



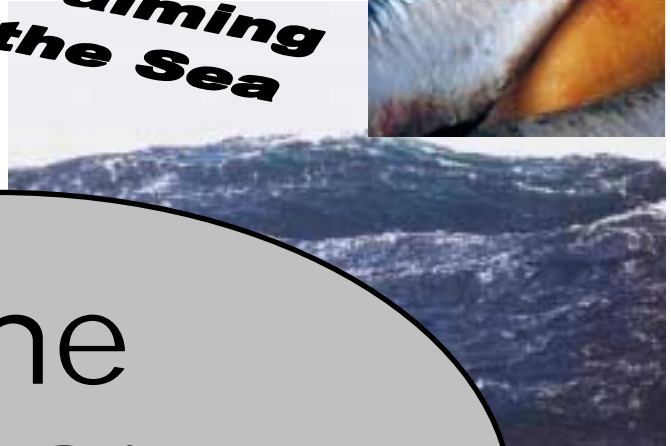
Water into Wine



Feeding the 5,000

The Impotent Man Made Whole

Calming the Sea



The
Eight Signs
of John



The Raising of Lazarus

Healing the Man Born Blind



The Great Harvest of Fish



The Ruler's Son Cured

There is one Lord, but there are four Gospels. Why?

The answer lies in the fact that each of the four Gospels tends to emphasize a different aspect of the Lord Jesus Christ and his ministry. For example, Matthew highlights Jesus' role as *king*. This is apparent from the first verse of the first chapter where Jesus is shown to be in the line of David, as well as the promised seed of Abraham:

¹*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1).*

In contrast, Mark emphasizes Jesus as a *suffering servant*:

⁴⁵*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10).*

Luke, on the other hand, depicts Jesus as the *perfect man*:

⁴⁷*Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man (Luke 23).*

The subject of our study is from the Book of John, which highlights Christ's role as the *Son of God*. The unique status of our Lord is evident from the theme verse of John's Gospel:

³¹*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 (John 20).*

Since the Gospel of John emphasizes Jesus' role as Son of God, it is fitting that John's narrative should be the most exalted portrayal of Jesus' ministry. Although the Gospel of John complements the first three Gospels, it differs from them in a number of ways, so much so that Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to collectively as the *synoptic Gospels*¹, a term that distinguishes them from the Gospel of John.

The content of the Gospel of John suggests that it was written to *Gentile believers* who were familiar with the life of Jesus. John's Gospel does not attempt to be a comprehensive retelling of the events that took place while Jesus was on the earth. Instead, only certain events are recorded, but the events in the narrative were selected so that the readers of the book might believe that Jesus was the Son of God in order that they might be saved. Indeed, we can use the Internet resource www.biblestudytools.net (which you may find very helpful in completing this workbook) to see the number of times the word "believe" appears in the Gospel of John compared to the synoptic Gospels²:

¹ "Synoptic" is from the Greek word *sunoptikos* and means "seeing together," or "having a common view of."

² This website is a good source for word studies, but be cautious about relying on its commentaries.

The screenshot shows the Crosswalk.com website in Microsoft Internet Explorer. The main content is the KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon entry for the word 'pisteuo' (Strong's Number 4100). The entry includes the original word, its transliteration, and a list of Bible verses where it appears. The list of verses is as follows:

Strong's Number	Original Word	Word Origin	KJV Verse Count
4100	pisteuo	from 4102	86
	Transliterated Word	πιστευω	86
	Phonetic Spelling	pist-yoo'-o	
	Parts of Speech	Verb	
	Definition	1. to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence in	
		a. of the thing believed	
		1. to credit, have confidence	
		b. in a moral or religious reference	
		1. used in the NT of the conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher	

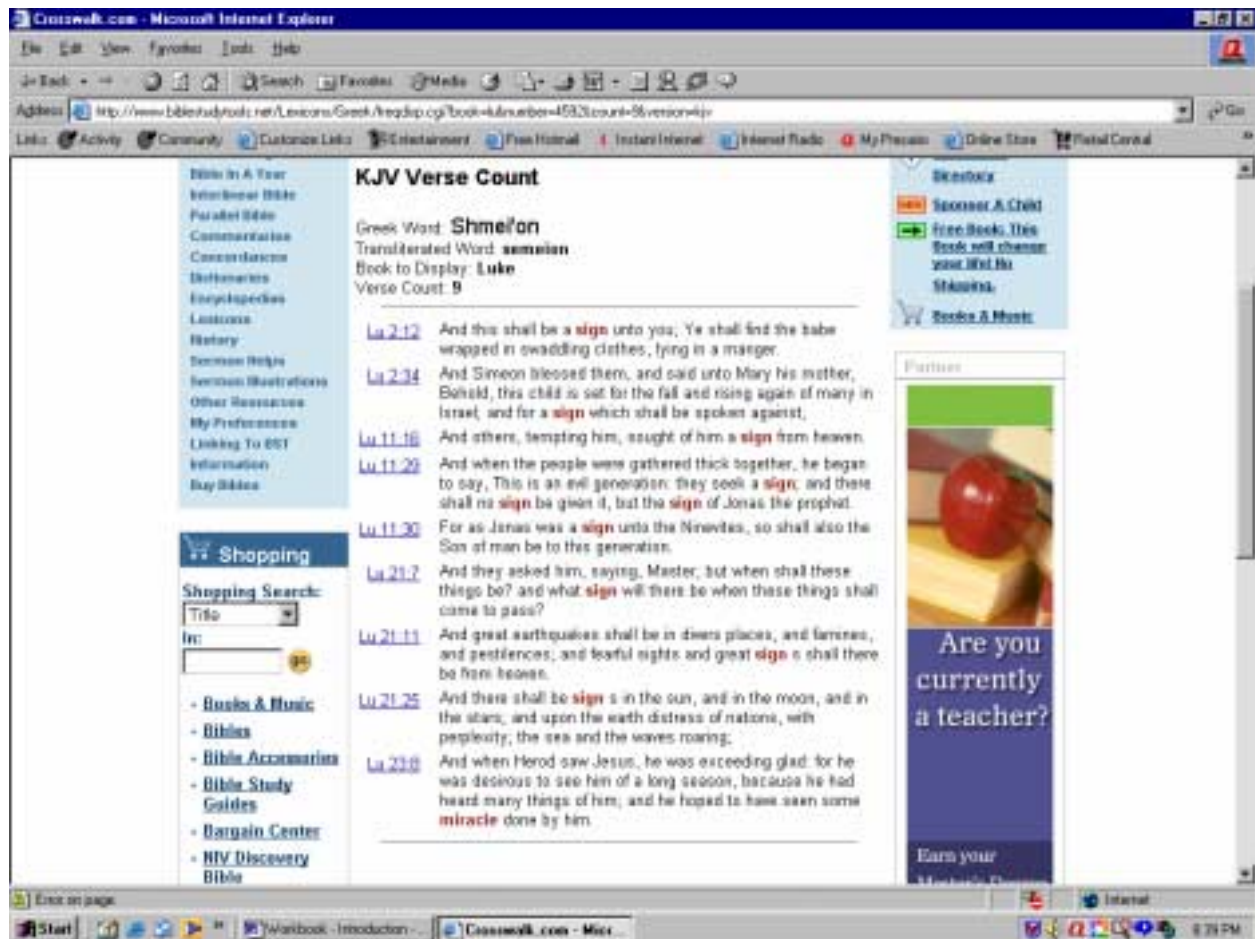
The list of verses is as follows:

Book	Chapter	Verse	Count
Matthew			9
Mark			14
Luke			9
John			95
Acts			35
Romans			20
1 Corinthians			8
2 Corinthians			1
Galatians			4
Ephesians			2
Philippians			1
1 Thessalonians			5
2 Thessalonians			3
1 Timothy			3
2 Timothy			1

“Believe” appears 86 times in the Gospel of John as compared to 32 times in all of the other Gospels *combined*. This shows that whereas the other Gospels sought to instruct people about the rudiments of Jesus’ ministry, John sought to take them to a greater spiritual understanding and to lead them to truly believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

There are only eight miracles recorded in the Gospel of John. (Luke, by contrast, has 21.) However, the text of John’s Gospel draws attention to the miracles it contains. Indeed, the word “miracles” appears nine times in John and never appears in the other Gospels. “Miracle” appears four times in John and only once in the Greek text of Mark and Luke.

The Greek word translated “miracle” in John is *semeion* (Strong’s Number 4592). This same Greek word is frequently translated “sign” elsewhere in the New Testament. (For example, it is translated as “sign” in 8 out of the 9 times that it appears in Luke.)



As a result, the eight miracles in John's Gospel are frequently called *the Eight Signs of John*.

This term "sign" is used because these miracles are *acted parables*; that is, they contain lessons in symbol in addition to those given through the literal teaching of the account. This makes the study of the Eight Signs extremely profitable.

The Eight Signs of John are:

- 1) Water into Wine – John 2: 1 – 11
- 2) The Ruler's Son Cured – John 4: 46 – 50
- 3) The Impotent Man Made Whole – John 5: 1 – 15
- 4) Feeding the 5,000 – John 6: 1 – 15
- 5) Calming the Sea – John 6: 18 - 21
- 6) Healing the Man Born Blind – John 9: 1 – 41
- 7) The Raising of Lazarus – John 11: 1 – 46
- 8) The Great Harvest of Fish – John 21: 1 – 14

Of the Eight Signs of John, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th, and 8th are unique to John's Gospel. The 5th Sign, calming of the sea (at which time Jesus walked on water), is recorded in Matthew and

Mark, and the feeding of the 5,000 (i.e., the 4th Sign) is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels.

The Eight Signs are an integral part of the Gospel of John. They are linked to the discourses that surround them as well as to the “I am” statements of the Gospel (e.g., “I am the Bread of Life”).

There are many expositional resources that are available to you and which will help you get the most out of your studies of this wonderful subject. We particularly recommend:

- 1) The Eight Signs of John by Bro. John Ullman; (Bro. Ullman fell asleep in the Lord while this Workbook was being completed, but he knew that the Eight Signs were the subject of the 2006 Manitoulin Youth Conference. He was delighted.)
- 2) The Gospel of John by Bro. John Carter
- 3) Studies in the Gospels by Bro. Harry Whittaker
- 4) Nazareth Revisited by Bro. Robert Roberts
- 5) “The Eight Signs of John” series in the *Youth Speaks* section of The Christadelphian Tidings magazine by Bro. Jay Mayock, Jr. and Bro. Ryan Mutter, which will begin December 2005 and run through the Winter, Spring, and early Summer months of 2006.

Another resource which you may find helpful (particularly for the harmony of the Gospels that it contains) is the Guide Book to the New Testament by Bro. H.P. Mansfield. Bible study is generally more profitable with Strong’s Concordance and a Bible dictionary close at hand. Both of these (as well as many other useful resources) are available online at www.biblestudytools.net.

May God guide you in your studies and bless you richly in them. We look forward to spending the 2006 Manitoulin Youth Conference with you, God willing.

In the Hope of Israel,

Bro. Jay Mayock, Jr.
Bro. Ryan Mutter

The Account—John 2:1-11

“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee”

QUESTIONS: List any questions that you might have about the reading in the space below:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In John 2:1, there is reference made to ‘the third day’:

a. Identify the progression of days beginning in John 1:

b. It has been suggested that ‘the third day’ that John records in 2:1 is the seventh day of his narrative to make up the first week in Jesus’ ministry. Is this sustainable?

c. Give some examples of Scripture’s use of the number three:

d. To what ideas is the number three attached in these passages?

e. Why would John use ‘the third day’ to identify the first sign that Jesus performed?

2. In what city was the marriage held?

a. Which follower of Jesus was native to this city (use a concordance for help)?

b. By what name is he known in the other gospel accounts? What is the evidence for this?

c. Highlight the conversation this follower had with Jesus in John 1:

d. What event in Jacob's life did Jesus allude to in his conversation?

e. When Jacob had this experience, what choice was he about to make?

f. How might this help us understand this follower's role in the wedding at Cana?

3. Jesus chose a wedding to begin his signs. Why do you think Jesus thought this was appropriate?

4. Does Jesus' response in John 2:4 seem unkind?

a. Consider the use of the word 'woman' in other parts of the gospel:

b. Do Jesus' words in these instances seem unkind?

c. How do other translations render 'what have I to do with thee?'

d. Where does the phrase 'what have I to do with thee?' appear in the Old Testament? What does the context suggest about the meaning of the phrase?

e. What point is Jesus trying to make with his mother? Where else does he make a similar point to her?

f. What is the significance of Jesus' statement that his hour was not yet come? Where else in the book of John do we see reference to the hour of Jesus?

5. Mary, the mother of Jesus, expressed confidence in our Lord when she said ‘unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.’ Without knowing exactly what Jesus would do, she had faith that he would do something.

a. There are others in Scripture who were obedient to God, without knowing exactly how God would deliver them out of their situations. List and discuss one or two of them below:

b. How can we be comforted by these “things written aforetime” (Romans 15:4)?

6. Six stone waterpots ‘after the manner of the purifying of the Jews’ were used in this sign:

a. How much is a firkin?

b. Give some examples of Scripture’s use of the number six:

c. To what ideas is the number six attached in these passages?

d. What are ‘vessels’ like waterpots commonly symbolic of in Scripture? Give some examples:

- e. Stone has a wide variety of meaning and application in Scripture. With what ideas do you see ‘stone’ connected in this sign?

- f. Why do you think Scripture mentions that the waterpots were for the ‘purification of the Jews’?

- g. Were the waterpots for drinking purposes?

- 7. Careful reading yields the presence of two different wines, as well as water. With what ideas is each associated?

- a. ‘They have no wine’—2:3

- b. ‘Six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews’—2:6

- c. ‘Thou hast kept the good wine until now’—2:10

8. Where else in Scripture are lessons drawn from vessels? With what ideas are those passages associated, and how do they help us to better understand the message of the first sign (Try Isaiah 12 to start)?

9. Where in Scripture is wine a symbol of doctrine?

10. With what other ideas is wine associated in Scripture?

11. Do you think that the vessels of wine represent our Lord in any capacity? Why or why not?

12. After this ‘beginning of miracles’, Jesus’ disciples believed on him. How is it possible that the disciples believed on him because of this, if 2:9 seems to imply that only the servants which drew the water knew?

13. Jesus ‘manifested forth his glory’ in this ‘beginning of miracles’:

a. How did Jesus show his glory by this first sign?

b. Study this Greek word for *glory* and include how it is used in John’s gospel account.

c. Moses asked the Lord to reveal His glory to him in Exodus 33:18. How did the Lord reveal His glory to Moses (see Exodus 34)?

14. Allegorically, how had the good wine been kept until the time of Jesus?

Challenges from Christendom (Part 1)—John 12:37-41

“These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him”

1. The Scripture says that through the beginning of signs in Cana, Jesus manifested his glory. His glory would be seen in all the signs that followed, especially in his death and resurrection. In the passages above, John the apostle explains that Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory (Isaiah 6:5).

Isaiah says his “eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts,” while John explains that it was the glory of Jesus Christ. The vast majority of Christendom expounds this passage through the vehicle of Trinitarianism. How should we understand these passages?

Challenges from Christendom (Part 2)—John 3:16

“Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”

1. There were several instances during the disciples’ experience with Jesus, that Scripture records they believed on him (i.e. John 1:40,45,49; 2:11; Matthew 16:16; John 20:29; etc.). Even many of the chief rulers—who consented to the death of Jesus—believed on him (John 12:42).

It is a common teaching of Evangelical Christianity that this belief alone grants eternal salvation—or, ‘eternal security.’ How should we understand these passages?

Challenges from Biblical Skepticism—John 2:13-16; Matthew 21:12-13

“Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise”

“It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves”

1. Both Matthew and John record Jesus’ ‘cleansing’ of the temple.

Biblical antagonists argue that since Matthew places the cleansing late in our Lord’s ministry, and John places it early (just after his ‘beginning of miracles’ in Cana), the record contains a conflict, and cannot therefore be inspired. How should we respond to this attack?

Subjects for Further Study

Choose at least **two** of the following subjects to study in detail and attach your notes to the workbook:

1. Choose from one of your QUESTIONS at the beginning of this section to study any subject that might not have been answered through the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.
2. Study DISCUSSION QUESTION 3 in more detail. Include comments on the following:
 - a. The institution and purpose of marriage
 - b. The responsibility of marriage and shadow
 - c. The prayer of Jesus (John 17)
 - d. Some parables of marriage used by Jesus
 - e. The marriage supper of the Lamb
 - f. Marriage to our Lord—what it means to us as believers
3. The first sign took place close to the time of Passover (John 2:12,13,23-25). The Passover, and the historical events around which the first Passover took place, is a theme seen throughout the New Testament. Study the Passover in more detail, and include comments on the following:
 - a. The institution of the Passover
 - b. The occurrence of the first Passover
 - c. The events following the Passover
 - d. NT references and echoes to the Passover
 - e. The relationship of the song of Moses to the Passover
 - f. Miracles of Jesus performed near the time of Passover
 - g. The Passover and our Lord—what it means to us as believers

4. After the first sign, Jesus, with his mother, brethren, and his disciples went down to Capernaum. This city occurs often in the record of the gospels. Study this city in more detail, and include comments on the following:
 - a. The meaning of ‘Capernaum’
 - b. The history of the city
 - c. The occurrences of the city in the gospel records
 - d. The miracles performed there
 - e. The natives of the city

5. John the Baptist publicly declared Jesus as “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29). If John believed this, why did he send two of his disciples to Jesus to ask him if he was the one “that should come” (Luke 7:19-23)?

Notes:

The Account—John 4:43-54

“There was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum”

QUESTIONS: List any questions that you might have about the reading in the space below:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus spent two days in Sychar, a city of Samaria, before departing (John 4:39-40).

a. What in particular was significant about Sychar?

b. Who were the Samaritans? Where did they come from? Were they Jews or Gentiles? Explain:

c. From what region was Jesus traveling when he arrived in Samaria?

d. To what region was Jesus traveling when he stopped in Samaria?

e. Why do you think the text says that Jesus ‘must needs go through Samaria’?

- 2. ‘Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country,’ but he returns to his own country—Galilee. How does this verse make sense despite its apparent contradiction?

- 3. Why was Jesus well received in Galilee?

- 4. Why are no details provided of Jesus’ Judean miracles? (John 2:23; 3:2; 4:45)

- 5. Where are the disciples? Are they mentioned in this sign?

- 6. Where does this sign fall in the chronology of Jesus’ ministry?

- 7. After his first sign at Cana, Jesus visited Jerusalem for passover. He then traveled back down to Cana where he met the nobleman from Capernaum.

- a. Why do you think Jesus returned to Cana, having already performed a sign there?

- b. What kind of response would Jesus be seeking from the people?

- 8. Study the Greek word for nobleman:

- a. What does the word mean?

- b. To which king would this nobleman be subject? (A Bible dictionary may be helpful.)

- c. This king had a steward whose wife ‘ministered to him [Jesus] of their substance.’

- i. Where are their names recorded in the gospels?

- ii. What evidence do we have this man could be the nobleman of John 4?

- 9. From what city does the nobleman come to Jesus?

- a. To what city does the nobleman travel to see Jesus?

b. How far did this man have to travel?

c. Why did the nobleman want Jesus to come with him to Capernaum to heal his son?

10. Compare the initial attitude of the nobleman to that of the Samaritans. What signs and wonders had Jesus performed to convince them?

11. When the nobleman ‘besought’ Jesus for help, Jesus said ‘Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.’

a. Does this response seem harsh?

b. Are there any other instances when Jesus challenges people in this way? Explain.

c. Respond to this statement: ‘Jesus was attempting to increase the nobleman’s faith, by lifting his thoughts beyond his mere power to heal.’

12. Identify the nobleman’s progression of faith from his dialog with the Lord. How can we measure the nobleman’s faith through each of his reactions?

a. He ‘besought’ Jesus ‘that he would *come down*, and heal his son.’

b. ‘Sir, *come down*, ere my child die.’

c. ‘And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.’

d. ‘Then enquired he of them the hour when *he began to amend*. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour *the fever left him*. So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.’

13. This sign was Jesus’ answer to the nobleman’s request in verse 47:

a. How was the nobleman’s petition answered?

b. How was the nobleman’s petition not answered in the way he had initially hoped?

c. How was Jesus’ answer better than the nobleman’s hopes?

d. How does this relate to our petitions to our God in prayer?

e. Discuss another Scriptural example in which a petition was answered in this way:

14. 1 Corinthians 1:22-23 speaks about the barriers of faith to the Jews and Gentiles respectively. What are they? How can we be affected by these barriers today?

15. Identify times in Scripture in which faith is demonstrated *imperfectly*:

16. Discuss a moment in your life in which your faith had to grow:

17. Name some other miracles that Jesus performed from a distance? Were these people Jews or Gentiles? Why might this be significant?

18. John marks this as the second sign.

a. Jesus performed many miracles in Jerusalem before this sign, but they are not included in John's numbering. Why might this be? What was the purpose of the signs that John records?

b. Give some examples of Scripture's use of the number two:

c. To what ideas is the number two attached in these passages?

19. The nobleman's son was healed in the seventh hour:

a. When is the seventh hour?

b. Is this a Jewish or Roman measurement of time?

c. What spiritual significance can be attached to this fact?

20. The nobleman's son was 'at the point of death.'

a. In spiritual language, what moral condition is being described? Explain.

b. In which other miracle(s) is someone 'ready to die'?

c. Which ecclesia is warned to 'strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die'?

d. How did the Jews have a name that they lived, but were dead?

21. The nobleman's whole house believes as a result of this sign:

a. What can we infer about the nobleman from his household's belief?

b. Where else in the NT do we see a similar reaction to the truth?

c. Where else in the NT do we see an opposite reaction to the truth?

22. The Jewish leaders are sometimes called ‘fathers’.

a. Find a few Scriptures that show this:

b. Though most Jewish leaders rejected, some demonstrated belief in Jesus, encumbered with their doubt and misunderstanding. List some examples of these leaders:

23. Do we know for sure whether the nobleman was a Jew or a Gentile? Explain.

24. Being a resident of Capernaum:

a. What other works of Jesus might this nobleman have witnessed?

b. Do you think the nobleman’s son ever met Jesus?

25. What evidence do we have to support the idea that Capernaum was the base of Jesus’ operations in Galilee?

26. The text is emphatic when it reads ‘this is *again* the second miracle that Jesus did, *when he was come out of Judea into Galilee.*’

a. Does Scripture connect *Galilee to the Gentiles* in any passages?

b. What OT prophecies predict this Galilean enlightenment?

Challenges from Christendom—John 4:2; 1 Corinthians 1:17

“Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples”
“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel”

1. In an effort to edify an existing theological structure, some who operate from the ‘once-saved-always-saved’ position suggest that the verses above prove that baptism is not necessary for salvation. Because Jesus himself never baptized, and Paul only baptized few, they believe baptism is not a prerequisite for salvation. How should we understand these passages?

Subjects for Further Study

Choose at least **two** of the following subjects to study in detail and attach your notes to the workbook:

1. Choose from one of your QUESTIONS at the beginning of this section to study any subject that might not have been answered through the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.
2. Study DISCUSSION QUESTION 11 in more detail. Include comments on the following:
 - a. How this experience helped you:
 - b. How this experience can help other people:
3. Study DISCUSSION QUESTION 1a in more detail. Include comments on the following:
 - a. What does Sychar mean in Greek?
 - b. What is significant about the place 'near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph'?
 - c. What OT city did Jacob give to Joseph?
 - d. How does that city factor into the history of the nation of Israel?
 - e. How do the events in John 4 relate to the prophetic blessing that Joseph received from Israel on his deathbed?
4. Study DISCUSSION QUESTION 9 in more detail. Include comments on the following:
 - a. What are the stumbling blocks in the Ecclesia today?
 - b. What barriers of faith have you broken down in your life?
 - c. With what barriers do you still struggle?

The Account—John 5:1-16

“And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years”

QUESTIONS: List any questions that you might have about the reading in the space below:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In John 5:1, there is reference made to ‘a feast of the Jews.’

a. Of which Jewish feast do you think this passage speaks?

b. Where else in John’s gospel are these time details given?

2. In Jerusalem there was a ‘sheep market’, as the AV calls it:

a. What was this ‘sheep market’?

b. Where does Nehemiah place the ‘sheep gate’?

3. The pool by the ‘sheep market’ was called ‘Bethesda.’

a. What does Bethesda mean in its original tongue?

- b. What are some suggestions as to the location of Bethesda?

- 4. There were five porches at this location:

- a. Give some examples of Scripture's use of the number five:

- b. To what ideas is the number five attached in these passages?

- c. What do you think the number five signifies here?

- 5. Present at Bethesda was a multitude of impotent, blind, halt, and withered, waiting to be healed by the troubled water. Describe the maladies of the multitude, and discuss in what ways they can represent spiritual infirmities:

- a. Impotent:

- b. Blind:

- c. Halt:

d. Withered:

6. There is some uncertainty as to the textual authenticity of John 5:4:

a. Briefly describe this uncertainty:

b. What do you think about the textual authenticity of this passage?

7. The infirmed man had been ill for ‘a long time’:

a. For how many years was the man infirmed?

b. Why is this number significant in the experience of the nation of Israel?

8. Jesus commanded the man to ‘rise’:

a. Where else does Jesus command others he healed to do the same? (Search using the same Greek word for ‘rise’.)

b. How can this command be taken allegorically?

9. Jesus healed the infirmed man on the sabbath day. In order to avoid conflict, Jesus could have healed the man on any other day (his illness was not fatal), but he chose the sabbath:

a. Did the law prohibit the carrying of a bed on the sabbath?

b. Did Jesus break the sabbath?

c. Why do you think Jesus healed on the sabbath?

d. Find other examples of Jesus healing or ‘working’ on the sabbath:

10. In v10-16, the Jews are more interested in the sabbath regimen than the healing that Jesus worked on it:

a. Where else can we find similar reactions from the leaders of the Jews?

b. What does this tell us about their character?

c. How can we fall into the same condemnation?

11. If the healed man remained in his sins, a worse thing would come unto him:

a. Where else in Scripture is a 'worse' state described after a healing?

b. What is that 'worse thing'?

c. How is it possible for us to fall into the same condemnation?

12. How is the command 'sin no more' (v14) related to Jesus' command to 'rise' (v8)?

13. Did the healed man go to the temple to:

a. worship God who had healed him?

- b. find favor in the eyes of the Jews who had reprimanded him (v10)?

14. Explain how Jesus' words: 'Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee' are:

- a. An expression of mercy:

- b. A warning to repent:

15. In Jesus' discourse to the Jews following the miracle, what doctrine does he emphasize?

16. How is it fitting that Jesus would emphasize this doctrine after healing the infirmed man?

17. 'The hour is coming' and 'the hour is coming and now is' are two phrases used by our Lord in John 5:

- a. Identify where these phrases are in John 5:

- b. To what 'hour' does Jesus refer in each use of the phrase?

- c. Identify other places these phrases are used in John’s gospel:

18. In v17-31, Jesus spoke about the two phases of our transformation:

- a. What are these two phases of our transformation—one which ‘is coming and now is’, and the other which ‘is coming’?

- b. What other passages speak of a transformation in the days of our mortality?

- c. What other passages speak of a transformation in the age to come?

19. The infirmed man was painfully aware of his own weakness:

- a. Provide some examples of people who were made strong in their weakness:

- b. Why is this understanding so essential in our collective walk to the kingdom?

Challenges from Christendom (Part 1)—John 5:18; John 5:23

“Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God”

“All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father”

1. These passages are sometimes used to prove that Jesus made himself equal with God, and so must be God. How should we understand these passages?

Challenges from Christendom (Part 2)—John 5:28-29

“The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth”

1. This passage is sometimes used to prove a ‘universal resurrection’. How should we understand this passage?

Subjects for Further Study

Choose at least **two** of the following subjects to study in detail and attach your notes to the workbook:

1. Choose from one of your QUESTIONS at the beginning of this section to study any subject that might not have been answered through the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.
2. Study DISCUSSION QUESTION 1b in more detail:
 - a. Create a possible chronology for the Lord's ministry by using the feasts as markers for your chronology.
 - b. Use other gospel accounts to fill in the spaces of the ministry that John leaves out.
3. Study DISCUSSION QUESTION 3b in more detail:
 - a. What places are candidates for the real location of Bethesda?
 - b. Give the reasons why each place is suggested as the true location?
 - c. Where do you think Bethesda actually was?
4. In John 5:6, Jesus asks the impotent man, 'Wilt thou be made whole?'
 - a. Why do you think Jesus asked this?
 - b. Are there other instances in Jesus' life in which he asked similar questions—the answers to which seemed obvious? Why did he ask such obvious questions?
5. There is some debate over the character of the healed man in John 5. Some believe that he is an example of a good conversion, and others of a betrayal.
 - a. Do some research and identify this debate.
 - b. How do you see the infirmed man?

The Account—John 6:1-14

“So the men sat down, in number about five thousand”

QUESTIONS: List any questions that you might have about the reading in the space below:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Identify this account in the records of the other gospel writers:

2. According to the other gospel accounts, who was murdered just before the fourth sign?

3. What evidence is there to suggest that this event brought the thought of Jesus’ own sufferings to bear?

4. Why do you think Jesus and the disciples departed into a desert place apart from everyone else?

5. Do you think Jesus’ departure had anything to do with the death with which they were dealing?

6. How was their retreat into a desert place cut short?

7. How did the disciples respond?

8. How did Jesus respond?

9. How is Jesus' response an exhortation for us?

10. Explain what the modern equivalent of 200 pennyworth would be:

11. Jesus asked, 'Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?'

a. Why did Jesus ask this question if 'he himself knew what he would do'?

b. Where else in the gospels does Jesus ask a question, the answer to which he already has? Why do you think Jesus does this?

12. During what season did this sign take place?

13. Which feast of the Jews was nigh?

14. A lad among the multitude had with him five barley loaves and two small fish:

a. Give some examples of Scripture’s use of the number five: (See Sign 3:4a)

b. To what ideas is the number five attached in these passages? (See Sign 3:4b)

c. Give some examples of Scripture’s use of the number two:

d. To what ideas is the number two attached in these passages?

15. Why is John careful to record that the five loaves were of barley? Consider other scriptural examples where barley is found.

16. According to other gospel accounts, how did Jesus have the men seated in this area of ‘much green grass’?

17. Why is ‘much green grass’ an appropriate detail to record as so many people were present? In other words, what does grass represent in the Biblical system of symbol?

18. Why do you think it is significant that 5000 men (beside women and children) were present for this sign?

19. Read verses 22-71 of John 6:

a. How do these verses help us to understand the meaning of the miracle?

b. What was Jesus expressing to the multitude in symbol the day before?

20. How does the fourth sign foreshadow the events in the last supper? In what way is the procedure and language similar? Find at least 4 ways in which these events are similar:

21. What significance do you attribute to Jesus' words in verse 12? Can you find similar language used in his discourse to the multitude in Capernaum the next day that would suggest a deep significance to these words?

22. Twelve baskets were filled with the fragments of the bread after all were filled:

a. Why do you think that the Spirit by John records the number of the baskets?

- b. Why do you think it is significant that the bread filled them all?

23. Jesus declared himself to be ‘the bread of life’ (v35) and ‘the true bread from heaven’ (v32):

- a. What was the ‘bread from heaven’ for which the multitude lusted?

- b. What is manna called in Exodus 16:7? How is this significant when we come to the NT declaration of the true bread from heaven?

24. Jesus used ‘the true bread from heaven’ and ‘the bread of God’ interchangeably (v32,33):

- a. Where is ‘the bread of God’ found in the Old Testament?

- b. What does it signify?

- c. Who could eat it?

- d. Who did Jesus say could eat the bread of God now?

25. Why do you think the institution of Jesus' memorial in bread and wine is not included among John's detailed account of the night before Jesus was betrayed?

26. Jesus declares himself to be the Son of man and the giver of everlasting life (v27)—from which OT passage(s) did Jesus refer to?

27. Do you get the impression that the language Jesus used made it more difficult for the multitude to accept his words? Explain.

28. Jesus said that his Father had 'sealed' him:

a. Where else in Scripture does this word occur?

b. What does this word mean in those contexts?

c. What do you think Jesus was saying when he spoke of God sealing him?

29. Summarize the key points of this miracle, and express the significance of it as Jesus did in his discourse to the multitude:

30. This is the fourth sign: Do you think this number is expressive of any significance within the framework of this miracle?

31. What did Jesus mean when he said ‘whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life’?

32. Does the bread represent the Word? If so, how?

33. How does Jesus emphasize the word of God as the meat for eternal life?

34. Does the bread also represent us? If so, how?

35. How is it possible for us to stumble in the same ways that the Jews stumbled at the words of Christ?

36. Did the disciples understand his words? How do you know?

37. How did the various disciples cope with their perception of Jesus' difficult words?

38. How can we today draw practical comfort and warning from their experiences?

Challenges from Christendom (Part 1)—John 6:33; John 6:51

“For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life to the world”

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven”

1. These passages are sometimes used to prove that Jesus preexisted personally in heaven before his incarnation in human flesh in the womb of Mary. How should we understand these passages?

Challenges from Christendom (Part 2)—John 6:54

“Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day”

1. This passage is used with others by Catholic theology to teach the doctrine of transubstantiation. What is transubstantiation, and why is it important to Roman Catholicism? How does Scripture actually refute this doctrine?

Challenges from Christendom (Part 3)—John 6:62

“What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?”

1. This verse is used in conjunction with others (see Challenges from Christendom Part 1) to prove the personal preexistence of Jesus Christ. Does this passage present any difficulties that Part 1 may not have addressed? Explain.

Subjects for Further Study:

Choose at least **two** of the following subjects to study in detail and attach your notes to the workbook:

1. Choose from one of your QUESTIONS at the beginning of this section to study any subject that might not have been answered through the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.
2. John 6:14-15 records the immediate effect of the miracle on the multitude. What did they think? Why did Jesus depart to be alone? Why does Mark 6:45 say that Jesus forced his disciples into the boat? Why had their hearts been hardened ‘for they considered not the miracle of the loaves’ (Mark 6:52)?
3. John 6:45 records Jesus’ words quoting from the prophets in which it is said that ‘they shall be all taught of God’. Where is this passage? How does the context of that chapter (and those following) have much to do with the events at this time in Jesus’ ministry?
4. Study DISCUSSION QUESTION 28 in more detail. In particular, how might it relate to the events in Isaiah 8?
5. Study DISCUSSION QUESTION 23b in more detail by using Exodus 16 to begin. What are the three types of manna detailed by that account? What do you think each type of manna symbolizes?
6. Identify some parallels between Israel’s tempting of God in the wilderness, and the multitude’s tempting of Christ in John 6.
7. Consider Peter’s response to Jesus (v66-71). Did Peter understand what Jesus was saying in his address to the multitude? If so, how do you know? If not, why did Peter and the eleven continue with Jesus? Does this relate to our walk to the kingdom, or does our present knowledge exempt us from such trials?

The Account—John 6:15-21

“And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.”

The events of John 6 occurred over a two-day period. During that short time, Jesus healed many sick people and performed two of his most notable miracles, the feeding of the 5,000 and walking on water. Like the other signs, the miracles recorded in this chapter contain lessons in symbol. The feeding of the 5,000, which is the fourth sign, is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. As such, it is a fitting symbol for Christ’s earthly ministry. Christ’s calming of the sea, which is the fifth sign, is symbolic of the time after Christ’s ascension, the time when he is no longer with his disciples, and they struggle in his absence. Its lessons, therefore, are of particular interest to us, as we weather life’s storms and await our Master’s coming.

QUESTIONS: List any questions you might have about the reading in the space below:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The Multitude’s Reaction:

After Jesus miraculously provided food to the multitude during the fourth sign, the people wanted to make him king. The reasons behind the multitude’s desire (and Christ’s reaction to them) teach us a great deal about spiritual thinking.

a. Why did Jesus not want the people to make him king at that time?

b. How did Jesus respond to the people’s desire to make him king? Why did he do this?

2. The Disciples' Reaction:

The multitude's reaction to the feeding of the 5,000 is clearly stated: they wanted to make Jesus king, and they were prepared to use force to have their way. The disciples' reaction is not as clearly stated, but it can still be determined.

- a. Did Christ bring the disciples with him?

- b. Mark 6:45 – 52 is a “parallel account;” that is, it tells the same story but with slightly different details. What does Mark 6:45 say Christ did with the disciples?

- c. In the KJV, Mark 6:45 uses the word “constrained” when describing what Jesus did. What does this imply about the disciples' attitude about the people's wish to make Christ king?

- d. Who did Christ seek to please, God or man? What do Psalm 16:8 and Psalm 73:25 say about how he did this?

3. Light and Dark:

- a. Where in John 6 does it first say what time it was when Christ put the disciples in the boat? What time was it?

- b. This point is really emphasized. There is another verse in John 6 that indicates what time it was when Christ put the disciples in the boat. What is the verse? What does it say?

- c. The concepts of “light” and “darkness” are important themes in the Gospel of John. Using a concordance, find the different occasions where “the light” is mentioned.

d. What does “light” represent in John?

e. What does “darkness” represent?

4. The Journey Begins:

a. What does John 6 say the disciples’ destination was?

b. What does the name of the city mean?

c. Read Hebrews 11:9 – 10. What does the city represent there?

d. What might the city in John 6 represent?

5. The Storm:

a. According to the parallel account in Matthew 14 (starting at verse 22), what became of the sea while the disciples were in the boat?

b. The sea is used as a symbol in Isaiah. What does it represent (use a concordance and look up “sea” and “seas” for help.)

c. Waters are used as a symbol in Revelation 17: 15. What do they represent?

d. The wind is used as a symbol in the New Testament. What does it represent in James?

e. What else does the wind represent in the New Testament. Provide at least one example.

f. The storm prevented the disciples from using their sails. So, how did they make progress? What is the lesson for us?

g. Consider the Mark 6 account. Was Jesus aware of what was going on with the disciples in the boat?

h. What was he doing?

i. What is the lesson for us?

j. How far does John say the disciples rowed?

k. Where does Matthew say this put them?

l. Find another place in the Bible where people were in sea storms. What was the experience like for them? What did they feel?

m. Did Jesus come to the disciples aid immediately?

n. (Optional.) What nation kept three watches during the night? (A Bible dictionary or commentary will be helpful.)

o. (Optional.) What nation kept four watches during the night?

p. (Optional.) Whose method of reckoning time do Mark and Matthew use?

q. (Optional.) Fill in the following blanks. (A Bible dictionary or commentary will be helpful.)

The first watch of the night occurred from: _____ to _____.

The second watch of the night occurred from: _____ to _____.

The third watch of the night occurred from: _____ to _____.

The fourth watch of the night occurred from: _____ to _____.

r. During which watch did Jesus come to the disciples?

s. During which watch does the sun rise?

t. What does the Bible symbol of the rising sun represent? (Using a concordance, look up words like “sun,” “arise,” and “shine.”)

u. How did Christ appear to his disciples?

v. How did they respond?

w. Why is it significant that Jesus walked on water?

x. What lessons can we learn from the literal account of the disciples’ experience during the storm?

y. What lessons can we learn when we consider the symbolic meaning of the account?

6. Peter:

a. How did Jesus identify himself to the disciples?

b. What request did Peter make of Jesus in Matthew’s account?

c. How did Christ react to Peter’s request?

d. Did Christ approve or disapprove of Peter’s request? Why do you think so?

e. Identify another time in Peter’s life when he acted in a similar fashion. (Hint: There is a great instance in the last chapter of the Gospel of John.)

f. What lessons can we learn that we can apply to our own lives from what happened with Peter in Matthew 14:28 – 31?

g. Jesus allowed the disciples to struggle for hours against the storm, but he rescued Peter immediately. Why? What does this teach us about how Jesus oversees our trials?

- h. The events of John 6:22 – 71 happened the next day. Read John 6:51 – 71. What did the disciples, other than the Twelve, do?

- i. What did Peter say about Christ’s words? In contrast, what had the people said about Christ’s words?

- j. How might have Peter’s experience of trying to walk on water, failing, and then being rescued by Christ caused him to be so enthusiastic in his support of Christ?

It is significant that Peter chose to use the word “we” in his confession. There was no self-serving “I” or “me” in his remarks. Instead, he chose to identify with the others (i.e., “we believe”) and in so doing, he might have helped to shore up the faith of those disciples who might have been struggling. His words helped mold them into a unit. Although the disciples sometimes squabbled, Peter encouraged them then by affirming that they would follow Jesus together.

7. Calming the Sea:

- a. What happened when Jesus entered the ship?

- b. Thinking back to the symbolic meaning of the sea, what might this represent?

- c. Read Psalm 107:23 – 31. Discuss the parallels to events in the fifth sign of John.

Challenges from Christendom (Part 1)—Matthew 14:26

“And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear”

1. Many Christians believe in the immortality of the soul, and they would cite this passage as proof that the disciples did as well. How would you explain this verse to an interested friend? (You may find it helpful to look at other passages in the Bible where people actually saw a spirit or thought they saw one.)

Challenges from Christendom (Part 2)—Matthew 14:32-33

“And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God”

1. Trinitarians could cite Revelation 22:9 and say that God alone can be worshipped; therefore, since Jesus received worship in this passage, he must be God. How would you explain this passage to an interested friend who believed in the Trinity?

Challenges from Bible Skepticism

“And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people” (Mark 6: 45).

“And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them” (John 6:16 – 17).

1. Mark says Jesus sent the disciples unto Bethsaida. John says Jesus sent them toward Capernaum. Is this an error in the Bible? How would you explain this to an interested friend, particularly one who has questions about the inspiration of the Bible? (The Oxford King James Bible has a center column note that is helpful in understanding Mark 6.)

Subjects for Further Study

Choose at least **two** of the following subjects to study in detail and attach your notes to the workbook:

1. Choose from the QUESTIONS at the beginning of this section to study any subject that might not have been answered through the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.
2. Study DISCUSSION QUESTION 1 in more detail. Include comments on the following:
 - a. The anointing of David (e.g., Who choose him as king and decided when he would start ruling?)
 - b. How Omri became king of Israel (e.g., Who choose him as king and decided when he would start ruling?)
 - c. (Optional.) The Roman tradition of appointing kings by acclamation
 - d. Whose example the people were following in John 6
 - e. The relevance of Psalm 2:6 and Hosea 8: 3 – 4 (the NIV is clearer than the KJV) to this account
3. Jesus responded to the multitude's desire to make him king by separating himself from them. (The disciples appeared to have sympathized with the multitude's wishes; therefore, Jesus separated himself from them as well.) Discuss what lessons we can learn from handling temptation from the life of Christ and other characters in the Bible. Include comments on the following:
 - a. What else Christ did (in this and other parts of his life) to overcome temptation
 - b. Name another character in the Bible who was confronted with temptation and overcame it. Discuss what the temptation was and what the person did to overcome it.
 - c. Name a character in the Bible who was confronted with temptation and succumbed to it. Discuss what the temptation was and the mistake(s) the person made in confronting it.
4. The time the disciples spent on the water represents the time during which Jesus is away from believers, and we struggle in his absence. His appearance to the disciples is typical of his return. The disciples initially reacted to him in fear. Discuss what the Bible teaches about the return of Christ and about how people will react to it. What should the attitude of believers be about the return of Christ? Include comments on the following:
 - a. What Jesus taught about how people will and/or should react to his coming in his discourses (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount)
 - b. What Jesus taught about how people would and/or should react to his coming in one of his parables
 - c. What another New Testament writer teaches about how we should react to Jesus at his coming
 - d. What at least one Old Testament passage teaches about how people will and/or should react to Jesus at his coming. (See, for example, Daniel's symbolic death, resurrection, and immortalization in Daniel 10: 8 – 12 and Brother John Thomas' commentary on it in Anastasis.)

Notes:

The Account—John 9:1-41

“I am the light of the world.”

The events of John 9 contrast those who receive spiritual sight with those who do not, and it shows how spiritual sight is acquired through the choices we make. The account teaches that while some choices are more important than others, spiritual sight is not developed as a result of one decision we make. Instead, it is the result of many choices that relate to both our actions and our attitude. This account demonstrates that God overthrows pride and willfulness but nurtures the humble heart and the mind that seeks to honor Him and to serve others above all else.

QUESTIONS: List any questions you might have about the reading in the space below:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The Discourse Before the Sign:

The mindset that God loves is exemplified in His Son, the Word made flesh, and we miss a powerful demonstration of Jesus’ character if our consideration of this account begins at verse 1. To get a complete picture of the account, we need to look at the events of the previous chapter.

a. What message did Jesus proclaim in John 8:12 as he was teaching in the Temple?

b. How did the Pharisees respond to him in the following verse?

c. The term for Jesus’ antagonists switches from being “the Pharisees” to “the Jews” in verse 22. Study the use of the term “the Jews” in the Gospel of John. To whom is John referring when he uses the term? List and discuss one or two verses that support your argument below.

d. How does verse 30 say the multitude responded to Jesus' exchange with the Jews?

e. The Jews tried to dissuade the people from following Jesus in verses 33 and 39 by attempting to resist his teaching with arguments derived from the Bible. But they failed. So, they tried a new tactic in verse 41. What was it? Why did they say what they did?

f. Does the Old Testament support or refute the Jews' claim, "We be not born of fornication"?

g. Jesus responded to the Jews' statement with further spiritual teaching. How did they respond to his teaching in verse 48?

h. The Jews said, "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" Jesus replied, "I have not a devil." Note that Jesus did not say, "I am not a Samaritan." Why not? See Luke 10: 29 – 37.

i. Jesus once again responded with spiritual teaching. How did the Jews respond to his teaching in verse 59?

j. John 9:1 records that Jesus noticed a blind man as he was walking away from the Temple. What does this indicate about Jesus' character?

k. How does this relate to us?

- 1. Read John 9:1 – 7. What acts of kindness does Jesus perform in these verses?

- m. The abuse received by Jesus in chapter 8 and his reaction to it in chapter 9 are linked in the text. What Greek word that appears in the last verse of chapter 8 and the first verse of chapter 9 links the two accounts? How often does this word appear in John’s Gospel?

- n. Our natural inclination is not to respond to difficulties in our lives by showing kindness to others as Jesus did. What can we do to encourage ourselves to change so that we respond more like Jesus did?

2. Blind from Birth:

- a. List two Bible characters that were punished with sickness because of sin.

- b. Provide a New Testament verse that says that sickness can be a punishment for sin.

- c. List two Bible characters who suffered from sickness that was not the direct result of wrongdoing.

- d. Jesus healed this man by having him wash in the pool of Siloam. There is a great passage in the Gospels where Jesus discusses the relationship of misfortune and wrongdoing and mentions “Siloam” in so doing. List the passage. What exhortation did he use the occasion to give?

- e. What lessons can we learn from what the Bible teaches about misfortune and wrongdoing? How should we react to sickness and adversity in our lives? How should we react to others when they experience these things?

- f. The disciples wondered whether the man’s sickness could have been due to wrongs done by his parents. What proverb did the people of Ezekiel’s day (see Ezekiel 18) use to express this concept? What was God’s opinion of the proverb? Why?

- g. Thinking back to the echo of “Siloam” in question 2d, which event came first chronologically, the healing of the blind man or Jesus remarks where he makes reference to “Siloam”? Were the events close together in time? (Use a harmony of the Gospels such as Guidebook to the New Testament by Bro. H.P. Mansfield.) What does this reveal about imparting spiritual things to the human mind?

- 3. Isaiah 42 talks about the work of the Messiah and healing the blind. Who do you think the blind man represents? Provide evidence from Isaiah 42.

- 4. Given your answer to 3, why do you think it is significant that the man is characterized as being “blind from birth?”

5. Christ said that the man had been born blind so “that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” The implication of this statement can be hard for us to accept: this man’s many years of sorrow, hardship, and exclusion from society had occurred so that God might be glorified in him. What lessons can we learn from this?

If we are experiencing difficulty in our lives, there is much consolation in the words that Jesus speaks in verse 5, “I am the light of the world.” We have the choice of following Jesus. If we do, he will show us the way through our trials. God will be glorified, and we will receive our reward.

6. Jesus (again) makes the statement, “I am the light of the world” in verse 5. Given that he had already said it, why did he say it again?

7. How did Jesus heal the man?

8. Why did Jesus choose to anoint the blind man’s eyes with clay as part of the miracle?

9. Lessons in Symbol:

- a. Clay is an oft-used symbol in the Bible. What does it represent? List and discuss one or two supporting verses below.

- b. What is represented in Jesus’ command to the man to go wash?

- c. When a symbol is particularly important in an account in the Gospel of John, attention is frequently drawn to it in the text. (For example, in the fifth sign, the fact that it was dark at the time of the account is mentioned twice in the space of two verses.) In verse 7, attention is drawn to the pool of Siloam by stating what “Siloam” means. What does the pool of Siloam represent in the account?

- d. Put yourself in the man’s position and think about what obeying Jesus’ command would have entailed for him. Describe what the man’s experiences might have been as he did what Jesus asked him to do. What lessons can we learn from this?

10. The Neighbors:

The man received his natural sight in an instant. His spiritual sight took longer to develop, however, although it was already growing by the time he washed in the pool. Just as baptism is not the end of our spiritual development, this man would grow in faith as he consistently chose to honor Christ during the divinely controlled trials he was about to endure.

- a. The man’s neighbors saw him after his encounter with Jesus. How did they react to him in verses 8 - 9?

- b. What is the lesson for us? Provide at least one supporting verse.

- c. The man’s neighbors questioned him about the circumstances of his healing. He told them that Jesus had healed him. Although his plain declaration may seem like a trivial matter, it required faith. Even individuals of great faith have faltered when called upon to give proper credit to blessings given to them by God. Identify and discuss an individual in the Bible who did not give proper credit to God. Why did the person fail to do so?

d. What did the man refer to Jesus as in verse 11?

e. Why do you think the neighbors brought the man before the Pharisees?

f. What mindset does Paul commend in Romans 12:12?

g. Why does Paul say this mindset is important in 1 Corinthians 12:25 – 27?

h. Was this mindset reflected in the neighbors' interactions with the man born blind?

11. What did the man refer to Jesus as in verse 17? How does this reveal a growth in his faith? What caused his faith to grow?

12. The Blind Man's Parents:

a. Who were the man's interrogators in verse 16? Who were his interrogators in verse 18?

b. What does Isaiah 58:13 – 14 say the purpose of the Sabbath was?

c. Why did the Jews call the parents in to testify?

d. Why were the parents afraid?

e. As a result of the parents' fear, they deflected the attention of the authorities away from themselves and back onto their son. Being mindful of our own failings, we may feel hesitant to condemn them too strongly. Nevertheless, we must remember that we are called upon to be courageous in our advocacy and defense of the Truth. What does Revelation 21:7 – 8 say the fate of the fearful will be? What other types of people are put in the same category as the fearful?

f. Why do you think an attitude of fearfulness is so abhorrent to God?

13. "Give God the praise":

a. The Jews brought the man born blind back in for further questioning in verse 24. They began by addressing him with the words, "Give God the praise." This was a phrase reserved for serious judicial inquiries. During what incident in the history of Israel was it used? (Use a Bible search engine or a cross-reference for help.)

b. (Optional.) A very similar phrase is used in Jeremiah 13:15 - 17. How does it relate to this account?

The man born blind was now under intense pressure. He had just received his sight after a lifetime of blindness. He had a choice of siding with the elders and enjoying some of the pleasures of this world for a season. (He had, after all, never experienced the "lust of the eyes.") He also had the choice of siding with Christ and facing the implications of doing so.

14. Choosing Christ:

- a. What did the man born blind say he was (by implication) in verse 27?

- b. Describe the attitude of the elders of the people in verses 24 – 34. How does it differ from what the Bible says the attitude of elders should be?

- c. The man had endured a lifetime of blindness, but his words reveal that he possessed a vast knowledge of Scripture that he had acquired despite his disability. How does Psalm 66:18 – 20 relate to this account?

- d. What does Ecclesiastes 8:1 suggest might have made this man (who had only recently been a beggar) so bold in the presence of the elders?

- e. The Jews told the man, “Thou wast altogether born in sins.” Why did they say this?

- f. What is incredibly ironic about their statement?

- g. The Jews “cast him out.” What were the consequences at that time of being put out of the synagogue? (Use a Bible encyclopedia or commentary for help. You may find John Gill’s commentary on John 9:22 and 34 helpful. It is available at: [http://biblestudytools.net/Commentaries/GillsExpositionoftheBible.](http://biblestudytools.net/Commentaries/GillsExpositionoftheBible/))

There might be times in our lives when we are reduced to little more than putting faith in God and looking to the future. But let us have confidence that our trust in God will not be in vain. Loyalty to Christ will always have a glorious reward.

15. How does Isaiah 66:5 relate to this account?

16. Christ learned of the man’s plight. He knew of his difficulty. So, he sought him out and found him. We see in Christ’s actions here an introduction to an aspect of him that is the focus of the next chapter. What aspect of Jesus is presented in the beginning of John 10?

17. “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” Jesus asked the man. The fact that Jesus would ask him this question shows just how far his spiritual vision exceeded that of the Jewish elders. When Christ confessed to them that he was the Son of God in Matthew 26:63 – 66, what did they do?

18. What did the man refer to Jesus as in verse 36? How does this reveal a growth in his faith? What caused his faith to grow?

19. How did the man respond to Jesus in verse 38?

Here we have a vision of the Kingdom Age when those who choose to humble themselves and obey Christ’s commands will worship their Lord. They will see clearly then, and they will have the pleasure of looking on Jesus, their healer and deliverer.

20. The Pharisees looked on and mocked. “Are we blind also?” they asked. Were these the same men who cast the man out of the synagogue? What do you think explains their attitude? What did Jesus say was the consequence of their attitude?

21. The same choices that faced the man born blind and the Pharisees face us now. We, like him, have been called out of darkness. We, like the Pharisees, can find reasons to be proud and to exaggerate our own importance. We can choose to reject the Son of God and to treat his friends with contempt by choosing to ignore the evident display of God’s power. How have we seen God’s power displayed in our lives? What lessons can we learn from the man born blind about how we should react to it?

Christ appears twice in this account. At his first appearance, he gave instructions. At his second appearance, he pronounced judgment. Two categories of men, the man born blind and the Pharisees (who were in the majority) were before him. The category that each was in was based on the choices they made and was a reflection of the spiritual sight they had. Let us spend the remainder of the days we have on this earth in service to our God, looking to our Lord to lead us, and seeing with the eye of faith.

Challenges from Christendom (Part 1)—John 8:56

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad”

1. Many Christians believe that Jesus pre-existed and cite this passage as evidence. How would you explain this verse to an interested friend?

- 2. Be ready to turn the conversation around when sharing the Truth with others. We do not want to focus too much on what the Bible does not teach (e.g., the Bible does not teach the pre-existence of Christ). Instead, we want to share its positive message. If you are discussing this verse with an interested friend, what would be a good direction to take the conversation in once you had addressed the question of pre-existence? In particular, why does Jesus say Abraham rejoiced to see his day?

Challenges from Christendom (Part 2)—John 8:58

“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am”

- 1. In Exodus 3:14, God tells Moses that His name is “I am.” Is Jesus saying here that he is Yahweh? How would you explain what Jesus is saying to an interested friend?

Subjects for Further Study

Choose at least **two** of the following subjects to study in detail and attach your notes to the workbook:

1. Choose from the QUESTIONS at the beginning of this section to study any subject that might not have been answered through the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.
2. Think back to Jesus' exchange with the elders of the people in John 8. What lessons can we learn from it about how we should conduct difficult conversations with others on spiritual matters? What do other parts of Scripture teach about how we should converse with each other, especially when the subject is difficult? Include the following in your discussion:
 - a. Lessons from the Law (e.g., Numbers 16:1 - 5)
 - b. Lessons from the Proverbs (e.g., Proverbs 15:1)
 - c. Lessons from the life and teachings of Jesus (e.g., Matthew 18:15 – 18)
 - d. Lessons from the New Testament epistles (e.g., James 1:19)
3. Siloam appears throughout the history of Jerusalem as recorded in the Scriptures. Recount the history of Siloam. (Use a Bible encyclopedia as necessary.) Be sure to discuss the following:
 - a. The Gihon Spring, the source of Siloam's waters
 - b. The prophecy given to Ahaz near Siloam in Isaiah 7
 - c. The use of Siloam as a symbol in a prophecy given in Isaiah 8
 - d. Hezekiah's transformation of Siloam from a conduit that brought water into the city into an aqueduct that created a pool within Jerusalem, which was named Siloam
4. The faith of the man born blind increased through suffering. Discuss how our faith increases through suffering. Include comments on the following:
 - a. The Bible's teaching about the importance of suffering
 - b. The Bible's assurances that God is with us during times of difficulty
 - c. How Christ benefited from his suffering
 - d. How at least two other Bible characters benefited from times of trial
 - e. What we should do during times of suffering
5. There is a great deal of emphasis on natural descent in John 8 and 9. In John 8, the leaders of the people expressed pride in their ancestry and doubt about Jesus because of questions about his parentage. In John 9, the disciples wondered aloud whether the man's disability was because of something his parents had done wrong, and the elders asserted his blindness was the result of his parents' wrongdoing. What does the Bible say about natural descent, adoption, and how they relate to salvation? Be sure to discuss what Galatians 3 and Romans 11 teach about these subjects.

The Account—John 11:1-57

“Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.”

This account is a demonstration of the power that has been given to the Son of God, but it is also an exposition in symbol of the spiritual development of believers. In it we see how Christ interacts with his followers to increase their faith. And the lesson is powerfully made that if we maintain our faith even during difficult and confusing times, the power given to Jesus by his Father is able to deliver us from the sorrows of this life and ultimately to free us from the shackles of our mortality at his return.

QUESTIONS: List any questions you might have about the reading in the space below:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Which Gospels record the raising of Lazarus? Why is this significant? See John 5:25.

2. The events of John 11 occurred near the end of Jesus’ ministry:

- a. The nearest time marker to the account is John 10: 22. What season was it?

- b. Many translations (e.g., KJV, NIV) say that the events of John 10: 22 – 39 occurred at the “feast of dedication.” What else is this feast known as? (See *The Complete Jewish Bible* available on www.biblestudytools.net or the margin of the NIV for help.)

- c. What feast occurred at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion?

- d. In what season does that feast occur?

3. The Family:

- a. John 11:2 mentions that Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with her hair. Where else in John does it mention this event?

- b. Which event came first - the anointing of Jesus' feet or the raising of Lazarus? Support your answer with Scripture.

- c. Why does John record these events as he does?

- d. Lazarus lived in a house with his sisters, Mary and Martha. Who does the Bible say the house belonged to in Luke 10:38?

- e. Who does the Bible say the house belonged to in Mark 14:3?

- f. Offer an explanation that reconciles the answers given in 2d and 2e.

4. The Sisters' Message:

- a. Why did the sisters send a message to Jesus in verse 3?

- b. What did the message say?

- c. What did they ask Jesus to do?

- d. Why did the sisters send the message that they did? What attitude does it reflect?

- e. Identify an instance in the Bible where a righteous individual made a very specific request of God in prayer.

- f. Identify an instance in the Bible where a righteous individual spoke to God in prayer about a trying situation but made no specific request to Him.

- g. When is it appropriate to make specific requests to God in prayer? When is it appropriate to make mention of a situation without making a specific request?

- h. How did Jesus respond to the sisters' message in verse 4?

5. Two Days:

- a. Read John 10:40 – 41. What work was Jesus doing when the messenger came to him?

- b. Where was the work taking place?

- c. Read John 10:42. Was the work successful?

- d. Read John 11:6. What did Jesus do in response to the sisters' message?

e. What do the two days represent? See 2 Peter 3:8.

f. What is the lesson for us?

g. Read John 11:17. How was Lazarus when the messenger returned with Jesus' message?

h. What does this represent symbolically?

i. Why is John 11:5 inserted where it is in the account?

j. What does verse 5 teach us about how God loves us?

6. Judea:

a. Why did the disciples not want to return to Judea?

b. Why did Jesus answer his disciples as he did in verses 9 and 10?

c. Why did Jesus say he wanted to go into Judea in verse 11?

d. Why did the disciples object in verse 12?

e. What did Jesus mean when he said that Lazarus was asleep?

f. Find a chapter in the Bible where “asleep” is used in the same way. How many times is the word used in that way in the chapter?

7. Thomas:

a. What characteristics does Thomas display in verse 16?

b. What language is the name “Thomas” from? What does it mean?

c. What language is the name “Didymus” from? What does it mean?

d. Where is the next place in the Gospel of John that this apostle is called both “Thomas” and “Didymus?”

e. What characteristics does he display there?

- f. Do you think this apostle’s name is appropriate for him? Why or why not?

Thus, Jesus and the Twelve made their way to Bethany. When Mary and Martha heard that Jesus was coming, Martha rushed out to meet him. Mary, who was the quieter and more contemplative of the two, remained behind in the house.

8. Martha:

- a. Martha’s spiritual discernment is sometimes underestimated because of a rebuke she once received from Jesus. Describe the exchange Martha had with Jesus in Luke 10: 38 – 42.

- b. What virtues does Martha display in the Luke 10 account?

- c. What mistake did Martha make in Luke 10?

- d. Returning to John 11, what had happened in Martha’s life after she sent the messenger to Jesus?

- e. Describe what Martha would have felt.

- f. What do her words to Jesus in verse 21 and 22 convey about her attitude towards him?

- g. Read John 11: 23 – 24. What made Martha different from many of Jesus’ followers?

- h. What did Martha confess to Jesus in verse 27?

- i. Read John 10: 24 – 31. What does what Martha said reveal about her?

After making her confession, Martha departed to call her sister to Jesus. She did so secretly. There were many of the Jews, John’s term for the elders of the people, who were with Martha in the house, and she preferred not to alert them to Jesus’ presence for they sought to persecute him. Once called, Mary hastened to Jesus. Martha’s secret call to her and the words “The Master is come, and calleth for thee” are significant. Indeed, they may foreshadow the way in which we are called to meet the Lord at the Judgment Seat.

9. Mary:

- a. Compare Mary’s words to Jesus in verse 32 with Martha’s words to him in verse 21. What does this suggest about the two sisters?

- b. What lessons can we learn from the way these sisters handled grief?

- c. The KJV renders verse 33 as “When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.” What Greek word is translated “groaned?”

- d. What Greek word is this word from? What does that word mean? (You may find <http://www.biblestudytools.net/> helpful.)

- e. Using a concordance, look up the Greek word translated “groan” in the New Testament. Is it the same word as in 9c? What does the word mean?

- f. What does this suggest about what Jesus was feeling in verse 33?

- g. Why did he feel this way?

10. At the Tomb:

- a. “Jesus wept.” Why did he weep?

- b. What are the lessons for us? See Hebrews 4:15 – 16 and Hebrews 5:8.

- c. The elders did not miss this opportunity to mock Jesus. How they delighted in the display of his sadness. “Behold how he loved him!” They had no idea that Jesus loved Lazarus so, and yet this man who had confounded them time and again with his miracles was unable to deliver his friend from death (or so they thought). They wondered this sentiment out loud for all to hear in the hopes that doubt in Jesus would spread. Why was it especially cruel that they asked, “Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?”

- d. Read John 11:38 – 42. How many prayers does it mention that Jesus offered in these verses? What was each prayer about?

- e. What lessons can we learn from these verses about dealing with adversaries?

- f. Name and discuss another Bible character who dealt with adversaries the same way.

11. Resurrection:

- a. (Optional.) Lazarus had been dead for four days. What does that represent?

- b. Read John 11: 43 – 44. Describe the events of Lazarus' resurrection.

- c. Why is it significant that Lazarus came out of the grave still wearing his graveclothes?

- d. Did the elders all have the same reaction to the raising of Lazarus? Explain.

12. The Council:

- a. What did the elders fear would happen as a result of Jesus’ ministry?

- b. What did the elders refer to the Temple as in verse 48?

- c. What did Jesus call the Temple in John 2:16?

The assemblage of chief priests and Pharisees debated various schemes for neutralizing the influence of Jesus, but none of them went far enough for Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year. He insisted that Jesus be put to death. “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (NIV).

- d. Caiaphas said that Jesus’ death would save the nation from destruction. And he was right, but in a sense other than what he intended. Explain.

13. Read John 11: 53 – 54. How did Jesus sacrifice of himself in giving life to Lazarus?

Yet there were some sweet moments for Jesus during the final, trying days of his ministry. John 12 opens with Jesus, Mary, and Martha enjoying a meal of fellowship together.

Challenges from Christendom (Part 2)—John 20:28

“And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God”

1. Thomas calls Jesus “my God.” That settles the issue in the mind of many Trinitarians. How would you explain this passage to an interested friend?

Subjects for Further Study

Choose at least **two** of the following subjects to study in detail and attach your notes to the workbook:

1. Choose from the QUESTIONS at the beginning of this section to study any subject that might not have been answered through the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.
2. Study the family that is so central to this chapter in more detail. In particular
 - a. Identify the Hebrew form of the Greek names used in this chapter (e.g., what is the Hebrew name equivalent of “Lazarus?”)
 - b. Identify the meaning of Bethany, the town where the family lived, as well as the meaning of the names of the members of the family. How do the meaning of the names relate to the account?
 - c. Read the account of Mary washing Jesus’ feet in John 12:1 – 7 as well as in the parallel account of Matthew 26:6 – 16. What disciple of Jesus appears in these accounts? There is some evidence that he was a member of the family. Discuss the evidence. Do you agree that this disciple was a member of the family?
3. Throughout this Gospel, John portrays disciples as suffering yet succeeding. This is done, for example, through his depiction of Thomas. Find the instances where Thomas appears in the Gospel. Discuss his spiritual development. How is it similar to your own spiritual development?
4. Many lessons on prayer can be learned from the example prayers provided in the Bible. Study a prayer of a righteous person and discuss the lessons that you learned from it.

The Account—John 21:1-19

“After these things Jesus shewed himself again”

Jesus had risen, and the disciples were about to go forth without his physical presence and spread the “things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.” The disciples had grown a great deal during the time they had spent with Jesus, but they still had lessons to learn. The eighth sign helped to prepare them for the work that was ahead.

QUESTIONS: List any questions you might have about the reading in the space below:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. “After these things:”

a. What major events occurred between the seventh and the eighth signs?

b. The eighth sign takes place in Galilee. Why were the disciples in Galilee? See Matthew 28:10.

c. Verse 14 states that the events of John 21 were the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples after his resurrection. John 20 records the first two times he appeared to the disciples. How soon after the resurrection was the first appearance? The second?

d. A number of appearances by Jesus after his resurrection are recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:4 – 8. List them.

- e. Where chronologically do the events of eighth sign occur in the above list?

2. The Disciples:

- a. How many of the disciples were together in verses 2 and 3?

- b. Give some examples of Scripture’s use of this number.

- c. With what ideas is this number associated in these passages?

- d. Why do you think this number appears in this account the way it does?

- e. Peter and Thomas are mentioned first in the list of disciples. What did these two men have in common?

3. “I go a fishing:”

- a. Who initiated the fishing expedition?

- b. Who led the way in preaching to the Jews after Christ’s ascension? See Acts 2.

- c. Who led the way in preaching to the Gentiles after Christ’s ascension? See Acts 10.

- d. Think back to the questions on the fifth sign. What does the sea represent in the Bible?

e. What does the disciples' fishing expedition represent?

4. Nathaniel:

a. Nathaniel was part of the fishing party. Where was he from?

b. Look on a map. Where is that city located?

c. Is it likely that Nathaniel was a trained fisherman? Why or why not?

d. Why do you think Nathaniel was in the boat?

e. What is the lesson for us?

5. Hard Labor:

a. What time was it when the disciples were fishing?

b. Think back to the questions on the fifth sign again. What does darkness represent?

c. What did Jesus ask the disciples if they had?

- d. Look up the Greek word in a concordance. What is it? What did Christ literally ask the disciples if they had?

- e. Why did you think Jesus asked them this?

6. Jesus addressed the disciples as “children” in verse 5:

- a. What Greek word is translated “children” in John 4:12? What does the word mean?

- b. What Greek word is translated “children” in John 8:39? What does the word mean?

- c. What Greek word is translated “children” in John 21:5? What does the word mean?

- d. Later in his life, John addressed his readers with the word used in John 21:5. Where in his epistles does he do this? What message was he conveying to his readers there?

- e. Why do you think Jesus addressed his disciples as he did?

7. The disciples were about to embark on a work of spreading the Gospel. For their efforts to succeed, they were going to have to obey Jesus, and that was not always going to be easy for them to do. However, obeying Jesus was necessary because he was the one who would cause their work to be successful. This sign was helping to teach this lesson.

a. What did Jesus ask the disciples, specifically Peter, to do in Acts 10:9 – 23?

b. Why would that have been difficult for him?

Imagine the disciples laboring throughout the night. They would have enjoyed moments of sweet fellowship for sure, but for the most part their work was hard. This is a depiction to us from God of the task of spreading the Gospel. He knows it is a work that is not always easy. But if we are faithful to His Son and obey Jesus' commands, our work will ultimately be profitable because His power will make it so.

8. The Great Harvest:

a. What command did Jesus give the disciples in verse 6?

b. What happened as a result?

c. What is the significance of the right side of the boat? See Matthew 25:31 – 46.

d. Luke 5:3 – 10 records an earlier miracle that is similar to the eighth sign in some respects, but also has some important differences. Where is Jesus in John 21? Where is he in Luke 5?

e. How are the fish described in John 21:11? How are the fish described in Luke 5:6?

f. What is the significance of the fish in John 21 being described as “great”? See Matthew 13:47 – 50.

g. What happened to the support ships in Luke 5:7? Did the same thing happen in John 21:8?

h. What happened to the nets in Luke 5:6? Did the same thing happen in John 21:11?

i. It is clear that these accounts have symbolic meaning. (See Luke 5:10, for example.) Yet some of the symbols are different. What is Luke 5 depicting? What is John 21 depicting?

John 21:11 notes that there were 153 great fish caught in the net. These fish represent the saints who will be immortalized at Christ’s return. The most important aspects of their number (as it relates to the redeemed) are that 1) it is known of the Father, and 2) none of them are lost.

9. What do you think is the significance of the number 153? (You may find a study book, such as Bro. John Ullman’s *Eight Signs of John* or Bro. Harry Whittaker’s *Studies in the Gospels* helpful in answering this question.)

10. The disciples had not perceived the presence of Jesus when the miracle took place. What lesson can we learn from this? See Matthew 18:20.

11. “It is the Lord.”

- a. Who realized that it was Jesus standing on the shore?

- b. John 21:7 says that Peter was “naked,” a term used in the Bible to describe one wearing only a tunic. What did he do before casting himself into the sea?

- c. Why did he do this? See Ephesians 6:14.

12. Powerful Imagery:

- a. What was waiting for Peter in verse 9 when he came to shore?

- b. At what important event in Peter’s life had there also been “a fire of coals?”

God, who created us, knows best how to teach us. Sometimes He does so using stunning visual images that remind us of our past. For example, the story of David and Bath-sheba really begins in 2 Samuel 10 when David sends comforters to Hanun the son of Nahash, king of Ammon. Those comforters are abused and a war between Israel and Ammon ensued. When David stayed back from the siege of the capital of Ammon, he met Bath-sheba. Years later when David fled from Absalom to Mahanaim, Shobi, another son of Nahash, brought him supplies (2 Samuel 17:27 – 29). Seeing a son of Nahash at that time must have stunned David, reminding him of the reason for his plight and reinforcing in his mind the awesome power of God.

13. Discourse with Peter:

- a. What question did Jesus ask Peter in verse 15?

b. What Greek word is translated “love” in Jesus’ question? What does the word mean?

c. What was Peter’s answer?

d. What Greek word is translated “love” in Peter’s response? What does the word mean?

e. How did Jesus reply at the end of verse 15? Look up the Greek words in his reply. What do they mean?

f. Jesus asked Peter a slightly different question in verse 16. How is his second question different from his first?

g. What Greek word for “love” did Jesus use in his question? What Greek word did Peter use in his response?

h. How did Jesus reply at the end of verse 16? Look up the Greek words in his reply. What do they mean?

i. Jesus asked Peter a slightly different question in verse 17. Look at the Greek words. How is his third question different from his second?

j. Why was Peter grieved at Jesus' third question?

k. What Greek word for “know” did Peter use in verses 15, 16, and once in 17? What does it mean?

l. The second time Peter says “knowest” in verse 17 he uses a different Greek word. What is it? What does it mean?

m. Why do you think he uses this word?

n. How did Jesus reply at the end of verse 17? Look up the Greek words in his reply. What do they mean?

o. What lesson was Jesus trying to teach?

p. How does the discourse with Peter relate to the eighth sign?

Although Jesus’ message to Peter (in verses 18 and 19) that his pilgrimage would end in violent death could have been distressing, Peter was nevertheless encouraged by it because Jesus told him that he would glorify God by his death. Peter knew by this that he would remain faithful to Christ to the end. Peter must have been greatly comforted by this knowledge because echoes of these words of Jesus appear throughout the remainder of his recorded life in Scripture.

14. Glorifying God:

- a. Read Acts 12:1 – 11. What echo of John 21:18 appears in Acts 12:8?

- b. Peter wrote his second epistle at the end of his life. Where in 2 Peter 1 does it show that Peter was still thinking of the words Jesus spoke in John 21:18 – 19?

15. Conclusion:

- a. Give some examples of Scripture’s use of the number eight.

- b. With what ideas is this number associated in these passages?

- c. Why do you think there are eight signs in John?

Challenges from Christendom—John 21:17

“Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep”

1. Catholics claim that Jesus gave Peter authority over all of his followers when he told him, “Feed my sheep.” They further assert that this authority has been passed on to his successors, the Popes, a view that they contend is supported by Matthew 16:18, which states, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” How would you explain these passages to an interested Catholic friend?

Subjects for Further Study

Choose at least **two** of the following subjects to study in detail and attach your notes to the workbook:

1. Choose from the QUESTIONS at the beginning of this section to study any subject that might not have been answered through the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.
2. The eighth sign leaves us with the message that although Christ is physically absent from us, he nevertheless has the preeminence over us. What are the implications of this for us in the way in which we conduct:
 - a. Our personal lives
 - b. Ourselves in the home
 - c. Ourselves in the ecclesia
 - d. Ourselves in the world
3. The eighth sign contains powerful lessons about preaching the Gospel. Study the conversion of a person in the Bible and discuss the lessons you learned from it.
4. Discuss how the signs, from first to last, reveal God’s purpose with Israel.

shall be poured out upon the altar of the LORD thy God, and thou shalt eat the flesh.

The blood of sacrificial animals had to be poured out at the altar. These two laws speak volumes about unholy human life.

Blood represents death-prone human life, the life of the flesh. This life must not be eaten or consumed. This life must not be indulged, elevated or worshipped. This life must be poured out at the altar. The antitypical altar is the Messiah. Hebrews 13:10 tells the believers of the ecclesial age that we eat from an altar from which the priests of the Mosaic age were forbidden; Paul parallels the sin offering under the Mosaic age when the blood went into God's sanctuary to Christ's sin offering.

The powerful exhortation of the blood is that we must live sacrificially, pouring out our human life at the feet of Jesus Christ. We are not free to worship this life, joining society's self-delusion concerning humanity's inherent holiness. This life must be sacrificed hour by hour, day by day and year by year.

We do this because we love our Heavenly Father and His Son. It is sacrifice that defines love. A spouse sacrifices for his/her beloved. A parent sacrifices for his/her child. A child sacrifices for his/her parents. Sacrificial love is divine love. Indulgent, unrestricted and unbounded love is vile, immoral, temporary and self-defeating. It is indulgent love that defines our current society with its love at first sight drivel, guiltless self-indulgence and constantly evolving moral definitions. A love without sacrifice is a lie.

The blood trail

The lesson of the blood representing unholy human life intricately weaves its way through laws, historical records, visions and promises with complex but perfect symmetry. The destination of a clean animal's blood was determined by its compliant nature. A wild, unwilling-to-serve animal that qualified as ritually clean and eatable had to have its blood poured into the dust and never brought to the altar. A domesticated clean animal had to have its blood taken to the altar. While in the wilderness wanderings, if the blood of a sacrificial animal was not brought to the altar, the offending party was to be permanently ostracized from God's community (Lev. 17) emphasizing the significance of the reflected principle. In the promised land God granted permission to eat sacrificial animals without bringing the blood to the altar by declaring these sacrifices as comparable to the ritually clean, wild animals whose blood was bound to the dust.

This tells us that wild, unrestrained human life is bound to the curse of the dust ("dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return...dust shall be the serpent's meat") as opposed to life that is defined by willing service being bound to the blessing of the altar. Anything that came in direct contact with the altar was automatically holy (Ex. 29:37). The dependent, service-oriented, domesticated life meant the blood was destined for the blessing of the altar. The independent, self-absorbed, wild life meant the blood was destined for the curse of the dust.

Death is the righteous answer for sin

Blood is a theme lesson that can be tracked through scripture with amazing consistency. Understanding the lesson of the blood is impossible if we elevate mortal life to a status of a holy or sacred nature. The cessation of mortal life is the righteous answer for the ungodly behavior flowing from humanity like a brackish spring. This is why an offerer placed his hand on the head of the animal before personally executing the sacrificial animal under the law of Moses (Lev. 3:8; 4:4). After associating themselves with the sacrificial animal, their execution of it was a statement that sinful human nature deserves death, that death is the righteous judgment for sinful life. The offerer recognized God's righteousness in his own personal condemnation to death; the acknowledgment came in his execution of the animal after holding its head in his hands.

Mortal life is not holy or sacred. We should not concern ourselves with the self-centered, self-elevating delusions of society based on the presumption that mortal life is sacred. It is not. It is cursed, and we hope for the day when all mortal life is a distant, unpleasant memory.

Jim Dillingham, Dunbarton, New Hampshire

YOUTH SPEAKS

The Eight Signs of John's Gospel (1)

Water into Wine

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF FEATURES of the gospel of John that make it distinct from the other three gospels, which are known collectively as the synoptic gospels. These unique features of John's narrative highlight the focus of the book, which is Jesus' role as the Son of God. They also contribute to the purpose of the book, which is strengthening the belief of Gentile followers of Christ (John 20:31).

There are only eight miracles recorded in John's gospel and six of those miracles are unique to the book. Yet those miracles are a major focus of John's record because they contribute so much to the purpose of the book. (Indeed, the words "miracle" and "miracles" appear much more frequently in John's gospel than in the synoptic gospels.)

The Greek word used to refer to the miracles in John's gospel is frequently translated "sign;" therefore, the eight miracles recorded in the book are often called the "eight signs of John." This label is fitting since it is suggestive of the tremendous lessons contained in the records of the miracles, lessons that can be gleaned from a consideration of both the actual narrative of the accounts as well as the symbols contained within them.

The first sign

Jesus turning water into wine is the first of the eight signs of John. It is recorded in John 2:1–11. Verse 1 says that it took place at a marriage feast in Cana of Galilee. Cana was a Galilean village in the valley of Esdraelon located a few miles north of Nazareth. “Cana” means “zealous,” and it was the home of the disciple Nathaniel, a zealous man called “an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile” in the discourse that he had with Jesus at the end of John 1. (This structure, where a miracle is linked to a discourse of Jesus, is common in John’s narrative. Indeed, the miracle often provides an extension of the teaching contained in the discourse.)

Since Cana and Nazareth were in close proximity, it makes sense that Jesus and his family would be invited to the wedding feast. It is likely that the family of Jesus were friends or relatives of the people being married. Most commentators believe that Joseph’s absence from the account suggests that he had died. The fact that Mary came to Jesus for help in this account suggests that he had assumed the role of head of the household.

In verse 2, Jesus’ followers are referred to as “disciples.” The Greek word is *mathetes*, which means “a learner.” This is in contrast to the Greek word *apostolos*, which means “messenger” or “one sent.” The choice of words here emphasizes that the men who would one day be apostles were young spiritually at this point and were in an early stage of development.

(It is interesting to think about whether Jesus’ disciples would have regarded themselves as spiritually young at this time. The men Jesus had selected thus far all took spiritual matters seriously, and some of them had been disciples of John. Yet it is not how we regard ourselves but how God regards us in these matters that is important.)

Verse 3 states that the wine at the feast ran out. This shortage of wine was probably due to the poverty of those giving the feast. Running out of wine would have been a humiliating experience for the bridegroom. Therefore, when Mary learned of the situation, she realized the embarrassment it would bring upon the hosts, and she appealed to Jesus, informing him, “They have no wine.” (It is interesting to ponder how was it that Mary knew of the situation. Was it because she was a close friend or relative? Perhaps she was told because she had a reputation for being a kind and compassionate person who knew how to solve problems.)

Jesus and his mother

Jesus responded to his mother with the words, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.” Although Jesus’ response may seem a bit harsh at first glance, a closer examination reveals that he was being caring, as always, while teaching an important lesson.

This was not the only time that Jesus called his mother “woman.” He also called Mary “woman” when he was dying on the cross (John 19:26). He called Mary Magdalene “woman” when he appeared to her after his resurrection (John 20:15). Thus, although there was not unkindness in Jesus’ use of the term,

there was formality. Jesus chose to be formal with his mother on this occasion because she, like everyone else around him, needed to learn from him. One of the lessons she needed to learn was that it was his Father, and not her, who was going to guide and influence him. This was a lesson that he had been trying to convey to her for some time and was now teaching again. (See Luke 2:48–49 and note that the question came from his *mother*, and he told her that he was about his *Father’s* business.)

What did Jesus mean by the phrase, “what have I to do with thee?” It’s a Hebrewism that appears several times in the Old Testament and means “your concern is not mine.” (See II Samuel 16:7–12; II Kings 3:13). Indeed, the *New English Bible* translates Jesus’ statement as “your concern is not mine.”

With this in mind, how is Jesus’ statement, “mine hour is not yet come” to be understood? It is possible that it is a reference to Psalm 102:13: “Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.” Perhaps Mary was hoping that Jesus would use the occasion to reveal himself to Israel and establish the Kingdom.

Jesus’ words were a mild rebuke to his mother, yet Mary also understood from them that Jesus intended to do something about the situation for she told the servants, “whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” Thus, even in teaching her a difficult lesson, Jesus showed kindness and consideration to Mary.

Water into wine

Verse 6 mentions six waterpots of stone. These waterpots were used for the ceremonial cleansings of the Jews (Mark 7:1–4).

Jesus instructed the servants to fill the pots with water, draw from them, and bear it to the governor of the feast. There were six pots, and depending on how John 1 is read, there were six disciples of Jesus at this time. It is possible that the disciples were those who filled the pots with water. The fact that John 2:11 says that the disciples witnessed the miracle (and believed on Jesus as a result of it) supports this view.

The governor of the feast was responsible for preparing the feast, offering prayers, extending words of blessing to the newly married couple, and tasting the food before it was to be brought before the guests. At Jesus’ command, the servants brought the fluid from the pots to him. Jesus had performed a miracle, and when the governor tasted the liquid, it had been made wine. Not only that, but it was superior wine, so that the governor gave a mild rebuke to the bridegroom for having kept the best wine until last.

Significance of the miracle

The miraculous, God-given power of Jesus was displayed in this miracle. Jesus was able to change water into superior wine. More importantly, he was able to transform his disciples’ attitude.

Whether or not the disciples carried the six waterpots, they are represented by them. Six is the number of flesh (e.g. man was created on the sixth day), and the Bible often uses a pot (albeit a clay pot) to represent people (e.g. Romans

9:20-23), making the pots a fitting symbol for the disciples. In the work that Christ did with his disciples, he did not change their outward appearance. Instead he changed what was in them from something common and ordinary (like water) to something of supreme value.

Those giving the feast represent natural Israel. There was spiritual poverty in Israel at the time of Christ's appearance. The house of Israel had, as it were, nothing in it but empty pots, a symbol of the empty legalism that many of the people were pursuing. There was no wine in the house of Israel.

Wine can represent many things in the Bible, including doctrine (e.g. Rev. 17:2) and the Abrahamic promises (Gen. 27: 37). Christ is teaching here that the "wine" he would provide could save the house of Israel.

The governor of the feast represents the elders of the Jews. He did not know from whence the wine was, yet he acknowledged that it was better than the old. Likewise, the religious rulers of the people did not know from whence Christ was (John 9:29). However, they unknowingly acknowledged him as the means by which man would attain unto eternal life (John 11:49-51). And one of their number would one day acknowledge that "the good wine" had been kept until last (Hebrews 1:1-2).

The account ends with the words, "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him" (John 2: 11). And since where Christ sows, he expects to reap, the second sign of John also took place in Cana, a fact brought out by the text that introduces it, "So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine" (John 4: 46). God willing, we will consider the second sign next month.

Ryan Mutter, Rockville, Maryland

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Iran's Tirade Against Israel

IN SPITE OF the "roadmap for peace" and other efforts at peace in the Middle East, nations of the area remain determined to wipe Israel off the map.

Iran's latest declarations

As reported in the *New York Times* on October 27, 2005, Iran's new president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, told a group of students at an anti-

Israeli event Israel, "must be wiped off the map" and that "attacks by Palestinians would destroy it." He declared the issue of a Palestinian state would be resolved only when Palestinians took control of all their lands. With further elaboration of his comments he indicated that: "The establishment of a Zionist regime was a move by the world oppressor against the Islamic world. The skirmishes in

the occupied land are part of the war of destiny. The outcome of hundreds of years of war will be defined in Palestinian land."

He then made reference to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution. Ahmadinejad said, "As the imam said, Israel must be wiped off the map." In excerpts taken from his speech, he made comparisons to the difficult task of eliminating Israel to the improbable thought of the Berlin wall being razed and the dictator of Iraq being captured. If both of these previously unthinkable and improbable events could happen during his lifetime, then it would be with certainty that Israel could be eliminated.

The most revealing aspect of his speech and his intent can be seen from the following: "For over 50 years the world oppressor tried to give legitimacy to the occupying regime and it has taken measures in this direction to stabilize it. About 27 or 28 years ago they took a major step and unfortunately one of the leading countries made a mistake which we hope to correct." This is an apparent reference to the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

The new President's tone was reminiscent of the early days of Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979. During that time, the revolutionary government went out of its way to encourage their citizens to fight against the Zionist power. However, during the past 20 years officials from Iran have avoided using provocative language against Israel. It therefore seems remarkable that Mr. Ahmadinejad has changed course and is now taking a more confrontational approach.

In less than a year, the entire tone and political leanings of Iran have shifted from a moderate nation to one intent on destroying a neighboring nation. In February, 2005, during the funeral of Pope John Paul II, the then Iranian President Khatami not only sat in close proximity to Israel's president he also shook hands and chatted briefly with him in his native tongue of Farsi. As well, President Khatami had proposed a dialogue among civilizations and pursued a policy of détente with Israel.

Israel's response

As one might appreciate, Israel was quick to respond to the words of the new Iranian President. A spokesman for Israel's Foreign Ministry, said, "Unfortunately, this is not the first time we've seen such extreme statements from senior Iranian leaders," adding, "We see today that there is a growing understanding in the international community that the extremist regime in Tehran is not just Israel's problem, but rather an issue that the entire international community must grapple with."

Israel did the smart thing and took the comments of the Iranian president and extrapolated them so that they encompassed the rest of the world. And indeed the folks in Washington were quick to jump into the fray by indicating in a press statement that: the remarks reconfirmed "what we have been saying about this particular regime in Iran." "I think that it only serves to underscore our concern, as well as the international community's concern, about Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons."

In this war of words, Mr. Ahmadinejad countered by calling

The first compilations of the Book of the Popes (*Liber pontificalis* – with short biographies of each pope from Peter onward, kept current, pope by pope) apparently date to the early sixth century. From that period we even have evidence of competing versions of the book of popes being created and disseminated by rival factions.

But Dr. O'Donnell also observes that Augustine's part in shaping the Catholic identity was the "central achievement of his career." He lived to see the sack of Rome by the Visigoths, which presaged the fall of the Empire and also its being replaced by a different structure and a new Pontifex Maximus.⁵

From Augustine to Benedict XVI

As a writer, Augustine was far ahead of his time, and that is one reason his writings have had such influence on later generations. His Confessions, an autobiographical work, reads, they say, almost like a novel. Obviously his works have been able to hold the interest of readers. Augustine was declared a "saint" of the Roman Church long before the present process of canonization was invented. His rules for the monastic orders are still in force. Among those ordained into the Augustinian Order was the young Martin Luther. It is interesting that this Augustinian priest would bring about a Reformation that would make the Bible available to all in their common tongue and bring about a freedom of worship that would make the search for gospel truth possible.

The appearance of this new biography – widely reviewed – attests to the importance of Augustine in the development of Christendom as we know it. And there is another book about him in the works. Boston University scholar of ancient Christianity Paula Fredriksen is producing a book, *Augustine and the Jews*.

Joseph Banta, Austin, Texas

1. HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2005.
2. They are the Christian writers whose works were produced in the years before the Council of Nicea (325 AD). It was that council of churchmen (convened by the emperor Constantine) that defined and declared as essential dogma the doctrine of the trinity.
3. The Manicheans were a gnostic sect whose principles were more pagan than Christian and distinctly anti-Jewish. The two most numerous sects in North Africa were the Caecilianists and the Donatists. The latter, more numerous at first, were eventually stamped out, and the former were aligned with the Roman church.
4. Augustine would later write a book entitled *What Sin Deserves; or, Infant Baptism*.
5. "Originally the Pontifex Maximus was the high priest of the pre-Christian Roman religion. A distinctly religious office under the Roman Republic, it gradually became politicized until, beginning with Augustus, it was subsumed into the Imperial office. Today, Pontifex Maximus is one of the titles of the Roman Catholic Pope." – *Wikipedia*, online encyclopaedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/html>



The Eight Signs of John's Gospel (2) Healing the Nobleman's Child

For the Manitoulin 2006 Youth Conference, August 19-26, we will be studying the 8 signs of John, God willing. In the months leading up to the conference, we will use "Youth Speaks" to cover one sign each month, to help excite youth about this wonderful study and to spur their studies in preparation for the conference. For conference registration information, please see www.youthconference.com.

COMING TO JESUS is a theme of the gospel of John. Indeed, there are more calls for people "to come to Jesus" in John than in any of the other gospels. This is a striking feature, since John was written to believers. One would think, therefore, that John would not dwell so much on the topic, since believers have seemingly already made the choice of coming to the Lord Jesus. But the theme is there to emphasize the point that our conversion to being followers of Christ is a process.

Enacted parable of a believer's growth

Growing closer to Christ requires us to recognize our weaknesses, humble ourselves, and follow the teachings of our Lord, even when everything in our nature and our instincts tell us to do otherwise. The account of the nobleman with the sick boy in John 4 is a depiction of the process (that every believer must go through) of coming to Christ and growing spiritually. Its presence in the gospel record is an assurance that God knows our frailties and the difficulties inherent in struggling against them.

Like the seven other recorded miracles in John's gospel, this miracle contains symbolism. When the nobleman appears at the beginning of the account, he resembles us: he is a believer in Jesus, albeit with an incomplete understanding and an imperfect faith, who has a desperate problem.

The nobleman believed in Jesus because of the miracles Jesus had performed. He was from Capernaum, a city on the Sea of Galilee, which was about 25 miles away from Cana, where Jesus had performed his first miracle of turning water into wine. After performing that miracle, Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem to keep a feast where he performed more miracles, which were witnessed by many Galileans. They brought the report of Jesus back home with them, so that when he returned to Cana in Galilee (after traveling through Samaria), he was received enthusiastically (John 4:45).

The structure of verses 46 and 47 suggests that the nobleman's son was sick at this time and was growing worse. With the considerable resources that the nobleman could muster, we can imagine that no expense was spared

in trying different remedies to restore his boy to health. Yet his condition only worsened and death drew near.

Faith that was not complete

In this hour of great need, someone told the nobleman that Jesus was back in Galilee. Many men, unable to deliver themselves from trials by their own might or riches, have also denied the power of God and refused to believe that He could help them. But this man was not of that sort. He had faith in Jesus. What's more, he was willing to put that faith into action by traveling to see Jesus and making a public appeal for his aid.

The nobleman wanted Jesus "to come down," a request reflective (on the surface) of the topographical difference between Cana and Capernaum. Whereas Cana was in the rolling hills of Galilee, Capernaum was below sea level. The nobleman wanted Christ to come with him, which would necessitate him descending to a lower plane. In the allegory, the request is reflective of the immature spiritual discernment of those who would seek to bring Christ down to their level.

Believers, like the nobleman, are faced with a crisis that is unto death. Ecclesiastes 12 describes our mortal bodies as a house. Within that house, there is great sickness: our bodies are dying because of sin. Thus, our plight, as expressed by the apostle Paul, is the spiritual analogue of that faced by the nobleman: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death" (Romans 7:24).

But the crisis of our mortality is not the only problem we face. We also suffer from spiritual weaknesses and trials of this life. When dealing with these issues, we must never fear to turn to our Lord, confessing that there is "sickness in our house," and appealing for his aid. Yet we must do so in a way that exalts him. We must never attempt to bring him down to our level.

The nobleman wanted Jesus to "come down" with him so that Jesus could perform a miracle in his house. Jesus had been physically present when he turned water into wine, so the nobleman assumed that he had to be physically present to perform all of his miracles. Thus, although the nobleman knew of Jesus, his understanding was not complete. He did not know it was possible for Jesus to heal his son from miles away.

Therefore, the faith of the nobleman was somewhat lacking, particularly when contrasted with the faith of the people among whom Jesus had most recently preached, the Samaritans. He had not performed any marvelous works among them. Yet they believed in him (John 4: 41 - 42).

The sympathy of the Master

Jesus gave the nobleman a mild rebuke: "Then said Jesus unto him, 'Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe'" (v. 48).

The nobleman was too distraught to understand the meaning of Christ's words. Yet although he was confused, he did not lose his faith. He responded, "Sir, come down ere my child die."

As righteous and powerful as Christ is, he is also able to sympathize with

us. (Indeed, the Greek word translated "be touched with" in Hebrews 4: 15 is *sumpatheo*, which is related to our word "sympathy.") Jesus always demonstrated compassion when teaching a meek and humble spirit. He was willing to help people who were trying as best as they could, and he did so with the nobleman. Jesus replied to him, "Go thy way; thy son liveth."

The nobleman had just been delivered from a most difficult trial. He had been confused through much of it, yet he had not allowed his confusion to weaken his faith, and he had been constant in his appeals. He never doubted Christ's ability to help him. Although his needs were provided for and his request heard, the deliverance he received did not come in the manner in which he had asked. He had wanted Jesus to come with him; instead Jesus told him to return alone, assuring him that he would find his son healed when he returned.

So, making the journey home would require faith on the nobleman's part. Yet he did not set off on his way immediately, for it was not until the next day that he met his servants, who had set out to find him. It is likely that he spent the remainder of the day with Jesus, listening to him and learning of his doctrine. What better way could he have shown his gratitude?

When he met his servants the next day, they informed him that his son had recovered. The nobleman, desiring to confirm his faith, inquired of the hour at which his son "began to amend." How interesting it is to note that, although the nobleman had learned so much from his encounter with Jesus, his faith and understanding still needed to grow. His question was, "When did he *begin* to get better?" The servants answered that he was *completely healed* at the seventh hour. Spiritual growth truly is a continual process. "So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house" (John 4:53).

A thankful response in joy

This is the first time the man is referred to as a "father." Before this, he was called "the nobleman" or "the man." What could this be but a subtle reminder to us of the great joy that this man felt at having his son restored to health. This was a joy that no status or possession could match. And what an example the nobleman sets for us in how he handled that joy. He "himself believed, and his whole house." How could his "whole house" have believed if he had not shared with them of his experience in coming to Jesus? No doubt they would have been glad for those few hours he spent listening to Jesus, which he would be able to relate to them.

The Greek word translated "nobleman" in this account is *basilikos*, which signifies a "royal officer." He may well have been Chuza, the steward of Herod, whose wife provided to Jesus of her substance (Luke 8:1-3). It is possible that it was her son who was healed by Jesus and that she gave to Jesus as a way of showing her gratitude.

Regardless of whether the nobleman was Chuza, he and his family most likely did a great deal to help Jesus in his ministry. After Jesus was rejected at Nazareth, he made Capernaum, the town of the nobleman, his headquarters.

Indeed, it came to be referred to as “his own city” (cf. Matthew 9:1 and Mark 2:1). It is hard to imagine that this was not due in some measure to the kindness, enthusiasm, and love that would have been shown to him by the nobleman and his family. Certainly the boy who was healed would have been thrilled to meet and spend time with the one who saved him.

That boy was healed at the seventh hour. We hope to be among those healed at the seventh, one thousand year period of God’s plan for the earth, that is, the Kingdom. If we are to be healed, we must come to Jesus now, and in coming to him, we must be humble and willing to learn and to be changed.

Ryan Mutter, Rockville, Maryland

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Stuck in Limbo

THE WORD “LIMBO” has become part of today’s common vernacular. A quick on-line search of the world’s newspapers illustrates the point. The budget is stuck in limbo, or the peace talks are in limbo. This medieval term has become a very modern word, one that is used with frequency. However, it is interesting to note that the Catholic Church, which originated the concept, is attempting to relegate this word back to whence it came – the medieval ages.

The creation of Limbo

In Latin, it means “the lip,” and for centuries devout Roman Catholics have tried to avoid thinking about its full meaning: the edge of hell, where those who have died without baptism — notably babies — are sent for eternity. The fate of unbaptized babies has been a subject of obsession among the Catholic faithful since the earliest

centuries of Christianity. As early as the fourth century, scholars had addressed the fate of the unbaptized. Saint Augustine made it clear that unbaptized babies went straight to hell, though he did note that their suffering was somewhat mitigated.

As one may appreciate, this hard line approach was hardly reassuring to parents, especially considering the infant-mortality rates during the 4th – 5th centuries. Hence in order to help appease the masses, medieval scholars came up with two new locations in Middle Earth for unborn children to go. There was *limbus patrum*, the limbo of the fathers, which solved the tricky theological problem of determining the mortal fate of those holy figures such as Abraham and Moses, who died before Christ’s followers created the Church. This limbo was a temporary outbuilding, closing its doors with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The other place, *limbus infantium*,

the limbo of infants, proved more enduring. Since all infants, in Catholic belief, are stained with original sin but are likely free from mortal sin, limbo provided a place free from the fires of hell but without the rewards of heaven — “a giant daycare centre,” in the words of the U.S. theology professor Gerald Fagin, “where children were well cared for and lived happily, even if separated from their parents.”

To many Catholics, this still sounded more like hell than heaven, and thus was born the long-standing practice of baptizing babies at the moment of birth — or even before. Even very recently, divinity students were taught “intrauterine baptism” to be performed on dying fetuses.

The place called limbo, alongside such well-known medieval additions as the gates of heaven, the nine circles of hell, purgatory and the heavenly vestibule, has become increasingly shaky. Thus, the Italian media reported that an international commission of high-ranking theologians intends to advise Pope Benedict to banish the notion of limbo from all teachings of the Catholic catechism.

Redefining limbo

Last October, seven months before he died, Pope John Paul asked a special commission to come up with “a more coherent and enlightened way” of describing the fate of such innocent babes. This commission was then headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who was elected Pope in April. It is now headed by his successor at the Vatican’s doctrinal department, Archbishop William Levada, an American from San Francisco.

If the commission, which has been meeting behind closed doors, recommends banishing limbo, it will put an end to the unease and ambiguity in one of the church’s most awkward and embarrassing areas of faith. One Australian cardinal, George Pell, once dismissed limbo as “not the best seats in the house,” and the last four popes have tried to eradicate it from church teachings. Accordingly, within the church, limbo remains in a state of, well, uncertainty.

This is by no means the first time that the Catholic Church has attempted to redefine limbo. The Second Vatican Council in 1962 diminished the importance of limbo, and Pope John Paul II issued a new catechism in 1992 that addressed the issue: “As regards children who have died without baptism, the church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them.” In other words, they have as much access to heaven as anyone else. In an age when other Catholic teachings are growing more conservative, it is one effort to send a message of moderation.

Tickling ears

With close to one billion followers, the Catholic Church has changed its doctrine and continues to do so in order to appease the masses. As we observe its dilemma, we become ever more thankful for understanding the fundamentals of truth. Further, our prayers increase for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ when truth will be the order of the day and will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

May that day come soon.

George Rayner,
Mississauga, Ontario

Are there rules?

In the great majority of references to prayer in the New Testament, the recipient is not specified; but in Ephesians 5:20 Paul writes, "always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father." This, of course, is an acceptable approach but that does not rule out all other avenues. For example, in his first letter John advises his readers to confidently petition the Son of God, "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us" (I John 5:13-14).

We need to bear in mind that the majority in the early ecclesias were Jewish converts who would have difficulty in accepting any approach other than to God. In a similar way but in a different context, the Jewish converts had difficulty in accepting meat that had been offered to idols and meat that contained blood. So the council of Jerusalem made a temporary provision to allow for their consciences.

The reluctance of some in the brotherhood to communicate with the Lord Jesus may stem from a fear that by elevating the role of the Lord Jesus we may be conforming to a trinitarian concept of Deity and robbing God of His Supremacy. It is, however, ironic that our Lord's claim that he has been given all authority in heaven and earth, coupled with Paul's statement that this authority will be handed back to God (I Cor. 15:27-28), constitutes one of the most compelling arguments against the doctrine of the trinity.

Others may feel that by giving so much honour to Jesus we are in danger of dishonouring Almighty God. The opposite is true: Jesus makes it clear that by honouring him we are honouring God. "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son, that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him" (John 5:22-23).

Some have sought a compromise and suggest that we can give praise and thanks to the Lord Jesus, but petitions should be addressed to God. There seems to be no logical imperative for this suggestion. If the Lord Jesus has been given full executive authority in heaven and earth, then why would he need to refer our requests to God for an answer?

Spiritual songs

Prayer involved praise, thanks, confession and petition. It is an emotive activity that is well expressed through song. Most of us are happy to pray to Jesus in the words of any of our 60 hymns that are addressed wholly or partly to him, so we can surely speak to Jesus in the same words that we sing to him.

Two ways to the throne of grace

We are not suggesting that all prayer should be addressed to Jesus. There are two ways to the throne of grace where Jesus sits at the right hand of his Father. Our choice of approach to the throne of grace is especially appropriate in our thanks for the bread and wine. We can thank God for the gift of His only begotten son and we can thank Jesus for his willing sacrifice. It is not a

question of one or the other but a balance of both. This balance is beautifully illustrated in chapters four and five of Revelation. Chapter four ends with a paean of praise to Almighty God, "*Worthy* art thou our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things..." Chapter five renders praise to the Lion of the tribe of Judah in these words, "*Worthy* art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tongue and people and nation." Both the Lord God and the Lord Jesus are *worthy* of our praises.

Conclusion

In the light of these considerations, what conclusions can be drawn? Since Jesus has been given full authority, and has 'the keys of death and Hades' (Rev. 1:18), then surely it is appropriate that we would be ever conscious of his control in our lives and speak to him who is our guide and 'wonderful counsellor.' Since, in the days of his flesh, Jesus had the authority to forgive sins, then surely we can accept that the glorified Lord Jesus, who is "the one ordained to be the judge of the living and the dead," will be pleased if we seek forgiveness from him.

The Lord Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). Meals with Jesus were times of lively spiritual conversation. Shall we remain silent when we open the door and invite him into our home or ecclesia?

"We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive good or evil, according to that which has been done in the body" (II Cor. 5:10). When we are called to give account of ourselves at the judgement seat, will this be the first time we have spoken to our judge who has the authority to remove our name from the Lamb's book of life?

Alan Fowler, Bridgend, Wales

YOUTH SPEAKS

The Eight Signs of John's Gospel (3)

Man Infirm for 38 Years

AS IN THE FIRST TWO SIGNS, the third sign of John speaks about the past, present, and future. No verse says that the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda is the third sign — at least not in so many words. In fact, the only signs sequentially numbered are the first two. But as we will see in this and future articles, there are good reasons to believe that this gospel encourages us to attach other signs to this short list.

Third sign, John 5

A quick perusal of a few expositions or commentaries on this chapter reveals a variety of views touching everything from the “feast of the Jews,” (v. 1), to the textual authenticity of parts of the narrative. Some are even skeptical of the impotent man’s sincerity. Yet when we consider the history that John encourages us to consider, often our questions can be answered.

After spending some time in Galilee in which Jesus healed the nobleman’s son, he went up to Jerusalem to “a feast of the Jews.” It seems most Bible students agree it was the Passover. If this is true, John records four Passovers covering a full three years of Jesus’ ministry — the first being the Passover after the first sign, and the last just after his crucifixion (2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 18:28).

We are told that by the sheep gate at the pool of Bethesda, with its five porches, there was a crowd of blind, lame, and withered people “waiting for the moving of the water.” They believed that after an angel “troubled” the water, the first one who stepped in would be healed. One man was there who had been sick for 38 years, and it was on him that Jesus fixed his attention, and asked, “Wilt thou be made whole?”

Doubts about some of the words

Many people believe the last clause of verse three through verse four does not belong in the Bible. If we accept the passage as recorded, however, we are not presented with any scriptural contradiction. We should always be cautious when asserting that any given passage is not authentic. In a footnote, the *Emphatic Diaglott* says that this section of Scripture “is without doubt the addition of some transcriber.” Some find it difficult to believe an angel of God would operate in this way, but it is certainly within the realm of possibility. There is another alternative; it is possible that the spirit is simply providing us with *the multitude’s belief* about an angel at the pool of Bethesda. Upon first glance there is no hint of this interpretation, but verse 18 seems to allow for it, as we will see later.

Significance of 38 years

The man had been unable to walk for 38 years. Though we are not told how long he had been coming to the pool with his hope of healing, it was at least long enough to experience the disappointment and futility he described in verse 7: “Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me” (John 5:7).

The fact that John includes the number 38 is significant, and helps us begin to understand how we should interpret this sign. On the plains of Moab, Moses spoke to the children of Israel and said: “The space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years” (Deut. 2:14). Numbers records what happened in this 38th year counting from the time of the spies’ “evil report.” It was a year marked by victories over Sihon and Og. It was the same year in which Balaam taught Balak “to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel,

to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication” (Rev. 2:14). Before Phinehas turned away God’s wrath, 24,000 died in a plague. But this generation of Israel, in the 38th year from Kadesh-barnea, was the same one that entered the land of promise, and “served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel” (Josh. 24:31). For Israel, this 38th year was marked by great faith and victory, but also terrible sin and death.

Through his 38 years in the wilderness, marked by the same struggles as that generation of Israel which he represents, the impotent man understood he could not do it on his own. “I have no man,” he said, not knowing the manner of man to whom he spoke.

There must have been something about the way Jesus spoke for the impotent man, so accustomed to his disability, to even make an effort to stand. “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk,” must have been spoken with the same authority that astonished the multitudes he taught, and struck fear into the mob that arrested him. And after nearly four decades of infirmity, he “took up his bed, and walked.”

Healed on the Sabbath day

Jesus could have picked any day to heal this man, but “the same day was the Sabbath.” Having already survived for 38 years in his condition, it hardly appeared the impotent man would die that day without Jesus’ intervention. Neither was this the only time that Jesus healed on the Sabbath: there appear to be seven times when he healed on the day of rest (Matthew 12:13—Mark 3:1-5—Luke 6:7-10; Mark 1:23; Luke 4:33; Luke 13:11-14; Luke 14:3-4; John 5:9; John 9:14).¹

The Jews accused the healed man of breaking the Sabbath. “He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk” (John 5:11). We see another example of the Jews’ mentality in their response to the man, “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). Instead of sincerely desiring to know who was capable of such a work (which only God could do), they rather asked who it was that commanded such a brazen infraction of their brand of “lawfulness.”

It cannot be said that either the healed man or Jesus broke the Sabbath. A profaner of the Sabbath could not have been an acceptable unblemished sacrifice for our sins. Neither would the lamb of God command those he healed to profane the sabbath. But the Jews believed otherwise, “and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day” (John 5:16).

It is appropriate at this point to notice the way in which the word has recorded the belief of the Jews concerning Jesus’ supposed crime of Sabbath-breaking. Verse 18 says that Jesus “had broken the sabbath.” But Jesus’ guilt was only a reality in the minds of his accusers.

On this same principle, perhaps verses 3 and 4 become clear in their proper context. It was *the belief of the Jews* that verses 16 and 18 illustrate, and it was *the belief of the impotent multitude* by the pool that verses 3 and 4

explain. It is fitting that this would be the case, as we consider again the picture of the impotent multitude. The earth's multitudes have always sought healing and life in pools that never keep their promises. It was from this desperately idolatrous and superstitious situation that both the nation of Israel and this impotent man were called.

Rise up and walk has significance for us

Both the children of Israel and this impotent man received a command filled with meaning that sheds more light on the lesson of this sign. Jesus commanded the impotent man to "rise" (v. 8). This command, though full of practical significance to that man, carried much more: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (v. 14). Essentially, he was commanded to live after the pattern of his healing. He was to rise and stay risen—to walk.

When we rise from the waters of our baptism, we receive the same command. "Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Peter speaks of the "worse thing" in II Peter 2:20, when he speaks of those who return to the "pollutions of the world" after having once escaped from them.

God commanded the children of Israel in the same way in their 38th year: "Rise ye up, take your journey" (Deut. 2:24). They hearkened to the command, and, though the rest of that 38th year was marked by success and failure, they entered the land that same year. They did not experience the "worse thing" contained in the cursing of the law because, for the most part, they rose up, and walked with their God.

Sign connected to the resurrection

John's gospel contains some of Jesus' most extensive narratives concerning the miracles and we take this as his guidelines to their meaning. It is fitting that we find Jesus discoursing about the resurrection in verses 17-31. In fact, this third sign has everything to do with resurrection — three being its preeminent number. The Lord expounds the resurrection in two phases.

In a certain sense, we pass from death to life now, if we hear his word, believe on Him that sent him, and "love the brethren" (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14). It is in this way that "the hour is coming, and now is," because "now is the day of salvation" (John 5:25; II Cor. 6:2). But "the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life" (John 5:28-29).

How inexpressible will be our joy in that day if we are counted worthy of the resurrection of life. The hour is coming. But though in the future, our resurrection begins now. It is part of the parable of our baptism, by which we are commanded to be "risen with Christ" (Col. 3:1). These words of scripture were written for our learning that we might be comforted, and encouraged about a time when "the body of this death" might be "swallowed up of life" (Rom. 7:24; II Cor. 5:4).

The generation that heard Moses speak on the plains of Moab rose up, entered the land of promise, and served the LORD. It would make sense if the man Jesus healed was of the same moral caliber — he certainly demonstrated

that in verse 15. In this verse, it wasn't Jesus that had told him to take up his bed and walk, rather, he courageously declared before the Jews that it was Jesus who made him whole.

Jay Mayock, Jr., Hamilton, ON

(Footnotes)

1 Perhaps eight sabbath healings if Mark 6:1-5 happened on the sabbath.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Nuclear Iran

WITH THE PRICE OF OIL hovering around \$60 a barrel, most nations will do whatever it takes to find alternate sources of power. The list is wide and ranging, including wind, solar, gas and even nuclear. One can understand any nation pursuing alternate methods of energy exploration unless, of course, the nation has great reserves of oil. In a world-wide rank of oil reserves, Iran (the biblical Persia) is ranked as the nation with the third largest number of reserves, behind only Saudi Arabia and Canada. Despite their obvious oil wealth, Iran has been monitored by world governing bodies as they develop enriched uranium, a precursor to nuclear power.

While the rest of the world worries about another potential player in the nuclear weapons club, the government of Iran insists their nuclear program is being developed for energy purposes, rather than weapons. As Bible students, we can appreciate that these developments may play a significant role during the latter days.

Power or weapons

An article in the *New York Times*, January 12, 2006, reported: "Iran says that its nuclear activities are aimed only at generating electricity, but this claim is disputed by the Americans and many Europeans, who cite some 18 years of clandestine nuclear activity by Iran and, since that activity was discovered, an unwillingness to provide the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors with much of the information they have asked for."

For some time, the European Union and Iran have engaged in several rounds of discussions, some of them hopeful, some not. Iran recently signed an additional protocol to the nonproliferation treaty, which greatly increased the inspectors' right to probe undisclosed sites where nuclear activity is suspected. But in recent months, the negotiations have foundered on Iran's insistence it has the right to develop nuclear fuel on its own soil.

In August, 2005, in violation of an agreement with the Europeans to

out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods...there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit and the earth shall yield her increase...AND I WILL RAISE UP FOR THEM A PLANT OF RENOWN, and they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more...Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God.

This scripture is a beautiful description of the salvation of Israel in the latter days. But what about the 'plant of renown?' Does not this sound like a new food substance that has not been seen before on planet Earth? It sounds like some delicious and prolific fruit or vegetable created by Christ, who has all power in heaven and earth.

The other verse is found in Isaiah 27:6: "He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: ISRAEL SHALL BLOSSOM AND BUD AND FILL THE FACE OF THE WORLD WITH FRUIT."

Does the 'plant of renown' that Christ raises up unto them in the land become a blessing to all the nations?

Scripture tells us that there will be worldwide destruction from the Lord in the time of trouble because of worldwide wickedness. We are told in the Olivet prophecy that famines are one of the signs of his coming. We also know that there is much famine in the world today. Millions of people are starving to death.

When Christ takes over the rule of this world, he will save the poor and needy and him that hath no helper. Not only is he going to feed his people Israel, but he will also be the ruler of the Gentiles and will bless the survivors of the time of trouble and make them happy citizens of the Kingdom of God. This is the gospel message, and the prophet suggests he will use a 'plant of renown' as he fulfills his purpose.

May the day soon come when wars and violence and destruction cease all over the world and these scriptures come to pass before our eyes.

Esther Giordano, Norfolk, Virginia

YOUTH SPEAKS

The Eight Signs of John's Gospel (4) Feeding the 5,000

COMMENTING ON ALL OF HIS LORD'S WONDERFUL WORKS as a whole, the apostle John said, "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25). Of the four books about Jesus' works the world does contain, it

is remarkable that they all record the feeding of the five thousand. This miracle is John's fourth sign.

Mourning the death of John the Baptist

Since all four gospel writers record this fourth sign of John, we can understand a great deal about its context from their collective contributions. When we consider these records together, we find that the events of John 6 immediately follow a tragedy in Jesus' ministry. All four gospels place Jesus and his disciples as secluded from the multitude upon which Jesus would later have compassion — miraculously feeding them with bread and fish (Matt. 14; Mark 6; Luke 9). Just before the fourth sign, John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin and forerunner, had been murdered.

Many of Jesus' own disciples were first disciples of John. His death would have hit them hard. It is in times like these that God's true children have always prayed more earnestly for the kingdom. The deaths of their friends and loved ones have always transported their thoughts to the resurrection of life. Probably more than ever, the disciples wanted the kingdom to appear immediately.

Thus we find Jesus and his disciples on a mountain, isolated from the gathering crowd before them. But though hungry, tired, and sorrowful at John's tragic death, Jesus had compassion. We can so easily read over those words. But when we look at the full picture, we see that Jesus had compassion in spite of his own personal situation. By the time he was offered on the cross, he had already offered every other part of his life in his Father's service. He sacrificed himself daily, living for those he came to save — even for those whom he knew would eventually turn on him, and who followed him only for what bread or coin they might obtain in the process.

They would make him king

We learn from Mark and Luke that Jesus commanded the multitude to sit together in groups. Upon offering thanks for the five barley loaves and two fish, he distributed them to his disciples, who distributed them to the multitude encamped on the grass. After the meal filled all five thousand men (in addition to women and children), the disciples recovered twelve baskets of leftover bread at their Master's command.

The multitude remembered what Moses did for Israel in the wilderness about fifteen hundred years before. Under his leadership, God fed Israel with manna. They remembered Moses' words that God would raise up to Israel a prophet like Moses himself (Deut. 18:15). The multitude thought Jesus was "that prophet." They thought he was the Christ, and they wanted the kingdom to immediately appear. Had Jesus dispersed them, they would have forcefully made him a king.

At this moment, it is likely that both the disciples and the multitude wanted the same things — for Jesus to ascend the throne, abolish Gentile rule, vindicate the death of John, and usher in the kingdom of God. It would have been easy for the disciples to get caught up in the multitude's energy. As they distributed

the bread and fish their Lord had multiplied, they would have heard the conversations. Because they didn't yet understand Jesus' sacrifice, they were ready for the kingdom at a moment's notice. Maybe (they might have thought), this sign was the perfect time. This would explain why both Matthew and Mark record Jesus constraining his disciples to get into a boat — to flee from the temptation. With the immeasurable gift of the spirit, it was tempting for Jesus, too. And so, "when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray."

Lessons of the miracle

After another miraculous sign that night on the Sea of Tiberias (the subject of next month's article), Jesus encountered the same multitude on the other side. John recorded far more of Jesus' words to them than any other gospel writer. In Capernaum's synagogue, Jesus explained why he performed the miracle, and what it meant.

He talked about manna. When the people challenged him to give them bread from heaven, Jesus answered: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven... I am the bread of life." This is one of the unmistakable lessons of this sign — that Jesus is the "true" bread from heaven. He was the true bread in that he was the real thing. He was the substantial, heaven-provided bread, of which the wilderness manna was only a prophecy. Wilderness manna "bred worms and stank" (Ex. 16:20). Though the Sabbath manna was free from corruption longer than the common manna, only a portion became incorruptible — *hidden* in the ark of God (Ex. 16:32). Jesus repeatedly declared himself to be "the bread of life" or "the living bread" in the synagogue that day. By doing so, he was not identifying himself with manna generally, but specifically with the incorruptible hidden manna of the ark. That manna truly was the bread of life.

The bread of God

It is evident that the multitude missed the crucial teaching of Israel's manna experience. Moses explicitly declared God's reason for sending the manna, and it had a much larger objective than merely supplying them with sustenance. To Israel, Moses said that the LORD "fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end" (Deut. 8:16). The manna experience was to make Israel "know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). *God sent the manna to determine Israel's obedience to His words.* He sent "the true bread from heaven" for the same reason — "the words that I [Jesus] speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." They needed to be "taught of God," and find life through belief in His Son. "He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

Because manna came from the Father in heaven, it is called "bread from heaven." And even though the phrase "bread of God" sounds identical, the

Old Testament attaches another meaning to it. In the law of Moses, the bread of God refers to the sacrifices offered by the priests. Only the priests are spoken of as eating the "bread of God." But in Capernaum, Jesus said, "The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto *the world.*"

Jesus taught that he was the perfect offering foreshadowed in the sacrifices of the law. But unlike the law, according to which only *a select few* ate the bread of God, Jesus was for the life of *the world*. He is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world." In a certain sense, it is the same today as under the law. Now, too, only the priests can partake of the bread of God. But those priests are no longer after Aaron's priesthood, but after the Lord's. Years after witnessing the fourth sign, the Lord gave John the Revelation. In that vision John saw a multitude praising the once slain, but then glorified Lamb, who had redeemed them, and made them "a kingdom of *priests*" to reign over the earth. Only God's people can sing those praises. They become priests by being baptized into their high priest.

That none may be lost

There is great significance in the words Jesus spoke after the multitude had been filled. "Gather up the fragments that remain, *that nothing be lost.*" In addition to its practical application (that we should not be wasteful with the blessings God gives us), Jesus taught another spiritual lesson. The next day, on the other side of the lake, Jesus said, "This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of *all which he hath given me I should lose nothing*, but should raise it up at the last day." He was teaching the resurrection. And whereas the third sign emphasized *resurrection to judgment*, the fourth sign emphasized *resurrection of life*. In fact, in this chapter, Jesus refers to resurrection four times (John 6:39,40,44,54).

The sacrifice of Christ

"The bread that I will give is my flesh." This saying was too hard for many of Jesus' disciples, and they "walked no more with him." How, then, could this sign accomplish its purpose if they didn't believe the Lord?

On behalf of the twelve, Peter confessed, "Thou hast *the words* of eternal life. *We believe* and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Even though the disciples could not understand the Lord's sacrificial language, it seems they had seen and heard enough to understand the manna experience. The LORD wanted Israel to hear his words, but those words were too hard for the crowd on the shores of Galilee. They wrote off Jesus' words as the words of a madman. Not so for Peter. Are his words too hard for us?

Jesus used his miracles and signs to teach the world about himself. The manna (a test of obedience) and the sacrifices of Moses' law (offerings for sin) pointed forward to his death. But Jesus' teachings also specifically emphasized the resurrection to life. So it is no coincidence that one of Jesus' apocalyptic promises (also recorded by John), speaks about a certain bread of

life. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the *hidden manna*" (Rev. 2:17).

If we are accounted worthy of the resurrection of life, we will partake of our Lord in a way that now we cannot. We must partake of him now not only in symbols of bread and wine, but more importantly, *in obedience* — being transformed by *his words* to live as he lived. If we partake of him in that way now, we will partake of the hidden manna in the resurrection, and become like him in nature — incorruptible.

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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Hamas, Democracy at Work?

THE UNITED STATES and the European Union find themselves in an unexpected and difficult situation. Defending the democratic election process, they are now faced with a freely elected terrorist organization as the ruling party of the Palestinian people.

This month's article will look at the current Palestinian elections, one in which the terror organization, Hamas, took a majority of seats in the Palestinian parliament. As a result of the elections, the West now has to deal with a duly elected "well run" terror organization.

The election

On January 25, 2006, Palestinians shook their homeland, their region and the world by giving an outright victory in a parliamentary election to an organization which has publicly vowed to destroy the state of Israel. The final count gives Hamas 76 seats of the legislature's 132 seats. By comparison, the former ruling Fatah secular movement, which dominated Palestinian politics since its inception

50 years ago, took 43 seats. Hamas is now able to control the parliament, including selecting the leader of the Palestinian people. To date, the leader of the Fatah movement, Mahmoud Abbas, remains the Palestinian president, but with the Hamas controlling the majority seats they are well within their right to select a new leader.

At a minimum, the Hamas is sure to demand key cabinet posts within the government. Posts such as health and public works will allow the Hamas to showcase its reputation for efficiency, clean hands and sharia law. Under sharia law, not only do dietary restrictions prevail, but so do all other aspects of Islamic law including severe punishments for minor crimes. In addition, Hamas is able to set policy, enact budgets and determine taxes.

In the run up to the election, despite the surprisingly moderate statements from several of its leaders, the official position of the Hamas was a call for the destruction of Israel.

Flexing its democratic muscle

A February 9, 2006, article in the *New York Times* said: "A Hamas leader, Khaled Meshal, warned the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, on Wednesday not to revamp the Palestinian Authority or make cabinet appointments without Hamas's approval."

The New York Times continued to report that: "among the many differences to be settled is the control of the security forces and the use of violence. Mr. Meshal promised Wednesday that his group would not lay down its weapons when it took over the government. 'Hamas will rule and continue resistance, and the people will see how we can reconcile resistance and the exercise of power,' he said."

The contrast between the elected Hamas organization and the currently recognized Fatah is stark. Mahmoud Abbas opposes attacks against Israel and says he wants to pursue peace talks. He has called on Hamas to honor all existing agreements between the authority and Israel. In contrast, Hamas has staged the deadliest attacks against Israel, though it has largely abided by a truce for the last year. Abbas and the new government will both have responsibility for the security forces, but how those powers will be divided is unknown.

Currently, the United States, Europe and wealthy Arab countries supply more than \$1 billion to the Palestinian authority. For the time being they have agreed to keep supplying money at least until a Hamas-led government takes power, but the United States and the major

European nations say such aid will not be possible if Hamas does not change.

A strange twist

It is interesting to note that the first government to formally invite the Hamas leader to a meeting was Russian President Vladimir Putin. As one might expect, the invitation brought a frank and aggressive response from Israel. As reported in the *New York Times*: "It's not just a slap in the face to Israel. It's a slap in the face to Western countries," said one Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity because talks with Russia were going on. The official said the government was "waiting for an explanation" from Russia's ambassador in Israel.

But Russian Defense Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov defended Russia's offer of talks with Hamas. "Hamas is in power, this is a fact, and secondly, it came to power as a result of free democratic elections," Ivanov told reporters at a NATO-Russia meeting in Italy. He said Moscow was not happy with all of Hamas's policies, but predicted the West had no choice but to deal with it.

It can only be concluded that God's hand is involved in seeing that an organization seeking the demise of the state of Israel would be elected with a majority, and that Russia would be the first nation to welcome the new situation. We continue to watch with intense interest as events unfold leading to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

George Rayner, Mississauga, Ontario

sinners, we humans have been deluding ourselves that immortality was never really lost and we'll live on, somewhere, somehow.

But the way back to Paradise is steep and narrow. God gave Jesus to be the road map: Follow me!, he said.⁴ And that way leads to the cross before it leads to the king's palace.

The emergency line

What amazing technology is ours today! With a little machine in the palm of our hand we can call the world! *But emergency calls must be dialled direct.* Do we have a problem? Three pings on a button, and in no time at all we have police, fire-brigade, paramedics, with sirens blaring, racing to our aid!

But God does far better than that. He says: *Before you call, I will answer.*⁵

He says, Delight yourself in me, and I will give you your heart's desire. Leave finding your way to me, trust me, and I will do whatsoever is needed. Don't fret. Be still. Wait patiently. A little while and you will inherit the earth, and enjoy great peace. Your future is assured.⁶

As the going gets tougher, we need to start dialling some emergency numbers. And this is the answer we get from on high: I will never leave you nor forsake you. You are mine. And be assured, I am with you always, to the end of time.⁷

Set your troubled hearts at rest.⁸ Jesus told his disciples about the road map to the Father and the emergency help line. Thomas, the twin, was puzzled: we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way? Jesus' answer was clear: You know the way. I am the way.⁹ He gave them the emergency number: In very truth I tell you, if you ask the Father for anything in my name, he will give it you. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be complete.¹⁰

Brothers and sisters, we must pray, pray, pray. Yes, as the going gets tough, we need to start dialling some emergency numbers.

With all this in mind, what are we to say?, asks the apostle Paul. Ponder his reply: if God is on our side, who is against us? He did not spare His own Son, but surrendered him for us all; and with this gift how can He fail to lavish upon us all He has to give?¹¹

This is the real message of the Lord's supper. *This* is why are here: what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril, or the sword? Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹²

Dave Clarke, Port Maria, Jamaica

1. Mark 12:32-33. 2. Mark 12:34. 3. Matthew 20:22. 4. Matthew 4:19. 5. Isaiah 65:24. 6. Psalm 37:4-5,37. 7. Hebrews 13:5, Malachi 3:17, Matthew 28:20. 8. John 14:1. 9. John 14:4-6. 10. John 16:22-23. 11. Romans 8:31-32. 12. Romans 8:35-39. [Scripture references are from my New English Bible, Oxford, 1961].

YOUTH SPEAKS

A section devoted to the thoughts, experiences, and hopes of young people, coordinated by Bro. Ben Brinkerhoff.

Please send contributions for this section to Bro. Ben at ben.brinkerhoff@bateswhite.com

The current series is in coordination with the Manitoulin Youth Conference (see under "Coming Events")

The Eight Signs of John's Gospel (5) Awaiting the Return of Our Lord

THE EVENTS OF JOHN 6 occurred over a two-day period. During that short time, Jesus healed many sick people and performed two of his most notable miracles, the feeding of the 5,000 and walking on water. Like the other miracles, or signs, of John's gospel, the miracles recorded in this chapter contain lessons in symbol. The feeding of the 5,000, which is the fourth sign, is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels. As such, it is a fitting symbol for Christ's earthly ministry. Christ's calming of the sea, which is the fifth sign, is symbolic of the time after Christ's ascension, the time when he is no longer with his disciples, and they struggle in his absence. Its lessons, therefore, are of particular interest to us as we weather life's storms and await our Master's coming.

The background

The events of this chapter really begin with the execution of John the Baptist, which precipitated Jesus' departure into the mountain with his disciples. The multitude followed him there. They brought sick people, who desired to be healed, and Jesus showed compassion on them.

The love and care that Jesus showed to the multitude is remarkable given his insight into their attitude. He knew that many of the people pressing themselves upon him would uncharitably turn their backs on him the next day when he tried to expound the holy things of God to them. Yet, he was nevertheless willing to stay with them awhile and comfort them. And, in so doing, he provided a powerful example to us.

Christ continued to show love through the miraculous provision of food to the people. The miracle of feeding the 5,000 gave the people a reason to believe in him, and the people responded to it enthusiastically. Indeed, they wanted to make him king. But their desire was motivated entirely by human emotion and was not guided by divine principles. They wanted to make

Christ king by acclamation after the Roman fashion, thereby following the example of the nation for which they expressed so much hatred.

It appears even the disciples lost their spiritual bearings at this point and were caught up in the wave of human emotion. The Bible does not record them doing anything to calm the people. Mark's record of the account implies that they might have been supportive of the people's wish to make Christ king. *And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people (Mark 6)*. The fact the disciples had to be constrained (*anagkazo* "to compel") to get into the ship and depart suggests that they sympathized with the people's desire to make Christ king, as does Christ's decision to separate them from himself.

And it was dark

John 6: 16 states that Jesus withdrew from his disciples when "even was now come." The next verse stresses the point with the statement, "and it was now dark," and then provides a clue to the meaning of the symbol with the words "and Jesus was not come to them."

"Light" and "darkness" are themes of John's gospel. John 1 introduces Christ as the Word made flesh and "the true Light." Jesus' discourse with the Pharisees in John 8 began with his assertion, "I am the light of the world," a subject which continues into John 9 with Jesus' granting sight to the blind man before which he again refers to himself as the light of the world.

The time of darkness in the fifth sign must, therefore, represent the time when Jesus is away from his followers. This is the time in which we are now living, and we, like Jesus' disciples in this account, are striving for a destination. They labored to get to Capernaum, a city that was across the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum means "city of consolation," which is a fitting description for the kingdom of God.

Various meanings of "the sea"

Throughout scripture, the sea, waves and storms are used to represent a number of things. For example, the sea is used to represent the nations who are all around us (Isaiah 17: 12).

On their journey to Capernaum, the disciples were beset with howling winds, which represent things that trouble us on our journey to the Kingdom.

Waves can represent faithlessness: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed (James 1:5-6)*. The troubling winds can also represent false teaching: *That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (Ephesians 4:14)*.

And the sea troubled the disciples as well. It tossed them about and threatened to overwhelm them. Even though they managed to cling to the boat, the sea still sent waves crashing into them, which drenched and terrified them. The raging sea that threatened the disciples represents the wickedness of the world. When it spills into the ecclesia, it causes a great trouble, and makes everyone's journey precipitous.

The attitude of the disciples

The spirit of the disciples in this portion of the account is fairly amazing: they continued to labor despite all the obstacles that faced them. They had a destination in mind and a determination to reach it. So, when they were no longer able to use their sails, they started to row. When the storm grew worse, they rowed harder. Mark 6: 48 records that they toiled in rowing.

There is a lesson here for us. We sometimes wish that our circumstances were different, and these desires can be well motivated. We may want a change because we think it will help us to make more progress on our journey to the Kingdom. But we have to be prepared to continue laboring, even if our situation does not change. If we cannot use our sails, we need to pick up our oars.

John 6 states that the disciples rowed 25 or 30 furlongs, which was about four miles. This put them in the midst of the sea, several miles away from their destination of Capernaum. Their situation was dire and they must have wondered if they would ever reach safety.

The action of Jesus

But unbeknownst to the disciples, Jesus was watching them. The first sentence of Mark 6: 48 reads, "And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them." Jesus could have intervened at any time, but he chose to let his disciples labor through the night that their characters might be refined through trial. However, we can feel certain that he made mention of them in his prayers to his Father, foreshadowing his role as our helper in trial.

Christ's appearance to the disciples during the fourth watch of the night was marvelous, a foreshadowing of the glorious appearance he will make at his Second Coming. He came to the disciples walking on the water.

Peter's reaction

Although Peter's knowledge was not complete and his faith sometimes flagged, he had tremendous love for Jesus, and he delighted in being near him. Therefore, when he knew that Jesus was walking on the water, he asked to come out to him. He is sometimes accused here of being presumptuous and cocky, but if that were the case, it seems unlikely that Jesus would have responded with the encouraging word: "Come." It seems instead that Peter's love and enthusiasm is shown as a contrast to the coolness of the other disciples.

Peter was no doubt a competent swimmer, but no amount of natural ability could enable someone to walk on water. That required faith, and when Peter saw the wind and the waves, his faith began to wane, and he started to sink. In an instant, he learned that he was not going to be able to meet his Master on the sea as an equal. He discovered in a most tangible way his dependence on Christ for salvation. "Lord, save me," he cried. And Christ reached forth his hand and rescued him. Matthew records that Christ did so "immediately."

Christ loved his disciples, and he applied his wisdom and his power to refine them and make them fit for the Kingdom. Earlier in the account, he permitted them to struggle because it was good for them. But when he saw Peter about to sink, he knew he had to rescue him immediately. Christ applies similar wisdom and power in overseeing our trials today, and he will not let us suffer more than we can bear.

The end of the account points forward to the time of Christ's return. The joyful attitude of the disciples as they willingly received him into their ship points forward to those who will be faithfully awaiting Christ's coming and "who love his appearing." His subsequent calming of the sea is a symbol that is picked up in the Revelation for the peace that Christ will bring to the nations at his return (Revelation 15:2).

Ryan Mutter, Baltimore, Maryland

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Russia, Iran and Hamas

AS ONE MIGHT APPRECIATE, having nuclear weapons developed and deployed in Iran is most dangerous for the nations that lie close to Iran, such as Russia. It was, therefore, a startling change when on March 8, 2006, after discussing the Iran crisis with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed Russia's objections to applying sanctions to Iran, while warning that "there is no military solution to this crisis." Instead, Mr. Lavrov welcomed a proposal to

continue exploring diplomatic solutions with Iran, which would allow Iran to continue to develop its nuclear program. A nuclear program that would be in close proximity to the Russian borders, yet worrisome to the West.

After visiting the U.S. State Department, Lavrov said that the Hamas government should receive international funding because Hamas chief Khaled Mashaal had assured him that the money would "be spent in a transparent manner." And, like Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas before

him, Mashaal promised Lavrov to allow international monitors to ensure this. Mashaal went on to praise Russia for breaking "the blockade which Israel and the United States have been trying to impose on us," and added that his visit to Russia "opened the door to the entire global community."

This relationship allies Russia with an elected group that desires to see the destruction of the nation of Israel. On March 6, on Al Jazeera TV, Mashaal spoke to the international community saying: "If they [Israel] want an all-out war - we are ready. If they want peace -- let them acknowledge the rights of the Palestinian people and get out of our land." The demand to turn Hamas into a mere political party is unrealistic, he said, elaborating on an interview in which Hamas deputy head Musa Abu Marzouq explained the "phased" approach to seek "an independent Palestinian state with full sovereignty over the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza," while unflinchingly insisting that "From the [Jordan] River to the [Mediterranean] Sea belongs to the Palestinians ..."

Funds released

The *New York Times* reported on March 7, "The World Bank released \$42 million on Tuesday to help the debt-ridden Palestinian Authority pay salaries until the radical Islamic group Hamas forms the next government. The money represents part of the \$60 million withheld from the Palestinians last December because they failed to meet commitments to fiscal responsibility. The interim government has promised some reforms, an official said, which

allowed the bank to release the money." Further, Iran has announced that "they would fulfill all financial needs of the Palestinian Authority."

Problems for American influence

Under great political pressure in the United States, the Dubai government withdrew from a business arrangement to manage some port operations in America. Although the U.S. congress seemed pleased with the announcement, President Bush realized immediately that this decision would damage U.S. Middle Eastern relations. As reported in the *New York Times* on March 11, "I'm concerned about a broader message this issue could send to our friends and allies around the world, particularly in the Middle East," said Bush during an appearance before a conference of the National Newspaper Association. "In order to win the war on terror, we have got to strengthen our friendships and relationships with moderate Arab countries in the Middle East." Separately, in what may have been an aftershock to the failed transaction, a new round of trade talks between the U.S. and the United Arab Emirates was postponed.

With Dubai servicing more U.S. military ships than any other country in the world, the president said he would now have to work to shore up the U.S. relationship with the UAE and explain to Congress and the public why it's a valuable one.

Never fully comprehending how the hand of God works with the world's political leaders, we continue to watch, fascinated as the Middle East stays in the center of the daily news.

George Rayner, Mississauga, Ontario

say or write anything that might prejudice or jeopardize the spotless reputation of the church (brotherhood)? The present crisis in the Roman Catholic priesthood, facing serious charges going back decades, should warn all of us of the folly of sweeping wrong-doing under the carpet. In the 'west' at least, we all expect Muslims to disown their lawbreakers. Democratic societies look far more favourably on a religious body that is honest, and which copes with inevitable scandals promptly and fearlessly without foolish attempts to cover them up.

*Do not bring slanderous accusations.*¹⁵ When, in this day and age, those who claim to be Christ's refuse to accept his jurisdiction, the only course has to be, "*I appeal to Caesar!*"¹⁶

But we cannot leave the matter there. For there is a much deeper spiritual dimension to all this. "*If he repents, forgive him.*"¹⁷ Right there is the real test, for both the wrong-doer and the victim. Paul could refer to Barnabas as a co-worker years after their acrimonious dispute and parting of the ways. Who had repented? The distaste Paul expresses against using Gentile courts for Christian disputes is obviously not because we are 'above the law.' It is that Christians should never be so stubbornly spiteful that resorting to the law of the land ever becomes necessary.

We wish to conclude this instalment with a wise appeal to our brotherhood by Bro. Islip Collyer, first published a hundred years ago during a time of bitter controversy and division: "It is usual to judge the heinousness of a sin solely with reference to its effect on humanity. When people claim to be servants of God, however, they must employ a higher standard...There are some transgressions for which God has in a special sense expressed His abhorrence. The depth of a man's guilt is determined, not by reference to the degree of harm he does to other men, but by the degree of deliberateness with which the law is violated. In other words, sins of presumption are always worse than sins of infirmity".¹⁸

Alan Eyre, Kingston, Jamaica

NOTES

1. II Thessalonians 2:1-3.
2. Peter Espeut, "Religious hard talk", Daily Gleaner, November 22, 2005.
3. Douglas Johnson and Carol Simpson, "Copyright caution", Learning and Leading with Technology, 32:7, 2005.
4. Ephesians 4:28.
5. Peter Christian, Because of Conscience.
6. In Jamaica, very wisely, anyone who wants access to "adult" sites must request the server in writing to provide them. A few days ago, after repairing my line, the server's agent assumed that I would be making this request and gave me the form. He was astonished when I returned it to him unsigned.
7. Philippians 4:8.
8. II Corinthians 11:26.
9. Acts 25:10-11.
10. Acts 16:37-40.
11. Acts 22: 1,22-29.
12. I Corinthians 9:3.
13. John 18:23.
14. Acts 23:2-3.
15. II Peter 2:11.
16. Acts 25:11.
17. Luke 17:3.
18. Islip Collyer, Conviction and Conduct, 90-91.

YOUTH SPEAKS

A section devoted to the thoughts, experiences, and hopes of young people, coordinated by Bro. Ben Brinkerhoff. Please send contributions for this section to Bro. Ben at ben.brinkerhoff@bateswhite.com

The current series is in coordination with the Manitoulin Youth Conference (see under "Coming Events")

The Eight Signs of John's Gospel (6) The Man Born Blind - Receiving Spiritual Sight

THE ACCOUNT OF THE MAN BORN BLIND is the sixth of the eight miracles recorded in John's gospel. In this account we have set forth a contrast of those with and those who are without spiritual sight, and it shows how spiritual sight is acquired through the choices we make. This sign demonstrates that God overthrows pride and willfulness, but nurtures the humble heart and the mind that seeks to honor Him and to serve others above all else.

In John 8, Jesus proclaimed to the people gathered to him in the temple, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8: 12). In the exchanges that followed, Jesus was insulted in public by the hypocritical leaders of the people he had come to save. They even took up stones to try to kill him. Jesus had the choice of responding in bitterness. He could have taken time to contemplate the wrongs done to him and to dwell on the pain he felt. But he saw a man who needed his help; a man blind from birth. Jesus also had the choice of ministering in love, and this was the choice he always made.

Long-term suffering for others

The disciples asked Jesus if the man's pitiable condition was due to his own sin or that of his parents. Christ said the man had been born blind so "the works of God should be made manifest in him." The implication of this statement can be hard for us to accept: this man's many years of sorrow, hardship, and exclusion from society had occurred so God might be glorified in him. This teaching humbles us, for it teaches that we are here for the glory of God and not for our own glory or enjoyment. As a result, we may have to endure long periods of suffering that we do not fully understand. Some of us may be in the midst of such a time at this very moment. If we are experiencing

great difficulty in our lives, there is much consolation in the words that Jesus repeats in John 9: 5, "I am the light of the world." We have the choice of following Jesus. If we do, he will show us the way through our trials. God will be glorified, and we will receive our blessing.

Jesus chose to heal the man by anointing his eyes with clay and telling him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. Clay is an oft-used symbol of the flesh in the Bible (e.g., Isaiah 64: 8). Washing in the pool of Siloam would, therefore, be a putting away of the flesh. This is what we are called upon to do in baptism.

And what a reward awaited the man! For the first time ever he saw the world around him. No more would he need someone to guide him by the hand.

How similar this is to the spiritual sight we gain from following Jesus! We see the vanity of this world, and we change the way we think and spend our time. Instead of relying on the routes to escapism offered by man as a means of coping, we are filled with the peace that comes from serving God, and we trust in Him to guide us.

A remarkable reaction

The man left the pool with great eagerness and joy. His neighbors noticed the change in him, so much so that they initially disagreed among themselves whether he was the same man. But instead of rejoicing with him, his neighbors questioned him about the circumstances of his healing. He told them that Jesus had healed him. Although his plain declaration may seem like a trivial matter, it required faith. Even great spiritual leaders, such as king Hezekiah, have faltered when called upon to give proper credit for miraculous deliverances given to them. Moreover, this man was attributing a miracle to Jesus at a time when being associated with the Master brought ever-increasing risk.

Nevertheless, the healed man's faith was still maturing. He referred to Jesus as "a man" (John 9:11). That was what Jesus was to him at this point, but God was going to increase his spiritual sight in the more difficult choices he was about to face.

The healing of the man born blind was one of at least seven miracles that Jesus performed on the Sabbath. "Where is he?" the neighbors asked the man concerning Jesus. He did not know. Since the neighbors would not be able to ingratiate themselves with the Pharisees by bringing in Jesus, they decided to at least curry favor by bringing in the man born blind.

The parents were fearful

Although the man born blind was unlearned, his growing spiritual vision allowed him to see through the Pharisees' grand display. When they asked the man what he thought of Jesus, his answer was different from before. "He is a prophet," the man confessed.

The label of the man's interrogators changes from "the Pharisees" in verse 16 to "the Jews" in verse 18. This suggests the intervention of higher authorities who came and arrogantly dismissed the claims the man made concerning Jesus and called his parents in to testify.

The parents were careful to testify truthfully that their son had been born blind and could now see, but they feared the authorities and a threat of excommunication to anyone confessing that Jesus was the Messiah. Their lack of faith robbed them of courage, and they turned the rulers' attention back to their son so that they might escape.

Pressuring the formerly blind

The Jews returned their attention to the man born blind. They asked him again how the miracle had occurred, attempting to weaken his resolve in cross-examination. But he replied to them with his boldest confession yet: "Will ye *also* be his disciples?" The clear implication was that he now considered himself to be a disciple of Christ.

The Jews reviled him: "We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is" (John 9:29). There was an incredible irony to the Jews' statement. Did they not realize that the same sneer they were now making about Christ must have been made time-and-again about Moses when he was growing up in the house of Pharaoh's daughter?

A spiritual crisis

The man born blind was now under intense pressure. He had just received his sight after a lifetime of blindness. He had a choice of siding with the elders and enjoying some of the pleasures of this world for a season. (He had, after all, never experienced the "lust of the eyes.") He also had the choice of siding with Christ and facing excommunication.

There were many things the Jewish elders could take from this man. They could deny him access to the temple and deprive him of the right to employment and the enjoyment of society. But what Christ had given him could not be taken away. Christ had demonstrated that he had the power and the will to care for him, if he would only have faith.

So the man made his choice. He told them that Jesus could not be a sinner because God would not work such a miracle through a person who was against God. He told them that Jesus was "of" God.

"Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" came the cry from the elders. How interesting that they attribute sin to the man based on the fact that he had been born blind. But where was his blindness now? It was gone because of the power of Jesus. The man's choice allowed him to see freely. His faith freed him from sin. Their choice left them blinded. Their refusal to humble themselves left them mired in their sins.

And they cast him out.

A new disciple of the Lord

Christ learned of the man's plight. He sought him and found him. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Jesus asked the man. The fact that Jesus would ask him this question shows just how far his spiritual vision exceeded that of the Jewish elders. When Christ confessed to them that he was the Son of God, they sentenced him to death (Matt. 26: 63-66).

"Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" was the man's response. This man's faith through his trials had brought him a long way. At the beginning, Jesus was "a man" to him. Then he was "a prophet." Now he is "Lord." "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee" was Jesus' response. And the man worshipped him.

Contrast to the spiritually blind

The Pharisees looked on and mocked. "Are we blind also?" they asked. Drawing the distinction between these men and "the Jews," suggests that these were not the men who had cast the man out of the synagogue. These were men of lower rank who were nonetheless puffed up with self-righteousness and self-importance. They were spiritually blind and could not see their need to humble themselves, confess their faults, and follow the Son of God to salvation. Their sins, therefore, remained, declared Christ.

Christ appears twice in this account. At his first appearance, he gave instructions. At his second appearance, he pronounced judgment. Two categories of men, the man born blind and the Pharisees were before him. The category in which each placed himself was based on the choices he made and was a reflection of the spiritual sight he had.

Let us, therefore, spend the remainder of the days we have on this earth in service to our God, looking to our Lord to lead us, and seeing with the eye of faith.

Ryan Mutter, Baltimore, Maryland

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Israel Continues in the Forefront

THE SMALL STATE OF ISRAEL is literally surrounded by their enemies. With Egypt to the south, Jordan to the East and Lebanon and Syria to the north, Israel is surrounded by countries that would

like nothing more than to see her overrun. It wasn't always this way as in the late 1990's, a long-term peace finally seemed within Israel's reach. Israeli-Palestinian peace talks were under way, and most of Israel's

borders were secured by peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. Now, after the bloodshed of the second Palestinian intifada and the rise of Islamic jihadist groups throughout the region, the picture seems more menacing than ever. As Israel separates itself unilaterally from the Palestinians in the absence of a full peace - and without the leadership of Ariel Sharon, the architect of separation -- it also worries about events well beyond its borders.

Iranian threat

While Israel is threatened by her immediate neighbors, the greatest single recent threat to the nation of Israel has come not from a neighboring nation but from Iran. The old nation of Persia has embarked on an ambitious nuclear program, one that would enable her to eradicate Israel. As reported in the *New York Times* on April 12, 2006: "Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who announced on Tuesday that Iran had produced low-grade enriched uranium suitable for power stations, threatened last year to 'wipe Israel off the map,' provoking international condemnation." Fortunately for Israel the Western nations have rallied against Iran and its nuclear program (for the time being at least) by proclaiming that sanctions may follow should Iran proceed to the next step. "Iran's latest move is a serious setback to efforts by the U.N. Security Council to have Tehran halt its enrichment work. The development could now prompt Western powers, who fear Iran is planning to build nuclear weapons, to consider imposing sanctions against the Islamic Republic" (*NY Times*, April 12,

2006). To date, Iran has developed a Sharrab-3 missile which can carry a nuclear warhead and can reach both Europe and Israel. And within a year it is expected to be able to design, build and facilitate a fully operational nuclear bomb.

Dealing with one enemy is a difficult chore, but dealing with several enemies would be considered a challenge for any nation. Unfortunately for Israel, this is the reality that she faces everyday as a nation. The *Times* continues: "Since the Hamas government took office a little over a week ago, Israeli officials have been saying there has been an increase in the number of homemade rockets fired from the northern Gaza Strip into Israel. But in Gaza it is clear that the rockets are being launched, not by Hamas, but by militants from factions associated with the once dominant Fatah organization — Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades and the Abu Rish Brigade — as well as by the Popular Resistance Committees, an amalgam of gunmen that does include some Hamas adherents and members of Islamic Jihad."

The surrounding nations

In Egyptian elections late last year, the Muslim Brotherhood, an illegal organization linked to terrorist attacks, won five times as many legislative seats as it did in 2000, not enough to enact laws but enough to show that support for Islamists is rising. The trend Israelis fear might make it easier for terrorists to gain access to Gaza and thus Israel.

With Jordan sharing the longest boarder with Israel, a constant potential threat is always a door knock away. In November, 2005, suicide

days ago, the new Governor-General of Jamaica, Dr. Kenneth Hall, stopped me in the street and apologized for not having attended the thanksgiving service for sister Mary a year ago. He said: "I have respected Christadelphians all my life. And I will tell you why. In high school, I was taught by Christadelphians, and I have never forgotten it."

We all know that from time to time tyrannical political regimes arise. With Nero in the 60s AD, the Holy Roman Empire in 16th century Europe, the Soviet Union, and narco-terrorist regimes in downtown Kingston, cooperation has proved to be impossible. Then is the time for martyrdom, not otherwise.

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude this series with two citations from and about the early Christian church:

(1) "They pray together, teach each other, honour each other and support each other. They are united in the Church of God and at his banquet [the breaking of bread]. They do not keep secrets from each other, nor avoid each other, nor are they burdensome to each other. They do not reproach each other for making personal sacrifices" (Tertullian, "To My Wife", 9).

(2) "May the very thought of doing [unlawful things] be far from the Christians! They exercise wise self-control. They practise self-restraint, observe monogamy, guard chastity, and wipe out injustice, destroying sin with its root. With them justice is lived out, laws are kept, and faith is witnessed to by deeds. They confess God. They consider truth supreme. Grace protects them. Peace shields them. The Holy Word leads them. Wisdom teaches them. Life is real. God is their King" (Theophilus of Antioch, "To Autolycus", 3:15).

Alan Eyre,
Kingston, Jamaica

Editor's Note: "Satan's Throne", in Pergamon, or Pergamum, is the subject of quite an interesting article in the very latest Biblical Archaeology Review, May/June 2006 (Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 26-39). The article contains photographs, illustrations, and explanatory text concerning the Great Altar of Pergamon, which was recovered in a 19th-century German excavation, has been reconstructed and now sits in Berlin's State Museum. Originally built in the first half of the second century BC, the altar was surrounded by a monumental frieze depicting mythical battles between the Greek gods and the Giants, a monstrous-looking race said to be descendants of "marriages" between Earth and Heaven (cp. "the daughters of men" and "the sons of God" in Gen. 6:2). It is not difficult to imagine that the Apostle John, by inspiration, might call this striking monument "Satan's seat, or throne", promoting as it did the most foolish pagan ideas about "fallen angels" and the like.



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The Eight Signs of John's Gospel (7) The Resurrection of Lazarus

Not long ago, my grandfather passed along to me an expression of his father's: "God is never in a hurry, but He is always on time." There is a lot of truth in this saying. God has no reason to hurry because He knows the future intimately. At the appointed time He acts deliberately. But our crowded lives, checkered with necessity and unpredictability, can never attain to such perfection. We need help. We need to be changed. A life in Christ now is the beginning of that transformation; it is a journey in which we can experience "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7) in the midst of life's uncertainties. John's seventh sign speaks to these truths — contrasting our weaknesses with God's wisdom, and teaching us that "all things work out for good for those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28), even when those things are beyond our understanding.

At a distance from Bethany, Jesus received a message from Mary and Martha: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick" (John 11:3). There had been many times before this moment that Jesus had been approached by those who either requested healing for themselves, or desired it for a loved one; and he had healed. But the sisters requested nothing, though they certainly desired it. They knew that Jesus loved Lazarus; and they believed it to be enough that Jesus was aware of his condition. But Jesus did not rush into Bethany to be at Lazarus' bedside. He spoke no words to heal his friend, as he had to strangers. "When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was" (v. 6).

As a prelude to his sign at Bethany, Jesus clearly identified himself as "the light of this world" (v. 9). In a natural sense, the light of the world is the sun — in the light of which "if any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not." In the gospel of John, Jesus uses *night* as an expression of *death*, and *day* as *life*. We

see this in his words before the sixth sign: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). More than two dozen times, Solomon declared that all the affairs of life transpire "under the sun" (Eccl. 4:15). And so Lazarus' days under the sun were fulfilled, and he slept in the night. But when the Sun would rise again, at its appointed time, so Lazarus would rise and "*awake out of sleep*" (John 11:11). The disciples misinterpreted Jesus' words, believing that Lazarus was actually sleeping. Jesus, however, was speaking of his death.

He seemed to be in no hurry. Lingered two days at the same place outside of Bethany, Jesus allowed Lazarus time to die. Jesus gave his sisters four days to grieve. Humanly speaking, it is difficult to imagine anything more cruel. What would they have thought about Jesus' words? What did Jesus mean when he said, "This sickness is not unto death" (v. 4)? His words would have added grief to grief. In the eyes of men, Lazarus was dead; but this was not so through the eyes of God and His Son. Lazarus, though dead four days, was alive because he loved Jesus, and Jesus loved him.

How is this possible? *The Lord regarded Lazarus to be living because of the certainty of his resurrection.* Even though Lazarus was as unconscious as the rock into which his body was deposited, he was alive in God's eyes, because God will raise him. It is the same principle upon which God could rightly say to Abraham, "*I have made thee a father of many nations*" (Rom. 4:17) before the old man had any children. God is able to "call those things which be not as though they are" (Rom. 4:17) because He possesses the indisputable power to bring His promises to pass.

Jesus finally arrived with his disciples. Mary greeted the Lord with the same words that Martha had used just moments before. The words give us a glimpse into the sisters' conversations while Jesus delayed: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21,32). This was not to say that they believed it was *necessary* for Jesus to be present to heal their brother — they certainly must have known about the healing power of Jesus' word. Mary and Martha knew that distance made no difference. They also knew that Jesus was a man of compassion. It seems the sisters believed that if Jesus had arrived in Bethany while Lazarus was still alive, he would have seen their grief, and had compassion, and healed. Hadn't Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law the same way? Jesus had said to his disciples, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there" (John 11:15). Maybe this was because Jesus knew that if he was present with Lazarus, he would have felt compelled to heal him.

Nevertheless, his delay gave time for an even greater work. Our Lord had other plans for his friends in Bethany — plans far beyond that little family's ability to comprehend. In this case there is good reason to believe, just as before the feeding of the five thousand, that Jesus "himself knew what he would do" (John 6:6). Even though he tarried outside of Bethany, Jesus would soon show how he "loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (John 11:5).

Jesus elicited from Martha her belief in the resurrection: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24). This is a point

not to be glossed over. The hope of every true believer in the gospel, and the comfort of those who mourn the dead in Christ, is the resurrection. "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (vv. 25,26). Jesus told Martha that he was the resurrection AND the life. It is nothing for God to raise someone from the dead. Indeed, the Bible contains several instances where the dead were restored to life. But those victories over death were only temporary, and in the process of time those raised fell asleep once again. Immortality is promised to those in covenant relationship to God who are found worthy at the judgment of Christ. It is raising and *bestowing immortality* that is the truest "gift of God".

Martha protested when Jesus commanded that the stone be taken away from the sepulcher. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" (v. 40). Martha would have remembered that. That was the message he sent to her: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (v. 4). She yielded to his words, and they took away the stone. Jesus then offered a prayer that was probably spoken loud enough for the multitude to hear — praising his Father — leaving no one in doubt of the authority by which he worked his signs.

Every eye was fixed on the Lord. After four days of mourning, the appointed time had come. The heavy hearts that day in Bethany experienced a joy that few ever have, when Jesus cried with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth" (v. 43). And he did. It would be presumptuous of us to believe that we can fully enter into thoughts of those who witnessed a dead man stagger out of a tomb, after being commanded to "come forth". They all saw the glory of God that day. They saw it in His Son — "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Looking back through John's gospel record, we can understand why Jesus did not come to Bethany when it appeared that his friends needed him the most. Jesus was not late, despite the appearances. He had other plans for them — greater plans. He knew they would understand with time. In his absence, Mary and Martha would have wrestled with his words — "The sickness is not unto death" (John 11:4) — when Lazarus had died. But though distressed at their situation, Martha faithfully clung to what she knew had to be true — "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (v. 27).

The exhibition of Martha's faith is a wonderful practical lesson in this sign. The world gives us so many reasons not to believe. Perhaps within earshot of Martha, some of the crowd faithlessly asked, "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" (v. 37) — as if even Jesus was impotent in Lazarus' case. But Martha held on — clinging desperately to her belief in the Lord despite her questions, and the faithlessness of those around her. No wonder the Lord loved her.

We have never spent a day with the Lord in the days of his flesh, in the way that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus did; but our experience is in many ways the

same. The sisters had to wait for the appointed time to understand the message that Jesus sent them, when he said Lazarus' sickness was not unto death. At the appointed time, the light of the world dawned on their darkness. At the appointed time, we with them will see the glory of God. With allusions to resurrection, it is written, "Arise [ye saints], shine; for thy light [the light of the world] is come, and the glory of the LORD [the Lord Jesus] is risen upon thee" (Isa. 60:1).

When he does at last come, no matter when it is, he will be on time. He was on time for his friends in Bethany.

Jay Mayoock, Jr.
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True West, Our Moral Compass

Horace Greeley, contemporary of Bro. John Thomas, had the right idea if not the right application. His famous editorial quote advised young men to go west in order to improve their lives. A westerly direction is consistently presented in scripture as being toward God and away from the flesh, beginning with mankind's ejection from Eden to the east: "So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24).

This suggests, as Dr. Thomas writes in *Elpis Israel*, that Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden and its tree of life in an easterly direction. This would also presume the need to progress in a westerly direction to approach the cherubim as well as the inaccessible tree of life.

This initial westerly direction to approach God sets a precedent that is repeated throughout Scripture. The eastern/away-from-God relationship is repeated with Cain. After Cain murdered his brother he went out from the presence of Yahweh and dwelt in the east in the land of Nod (Gen. 4:16).

In the wilderness

A powerful pattern displaying this principle would be the exclusive direction by which to approach the presence of God during the foundational structuring period of the original kingdom of God. If we were outside the wilderness encampment we would need to approach from the east, traveling west. We would pass through the lead tribe of Judah (which in Hebrew means "praise") along with Issachar ("recompense") and Zebulun ("exalted", Num. 2:3), which were

encamped on the eastern part of the outer square. Continuing westward we pass through the tents of Moses and Aaron, encamped on the east of the inner square along with the three divisions of the Levites (Num. 3:38). Continuing westward we pass through the only entrance of the tabernacle courtyard, on the east, thereby necessitating a westward approach — just like Adam and Eve to the Cherubim on the east of Eden. Continuing westward we pass the bronze altar of burnt offering and the laver, entering the tabernacle through its only access, which faces east as required by God. We pass the golden lampstand, the golden table of shewbread and the golden altar of incense, now passing westward through the veil into the Most Holy where the glory of Yahweh rests above the mercy seat between the Cherubim.

It is an exclusively westward approach to God with our backs to the east.

Western entrance despite southwest origin

When Abram left Ur, heading for the promised land, he had to go west. Interestingly, this is the specific direction by which his descendants reentered the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. Despite the fact they had come from Egypt, far to the southwest, God brought them up all the way around to the east side of Jordan. The overflowing Jordan River reversed its standard progression from the sea of life to the sea of death, receding all the way back to the city of Adam upon the signal of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant stepping into its

waters (Josh. 3). This is a picture of the reversal of Adam and Eve's deportation from the garden with its tree of life. The first couple was sent out eastward. The Israelites, having left upon Joseph's invitation to Egypt, returned into the promised land westward, coming out of the east.

At Christ's return

When Christ leads the immortalized saints to Jerusalem, it will be consistent with the standard westward approach, approaching from out of the east (Ezek. 43:1-5). The Mount of Olives, impeding this approach, cleaves in two (Zech. 14:3,4). An access valley will run east and west where the Mount of Olives now rises up in front of Jerusalem. In similar fashion, all the Judean hills from somewhat to the north of Jerusalem and stretching far to the south will prostrate themselves into a plain before the elevated city where God places His name (Zech. 14:10).

This geographical prophecy mirrors how the nations around the world will politically prostrate themselves before the rock that grinds the image to dust and then grows into a mountain filling the earth. Appropriately, Jesus prophetically parallels his return with lightning that just happens to shine from east to west (Matt. 24:27). Thus he leads mankind back to God who had driven them from His presence west to east as they were deported from Eden. Accordingly, those who are not allowed to inherit with the son of the covenant are sent away to the east, as Abraham did with his

Thanks for your comments regarding the magazine. I can only hope that, with God's help, we can continue the diversity and scholarship exemplified by *The Tidings* in Bro. Don's years as editor.

As to your comment about Samuel's lineage, I think you are exactly right. The "Ramathaim-zophim" mentioned in 1 Sam. 1:1 seems to have been a town in the hill country of Ephraim (1 Sam. 1:1,19; 2:11), where Samuel's parents lived. It would have been near Beth-horon — a city of Kohathites (Jdg. 21:20-22).

All this, of course, suggests that Samuel was a Levite and descendant of Kohath, but not a direct descendant of Aaron, and therefore not in the lineage of the priests. But it does also appear — and there may be an important lesson here — that, when one institution failed temporarily in its purpose (as did the priesthood in the days of Eli's wicked sons), God was willing to make an exception to His Law, and take an alternate course by choosing Samuel to fill the role of priest in the interim.

George

Civil Disobedience

Dear Bro. George,

It was quite a shock to see the suggestion that "the interests of a religious body being above civil law was certainly not a first century Christian doctrine" [*Christians and the Law* (3): Copyright, Alan Eyre, May 2006 issue, p. 222]. I find that very disrespectful to the many brothers and sisters who were executed in barbaric fashion for the amusement of the Roman government and its pagan citizens during that first century...

Even through the last hundred years Christadelphians have been abused, imprisoned and even shot by firing squad for refusing to comply with the civil law of military conscription. When our responsibilities to Christ and the true gospel conflict with civil law it has traditionally been the absolute understanding among believers in the true gospel that God's requirements take precedence, even at the expense of civil compliance.

Jim Dillingham

It is quite right that God's requirements of believers take precedence over the laws of the land. When threatened by the Jewish authorities, Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), and continued right on with their preaching in the face of civil penalties.

I feel sure Bro. Alan would agree wholeheartedly with this assessment too. In the last article in his series [June, p. 272], he wrote admiringly of brethren in Germany and Russia in the 20th century who sacrificed their freedom and sometimes their lives when the absolute commitments of their faith conflicted with secular authority.

The subtitle of the article you cited — "Copyright" — as well as the context of the sentence you quoted, says it all. Clearly, when Bro. Alan encouraged obedience to civil law, he had in mind particular aspects of that law, and not an overriding principle. The overriding principle is surely expressed in the Acts verse above.

However... when the believer is able to obey the laws of his country without violating the law of God, he is bound — even by God's law — to do so. This is

surely the intent of Jesus' words in Matt. 17:24-27; 22:21; Mark 12:17; and Luke 20:25 (all about paying taxes), as well as Paul's teaching in Rom. 13:1-7.

In this, as in other matters, we should all be careful not to make sweeping generalizations.

George

YOUTH

A section devoted to the thoughts, experiences, and hopes of young people, coordinated by Bro. Chris Atwood. Please send contributions for this section to Bro. Chris at lex87author@yahoo.com

This series is in coordination with the Manitoulin Youth Conference (see under "Coming Events")

The Eight Signs of John's Gospel

(8) The Great Catch of Fish

The same night in which he was betrayed, Jesus shared a meal with his disciples, and said, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." It was too much for the disciples, who still could not understand that their Lord had to die in the first place. Jesus now said they would forsake him. Peter protested first: "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." And again: "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." Likewise also said all the disciples" (Matt. 26:31-35).

It only took time for Jesus' words to be realized. Jesus was betrayed, forsaken, crucified, and then raised from the dead. Peter had denied him — three times — just like Jesus said, and the disciples, who now numbered one less, forsook him at a time when a man needs his friends the most. All this had been fulfilled — but the Lord had not yet appeared to the disciples in Galilee, and so it is appropriate that we find seven of them in that region, occupying the passing time on the sea of Tiberias until he would come.

A testimony to the Lord's mercy

The Lord had already appeared to the disciples twice before, though Thomas was absent the first time. On the morning of the eighth sign, Jesus' third manifestation to his disciples, Thomas was one of those disciples present. His presence is a testimony to the Lord's mercy, rather than to Thomas' own faith — a testimony that Jesus' disciples of every age appreciate, because it is true of

them all. That night on the fishing boat, there was a small group of men who were perfectly fitted for the work to which they were called. They were not fitted for the work by their intellect or talent, being notably uneducated (Acts 4:13). They were not fitted for the work by their faith, because it is evident from their own writings that Jesus frequently rebuked them for lacking it. Rather, the great truth of their calling is that God extended His grace to them *in spite of themselves*. A true appreciation of this fact can only be received in humility — and it took the disciples time to understand it. The same is true of us — our Lord did not love us because we loved him. He loved us first.

After a tiring night of fishing, the disciples had caught nothing by morning. A man who called to them from the shore did not lessen their sense of futility when he asked them if they had caught any fish. After they answered tersely, “No,” he told them to cast the net on the right side of the boat (John 21:6). Maybe the disciples thought a man on the shore could see a school of fish where they could not, as the bright rising sun obscured their vision. Whatever the reason, they complied and threw in their net, and the catch was so great that they lacked the strength to pull it into the boat. It was then that the author of this record recognized the man on the shore: “It is the Lord,” he said (v. 7). Hearing John’s word, Peter flung on his fisher’s coat, and leapt in the lake — evidently so eager to be with his Lord that he decided not to wait with the rest of his fellow disciples.

They had seen this before

Some of the disciples on that boat had seen this kind of miracle before. About three years earlier, Peter, James, John, and those with them had a similar experience. They would have recalled a day when Jesus spoke to the multitudes that flocked to hear him, the Lord using Peter’s boat as a stage. When Jesus had finished speaking, he told Peter to cast the nets into the deep. At that time, too, they had already “toiled all the night, and had taken nothing.” But at Jesus’ word, he let down the net, and the catch was so great that neither net nor boat could handle it. Falling down at Jesus’ knees, Peter said, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” He could not believe that he deserved to be in the company of such a man of miracles — he clearly saw his own sinfulness contrasted with the Lord’s greatness. But now, about three years later, instead of asking Jesus to depart from him, Peter swam a hundred yards to be near his Lord as fast as he could (Luke 5:5-8).

A fire of coals

When the disciples came to the Lord on the shore, they shared a meal with him. He gave them bread, and fish cooked on a fire of coals. The fire of coals is one of several allusions of particular relevance to Peter. It was on a night in which Peter huddled around a fire of coals that he had denied his Lord — three times. And now, after a meal around a fire of coals, Jesus asked him three questions, followed by three commands to strengthen his brethren in the flock of God.

The first question for Peter was, “Lovest thou me *more than these?*” (John 21:15). Biblical expositors have not all interpreted Jesus’ question in the same way. Some have suggested he was asking about Peter’s priorities; in other words Jesus meant, ‘Do you love me more than your fishing?’ But it seems more appropriate that Jesus was calling to Peter’s mind the night before he was crucified, when he shared a meal with his disciples, spoke to them about his death and their temporary defection, and assured them that he would meet them in Galilee after he rose from the dead. What had Peter said that night? “Though *all* shall be offended because of thee, yet *will I never* be offended” (Matt. 26:33). He essentially said he loved Jesus more than all the disciples. Peter truly did love his Lord, but only the flesh says, ‘I love you *more*.’ Each of Peter’s responses was followed by a command from his Lord: “Feed my lambs... tend my sheep... feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17). It was almost as if Peter was being challenged to show his love for Jesus to the flock, over which he was made a shepherd. “This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:21).

The benefit of failure

By briefly bringing Peter back to that night with the three questions and commands, the Lord gave Peter a great responsibility, and at the same time reminded him of his own weaknesses. This is a profound lesson. Knowledge, authority, and eminence only encourage arrogance in the hearts of men, when they are not mixed with a healthy sense of perspective and humility. Peter would never forget that he denied his Lord. His failures were more of a qualification for his calling than a reason against it. Pride is less likely to own a man after his deficiencies are publicly displayed. He would carry that with him for the rest of his life, along with the full assurance that he was forgiven.

The same is true of Thomas, who was also present at the great catch of fish. Just days before, he had refused to believe Jesus had risen, despite the testimony of the women and the other disciples. Consider the strength of the apostles’ preaching, with people like Peter and Thomas. They would have certainly come across people objecting to gospel truth because they never saw the risen Lord. What a powerful witness Thomas would have been because he had been a skeptic too. What a powerful testimony to the forgiveness of sins can be seen when we consider Peter’s denials, followed by his conversion. All the apostles were part of this great truth — that God’s offers His grace to men *in spite of themselves*, so “that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Cor. 4:7).

Their calling

With this appreciation, the apostles were fitted for their calling, which is symbolically expressed in this eighth sign. After that great catch of fish early in his ministry, Jesus had said to Peter, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). That phrase “fishers of men” was an expression of the ministry to which they were called. And now, after a second great catch of fish,

IRAN AND ISRAEL

Iran Wants the Jews to be the First to Suffer

Charles Krauthammer, national columnist for The Washington Post, wrote the following, which appeared in The Austin American-Statesman on May 6 [his comments are in italics, ours in regular type]:

When something happens for the first time in 1,871 years, it is worth noting. In AD 70, and again in 135, the Roman Empire brutally put down Jewish revolts in Judea, destroying Jerusalem, killing hundreds of thousands of Jews and sending hundreds of thousands more into slavery and exile. For nearly two millennia, the Jews wandered the world. And now, in 2006, for the first time since then, there are once again more Jews living in Israel — the successor state to Judea — than in any other place on earth.

Several generations of Christadelphians have watched the signs of the times with growing optimism, sometimes with excitement. Grandparents and parents and now children have traced the times of their lives in relation to milestones in Middle East events. The present writer can never forget when he was born: he is precisely as old as the state of Israel!

Sometimes we have also watched the signs of the times from the viewpoint of our own overconfident predictions.

Also, sadly, some of us have, over time, grown rather calloused to the ongoing and developing MIRACLE of Israel. For it is surely, in our day, the primary and preeminent evidence — from extra-Biblical sources — for the existence of God.

From the earliest signs of Jewish interest in Palestine, in the last years of the 19th century, through World War I and the Balfour Declaration (freeing the Land from the Turkish oppressor, and pointing the way to a Jewish homeland), through the terrible European persecutions and the Holocaust of World War II, to the birth of the state of Israel in 1948, to the recovery of the Old City in 1967 — Christadelphians, and others, have observed an ongoing miracle. In days of old, the Almighty walked through the Red Sea and the psalmist said, “Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen” (Psa. 77:19). Now, in our very days, the Almighty has been walking through the earth again — doing wondrous things in furtherance of His plan for Israel. We cannot see the wind, yet we can see what the wind has wrought. Likewise, though we see not the God of Israel with the

the Lord gave Peter the same command: “Follow me” (John 21:19). Perhaps Jesus was saying that even though he was leaving, the disciples would still be fishers of men, and that he would be with them always. On a nearby Galilean mountain, not long after these events, Jesus seems to have commanded his disciples in this way, saying, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age” (Matt. 28:16-20).

There are many similarities between the two great catches of fish recorded by the gospel writers. But unlike those in the first great catch, the fish of the eighth sign were all numbered, having been preserved in an unbreakable net. They represent the called, chosen, and faithful, whom the apostles would gather from the right side into the net of the kingdom of heaven. And though Jesus referred to those fish as “the fish which ye have now caught” (John 21:10), his disciples knew very well that they could do nothing of themselves. They knew the weakness of the flesh, and how the Lord had called them in spite of it. His disciples today know this is true of them, too.

Let us watch

While the Lord remains away during this Gentile night, we live in constant danger of spiritually falling asleep: “Ye are the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thes. 5:5,6). The disciples, during a night on the sea of Tiberias, were awake and working, and soon found themselves in the presence of the Lord. This is part of the message for us — that just as the disciples shared a fellowship meal with their Lord after a long and laborious night, so would they also in the age to come. “Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them” (Luke 12:37).

Jay Mayock, Jr.
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(Series concluded)

“The true followers of Christ are ‘sons of the light’ or ‘sons of the day’ — even though the ‘day’ has not officially arrived. That ‘day of the Lord’ has cast its radiance ahead with the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and especially with his sacrificial work. We must remember, and endeavor, to live in that ‘day’, and to exemplify all its qualities, EVEN NOW. In no other way may a people ever become prepared to enter into the glories of that future inheritance, when it does indeed arrive!” (GB)