

that the world about us holds in high esteem—the acquisition of wealth, increased knowledge, and status in the community—regarding them as valid prizes for which we should strive. Solomon, however, sets the whole matter of worldly ambition in its proper perspective as, in the memorable epilogue, he comes finally and significantly to the axiomatic moment of truth, declaring with fervour and conviction: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (v. 13).

After reading this heartfelt confession by Solomon, we are left with the impression that it was

given only after agonising self-examination and deep repentance. It was uttered, perhaps, in the same spirit as his earlier impassioned prayers before the God of Israel at the dedication and consecration of the temple, when, in the presence of all the people, he pleaded: “Hearken therefore unto the supplications of Thy servant, and of Thy people Israel, which they shall make toward this place . . . and when Thou hearest, forgive . . . if they pray toward this place, and confess Thy name, and turn from their sin . . . then hear Thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of Thy servants, and of Thy people Israel” (2 Chron. 6:21,26,27).

The signs of John’s Gospel

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IT IS CUSTOMARY to think of there being eight ‘signs’ in John’s Gospel. The Greek word *sēmeion* is not unique to John’s Gospel, but John does use only this word in relation to the miracles he describes. Reference works tell us that *sēmeion* means ‘a sign’, so this, rather than ‘miracle’, is an appropriate translation into English. The AV is not consistent, sometimes translating *sēmeion* as ‘miracle’ and sometimes as ‘sign’, thirteen and four times respectively in John’s Gospel. More recent versions use ‘sign’ more consistently.

The signs recorded by John are, as he himself reports, a selection from the many signs which “truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples” (20:30). The eight signs commonly identified are often related to each other in pairs, set out in the table as described by that arch pattern seeker Bullinger in his *Companion Bible*, Appendix 176.

disciples asking, concerning the blind man, “who did sin, this man, or his parents . . . ?” (9:2). Further connections are suggested for these and the other pairs, some more convincing than others.

It is interesting, and can be helpful, to find what seem to us to be patterns in Scripture. There is the risk, however, that we can allow a possible pattern to take precedence over the actual situation as recorded. So, with John’s signs, the suggestion that there are nine, rather than eight, might appear to upset the pattern and, unreasonably, be rejected merely on that score. What must be examined, as impartially as possible, is the evidence within the text of Scripture.

Taking the Gospel as a whole, without any preconceived notions, is not the greatest miracle, and sign, the resurrection of Jesus himself? And, indeed, when asked the question by the Jews, “What sign [*sēmeion*] shewest thou . . . ?”, he “an-

Sign 1: water into wine (2:1-11)

Sign 2: healing nobleman’s son (4:46-54)

Sign 3: healing the paralytic (5:1-16)

Sign 4: feeding the five thousand (6:1-14)

Sign 5: walking on the water (6:15-21)

Sign 6: healing the man born blind (ch. 9)

Sign 7: raising of Lazarus (ch. 11)

Sign 8: multitude of fishes (21:1-14)

There are quite striking connections between the elements of some of these pairs. For example, the second and seventh both refer to death, the nobleman’s son being “at the point of death” (4:47) and Lazarus being raised from death. The third and sixth both refer to sin, Jesus telling the healed paralytic to “sin no more” (5:14) and the

swered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”. Clearly, as a sign, he was referring to his resurrection, as the disciples later recognised (2:18-22).

However, the resurrection of Jesus did not occur “in the presence of his disciples” (20:30), for none of them, nor indeed any other human

being, was there within the confines of the tomb when life was restored. Nor was it one which “truly did Jesus”, at least not in the same sense as applied to the other signs, even if we take into account the enigmatic statements, “I will raise it up”, speaking of his body (2:19), and, “I have power to take it again”, speaking of his life (10:18). On the face of things, then, though a sign, the resurrection would not seem to fit into John’s own criteria.

Though not actually observed by his disciples, the resurrection of Jesus was demonstrated to have occurred by his appearances to them. John describes, deliberately no doubt in identical terms, two appearances which are miraculous in the way they occurred:

“the first day of the week, when the doors were shut . . . came Jesus and stood in the midst” (20:19);

“then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst” (v. 26).

That these two miracles were signs is supported by the flow of the narrative. They follow each other immediately, and then, immediately after the second, as if referring to what he has just described, John writes: “And many *other* signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples” (v. 30). The force of this can be seen if we replace the preceding narrative by an incident which did not involve a miracle. Suppose, for instance, that John had just recorded, as Matthew does (28:11-15), the report of the soldiers, and the elders’ instructions for them to say that the body had been stolen while they slept. The conjunction would now be thus: “. . . this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day . . . And many other signs truly did Jesus . . .”. The lack of continuity in this reconstruction serves to emphasise the continuity in John’s actual record.

Here then are two miracles which “truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples”, thereby qualifying as ‘signs’ in John’s terms. Are there then ten signs? The second of these identical

appearances occurred specifically for the benefit of Thomas. It seems to me legitimate, therefore, to regard the two as essentially one; the same sign repeated. And it was by this sign, now the eighth, that the greatest sign of all, the resurrection of Jesus, was confirmed to his disciples. The miracle was done particularly as a sign for his disciples, and so too, it seems, was the turning of water into wine; and belief, though in differing respects, was the result (2:11; 20:25-29). Pattern between pairs, if that seems important to us, can therefore be maintained.

There is also the additional point that there may be a significance in the number eight, as marking a new beginning, and here we have a double eighth sign. The first of these occurred on the first day of the week (20:19), in a sense an eighth day, and the second “after eight days” (v. 26). The Greek word for ‘after’, *meta*, can also mean ‘upon’, which would indicate the first day of the next week, another eighth day.

However, it then leaves the ninth sign, the multitude of fishes, recorded in chapter 21, out on its own, but so it is. Chapter 20 concludes by John declaring concerning the signs, “these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”. It is reasonable, and appropriate, to take the phrase “these are written” as referring to those signs John had already described, beginning and ending with ones which brought belief. And it was the last of these signs, demonstrating the resurrection of Jesus, which clinched the disciples’ conviction that he was indeed the Christ, the Son of God.

The miracle of the multitude of fishes was therefore not necessary to convince the disciples of this stupendous truth. They already believed it. At the time, what it first did was to identify the man on the shore as “the Lord” (21:7). But, of course, like all the other eight signs, it had a parabolic significance. Not least it confirmed that the disciples’ work as “fishers of men” was to continue, but now with the support and power of the risen Lord.

The Exodus

Readers will have noticed the absence of this long-running series from the previous issue and the present one. Having reached the end of chapter 10, and completed the consideration of the first nine plagues, the series will take a break for three months, and will resume, God willing, in June. Further articles will consider chapters 11–15 of the book of Exodus, concluding, it is estimated, sometime in the first half of 2004, after which consideration will be given to publishing it as a book.