

THREE IMPORTANT MIRACLES

By Richard Jordan

Explaining his purpose in writing his gospel account, the Apostle John tells us that "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*" (John 20:30, 31).

Thus from the vast array of miracles performed during the earthly ministry of Christ, John selects the eight that form the structure of his record--eight miracles which accomplish a specific doctrinal purpose.

Interestingly enough, the Book of Acts seems to follow somewhat the same pattern with the ministries of Peter and Paul. In fact, as one studies the miracles performed by Christ, Peter and Paul, it soon becomes obvious that important dispensational and doctrinal truths lay just beneath the surface of the actual events. Here we want to focus briefly on the first miracle performed by each member of this illustrious trio, for their *first miracles* have much to say about the focus and theme of their subsequent ministries.

A MIRACLE OF REVELATION

After recording Christ's miracle of turning water into wine, John adds a pungent editorial comment:

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him." (John 2:11)

His glory? Yes, and especially that glory associated with His *coming in glory* to "sit upon the throne of his glory" (cf. Matt. 25:31; 19:28). Notice how the details of the account abound with typical significance:

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: (John 2:1).

The *third day* in Scripture is the day of resurrection. In this connection Hosea 6:1,2 should be placed alongside John 2:1. There we read the plaintive cry of the nation Israel in her day of trouble:

"Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.

"After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight."

Thus, John sets before us a typical picture of a future *third day* scene, when "after two days" of dispersion and trouble Israel will invite Christ to come to them and then will be fulfilled what the prophets had long before predicted:

"Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah [i.e., My delight is in her], and thy land Beulah [i.e., Married]; for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.

"As a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee; and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." (Isa. 62:4-5)

In that day, Christ will return and do for Israel what she has been unable to do for herself. By His own power He will restore her completely and place His beloved nation in her land so fully that she shall indeed be *married* both to the land and to Him, never to be removed again (see Hosea 2:14-20, Rev. 19:7, etc.).

But we should notice that this is also a *seventh-day scene*. The second chapter of John begins with the word *and*, indicating a connection with the events of Chapter 1. A quick glance through the preceding verses show that they cover a period of four consecutive days. Add to this the three days of 1:1 and we have the marriage in Cana on the seventh day! All this clearly looks forward to that wonderful millennial sabbath rest when Israel is no longer to be without a king, without a priest, without a home, but is to be joined once again in glorious union to her Lord. Then Hosea's prediction will be a joyful reality:

"And I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.

"I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord." (Hos. 2:19, 20)

John is also careful to tell us that "the mother of Jesus was there." Mary's inclusion surely is as a representative figure, for it can be equally said of her and of her nation that "as concerning the flesh, Christ came." This representative role is further borne out by our Lord's means of addressing His mother in Verse 4. Rather than being disrespectful or seeking to rebuke her, His use of the term "woman" demonstrates the broader significance of Mary's presence.¹ Jeremiah 6:2 is a fitting commentary on the use of this term here:

"I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman."

Seen thusly as a representative of her nation, Mary's confession is all the more stirring:

"And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine."
(John 2:3)

The vine is often used in Scripture as a symbol of the national life of Israel and wine is but the expected "*fruit* of the vine." Our Lord had come seeking fruit from His vineyard only to find that it had failed to produce the wine "that cheers the heart of God and men." Israel was to have been God's channel to bring His salvation and blessing to the nations. She was to proclaim to the nations, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." He had planted them a "choice vineyard," but they brought forth only wild grapes.

Passages like Matthew 3:7-10, 21:17-19, 33-43 and Luke 13:6-9 demonstrate that both Christ and His disciples hungered and thirsted for fruit, for wine, from God's vineyard, and they reveal the dread consequences of failure!

With the failure of the nation thus illustrated and confessed, Christ proceeds to demonstrate how He could and would produce for them what they failed to produce themselves:

"And there were set there six water pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.

"Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim." (John 2:6,7)

Six is the number of man and his labors--six empty stone waterpots which, at Christ's command, were filled to the brim with water, a familiar type of the Holy Spirit. We should not overlook Ezekiel's words here:

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

"And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." (Ezek. 36:26, 27. See also John 7:37-39.)

Where the "purifying of the Jews" had failed, Christ wonderfully accomplished the task. All the servants had to do was "fill the pots to the brim" and then "draw out and bear unto the governor of the feast." It was the Lord who changed the water of purification into the wine of joy for the marriage feast!

All this speaks of the true seventh day when our Lord will write His law upon the hearts of His people and produce good fruit from His vineyard.

Sadly, the enigma of the governor all too well foreshadowed the response of Israel's leaders to the proclamation that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." His suggestion that the

seconds were better than the first serving brings us to Peter's first miracle and the renewed opportunity extended to Israel at that time.

A MIRACLE OF RESTORATION

Notice how Peter's first miracle recorded in Acts was used to call special attention to his message and ministry:

"And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

"And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this...?" (Acts 3:11, 12)

The message that followed was a clear exposition of the meaning of the miracle--a miracle which spoke of the then present opportunity for the restoration of the nation Israel. Peter's words in the next chapter are important here:

"If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:9, 10, 12)

The word translated *made whole* in reference to the lame man in Verse 9 is the same word translated *saved* in Verse 12. Thus, Acts 4:12 is clearly a reference to the healing and restoration of the *nation*, a restoration clearly illustrated in the healing of the lame man.

As Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, they met "a certain lame man" who was a living picture of the nation Israel, both before and after restoration through Jesus Christ.

We learn from Acts 4:22 that this helpless beggar, lame from birth, was 40 years old, reminding us of Israel in her unbelief. He is said to have been "impotent" (4:9), just as his nation was totally helpless and unable to walk in the way God commanded.

In early Acts, Israel lay at the threshold of kingdom blessing, just as the lame man lay at the gate called Beautiful. Just as he was unable to enter into the temple, so without Christ Israel lacked strength to enter into her blessings. And both the lame man and his nation were seeking the wrong thing--only temporal deliverance and earthly prosperity.

Peter, representing Israel's believing remnant, declares to the beggar, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." (Acts 3:6) The results are significant:

"And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

"And he leaping up stood, and walketh, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

"And all the people saw him walking and praising God." (Acts 3:7-9)

All of this is beautifully typical of restored Israel "walking and leaping" as Isaiah 35:6 had predicted, and entering their place of blessing with the Apostles, praising God.

Thus, Peter's first miracle speaks of Israel's *restoration* and the opportunity that lay before that favored nation in the early Acts period.

A MIRACLE OF REJECTION

While Peter's first miracle was one of *healing*, Paul's first miracle was one of *blinding* and points clearly to Israel's *rejection*--and the resultant *reconciliation* of the Gentiles. This is so significant that we quote the account in its entirety:

"And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus:

"Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

"But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

"Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

"And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

"And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

"Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." (Acts 13:6-12)

Here the scene is transferred from Jerusalem--indeed, from the land of Israel altogether--

and is focused in Syria, on Gentile soil. And how clearly this incident pictures what was taking place dispensationally at this time: the fall of Israel and salvation going to the Gentiles as a result.

The name *Bar-jesus* means *son of Jehovah-Saviour* and is a clear statement of the place Israel was intended to fill before the nations. But, as Paul declared, he was in reality the "child of the devil," exactly what Israel in her rebellion had become.

Thus, he was blinded "for a season" and left to helplessly wander about. "Then," Luke tells us, "The deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." (V. 12)

And just what that "doctrine of the Lord" was, is set forth in Romans 11:

"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. (V. 11)

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness is part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. (V. 25)

"For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet now have obtained mercy through their unbelief:

"Even so have these now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. (Vs. 30-32)

The teaching of Paul's first miracle is clearly the *rejection* of Israel and the *reconciliation* of the Gentiles. Thus, the Jew was blinded "for a season" and *for a reason*, and we see a Gentile, who bears the name of the Apostle of the Gentiles, saved as the result.

Later, in Acts 13, it is Paul who introduces into the Scriptural record for the very first time the proclamation of justification by faith alone, the basis of that special, further revelation committed unto his trust.

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren , that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

"And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38, 39. Cf. Rom. 3:21-26)

Our Lord's first miracle foreshadowed His reign in glory. Peter's first miracle

foreshadowed the restoration of Israel. Paul's first miracle foreshadowed the rejection of Israel and the reconciliation of the Gentiles during the present *dispensation of the grace of God*.

1. Cf. John 19:26. Just as He commits Mary to John, so He places the nation Israel in the hands of the apostles while He was to be absent--a royal exile (cf. Matthew 21:43 with Luke 12:32).