

SIGNS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

EIGHTH SIGN (20:1-29)

The Resurrection of Christ

By Arlen L. Chirwood

The resurrection of Christ forms the last of eight signs around which John's gospel is structured. Jesus had called attention to His resurrection being *a sign* earlier in His ministry, at the Passover in Jerusalem following the "beginning of miracles ['signs']" in Cana of Galilee, in John chapter two.

"Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?

But he spake of the temple of his body" (vv. 18-21).

Then attention is called to the fact that His disciples, following His resurrection, remembered that which had been said at this point in His ministry, resulting in belief among the disciples:

"When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scriptures, and the word which Jesus had said" (v. 22).

Then, following Christ's resurrection, the experiences of Thomas are recorded, both on the day of Christ's resurrection and eight days later.

When Christ had appeared in the midst of His disciples while they were in a closed room late the same day of His resurrection, Thomas was not pres-

ent. Thomas, unlike the other disciples, had not seen the resurrected Christ. And, when hearing the report by the others of that which had occurred while he was absent, he, in an unbelieving and skeptical manner, stated:

"Except I shall see in his hands the print [Gk., *tupos*, 'type'] of the nails, and put my finger into the print [Gk., *tupos*] of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25b).

Then eight days later, Jesus appeared and stood in the midst of His disciples again, but this time Thomas was present. Jesus then singled out Thomas, and said:

"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing" (v. 27b).

And Thomas, responding to the resurrected Christ, could only say, "My Lord and my God" (v. 28b).

This account then leads into the statement in John 20:30, 31, a statement revealing the purpose for John's gospel, which could only be looked upon as the key to a proper understanding of this fourth gospel:

"And 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 that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

This statement, following Christ dealing with Thomas eight days after His resurrection, points in the near context back to things surrounding Christ's resurrection; and in the far context this statement could only point back to the other seven signs, taking the reader all the way back to the beginning sign in chapter two.

Then, approaching the matter from another standpoint, from a typical standpoint, Christ, in Matt. 12:38-40, referred to the account of Jonah as *a sign* of His coming death, burial, and resurrection.

"Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah:

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

As Jonah was cast into the sea, died in the sea, and was raised from the dead on the third day, so would the Son of Man be delivered by the Jews into the hands of the Gentiles, suffer death, and be raised from the dead on the third day.

In the preceding respect, the account of Jonah forms "a type," but this account is also referred to as *a sign*. The account of Jonah, "a type," forms *a sign for the Jewish people*, for it is *the Jews who require a sign* (I Cor. 1:22).

And as the type is inseparably linked with the antitype after one fashion, so must it be with the thought of *signs*. Not only is the type *a sign* but so is the antitype as well, something stated in so many words in John 2:18-21; 20:30, 31.

On the Third Day

The timing of Christ's resurrection is often associated with the early morning hours of the first day of the week. This though is derived from events at the time Mary Magdalene and other women came to the tomb before daybreak on the first day of the week and not only found the stone covering the tomb rolled away but also found that Christ's body was no longer in the tomb (Luke 24:1-10).

Christ was raised sometime prior to these events; and He was possibly raised hours earlier, for He could have been raised at any time following the end of the previous day, the end of the Sabbath (which ended at 6 PM [ten or so hours earlier], with the first day of the week beginning at that time).

Christ had to remain in the place of death until at least the beginning of the third day to fulfill Biblical prophecy. He was to be in the place of death for three days and three nights; but then He was to be raised on the third day, as all of God's firstborn Sons (Christ, Israel, and the Church, following the adoption) are to be raised up on the third day (the third millennium) to live in God's sight.

(The preceding — Christ being in the tomb for *three days and three nights*, being raised *after three days*, and being raised *on the third day* — must be understood in the light of the way in which this is handled in the O.T., not in the light of humanistic reasoning or our Western way of thinking.

The expression “the third day” relative to Christ’s resurrection is used twelve times in the N.T., [KJV]. In three of the references there is some manuscript support for the rendering, “after three days” [Mark 9:31; 10:34; Acts 10:40]. Minor manuscript support exists for another three on the alternate rendering [Matt. 16:21; 17:23; Luke 9:22]. However, for the remaining six, no manuscript support exists for a rendering other than “the third day” [Matt. 20:19; Luke 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46; I Cor. 15:4].

The expression “after three days,” relative to Christ’s resurrection, is found only two places in the N.T. [Matt. 27:63; Mark 8:31]; and, as previously seen, Matt. 12:40 reveals the same period of time to also be “three days and three nights.”

Also note the expression “in [or, ‘within’] three days,” pertaining to Christ’s resurrection [Mark. 14:58; 15:29; John 2:19, 20].

The Jewish Talmud reads, “A day and night together make up *an onah* [word referring to a complete period of twenty-four hours], and any part of such a period is counted as the whole.” The Jewish Talmud though, at this point, is simply a reflection of that taught in the O.T., which is the only possible source to derive information which will allow one to properly understand and reconcile the expressions in the N.T. relative to the time Christ spent in the place of death — *three days and three nights in the tomb, raised on the third day, raised after three days*.

One must allow Scripture to interpret itself at this point — or any other place in Scripture — rather than bringing man’s ideologies or his Western way of thinking over into the matter [cf. Gen. 40:13, 20; 42:17, 18; I Sam. 30:1, 12, 13; II Chron. 10:5, 12; Esther 4:16-5:1].)

Thus, having completed the time necessary to remain in the place of death at the beginning of the third day, there would have been no need for Christ to remain in this place longer than time immediately following the Sabbath, time immediately following 6 PM. But, again, the exact timing of His resurrection in this respect is not given. We can only know that His resurrection had already occurred prior to the

time Mary Magdalene and other women came to the tomb, found the stone covering the tomb rolled away, and the tomb empty except for the graveclothes.

And the stone *had not* been rolled away to let Christ out of the tomb, as was the case with the resurrection of Lazarus in the previous sign. Rather, the stone had been rolled away *to let others in to see that He was already out*.

That Which Had Occurred

Christ’s resurrection was unlike anything which had ever occurred in the annals of man’s recorded history. A Man had not only been raised from the dead by the triune Godhead, but He, as part of the triune Godhead, had raised Himself — something which He had to have a part in, for He was “the resurrection, and the life” (cf. John 2:18-21; 11:25; Acts 3:15; Rom. 8:11).

And His resurrection body was unlike any type body which had heretofore existed in the human realm. Christ, at the time of and following His resurrection, possessed a body capable of movement from one point to another at will. He could *appear* in the midst of His disciples and then *disappear* at will (cf. Luke 24:15, 31, 36; John 20:26).

And knowing these things — comparing Scripture with Scripture — it is a simple matter to understand the only thing which could have occurred both inside and outside the tomb at the time Christ was raised from the dead.

When Peter stooped down and walked into that empty tomb he saw the empty linen graveclothes which had been wrapped around the body of Christ “lying by themselves,” with the napkin which had covered His face “wrapped together [‘folded’]” in a separate place by itself (John 20:5-7 [‘lie’ in v. 6 should be translated ‘lying,’ same as in v. 5]). Peter saw the empty graveclothes either maintaining the shape and contour of the body (through a possible hardening of the mixture of myrrh [an aromatic gum resin] and aloes [an aromatic powdered wood, also containing resin]) or simply lying in an undisturbed and somewhat collapsed manner (with the layers of linen cloth still wrapped together), with the napkin which had covered His face in a collapsed place by itself (collapsed in folds).

What had happened? The answer, textually, is quite plain and simple.

At the instant Christ was raised from the dead, at the instant He raised Himself, He didn’t sit up or stand up inside that tomb and then walk out of the tomb as Lazarus had done. Rather life was restored to the body; and, in undoubtedly an instantaneous manner, at the same time, Christ found Himself completely removed from the graveclothes and in a place outside the tomb.

He raised Himself from the dead (through the Spirit breathing life into His body) and removed Himself from the graveclothes and the tomb to a location outside the tomb; and all of this probably occurred in the same length of time seen surrounding the future resurrection and rapture of Christians in I Cor. 15:52 — *an atomos* of time (the most minute particle of time which can be conveyed by the Greek language [less than a microsecond, less than one-millionth of a second]).

And, with His body no longer being on the inside of the graveclothes, the linen wrappings either maintained the shape and contour of the body or they simply collapsed (depending on the hardening effect of the mixture of myrrh and aloes), apart from the body being on the inside; and the napkin which had been placed over His face fell in folds where His head had been.

This is what Peter saw, and what John who was with him subsequently saw as well — the graveclothes “lying by themselves,” apart from the body being on the inside. This resulted in immediate “belief” on John’s part (John 20:8; cf. John 2:22); and it resulted in “wondering” on Peter’s part (Luke 24:12), something which, combined with subsequently spending forty days with the resurrected Christ, resulted in the unwavering faith/belief seen at Pentecost and beyond as Peter became the central figure in the proclamation of the message during about the first five years of the existence of the Church (Acts 2ff).

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