

SIGNS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION (IV)

OFFER AND REOFFER OF THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL

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The offer of the kingdom to Israel is seen in the gospels, and the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel is seen in the Book of Acts. As well, a number of the epistles were written during the Acts period, during the time of the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel. And certain things in these epistles must be understood in this light.

Christ's Pre- and Post-Resurrection Ministries

Christ's ministry to Israel prior to His death, burial, and resurrection lasted for about three and one-half years. This was a ministry which had begun while John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, was still proclaiming to Israel:

"Repent ye [a plural pronoun, referring to *all Israel*]: for the kingdom of the heavens [the rule of the heavens over the earth] is at hand" (Matt. 3:2, 13ff; John 3:22-24).

John's ministry was carried out in Judaea. And after John had been imprisoned, Jesus traveled to Galilee, which was north of Judaea and Samaria; and in Galilee He began to proclaim the message which had begun under John. And multitudes began to follow Him, both from Galilee where He was ministering and from the southern region of Judaea (Matt. 4:12-25).

To help in the proclamation of this message,

Jesus, early in His ministry, commissioned twelve disciples. Then, at a later time, He commissioned seventy others as well (Matt. 10:1-8; Luke 10:1-9). And it was eleven of the original twelve (Judas no longer present) that Jesus took aside after His resurrection and taught for forty days (Acts 2:2, 3).

Jesus taught them "things pertaining to the kingdom of God," which could only have been continued teachings pertaining to the same kingdom which had previously been proclaimed to Israel, beginning with John. And this could only have been with a view to the same message once again being proclaimed to Israel by the disciples — *a reoffer of the kingdom of the heavens*.

But something new was now seen. Prior to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, the message was proclaimed *to Israel alone* (Matt. 10:5, 6; 15:24; Luke 4:43, 44). However, after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, the message was to be carried not only to those "in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea [referring to the Jews, with the Jews in Galilee or scattered throughout the Gentile world understood as included]" but also to those "in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth [referring to the Gentiles]" (Acts 1:8).

And ten days following Christ's forty-day ministry to His disciples, a new entity — *the one new man "in Christ"* — was called into existence, allowing those in "Samaria" and in "the uttermost part of the earth" to become part of the complete, overall picture (Acts 1:4, 5; 2:1ff).

That is to say, once this new entity had been called into existence, the complete scope of the proclamation of the message as seen in Acts 1:8, involving God's complete scope of His redemptive plans and purposes as it related to man, would then be in effect.

But, as long as the reoffer of the kingdom was open to Israel — for about the next thirty years — Israel held *the priority* in relation to the proclamation of this message. The message was to be proclaimed in accordance with the order seen in Rom. 1:16, "... to the Jew first, and also to the Greek [the Gentile]" (*cf.* Rom. 2:5-10, 16; 3:9; 10:12).

(Though the message was proclaimed "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," *the reoffer of the kingdom per se was solely Jewish*. There was an "offer," not a "reoffer," of the kingdom to *the one new man* "in Christ.")

This was the beginning of that seen in Matt. 21:43 concerning the kingdom being taken from Israel and offered to a nation other than Israel [the proffered kingdom of the heavens (the heavenly sphere of the kingdom), not the kingdom covenanted to David (the earthly sphere of the kingdom)]. And following Israel's continued rejection during the reoffer of the kingdom [from 33 A.D. to about 62 A.D.] the offer continued beyond this time solely to the new nation in Matt. 21:43, *the one new man* "in Christ.")

The preceding is why the order of the proclamation of this message throughout the Book of Acts was always *to the Jew first*. This was an order apparently understood by those proclaiming the message. It was only *after* the Jews, in each instance, had heard the message that the apostles and others carrying the message were free to go outside the bounds of that designated by "Jerusalem, and in all Judaea" to that designated by "Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Prior to the events surrounding Calvary, the message couldn't be proclaimed to the latter (Samaria and beyond); but now, following these events and those in Acts chapter two, the disciples not only could but were commanded to carry the message beyond Jerusalem and Judaea.

Of course, in Acts chapter two there was no new entity beyond "Jerusalem, and in all Judaea" to which the message could then be carried. Rather, at this point in time, the message was carried to Israel immediately after the new entity was brought into existence by those forming the nucleus of this new entity. But once Churches began to be established in the Gentile world, then the proclamation of the message, in accordance with Acts 1:8, could be carried out in its fullness.

This whole panorama of events surrounding the

proclamation of the message concerning the kingdom undoubtedly formed a major part of that dealt with by Christ during the forty days of Acts 1:3, for note Christ's concluding instructions prior to His ascension in the verses immediately following (vv. 4-9). These verses form a recap of the complete picture of that which was about to occur, undoubtedly reflecting back on that which Christ had evidently taught the disciples during the previous forty days.

The *faith* of the apostles is seen after one fashion immediately following the resurrection of Christ (cf. John 20:25; 21:3ff), but it is seen after an entirely different fashion after they had spent forty days with the resurrected Christ, being taught by Him personally.

Ten days after Christ's ascension, on the day of Pentecost, "about an hundred and twenty" disciples, which would have included the apostles, were gathered "with one accord in one place" (Acts 1:15; 2:1). And after they had been filled with the Spirit, they, through the supernatural means of the indwelling Spirit, proclaimed "the wonderful works of God" to those present in Jerusalem — who had traveled to Jerusalem from "every nation under heaven" — in their own native languages (Acts 2:4-12).

Then Peter, with the multitude of Jews *astonished* and *perplexed* (vv. 12, 13), stood up and spoke to the entire group in a bold manner, moving beyond Christ's death and centering his thoughts on *Christ's resurrection and all which His resurrection now made possible* (Acts 2:14-40). And this same boldness is subsequently seen not only in Peter's ministry but in that of the other disciples as well (Acts 3-7).

What made the difference?

This type *belief* was not something that had generally been manifested after spending some three and one-half years with Christ prior to His death. In fact, at the end of this period, rather than exhibiting faith, "all the disciples forsook him [Christ], and fled." And though Peter still followed Christ "afar off," he *subsequently denied Christ three times* (Matt. 26:56-58, 69-75).

But now, after spending forty days with the resurrected Christ, *things were entirely different*.

Only *one thing* could possibly have made the difference. And that *one thing* was very much on not only Peter's mind but that of the other disciples as well during events seen in the opening chapters of Acts. Everything in the message now centered around something which heretofore it could not have centered around — *the fact that the One Whom Israel crucified had been raised from the dead* (cf. Acts 2:23-36; 3:12-26; 4:1, 2, 10-12; 5:28-42; 7:51-60).

Paul's Ministry During the Acts Period

Paul, a zealous Pharisee among the Jews — one who had sat "at the feet of Gamaliel" and had been "taught according to the perfect manner of the law" — was one of the great persecutors of the early Church during the first several years of the existence of the Church (Acts 8:1; 9:13, 14; 22:4, 5, 20; 26:9-11).

But Paul, a few years following Christ's resurrection and the events of Acts chapter two, enroute to Damascus in order to bind and bring to Jerusalem any that he found of "the way," was confronted by not only the resurrected but now the glorified Christ (Acts 9:1-5; cf. I Tim. 3:16). His body, unlike the time of and during the forty days following His resurrection, was now *enswathed in a covering of Glory*. And Paul's life, after being confronted by the One Whom he had been persecuting — particularly after seeing the resurrected Christ enswathed in a covering of Glory — was *immediately* changed.

After "three days" without sight (blinded by having gazed upon the resurrected, glorified Christ [cf. Acts 22:11; 26:13]), his sight was *restored, restored on the third day*; and Paul, in the same zealous manner that he had exhibited in persecuting the Church now began to proclaim "Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God."

And Paul knew enough about the Old Testament Scriptures that he could not only *proclaim* this message but *prove* "that this is very Christ" (Acts 9:20-22). And Paul was so zealous and effective in the proclamation of this message that, after a time,

"the Jews took counsel to kill him" (Acts 9:23, 24; cf. John 12:10, 11).

What made the difference? Why did Paul suddenly change from one of the greatest persecutors of the Church to one of its greatest ministers? The answer is simple. It was the power of the eighth sign in John's gospel being realized in his life.

And Paul, in his experiences enroute to Damascus and his subsequent experiences after his encounter with the resurrected, glorified Christ, forms a type of that which the entire nation of Israel will one day experience.

The pierced One, in all His glory, will appear to Israel in that coming day, following the completion of that seen in Daniel's Seventy-Week prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27; cf. Zech. 12:10-14; 13:6; 14:4-9). And Israel, exactly as Paul in Acts chapter nine, or exactly as Joseph's brothers in Genesis chapter forty-five, will be troubled, terrified, in Christ's presence. Then Israel, exactly as Joseph's brethren, or exactly as Paul, will go forth with a message concerning the resurrected Christ (Gen. 45:9, 13, 26; Acts 9:20ff; cf. Isa. 53:1ff).

This eighth sign in John's gospel formed the last of the signs set forth in this gospel to effect *belief* among those in Israel during the years of the reoffer of the kingdom (from 33 AD to about 62 AD). Though this didn't happen, Israel will *believe* in that future day when Christ personally reappears to the nation.

In that day, according to Zech. 12:10, the Jewish people will "look upon me, whom they have pierced" (the resurrected, glorified Christ, exactly as Paul saw Him). And in that day, exactly as in Paul's experiences, the power and reality of Christ's resurrection will do something which it didn't do in the reoffer of the kingdom — *effect belief throughout all Israel, with Israel's blindness being lifted after two days, on the third day*.

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