master, then they may be certain that he will recognise the efforts put forth in his name and will gather them into his Kingdom at the appointed time.

John's final comment upon this eighth 'sign' was most appropriate and meaningful. "This", he wrote, "is now the *third* time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead." This statement provided a remarkable link between the first and last signs — for, the account of the first 'sign' had begun with the words: "And the *third* day there was a *marriage* in Cana of Galilee . . ." (2:1). The Scriptural significance of the number three has been examined in relation to the first 'sign'. But now it may be observed that the earlier expository remarks concerning the importance of the number three may be added to — for the prophet Hosea, speaking concerning the coming restoration of Israel, and the dawn of the Millennial Kingdom wrote: "After *two* days He will revive us: in the *third* day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight . . ." (Hos. 6:2). Thus, after 2,000 years of absence from the earth the Lord will return — and a further "marriage" will take place — the marriage of the Lamb to his bride; for "his wife" will have "made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7-9). And Israel will be restored.

This group of men who sat around the Lord by the light of that early-morning dawn will be numbered amongst a vast multitude of the redeemed, when the Lamb receives his bride. No longer bewildered, tentative, or wondering, they will become a glorious assemblage in that day. Their sins forgiven and the shackles of their mortal nature cast off forever, they will have become clothed upon with divine

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nature, and will exult together. They will have come out of "great tribulation" and God will have wiped away "all tears from their eyes". Together they will rejoice, having come through their trials and probation to inherit the "kingdom" prepared for them. With one voice they will joyfully proclaim: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing . . . And hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth . . ." (Rev. 7:14; John 14:2; Rev. 5:10-12).

EPILOGUE

It has been observed that John's gospel virtually concluded with the final words of the twentieth chapter, and that the twenty first chapter was added by John as an addendum.

In drawing the twentieth chapter to a conclusion, John directed attention to the reason for the inclusion of the EIGHT SIGNS in his gospel account of the Lord's ministry. From the many miracles the Lord had performed John, under divine inspiration, had chosen to record these particular 'signs' that special conclusions might be deduced therefrom. His explicit reference to this matter is too obvious to be missed: "And *many other* signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are *not* written in *this* book . . ." He then emphasised the reason why these eight 'signs' in particular had been chosen for inclusion in John's gospel: "But *these* are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God . . ." (20:30-31). "Flesh and blood" could not reveal the precious Truths concerning the divine Sonship of Christ and all that it implied (Matt. 17:14-17). It was a work of the spirit; and "the things of the spirit of God" can only be "spiritually discerned" by those who are spiritually-minded (1 Cor. 2:14-15).

Why were eight signs given in the gospel of John? Why not some other number? Because "eight" is the Biblical number which symbolises the cutting off of the flesh. This was initially shown in Yahweh's command to Abraham to the effect that all Abraham's male descendants were to be circumcised on the "eighth" day (Gen. 17:12). The flesh is the source of sin, and as long as Adamic nature remains mankind will not be freed from the evil influences which inevitably bring him to despair and death. The task of overcoming the evil propensities of the flesh is set before all Believers during the period of their probation. Therefore, the eight 'signs' were designed to set forth the means

by which Christ's disciples might gain the victory over the flesh.

In the ultimate, the total abolition of Adamic nature will not become a reality until the end of the one-thousand-year reign of Christ over the nations. With the second resurrection and the final judgment, the "eighth" day will dawn, bringing to fruition Yahweh's purpose with the earth. Then there shall be "no more sea" (a symbol for fleshly mankind) and "all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh" (Rev. 21:1; Num. 14:21). The eighth millennia from the creation will result in a perfected, immortalised creation.

Summarizing the eight 'signs', it will be seen that they reveal the development of Yahweh's work which He purposed to achieve through His Son, from the beginning of Christ's work in setting before men the "wine" of sound, life-giving doctrine, to the ingathering of all the redeemed into the kingdom at the commencement of the one-thousand-year Kingdom — and beyond, to the ushering-in of the final epoch of complete perfection at the dawning of the "eighth" one-thousand-year day.

The apostle Paul described the conclusive fulfilment of the divine purpose: "Then cometh the end, when he (Christ) shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet . . . That God may be all in all . . ." (1 Cor. 15:25-28).

When the meanings of the EIGHT SIGNS are considered in the order in which they have been set forth, they may illuminate the minds of men and women more fully so that they might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. . ."

Thus, for Israel *nationally* the EIGHT SIGNS were designed to convey this message:

As they were the people whom Yahweh had specially chosen and separated to become His light-bearers among the nations, they were now revealed as being spiritually bereft. Only the Son of God could supply their spiritual needs and restore them to Yahweh. Only Christ could raise them to national and spiritual life. They were to acknowledge that their Messiah and Saviour was superior to their

own concept of the Law, and that only by recognising the power of his influence upon them could they be cured of their national and spiritual impotence. Only he could provide them with that spiritual food — the word of God — which would enable Yahweh to redeem them; and they were to understand that Yahweh, through His Son, had the power to redeem them, in view of the fact that His capacity in that regard made all other forces subject to His will and authority. Sound spiritual vision is more important than physical sight; and Christ could open their "eyes" to the Truth, so that they might spiritually "see" the way which would lead them to the Kingdom of God. Individually and nationally, they could find newness of life if they would accept the words which the Son of God preached to them to enable him to unite them in harmony with their God. He would effect a national and spiritual resurrection of Israel after his second coming.

For *spiritual* Israel — those who had already accepted and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ — the message of the signs was designed to confirm and strengthen their faith, and guide them towards the Kingdom:

Having "drunk" the "wine" of his doctrine, they have become covered by the blood of his sacrifice and should begin their journey towards the kingdom, taking joy in serving their new Master. The power of such a new way of life can be obtained only through the Son of God, and he can strengthen those who recognise their helplessness and obey his voice. If they continue to partake of the spiritual "food" which he has provided his word will sustain them unto life eternal. God will continue to care for them, comforting and consoling them amidst the storms of life, and will provide the means whereby their eyes might be continually open to the full richness of divine Truth. If they remain faithful, Christ will raise them from the dead; thus all faithful disciples may rest in the assurance that they will be gathered into the Kingdom, and God's blessing will be upon their labours during their period of probation and throughout the Kingdom Age.

There must also be design in the numerical order in which the 'signs' have been set forth.

The number "one" represents unity and singularity; therefore, the *first* 'sign' emphasised the over-riding omnipotence of the One Eternal Spirit, as the source from Whom the Lord Jesus Christ derived his power and authority. Only this One, self-styled Yahweh, is able to provide

the "wine" of pure Truth which is able to transform men and women — mentally, morally and physically — for His Kingdom.

"Two", in Biblical symbology, indicates difference. Thus, the second 'sign' sets before men the hope of a new life through Christ. A knowledge of this fact requires a decision. Only *two* choices are presented: to accept such a proposition, or reject it.

The number "three" speaks of the hope of resurrection, through the making of a covenant, by means of sacrifice. Thus the *third* 'sign' reveals the only way of escape from the weakness inherent in human nature.

"Four" is the Biblical number to represent the multitudinous Christ-Body. The *fourth* sign demonstrated that a vast concourse of people, who have been developed into the Body of Christ down through the ages, will be sustained by the teaching of Christ and the word of God until they become perfect manifestations of their Father at the Judgment Seat of the Lord.

The number "five" speaks of "grace" and "restoration". The *fifth* sign illustrates that God will extend grace to His faithful servants, bringing them comfort and consolation amidst the storms of life, eventually restoring them fully to oneness and unity with Himself.

"Six" is the number to represent man. The *sixth* sign revolves around a man who had been blind from his birth, high-lighting the helplessness of man when left to his own resources. Only God can change man from a weak, spiritually-helpless, corruptible creature, into a perfect manifestation of the divine image.

The Biblical number to represent "completion" or "perfection" is "seven". Thus the *seventh* sign shows that Yahweh's purpose with His faithful servants will be brought to completion and perfection with their resurrection and elevation to divine nature.

"Eight" is the number which represents the Lord Jesus Christ. His name occurs 888 times in the New Testament. The numerical value of the name Jesus is 888. It is the number which symbolises the cutting off of the flesh — which is to say: the submission of Adamic nature to the will

of God. Appropriately, then, the *eighth* sign assured faithful Believers that they will be drawn into the Kingdom, as the "great" fish were gathered into the net. Having learned to become malleable to the will of God, they will develop a character moulded upon the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will therefore "fashion anew" the body of their "humiliation" to make them glorious manifestations of divine nature, like himself (Phil. 3:21, R.V.).

Is it any wonder, then, that John's gospel records many of the wonderful words of comfort and encouragement which the Lord addressed to his disciples during the days of his mortal walk upon earth:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid . . . Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world . . ." (John 14:27; 16:33).

A SUMMARY OF THE EIGHT MIRACULOUS SIGNS

To Israel Nationally

- *The first sign: Water to wine — John 2:1-11*

To show that Israel is spiritually bereft, and that only the Son of God, its Messiah, can supply its spiritual needs and restore it to Yahweh.

- *The Second Sign: Healing the Ruler's son — John 4:46-50*

To show that only Israel's Messiah can raise the nation to national and spiritual life.

- *The Third Sign: The Impotent man made to walk — John 5:1-16*

To show that Israel's Messiah is superior to the Judaistic concept of Law, and that only through the power of his influence can the nation be cured of its national and spiritual impotence.

- *The Fourth Sign: Feeding the Five Thousand — John 6:1-14*

Only Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, can provide the nation with the spiritual food which will enable Yahweh to redeem it.

- *The Fifth Sign: Christ calms the sea — John 6:15-21*

To show that Yahweh has the power to redeem Israel, and that all laws are subject to His will.

- *The Sixth Sign: Curing the blind man — John 9*

To show that sound spiritual vision is more important than physical sight; and only Israel's Messiah has been granted the power to enable the nation to recognise the Truth in him and heal its present blindness.

- *The Seventh Sign: Raising the dead — John 11*

To show that only by Yahweh's power, manifested through His son, can the nation be raised to newness of life.

- *The Eighth Sign: The great harvest of fish — John 21:1-14*

To show that Israel's Messiah alone is able to unite them in harmony with their God, effecting a national and spiritual revival after his second coming.

To Israel Spiritually

To show that if we drink the wine of his doctrine, and become covered with the blood of his sacrifice, we can find joy in his service: a joy to be fully realised at the glorious marriage supper of the Lamb.

To demonstrate that it is possible to receive the power of a new life only through the Son of God.

To demonstrate that Christ can strengthen those who recognise their helplessness and obey his voice.

If we continue to partake of the spiritual food which the Lord Jesus has provided, he will sustain us unto life eternal.

To demonstrate that Yahweh, through Christ, will care for such, bringing them consolation and comfort amid the storms of life.

To show that Christ will graciously open their eyes to the full vision of Truth.

To show that Christ will raise from the dead and grant eternal life to all who walk faithfully in the way of the Truth.

To demonstrate that every faithful disciple will be gathered into Christ's kingdom, to receive divine nature as a reward for their faithfulness; and to see the increase of their labours in the Age to come.

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