

SIGNS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

FOURTH SIGN (6:1-14)

Feeding the Multitude

By Arlen L. Chirwood

The first three signs in John's gospel are peculiar to his gospel. The fourth and fifth signs though are not. Events surrounding the fourth sign (6:1-14) are found in all of the other three gospels (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17), and events surrounding the fifth sign are found in both Matthew and Mark (Matt. 14:22-36; Mark 6:45-56).

Then the sixth and seventh signs are peculiar to John's gospel; and the eighth sign, the resurrection of Christ, as the fourth sign, is found in all four gospels.

The fourth sign in John's gospel has to do with *supernatural provision* rather than supernatural healing, as seen in the second and third signs. The fourth sign foreshadows *that which Israel will experience at God's hand once supernatural healing has occurred.*

A healed nation will be restored to a healed land; and, once in the land, the same God Who will have previously BOTH healed the nation and the land will THEN provide for the nation in the land. ALL will occur through supernatural intervention, at the time which God has determined and revealed in His Word.

A Mountain, The Passover

One part of the backdrop for events surrounding the fourth sign in John's gospel has to do with Jesus taking His disciples aside and going up into *a mountain.*

The other part of the backdrop has to do with the subsequent mention of *the Passover* being at hand.

1) A Mountain

"A mountain" in Scripture signifies *a kingdom* (cf. Ps. 2:6; Isa. 2:2-5; Ezek. 28:16; Dan. 2:35, 44, 45; Matt. 16:28-17:5). And this is something seen and established very early in Scripture, in the opening chapters of Genesis. Note the symbolic use of "mountain" (Heb., *har*) the first four times that the word is used in Scripture during the Noachian Flood (Gen. 7:19, 20; 8:4, 5).

The typological teaching surrounding Noah and his family going through the Flood has to do with Israel going through the Tribulation yet future:

Enoch was removed preceding the Flood, as the Church will be removed preceding the Tribulation.

Noah and his family passed safely through the Flood, as Israel will pass safely through the Tribulation.

Worldwide destruction occurred then, as worldwide destruction will occur during the Tribulation.

There was a new beginning following the Flood, as there will be a new beginning following the Tribulation.

The whole scenario, from a typical standpoint, has to do with the destruction of Gentile world power during the Tribulation (the waters covering the mountains [7:19, 20]), with Israel then seen in the same position as Noah and his family at the end of one hundred fifty days — *ABOVE the mountains, ABOVE the destroyed kingdoms* (8:4).

Then, just as the mountains were later seen emerging from the Flood waters as the waters subsided (where the Hebrew word *har* is used a final time in the account [8:5]), *the nations will emerge from the judgments of the Tribulation. BUT, Israel will retain the position seen in the typology of Gen. 8:4, resting ABOVE the mountains, resting ABOVE all the kingdoms of the world.*

Note Isa. 2:2 in this respect:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it."

2) The Passover

The Passover, also mentioned in connection with the fourth sign in John's gospel, is the first of seven festivals which God gave to the Israelites during Moses' day (Lev. 23:4ff). These festivals, kept year after year by the Israelites, foreshadowed future events pertaining to Israel which will occur following the Tribulation, beginning with Christ's return and extending into the establishment of the millennial kingdom. In this respect, these seven festivals could be referred to as *the prophetic calendar of Israel.*

The thought of "the kingdom" is first brought to the forefront by the mention of Christ taking His disciples aside and going up *into a mountain.* Then, before anything about the sign is dealt with (having to do with Israel and the kingdom), the nearness of "the Passover" is mentioned.

"The Passover" had to do *with death and shed blood.* It had to do *with the Israelites slaying lambs, with the blood of these lambs being shed, and with the Israelites applying that blood to the door posts and lintel of the houses in which they dwelled, according to God's instructions* (Ex. 12:1ff).

"The Passover" had to do *with substitutionary atonement,* something which first began to be opened up and revealed in Genesis chapter three (v. 21).

Death had been decreed upon the firstborn in every household; but God provided *a substitute, a lamb from the flock which could die in the stead of the firstborn.* And the proper application of the blood of this lamb on the doorposts and lintel of the house in which the firstborn lived showed that the firstborn residing in that house *had already died. A substitute had died in his stead, something which God recognized* (cf. Gen. 22:8-13).

God, through Moses, had told the Israelites:

"...the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it [the paschal lamb] in the evening.

And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses...

For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt...

And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you..." (Ex. 12:6b, 7a, 12a 13a).

When the Lord passed through the land of Egypt at midnight, He looked for *ONE thing ALONE*. He looked for the *BLOOD of slain lambs on the doorposts and lintel of the houses*.

IF the Lord saw the blood, He knew that the firstborn had already died in that house. And *the Lord passed over that house*, for He was satisfied.

IF there was NO blood, there was NO indication that the firstborn had died. And *the Lord then slew the firstborn Himself*, for death had been decreed upon *ALL the firstborn*. The firstborn *MUST die, either via a substitute or apart from a substitute*.

"Christ" is the *Passover Lamb*, and Israel has slain this Lamb. But the nation, God's firstborn son, has yet to apply the blood. The Passover, the first of the festivals, points to that future day when Christ returns, the nation looks upon the One Whom they slew, they recognize that which has been done, and they then, *through faith*, appropriate the blood (*cf. Ex. 11:4, 5; 12:3ff; Isa. 53:4-6; Zech. 12:10-14; 13:6*).

The Passover foreshadows Israel's national conversion at the time of Christ's return. *ONLY AFTER* a nation has been born in a day (*Isa. 66:8*) can those things foreshadowed by the remaining six festivals occur. *ONLY AFTER* the Passover has been fulfilled (and, in reality, the subsequent six festivals as well) can that foreshadowed by the fourth sign in John's gospel occur.

The Loaves and Fish

The fourth sign in John's gospel has to do with a miraculous multiplication of five barley loaves and two small fish which a lad had in his possession. And the multiplication of this small quantity of food was enough to feed both the disciples and the multitude, with *twelve baskets of food* left over after the remaining fragments had been gathered.

Key information necessary for properly understanding the sign, within its contextual setting (as it is introduced through referring *to a mountain and to the nearness of the Passover* [vv. 3, 4]), is given later in the chapter when inquiry pertaining to the sign is made by some comprising the multitude.

Note verses twenty-six and twenty-seven in this respect:

"Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles ['the signs'], but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life [contextually, 'age-lasting life'], which the Son of man shall give unto you..."

Then in verses thirty and thirty-one, the people requested another sign, calling attention to the manna provided in a supernatural manner during Moses' day. But Jesus, remaining within the framework of the sign already given and their mention of the manna, drew a parallel between that bread (the manna) and the Bread which had been provided from heaven (He Himself [vv. 32, 33]). The former foreshadowed the latter. A partaking of bread to nourish and sustain the physical body foreshadowed a partaking of Bread to nourish and sustain the spiritual man.

The people then said unto Christ, "Lord, evermore give us this bread" (v. 34).

Then Jesus said unto them:

"I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst..."

For I came down from heaven...

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever ['unto the age']: and the bread that I will give is my flesh...

...Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life ['age-lasting life']; and I will raise him up at the last day" (vv. 35b, 38a, 51a, 53b, 54).

The previous multiplication of the loaves and fish foreshadowed partaking of Christ Himself, as the provided bread during Moses' day had foreshadowed as well — eating of the Bread of life, eating His flesh, drinking His blood.

But how can this be the case? How can one partake of Christ Himself in such a manner?

The answer is simple, and it was given in the introductory verses of John's gospel:

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14a; *cf. vv. 1, 2*).

The Old Testament Scriptures — which, in their entirety, are about the person and work of Christ, revealing the Son — became flesh (*cf. Luke 24:25-27, 39-44*). The written Word, which *is alive* (Heb. 4:12), became flesh, in the person of the Son, *the living Word*. And the Two *are so inseparably related — two manifestations of the same thing — that partaking of One is synonymous with partaking of the Other*.

Thus, one eats of the Bread of life, partakes of Christ's flesh and blood, *by partaking of the written Word*. And Christians *MUST* partake of Christ today, in this manner, if they are to have a part with Him in His kingdom:

"...Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man [a Messianic title], and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6:53b).

But the sign itself has to do with *Israel*. The sign has to do with *the nation through whom the written Word was given and to whom the living Word came, the nation which will be in possession of Both during the Messianic Era*.

There will be *an abundant supply for the nation in that day, above and beyond their every need*. The twelve baskets of food remaining in the sign ("twelve," the number of *governmental perfection*) *NOT ONLY foreshadows this abundant supply, BUT these twelve full baskets also foreshadow Israel placed at the head of the nations, in the position of the one through whom an abundant supply will flow out to the Gentile nations*.

The One upon Whose shoulders the government will rest (Judg. 16:2; Isa. 9:6, 7) will be *in Israel's midst, on David's throne* (Joel 2:27; Luke 1:31-33); and *the government of the earth, with this abundant supply, will flow from David's throne through the twelve tribes of Israel out to the nations of the earth*.

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