

1. **v. 3 strength of hand.** The importance of the 'hand' motif has been pointed out in earlier articles. In this section it occurs in verses 3,9,14 and 16.
2. **v. 5 this service.** The use of this term harks back to God's speech to Moses at the burning bush (3:12), and to Moses' demand that Pharaoh should let Israel go to serve the Lord their God, rather than serving Pharaoh.
3. **v. 9 sign.** This term (Heb. *'owth*) occurs 80 times, and is usually rendered 'sign' (60 times) or 'token' (14 times). It is the same term translated 'token' only seven verses later, in verse 16. In Exodus it is used of the plagues on Egypt, the signs which Moses works with his rod, and the token God gives Moses in 3:12. Just as God works signs and wonders, and just as the sign of blood was to mark their doorways (12:13), so Israel are to maintain a sign of their own, as instructed in this verse. The full list of occurrences in Exodus is as follows: 3:12; 4:8,9, 17,28,30; 7:3; 8:23; 10:1,2; 12:13; 13:9,16; 31:13,17.
4. **v. 9 memorial.** The Hebrew derives from the verb 'remember', just like the English. The same term occurs illustratively at 12:14; 17:14; 28:12 and elsewhere. The occurrence of the root at 3:15 is also perhaps relevant. Israel are to keep in memory Who God is (in chapter 3), and just what He has done (in 13:9); a memorial is a device by which something might be remembered, an *aide-mémoire*.
5. **v. 12 set apart.** Literally, 'cause to pass over', using the root 'avar. This is not the same Hebrew term as 'Passover', though the coincidence of the English is a happy one! 'avar is used again with significance in Exodus 15:16. Note that in 13:2 Israel were commanded to 'sanctify' their first-born (the root which relates to 'making separate', 'holy').
6. **v. 12 matrix.** See under 'womb' in verse 2 (Oct. 2003, p. 367, Note 6).
7. **v. 15 hardly.** As good a translation as any; literally, 'when Pharaoh was hard/severe to let us go'. The term *qashah* is the one used for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in 7:3 (see also 1:14, 'hard', and 6:9, 'cruel').
8. **v. 16 token.** Same word as 'sign' in verse 9.
9. **v. 16 frontlets.** From a Hebrew verb meaning 'to bind, tie around', this term occurs elsewhere only at Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18 (the context is the same as here in both passages; interestingly, the verb 'to bind' in those passages is a different one, *qashar*, although the term for phylacteries/frontlets is the same as the one used here). It is not difficult to see how the Jewish practice originated, and the Deuteronomy passages furnish further details.

## Water, wine and the red heifer\*

### 2. The signs

Sarah Joiner

*IN PART 1* we considered the ritual of the red heifer and how it foreshadowed the work of Jesus. We now consider Jesus's miracle of transforming water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana, as recorded in John 2, and draw attention to a significant link between the miracle and the ritual.

**T**HE BELOVED disciple calls Jesus's miracles 'signs', and the miracle at Cana the "beginning of signs". Interestingly: "In the synoptics miracles are *dunameis*, 'acts of power', 'mighty works'. In St John they are *erga*, 'works', when Jesus is speaking, and when the evangelist or others are speaking, *semeia*, 'signs', i.e. acts of symbolic, spiritual truth . . . Jesus' signs manifest the glory of God or His Son".<sup>1</sup>

In calling Jesus's miraculous works 'signs' the Spirit is drawing our attention to some key points.

It is from *semeia* that we gain our word 'semaphore', the system of waving coloured bats or flags to signal instructions to ships and aircraft. A signal usually warns us of something which is about to happen; it is sometimes a code which encapsulates a valuable message, such as the

\* All Scripture quotations are from the NKJV unless otherwise stated.

1. M. Hunter, *According to John* (SCM Press, London, 1968), p. 67.

trumpet call for a military advance or retreat. But John's signs are more than this.

### Signs in Scripture

The Septuagint uses *semeia* as the equivalent of the Hebrew *oth*. Significantly, *oth* is used frequently in Exodus; the ten plagues were actually signs that Yahweh alone is God, and that the gods of the Egyptians were mere idols. Obviously, the beloved disciple had this in mind when writing of Jesus's first sign, for turning water into the new wine of life is the very antithesis of Moses turning the Nile's life-giving waters into the blood of death. Indeed, the fourth Gospel is full of Exodus motifs.

In addition, the signs which the Old Testament prophets gave epitomised the very heart of their messages: Jeremiah with his earthen flask, smashed as Jerusalem would be (Jer. 19); Ezekiel with his image of Jerusalem besieged depicted on a clay tablet, just as Nebuchadnezzar would literally lay siege to the city (Ezek. 4:1-3). In short, "The *oth* of the prophet was both picture and pledge—not only an acted parable but a real earnest of what God was bringing to pass".<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the red heifer was both a picture of the Lord Jesus and a pledge that God's Son would sacrifice himself once and for all. In the same way, by turning the water into wine Jesus is offering us a profound picture of the abundant provision of his sacrifice. More than this, it is the "earnest", the deposit or guarantee, of the new covenant which God was sealing with the blood of His Son. The wine of the marriage in Cana signalled that the new wine of the Kingdom was on its way.

Jesus himself encourages us to see a symbolic meaning in his work. In response to his mother's observation,<sup>3</sup> "They have no wine", Jesus replies, "My hour has yet not come" (Jno. 2:3,4). In John's Gospel Jesus's "hour" clearly refers to his crucifixion and sacrifice (8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1).<sup>4</sup> Thus Jesus seems to be pressing us to equate the abundance of wine which he produces at this celebration with his blood shed for the taking away of our sins.

### The third day and the seventh day

It is right to see symbolic meaning in this sign, then, but where does the red heifer fit into all this? The allusion that first put my father onto the scent of a link with the heifer is found in John 2:1: "On the *third day* there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee". On a basic level, the writer is

telling us that it was the third day since Jesus spoke with Nathanael, promising him that he would see Jesus do "greater things" than read the thoughts of his heart (1:50). As Nathanael came from Cana (21:2), it seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus is keeping his word and showing some of the "greater things" to his first disciples.

But is the Spirit willing us to see more? We know that Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac on "the third day" (Gen. 22:4); the butler was released on "the third day", whereas the baker was hanged (40:20-22); on "the third day" the Lord came down to Sinai (Ex. 19:11); and so on. In brief, the events of "the third day" herald the sacrifice and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But it was not just the third day when the wedding at Cana took place, it was also the seventh. Just as John draws the Gospel full circle by concluding with the tragic triumphs of the last week of the Lord's life, so he also starts his Gospel by recording the events of seven days:

**Day 1 (Thursday).**<sup>5</sup> The Pharisees ask John the Baptist if he is the Messiah (1:19-28).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

3. Or was it expectation, as Chrysostom argues (*Homilies on the Gospel of John and Hebrews*, Eerdmans, 1989, p. 74)? We know that Mary "kept" all that was said about the Lord by Simeon, and the momentous events of his birth, "in her heart" (Lk. 2:51). Having heard of John the Baptist's public testimony to the Lord, and seen how disciples were beginning to gather about him, did she now expect greatness from him? Or was it, as Brother Melva Purkis (*A Life of Jesus*, p. 66) has suggested, that she had been accustomed to him skillfully solving family problems, and trusted that he would deal with the situation without supernatural aid?

4. Though J. H. Bernard (*St John*, Vol. 1, ICC, T. & T. Clark, 1928, p. 76) points out that another layer of meaning here could be that Jesus's "hour" was not "come" for him to begin his public ministry, I feel that this is secondary to the hour of his sacrifice.

5. We begin the countdown from Thursday because the wedding would have taken place on a Wednesday: "Marriage with a maiden was commonly celebrated on a Wednesday afternoon, which allowed the first days of the week for preparation, and enabled the husband, if he had a charge to prefer against the previous chastity of his bride, to make immediate complaint before the local Sanhedrin, which sat every Thursday". Alfred Edersheim, "Mothers, Daughters and Wives in Israel" (*Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, 1876, Philologos Religious Online Books, <http://www.philologos.org>).

**Day 2 (Friday).** John testifies that Jesus is the Messiah by the words, “Behold the Lamb of God” (vv. 29-34).<sup>6</sup>

**Day 3 (Saturday).** Two of John’s disciples (John and Andrew) follow the Lord (vv. 35-42).

**Day 4 (Sunday).** Jesus calls Philip, who introduces Nathanael. Nathanael believes that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus promises that he will see “greater things” (vv. 43-51).

**Day 7 (Wednesday).** Three days later Jesus displays “greater things” by transforming water into wine. Thus Jesus manifests his glory and the disciples believe (2:1-11).

So this day of the marriage is both the third day *and* the seventh day. Surely John, with his love of symbolism, is pushing our minds towards the significance of the red heifer. Why? He wants us to understand the importance of what the Lord Jesus has done for us, and our need to repent and live in him.

#### The red heifer connection

It is one of John’s foremost concerns to show his readers how Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets.<sup>7</sup> Echoes of the feasts, sacrifices and offerings can be heard throughout his writings, testifying to the fact that Jesus is the supreme sacrifice for our sins, and that all previous sacrifices find their final resting place in him.

And now we have emphasised for us how perfectly Jesus fulfils the shadow cast by the ritual of the red heifer, the most mysterious and extraordinary of all the Mosaic rituals.<sup>8</sup> Many have argued that the need for purification, after rubbing shoulders with death, was a matter of hygiene as well as a spiritual law.<sup>9</sup> But the emphasis is surely on the spiritual nature of the heifer ritual; touching a bone that was a few hundred years old was not a real health risk, nor was walking over a grave when the body had been properly buried. So why the need for cleansing in such cases? The whole human condition of sin and death is spiritualised in the red heifer ritual.

In the context of Jesus turning the water into choice wine, arguably the best ever produced, on the third/seventh day, consider the following verses from Numbers 19:

“He shall purify himself with the water on the *third day* and on the *seventh day*; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the *third day* and on the *seventh day*, he will not be clean . . . The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean on the *third day* and on

the *seventh day*; and on the *seventh day* he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean. But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean” (vv. 12,19,20).

The words “third day” and “seventh day” are repeated three and four times respectively because they are of paramount importance. If a

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6. Jesus is probably returning on Day 2 from being tempted in the wilderness. When John the Baptist sees Jesus he recounts the events of Jesus’s baptism, which presumably happened on the day when John had last seen Jesus, forty days or so earlier.
  7. Perhaps this confirms the suggestion of Brother Leen and Sister Kathleen Ritmeyer that John had previously been a temple priest.
  8. It is noteworthy that the account of the red heifer ritual in Numbers 19:2 starts with the words: “This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD has commanded”, which occurs only here and in Numbers 31:21, where the people are purified by following the procedures of the red heifer rites. This seems to indicate the unique importance of these rituals. See Ellicott’s commentary on Numbers (p. 533).
  9. “. . . the water of purification described in Number 19 actually had the ability to destroy germs and infection . . . This water of purification contained ‘cedar’ oil that came from a kind of juniper tree that grew in both Israel and in the Sinai. This cedar oil would irritate the skin, encouraging the person to vigorously rub the solution into their hands. Most importantly, the hyssop tree—associated with mint, possibly marjoram—would produce hyssop oil. This hyssop oil is actually a very effective antiseptic and antibacterial agent. Hyssop oil contains 50 percent carvacrol which is an antifungal and antibacterial agent still used in medicine, according to the book *None of These Diseases*. When we note that the waters of purification from the Red Heifer Sacrifice were to be used to cleanse someone who had become defiled and unclean due to touching a dead body, we begin to understand that this law was an incredibly effective medical law as well as a spiritual law . . . The Jews stood apart from the pagan nations in attention to sanitation and personal cleanliness as a result of the commands of God revealed in the Old Testament” (Jeffrey, Grant R., *The Signature of God*, Frontier Research Publications Inc. (1996), pp. 152-3). This is interesting, but could a mere sprinkling purify the flesh without Divine aid?—though it should be noted that in verses 13 and 20 the word for sprinkling, *zaraq*, actually means ‘to throw in quantities, e.g. in handfuls or bowlfuls’. It is quite distinct from the verb ‘to sprinkle’, *nazah*, used in verses 4,18,19,21.

person defiled by death wished to become clean, he must first purify himself on the third day in order to be clean on the seventh. This is the simple, powerful message at the heart of Jesus's first sign. Unless we associate ourselves with the things of the third day, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, we will not be clean on the seventh day when he returns to set up his Kingdom. John 3:5 clearly tells us how to associate ourselves with the third day: we must be baptized into the death of the Lord. We must drink of the wine of the new covenant, which is also typified in this first

sign. Then, and only then, do we enter into God's grace (Tit. 3:4-7). He will then cleanse us on the seventh day, that is, the day of his Kingdom.

We are imprisoned in 'bodies of death' (Rom. 7:24), we are unclean. If we reject God's remedy for purification—belief, repentance and baptism into the awesome sacrifice of His only beloved Son—we will be cut off on the seventh day. This is what the sign warns us of, clearly and simply. Accept the Lord's sacrifice, for there is no other way.

[\(To be continued\)](#)



## Encounter

*Reprinted items from earlier issues, chosen by the Publishing Editor*

# The Law given through Moses\*

## 24. The leper (concluded)

Islip Collyer

**T**HE VERY significant and peculiar ceremony in the final cleansing of the leper, to which reference was made at the end of the last article, was in putting a spot of oil in addition to the blood on the thumb of the right hand, the great toe of the right foot and the tip of the right ear. We noted in the last article that the ceremony with the leper so closely resembled the sanctification of the priests as to enforce the conclusion that there was an especial element of ritual prophecy in the matter.

The leper needed more ceremonial in his cleansing than was required in the offerings for sinners, not because he was accounted more guilty, but because he was a type of stricken humanity. In his restoration he was a type of the elect of God called to be kings and priests in the age to come, and so needing a sanctification such as was ordinarily reserved for the priest—ears to hear, feet to walk and hands to work, all dedicated to the Divine service by the blood of the atoning sacrifice.

But what is the significance of oil in this matter? And why is it that we do not read of oil being put on ear, thumb and toe of the high priest and his sons? The tabernacle and all the holy emblems it contained were anointed with

oil. Oil was sprinkled on the altar (Lev. 8:11) and was poured on the head of the high priest and sprinkled on his garments and on the garments of his sons (v. 30); but ears, hands and feet were not anointed in this special manner as with the cleansed leper.

There surely cannot be any doubt that the anointing with oil typified the Spirit of God. The association of ideas is perceived by all the attentive readers of Scripture. The words 'Messiah' and 'Christ' are only the Hebrew and Greek equivalents of our word 'anointed'. In ancient Israel, kings and priests were anointed with oil in the hope and expectation that they would be anointed with the Spirit of God. The symbol did not necessarily insure that the Spirit of God would follow. Just as in our day a man may be buried in baptism without rising to newness of life or ever being 'in Christ' in the true sense, so in ancient Israel there were some anointed kings and priests who never had the Spirit of God, and never received Divine approval.

Nevertheless the anointing bore this clear meaning. When men looked for the coming of

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