



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume VII
Issue 156

To What Do the SIGNS Point?

Circumcision – The Sabbath – Water Baptism – Sign Gifts

by – Richard Jordan

The book of Mark concludes with a passage that every believer and Christian worker should ponder prayerfully:

*“So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, **and confirming the Word with signs following.** Amen” (Mark 16:19-20).*

In order to get the full significance of this last clause we need to consider how “signs” are used in Scripture as a whole and to what they point. In this regard, Psalms 74:9 is a good place to start. Speaking of the condition of the nation Israel the Psalmist cries out:

*“**We see not our signs:** there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.”*

Clearly signs belong to the nation Israel. They are her birthright; “they are our signs,” Israel says.

The nation Israel was born *amid signs and wonders*, even as Moses reminds them in Deuteronomy 26:8,

*“And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and **with***

signs, and with wonders.”

When Moses was commissioned to deliver Israel from Egypt, he was given two specific signs designed to motivate the nation to believe. The Lord declared to him in Exodus 4:8,

*“And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the **first sign**, that they will believe the voice of the **latter sign.**”*

The first signs performed in Scripture are thus performed as signs to Israel in connection with her liberation from Egypt and establishment as a nation.

Throughout Israel’s history, signs were a part of her birthright. When she was where she belonged, doing what God gave her to do, these signs were in her midst. On the other hand, the signs stopped when Israel fell into sin and unbelief – as was the case in Psalm 74. Proverbs 29:18 also speaks to this:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish ...”

(see SIGNS, page 1571)

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| To What Do the Signs Point?..... | 1569 |
| Grace Abounding over Adam’s Fall..... | 1574 |
| Lived and Loved Together (Poem) | 1574 |
| Comparative Mentality | 1575 |
| Reader’s Question Box #6 | 1576 |

Dear Christ-Members,

What a joy to be members of Christ together!

*“For as the body is one, and hath **many members**, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: **so also is Christ**” (I Corinthians 12:12).*

*“Now **ye are the body of Christ**, and members in particular” (I Corinthians 12:27).*

In these verses Paul is not referring to the *actual* Person of Christ Himself, but he is discussing the many-membered Christ – God’s *ecclesia* – the Church, the Body of Christ.

In doing so he highlights the divinely significant relationship between Christ and us; between Christ and the members of His Body. We are *one* with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are so in oneness with Him, and so fully identified with Him, that Paul calls us by His name – “*Christ*” (:12).

This Issue

In this issue we are carrying another article from **Richard Jordan**. He is one of the truly great Bible students of our day. We carried his outstanding article *The Key to Understanding the Bible* in issue #26 of the *Bible Student’s Notebook*. If any of our readers have not read this, we encourage you to do so.

The current article that is running is *To What Do the Signs Point?* This is an important study on the nature and purpose of divine signs.

We will carry an answer from **Bill Petri** in our regular feature *Reader’s Question Box*. What a dear brother Bill is! How I have enjoyed his precious fellowship over the years! Two things have always stood out in my mind when I think of him: his love for and persistence at getting to the truth, and his sweet and gentle spirit of love. What a thrill, that over the years, his studies have also led him to see and embrace *the salvation of all*.

In this issue we are also carrying two articles from our managing editor **Andre Sneider**. Although these are short works, you will find that they carry a big weight. What a joy to have dear brothers such as Andre joining in this labor-fellowship.

In the love of the Father, until next week,



Clyde L.. Pilkington, Jr.

Bible Student’s Notebook

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume VII, No. 156 – September 30, 2008

This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God’s abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God’s purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the “preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any “church,” “denomination,” “movement,” “organization,” “mission,” “creed,” “meeting,” “school,” “conference” or “fellowship.”

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PATRIARCHS

Remember that it is our responsibility as husbands and fathers to take the truths we learn from God’s Word, the truths that we hold dear, and impart them to our families.

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Thus when the Lord Jesus Christ appeared and began to perform signs and wonders, this was nothing new for Israel. They knew exactly what was going on. John 4:48 tells us:

*“Then said Jesus unto him, ‘**Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.**”*

Our Lord knew Israel would not believe if they did not see signs and wonders. Why? Because she expected them – signs were her birthright. They were part of Israel’s program and she had a right to expect them.

This is why Peter declares to his nation at Pentecost:

*“Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, **a man approved of God among you by miracles and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you** ...” (Acts 2:22).*

Jesus Christ was “*approved of God*” – how? “*By miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him.*” They would not believe if He did not have signs and wonders, so God gave Him the necessary credentials to demonstrate who He was.

Paul later follows this same line of thought when he writes in I Corinthians 1:22,

*“**For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.**”*

Notice the wording: “*The Jews **require** a sign.*” They simply would not believe without such confirmation. They expected it. They demanded it. It was their birthright.

In light of this, we should not be surprised to find that each covenant God made with the nation Israel seems to have had an accompanying sign. Although this fact often seems to be overlooked, it is in reality an important point in understanding what signs were about and what they pointed to.

CIRCUMCISION

Romans 4:11 declares circumcision to be a “*sign*” and when first given by God to Abraham in Genesis 17, no doubt was left as to what this sign pointed:

*“This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; **every man child among you shall be circumcised...** And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and **it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you...** He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: **and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant**” (Genesis 17:9-10, 13).*

Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. Through this “*circumcision in the flesh made by hands*” (Ephesians 2:11), Israel literally carried the Abrahamic Covenant with them in their flesh. So basic was the requirement of the identity of the nation with this most fundamental of all her covenants. Indeed, if a “*stranger*” desired to become a part of the favored nation, circumcision was the rite of initiation (Exodus 12:48). It was by submitting to circumcision that a Gentile could “*take hold*” of the covenant made with Abraham.

Because circumcision was a sign of God’s covenant with Israel through Abraham, it is not unexpected that in the present dispensation it has no such value. With the setting aside of the nation Israel (Romans 11:11-15), Paul can now write:

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Galatians 6:15).

This is quite a change! Because Israel has been set aside, this “*sign of circumcision*” has nothing to point to today.



THE SABBATH DAY

When God made the further covenant with Israel through Moses, He again gave a sign as a ceremonial observance of that covenant. Exodus 31:12-18 clearly set forth the observance of the Sabbath Day as “*a sign between Me [the Lord] and the children of Israel forever.*” It was to be that part of the Mosaic Covenant that represented the whole:

“Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant” (Exodus 31:16).

The sabbath was a sign given to the nation Israel for the purpose of perpetually reminding them of the covenant God had made with them through Moses.

Hence centuries later the Lord calls Israel to repentance through Ezekiel with the plea:

*“I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and **hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you,** that ye may know that I am the Lord your God”* (Ezekiel 20:19-20).

Again, however, with the present “fall of Israel,” this Jewish sign has also been rendered inoperative, having nowhere to point. Hence Paul instructs the believer today:

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days” (Colossians 2:16).

WATER BAPTISM

The next great covenant God made with Israel was given to King David. This covenant had to do with the kingdom God purposed to establish through Israel. II Samuel 7:12-16 records the

giving of the Davidic Covenant, the essence of which is captured in the words, “*I will establish the throne of his [i.e., David’s] kingdom for ever.*”

This kingdom had long been promised to the nation Israel. In fact the very purpose of God in giving birth to the nation centered in this kingdom. God Himself had promised Israel through Moses:

“And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation ...” (Exodus 19:6)

While no specific “*sign*” is directly identified with the Davidic Covenant,¹ in light of Exodus 19:6 it is not difficult to identify the mark of entrance into the kingdom.

Notice that Israel was to become “*a kingdom of priests.*” In Exodus 29 we learn that ordination into the priest’s office was through a ceremony that included two very important rites: first, a *washing with water*; second, an *anointing with oil*. In other words, to prepare a priest to carry out the duties of his office, two things were done: first, “*wash them with water*” (:4) and then, “*anoint him*” (:7).

These two things are beautifully united when our Lord, Israel’s true High Priest (Hebrews 3:1), came to be baptized of John in order “*to fulfill all righteousness.*” First, He was *washed* with water and then *anointed* with the Holy Spirit by the Father (Matthew 3:13-17). Thus His ordination into His ministry as Israel’s Prophet, Priest and King was complete.

Water baptism is the sign of the Kingdom Covenant – the Davidic Covenant. It is “*the door*” through which the believing Israelite was

1. We believe there are two reasons: first, the Davidic Covenant was to have its ultimate fulfillment in the distant future in Messiah and His kingdom (Psalm 132:11) and thus an immediate “*sign*” would confuse things. Second, water baptism (as we demonstrate in this article) would easily be understood for what it was: the initiation rite into the “*royal priesthood.*” Thus in the book of Acts, water baptism is always associated with “*signs and wonders.*”

to identify himself as a part of the “*little flock*” to whom the Father purposed to give the Kingdom (Luke 12:32; See Luke 7:29-30).

This, of course, is why John the Baptist came preaching “*the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*” (Mark 1:4). We learn from Acts 13:24 that John preached his “*baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.*”

In other words, John preached a national baptism to the nation Israel as a means of national repentance and preparation to be the kingdom of priests God ordained that favored nation to be. Clearly, in Scripture water baptism is associated with the *kingdom* given to the nation Israel.

In Acts 2:38, Peter echoes John’s words in Mark 1:4 as he declares to His nation:

“... Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Peter’s appeal to Israel is a further development of John’s earlier call to repentance, calling Israel to place faith in her Messiah and to prepare herself to fulfill her God-given role as a “*royal priesthood, an holy nation*” (I Peter 2:9).

Just as circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant and the sabbath is the sign of the Mosaic Covenant, so water baptism is the sign of the Davidic Covenant. As with the other signs, the setting aside of Israel resulted in the setting aside of the practice of water baptism. It has no place in God’s current program.

As God’s program for Israel was replaced by His program for the Body of Christ, so Israel’s water ceremony was also replaced by the baptism by the Spirit of God into the Body of Christ:

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have

all been made to drink into one Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:13).

This is the “*one baptism*” of Ephesians 4:5 that is in effect today.

SPIRITUAL SIGN GIFTS

The nation Israel was promised a New Covenant – one in which God Himself would enable them to be all He purposed them to be. This covenant is recorded in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The essence of the New Covenant is clearly set forth in Ezekiel 36:27,

“And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them ...”

This direct empowering of the nation by the Holy Spirit assures the accomplishment of God’s purpose through Israel. The sign of this empowering by the Holy Spirit is found in the list of *sign gifts* given in passages like Mark 16:17-18 and I Corinthians 12:7-11. All of these gifts are signs to the nation Israel that point to the empowering of the Holy Spirit – the “*anointing*” of Exodus 29:7 – which completes the preparation for the priest’s office.

One example of this is *speaking in tongues*. Acts 2:4 records,

“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance.”

The evidence of the Spirit’s empowerment was the talking in tongues. This same evidence is given in Acts 10:44-47 when the Spirit fell on those in the house of Cornelius.

Thus Paul states in I Corinthians 14:22:

“Wherefore tongues are for a sign ...”

(see SIGNS, page 1575)

Grace Abounding over Adam's Fall

by – André Sneidar

"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Romans 5:18).

A. E. Saxby, in *God in Redemption*,¹ gives us a wonderfully logical reason for rejecting the notion that God will condemn anyone to eternal damnation and suffering, and rather proves that He has provided for the salvation of all mankind.

He says,

If a human act was effectual for ruin, how much more shall a Divine act be effectual for salvation?

How quickly we believers will latch on to some fragment of a verse, in a whole context, to prove a negative perception and then propagate it as truth, to the total exclusion of the whole context of the doctrine being presented.

Why do we so easily jump to conclude *all men to condemnation*, but find it so terribly difficult to accept with the same unabashedness the accompanying text which says that *"the free gift came upon **all** men unto justification of life"*?

How can anyone think that as the first Adam's act could bring about the "ruin" of *all* of his descendants, that the second Adam's act was nowhere near as efficacious to provide the remedy whereby *all* of those descendants would be rescued from such a penalty? It's really quite an illogical act of mental gymnastics to interpret Romans 5 that way.

1. *God in Redemption* by A.E. Saxby, reprinted by Bible Student's Press (2008).

It is rather amazing that we never consider that as sin abounded in its effect on all of the first Adam's posterity, God's "grace did **much more abound**" (Romans 5:20).

Thus, if the first Adam's act was so powerful as to affect the ruin of all of his future generations, how much less of an effect would God's grace be through the redeeming act of the Second Adam, that even one of those offspring could be eternally lost forever to the loving grace of His Creator and Father?

It is too much to comprehend that we serve a God and Father so callous to the welfare of His creation, that He would allow any one of His dear creatures to go unprovided for in the eternal plan of His "great love wherewith He loved us." ■

Lived and Loved Together

We have lived and loved together
Through many changing years;
We have shared each other's
gladness,
And wept each other's tears.
I have known ne'er a sorrow
That was long unsoothed by thee.
For thy smiles can make a summer
Where darkness else would be.

Charles Jefferys (1807-1865)
Creatures Great and Small

Comparative Mentality

by – André Sneidar

“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (II Corinthians 10:12).

We tend to think in human terms about other people, *i.e.*, in terms of “degrees.” We judge ourselves in a certain way, and as we view others’ lives, we then judge them according to our own judgment of ourselves, thereby deeming others either as good, or better (rarely), or worse (usually, or more often) than ourselves.

It is a natural, carnal mentality that drives us to “compare” others this way, which results in a legalistic “divvying” (or, dividing) of humanity, using ourselves as the “standard”

by which others are deemed acceptable first, by us, and then, in our own minds, by God. In other words, we might say, “This person has done worse things than I, and therefore does not ‘deserve’ to be accepted,” etc.

Thus we exclude whole groups of people from the provision of God’s grace on the basis that we are the dividing line by which God has determined one’s acceptability with Him (because, “naturally,” **We** are saved and accepted by Him, but those **others** are not, etc.). ■

SIGNS (continued from page 1573)

Since Paul has already declared that “*the Jews require a sign,*” it is clear that these “*gifts*” – of which tongues are but a representation – are signs given to the nation Israel for the purpose of identifying the empowering operation of the Holy Spirit. As a foretaste of “*the powers of the world to come,*” these signs were especially suited to Israel’s Kingdom hope.

Once again, however, with the setting aside of Israel’s Kingdom program these signs also ceased (I Corinthians 13:8-10). That this is an historic as well as dispensational reality is illustrated in Paul’s ministry. As the “*diminishing*” of Israel (Romans 11:12) was completed at the end of the Acts period, it is evident that these sign gifts ceased too, and were no longer operative, even in the ministry of the great Apostle Paul (*e.g.* II Timothy 4:20).

With the fall of Israel and her program, her sign gifts have nothing to which to point.

WHAT ABOUT NOW?

All the signs point to God’s purposes in and through the nation Israel – they are the *people* of the signs; theirs is the *program* of the signs. As the nation Israel was set aside her sign program was also set aside.

In the present dispensation of grace there are no signs such as were given to Israel. Rather, as the signs were withdrawn they were replaced with something far better: the fullness of God’s revelation of His grace to us in Christ Jesus found in the epistles of the Apostle Paul. ■

The Grace Journal
Bloomington, IL



Reader's Question Box #6

Q: Paul said that his “*heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved*” (Romans 10:1).

If Paul believed in the ultimate salvation of all, why does he seem so concerned that Israel might not be saved? If Paul believed in the ultimate salvation of all, why didn’t he mention it here? Why didn’t he give any indication here that he takes consolation in that fact?

Q: Didn’t Paul teach that only those who confess, believe and call upon the name of the Lord will be saved? (Romans 10:9, 13).

A: The key to Romans chapter 10 is to understand the difference between Israel *nationally*, and the Israelite *individually*. Paul in Romans chapters 9-11 is talking about the *national* condition of Israel, not each individual’s standing. Hence, in verse one Paul’s desire is that the *nation* of Israel would have salvation. Salvation from what? Salvation from the judgment God is placing upon her for rejecting His Son.

In Romans 10:6-8 Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30:11-14. Why? To demonstrate that God gave to the *nation* of Israel a message to believe. It was a message that was knowable to her as a nation.

“But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach”
(Romans 10:8).

Who’s mouth? – Israel’s (nationally) mouth. The purpose of verses 9-11 is not to teach salvation from hell, or individual salvation, but rather to show Israel what she could have and should have done to avoid her stumbling and subsequent fall – by simply exercising faith in Christ instead of going about to establish her own righteousness,

as Romans 10:3 states. This is why Paul will quote Isaiah 28:6 in Romans 10:11.

To understand verses 9 and 13 we must understand them in the context of Chapters 9-11. Hence, chapter 10 amplifies on the stumbling of Romans 9:32-33. Pay close attention to the words in Romans 9:33:

“As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a Stumblingstone and Rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.”

Whosoever believeth – the Messiah and His claims. This is a quote out of Isaiah 28:16. Israel as a nation had the opportunity to respond in faith to the claims and message of Christ as Israel’s Messiah, and thus avoid the national judgment befalling her. She could have, in faith, embraced Jesus as her Messiah, and thus received salvation from her *national* judgment.

Paul in Romans 10:1-13 explains why Israel stumbled over Christ and continues as a nation to do so – she (as a nation) had no faith. Romans 10 has nothing to do with the individual – but everything to do with Israel as a nation! ■

Bill Petri
Beacon of Grace
Buffalo, NY

Sentence of Silver

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

“Tend the garden God has given you.”
– Ricky Skaggs (singer, song-writer),
Faith and Fame.