

SIGNS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION (III)

THE STRUCTURE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

By Arlen L. Chirwood

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30, 31).

Signs were performed in the presence of the Jewish people during Christ's earthly ministry, during the time when the kingdom of the heavens was being offered to Israel.

And, following Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, *eight of these signs* were singled out and recorded in John's gospel for the Jewish people, which could only have been during the time when the kingdom of the heavens was being reoffered to Israel.

The original offer (during time covered in the gospel accounts) was made by Christ, the Twelve, and the Seventy; and *the reoffer* (during time covered in the Book of Acts) was made by individuals comprising "a nation" separate from Israel, *the one new man* "in Christ" (cf. Matt. 21:43; Eph. 2:11-15; I Peter 2:9).

The entire history of Israel, beginning with Moses leading the people out of Egypt and continuing throughout the remainder of Man's Day, can be summed up in four words, as seen early in Israel's history through repeated occurrences in the Book of Judges:

- 1) *Disobedience.*
- 2) *Judgment.*
- 3) *Repentance.*
- 4) *Deliverance.*

The people would *disobey* that which God had commanded, and *judgment* would then follow through God using the surrounding Gentile nations to subjugate and persecute His people. God's use of the surrounding nations in this respect was to effect *repentance*; and, following repentance, God would then *deliver* His people.

This cycle was repeated time after time, particularly, as previously noted, during the days of the judges (cf. Judges 2:16-19; 3:7-15; 4:1-4; 6:1-14; 10:6-18; 11:1ff; 13:1ff). And the culmination of the matter — *a closing and final cycle, still to be completed* — began during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, over two and one half millenniums ago (II Kings 17:4ff; Dan. 1:1ff; 9:24-27).

The Offer of the Kingdom to Israel

When Christ came the first time, *past disobedience* on the part of the Jewish people, which had lasted for centuries, had resulted in the existing state of affairs. God's people found themselves under Roman rule, the Gentile world power of that day. And the reason and purpose for this state of affairs was the same as it had been numerous times in the past:

God was again using a pagan Gentile power to judge His people in order to bring about repentance.

The Deliverer had appeared *before repentance*, calling the people to *repentance*. *Deliverance* was at hand, for the Deliverer Himself was present, proclaiming *a message of deliverance, based on national repentance.*

Though the Deliverer was present before repentance, calling the people to repentance, *deliverance could not come until the people had repented.* This was the order which had previously been set forth in the Book of Judges — *disobedience, judgment, repentance,*

and *deliverance* — which, of necessity, would have had to remain the same, for this was a *Divinely established order which could never change.*

The matter surrounding *the time* of the appearance of the different deliverers whom God had sent in the past is seen both ways in the Book of Judges. Throughout the repeated accounts in this book concerning *disobedience, judgment, repentance, and deliverance*, God sent the first eleven of the fourteen judges (the deliverers) *following repentance* (3:7-9, 12-15; 4:1-4; 6:1-14; 10:6-18; 11:1ff). But, after the death of the eleventh judge (12:15), when the same sequence began again with *disobedience* on the part of the people and *judgment* on God's part, God, *prior to repentance*, sent a twelfth judge — Samson.

The angel of the Lord had revealed to Samson's mother, prior to his conception, that she would bear a son and that this son would be the one *to begin a deliverance* of "Israel out of the hands of the Philistines" (13:5). But *full deliverance* could not be brought to pass *until the Israelites had repented*, something not seen until the days of Samuel the prophet, the fourteenth and last judge (following Eli, the thirteenth judge [ISam. 7:1ff]).

Thus, Christ appearing *before deliverance*, calling the people to *repentance*, was not something new in God's dealings with His people; nor was it a break in the Divinely established order of things, for, though the Deliverer was present before repentance, *deliverance could not come until the people had repented.* Christ's appearance to Israel followed exactly the same order seen through the appearance of Israel's last three judges, with that foreshadowed by Israel's repentance during Samuel's day *still awaiting a future fulfillment today.*

Thus, in keeping with Israel's refusal to repent during the days of the twelfth and thirteenth judges, there was no repentance when God sent the Deliverer 2,000 years ago. But repentance and deliverance are ultimately seen in both instances — one in history under the fourteenth judge, and the other yet future under the same Deliverer Whom God sent 2,000 years ago, Who will one day return to His people.

When Israel's Deliverer, Jesus the Christ, appeared

the first time, the Jewish religious leaders — mainly the Scribes and Pharisees, the largest of the religious sects, the keepers and teachers of the Law — continually followed Him about the country, seeking at every turn to find fault with both the Messenger and His message. And, resultingly, the Scribes and Pharisees were the ones directly responsible for the nation rejecting both the Deliverer and His offer of deliverance, resulting in His crucifixion at the hands of the only nation which could slay the Paschal Lamb, the nation of Israel.

(The preceding is why Christ, near the close of His earthly ministry, singled out the Scribes and Pharisees — the fundamental religious leaders in Israel, the ones occupying Moses' seat — for a rebuke of a nature unlike anything seen at any other time in His ministry (Matt. 23:1ff). They were the ones who had "shut up the kingdom of the heavens against ['before,' 'in front of,' 'in the presence of'] men." They had no interest in entering the kingdom, and they had been doing everything within their power to prevent others [the general populace in Israel] from entering as well [v. 13].

Christ pronounced one "woe" after another upon these religious leaders because of that which they had done. He referred to them as "hypocrites," "fools," "blind guides," individuals likened to "whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness."

Christ stated that these individuals were "the children" of them which had "killed the prophets." And, because of that which the Scribes and Pharisees had done — bringing about rejection on the part of the Jewish people — "all the righteous blood shed upon the earth," beginning with "the blood of righteous Abel" and extending to "the blood of Zacharias" over three millenniums later, would "come upon this generation" [vv. 13-36].)

The Reoffer of the Kingdom to Israel

Following Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, a reoffer of the kingdom was extended to Israel. A message surrounding repentance and bap-

tism, attended by signs, exactly as previously seen in the gospels, marked the reoffer of the kingdom, seen in the Book of Acts (*cf.* Matt. 3:1-12; Acts 2:37-43).

The Deliverer had returned to His place in the heavens, seated at the Father's right hand (Ps. 110:1). And, in relation to Israel, He was going to remain there until the Jewish people repented.

As stated in Hosea 5:15, He was going to remain there until the Jewish people *acknowledged their offense, and sought His face*. Only following this would the Deliverer be sent a second time (Acts 3:19-21).

During the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel, particularly up through the time covered by the first seven chapters of Acts, that which Israel had done to the One Whom God had sent to deliver them (crucified Him) forms the central point to which messages proclaimed to the religious leaders of Israel are built. Messages during this time built into and called attention to the apex toward which all past disobedience had led — Israel's crucifixion of Messiah Himself, Who was God manifested in the flesh. And a call for national repentance (either directly stated or inferred) followed in each instance.

Note how Peter brought the crucifixion to the forefront in his message on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:23, 36), prior to answering the question asked by the Jewish religious leaders (v. 37), telling them exactly what they must do to rectify the wrong which had been done (vv. 38-40; *cf.* v. 41)

Then the same thing can be seen in a subsequent address by Peter on Solomon's porch, outside the Temple (3:12ff).

Then note the same thing in Peter's address before the Sanhedrin (4:8ff).

The same sequence is again followed by Peter and others in another address before the Sanhedrin (5:28ff).

And exactly the same thing is again seen through the manner in which Stephen concludes his message before the Sanhedrin, resulting in his death at the hands of the religious leaders whom

he addressed (7:51-60).

(Note, in the previous respect, Jesus *standing* at the right hand of the Father in Acts 7:56 rather than being *seated*, as in Ps. 110:1. This is what God allowed Stephen to see, through the opened heavens, following his address to the Sanhedrin [comprised of Jewish religious leaders from both the Pharisaical and Sadducean sects].

Stephen's address [vv. 2-53] was evidently of such a nature — drawing from a number of O.T. types which dealt with the whole panorama of Jewish history, but climaxing with an emphasis on the crucifixion — that it moved Powers in the heavens to the extent seen in v. 56 [Jesus *standing*, rather than seated, at His Father's right hand], awaiting Israel's reaction, with a fulfillment of that stated in Acts 3:19-21 in the offering.

But Israel's reaction toward Stephen's message was exactly the same as it had previously been toward Christ's message — rejection, followed by the death of the one who had brought the message. Thus, *since there was no repentance, there could be no deliverance*; and the Deliverer, consequently, remained in heaven, at His Father's right hand, evidently no longer standing but *seated*, in accord with Ps. 110:1 [*cf.* Heb. 1:3].)

The preceding forms a picture of the unchanging mind-set among Israel's religious leaders at the subsequent time when the Spirit of God moved John to write a gospel built around eight signs, with a declared purpose near the end of his gospel (20:30, 31). This gospel was directed to a people whom Stephen, immediately before his death, had described as "stiff-necked ['hardened'] and uncircumcised in heart and ears" (Acts 7:51) and could only have been another means which God used in His attempts to reach the Jewish people during the time when the kingdom of the heavens was being *reoffered* to the nation.

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