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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 dispensation 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 the "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 MANIFEST 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 Hephzibah [i.e., My delight is in her], and thy land Beulah [i.e., Married]; for the Lord delighted in thee, and thy land shall be married.

"For as a young man marryeth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isa. 62:3 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, 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 2:1 and we have the marriage in Cana on the seventh day! All this clearly looks forward to that wonderful millennial 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 loving kindness, 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 of seeking to rebuke her, His use of the term "Women" demonstrates the broader significance of **Mary's presence.**¹ Jeremiah 6:2 is a fitting commentary of the use of this term here:

" I have likened the daughter of Zion to a COMELY AND DELICATE WOMAN."

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

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 said 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 nations, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." He had planted them a "choice vineyard," but they had 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 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 water pots 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 water pots 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 that 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." The governor's 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 lies 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 walked, 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 the temple with the Apostles, praising God. Thus Peter's first miracle speaks of Israel's restoration and the opportunity that lay before that special 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 the result.

The name "Bar-jesus" means "son of Jehovah- Savior" and is a clear testimony to the place Israel was to fill before the nations. But, as Paul declares, 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."

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."

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that BUNDNESS IN PART IS HAPPENED TO ISRAEL, UNTIL THE FULNESS OF THE GENTILES BE COME IN."

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

"Even so have these also 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" (Rom. 11:11,25,30-32).

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 this same chapter it is Paul who introduces into the record for the very first time in Scripture the proclamation of justification by faith alone--the basis of that special, further revelation committed to his trust:

"Be it know 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 foreshadows His reign in glory. Peter's first miracle foreshadows the restoration of Israel. Paul's first miracle foreshadows the rejection of Israel and the reconciliation of the Gentiles during the present "dispensation of the grace of God."

THE EASTER BUNNY AND A JAIL BIRD

BY RICHARD JORDAN

A favorite point of attack by critics of the King James Version is its use of "Easter" in Acts 12:4. This is suppose to be a knock-out blow to the defenders of KIV because the Greek pascha is clearly a reference to the Jewish passover and not to a supposed observance of the resurrection of Christ. As one popular writer laments, "There never was a more absurd or unhappy translation than this." But is this really such an "absurd" and "unhappy" occurrence--or is there more to the story than first meets the eye? Let's see.

The word "Easter" is of Saxon origin and is said to be derived from Eostre, the Saxon title for the goddess of love, in honor of whom a festival was celebrated by our heathen ancestors in the month of April (Webster). This festival coincides with the time of the Jewish Passover and, in fact, in the old Anglo-Saxon service books the term "Easter" is frequently used to translate the word passover.

According to the Trinitarian Bible Society's Quarterly Record of January-March 1980, both William Tyndale and Martin Luther often use the word "Easter" in their translations because their readers understood it to refer to the same time as the passover. Tyndale was the first to use the word in an English translation--he was also the first to use "passover." His renderings influenced all subsequent English translations, some of which used "Easter" and others "passover" until the latter prevailed. In the same way that "passover" and "unleavened bread" are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to the same general time (cf. Luke 22:1,7 and Mark 14:1,2), "Passover" and "Easter" refer to the same general time period. The translators were simply using a word which even their uneducated English readers would thus understand.

The usage of the term in the "Christian Church" as a reference to a celebration of the resurrection of Christ is little more than the "Christianizing" of a pagan festival so

commonly done by the Roman Church in its attempts to assimilate the masses under its control. Easter is no more a celebration of the resurrection of Christ than Christmas is of His birth. Both its dating formula and its bunnies with colored eggs (the very icons associated with the heathen goddess) come straight from paganism. (It is interesting to note, in passing that many of the very critics who object to "Easter" in Acts 12:4 make a big celebration of Easter in their churches, playing it to the hilt in an attempt to draw as big a crowd as possible!)

So then, rather than of necessity being an "absurd" "unhappy" "uncalled for," "misleading" etc., translation the use of "Easter" in Acts 12:4 is in line with its context, for it is the very name by which the heathen referred to the Passover. While many never get past the reference to "Easter" in Acts 12, we should not fail to note that the focus of this passage is really on Peter--who now, once again, becomes a "jail-bird." The continued negative response of the nation Israel to the message of Peter and the Twelve is set forth in graphic relief by the opening verses of this chapter:

"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. "And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

"And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

"And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people." (Acts 12:1-4).

Christ had purposely chosen twelve apostles--one to sit upon each of the twelve thrones of the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). Thus the death of the Apostle James is a further indication that the kingdom program was no longer continuing on as it was originally given, but rather by this point in Acts was being held in abeyance. We say a further indication because Luke has already given at least ten such indicators in the record up to this point. The death of James is one more such testimony to "the fall of Israel" which took place in Acts 7.

Notice how Israel's response to James' murder bears this out: 7 Israel's unbelief had become so deep that it was apparent to all! Just as the Herod of Matthew 2 stretched out his hand against Israel's rightful king now the Herod of Acts 12 stretches forth his hand against the followers of her rightful king and, sadly, she is happy to have it so, preferring a Herod to her own Messiah! This emboldens Herod to further go after the leaders of Messiah's "little flock," no doubt hoping to increase even more his own popularity while eliminating a problem to both Israel's leaders and himself.

As "the people's choice" Herod is a clear type of the Anti-Christ. The homage paid him as "a god and not a man" (vs.22) not only reveals the depth of Israel's apostasy but also its future result -- i.e., their coming subjection to the "Man of Sin" (cf. Dan. 11:36, 2 Thess. 2:3,4).

In the midst of, yea, in spite of Israel's gross defection and Rome's stepped up persecution we are told:

..BUT THE WORD OF GOD GREW AND MULTIPLIED" (vs.24).

How is this possible? Only because of the faithfulness of the believing remnant! See them praying for the imprisoned Peter:

"Peter therefore was kept in prison: BUT PRAYER WAS MADE WITHOUT CEASING OF THE CHURCH UNTO GOD FOR HIM" (vs.5).

Just what they were praying for is often debated. From their surprise over his appearance at their door (vs. 12-16) it seems unlikely they were simply requesting his release from prison. Rather, perhaps remembering his former denials, they doubtlessly were praying that Peter would be faithful, even unto death. In fact, from the reference to "his angel" in verse 15 it may well be that they thought he had done just that--been faithful unto death!

While the believer today has no place or part in Easter rituals and traditions either in heathen, Jewish or "Christianized" form, Peter's faithfulness in the face of such far reaching opposition--and God's faithfulness to him-- should remind us of the words of our Apostle concerning our handling of our message:

"Yea, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

..BUT CONTINUE THOU IN THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST LEARNED AND HAST BEEN ASSURED OF, KNOWING OF WHOM THOU HAST LEARNED THEM" (2 Tim. 3:12-14).

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

"Moreover IT IS REQUIRED IN STEWARDS, THAT A MAN BE FOUND FAITHFUL" (I Cor. 4:1,2).

I've seen the powers of Satan
And watched the schemes unfold;
I've felt his pull of temptation
Trying to conquer my soul.
I've heard the voice of my Savior
Telling me still to fight on;

He promised never to leave me.
Never to leave me alone!
