

# A NEW APPROACH TO THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

by FRANK MADELEY

**T**HE author of this article died on September 3, 1960, at the age of 90, less than a month after he sent the article to us. Mr. Madeley, a former missionary in China, had devoted himself for many years to the study of the Fourth Gospel, and published a book on it early in the present century.

**W**HILE humble disciples accept without question this Gospel, relying on its records of signs that Jesus wrought, and resting their hearts on its deep spiritual teaching, there has, as we well know, in the past been a belittling of it, though, thank God, less so now than formerly. It is considered to contain what are called "dislocations"; the last chapter is regarded as an after-addition not originally belonging to the Gospel — at best as an Epilogue. And the Gospel's authorship by the apostle John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved", has been seriously questioned by some commentators on this Gospel. All of this may not seem to matter if we can in spite of it regard "St. John's Gospel", with Archbishop Temple, as "the profoundest of all writings". But this Gospel, which more clearly than any other portrays the humiliation of Christ as having descended from infinite height to so despised a manhood, and which, as Campbell Morgan said, should be approached with reverence and awe, yet has suffered so much by a too purely intellectual approach. It is noteworthy that our Lord's human name is far more used in it than in the other three Gospels.

As regards the "dislocations", or passages held to have become in the course of transmission displaced from their original positions, there are half a dozen listed by one commentator; but he candidly points out there is no manuscript evidence for any one of them. With Bishop Headlam, we distrust the existence of dislocations, for which there is no manuscript authority.

As regards the last chapter being an afterthought, Sir Edwyn Hoskyns in his commentary in the 'thirties pointed out that a Gospel should not end with the appearance of the risen Lord to His disciples and their belief in Him, but the preparation for the

going forth of the good news to the world, which is what we have in the last chapter's record of the miraculous draught of fishes, and the commissioning of Peter to lead in the publishing of the gospel. But what of the ending of ch. 20 (verses 30, 31)? That is not the full ending; it relates to the signs done in the presence of the disciples "that ye [Jews, in answer to their challenge of 2:18] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing may have life through his name." *Before* the Jews' challenge in 2:18 a sign for the disciples is recorded, and *after* the earlier conclusion of 20: 30 f. a further sign (corresponding with the former) is recorded for the disciples, who were to carry forward the divine purpose of salvation, when the nation rejecting Jesus had failed. This calls for a recognition dealt with in detail below.

As regards the authorship, in spite of the express reference to the disciple whom Jesus loved in 21:24 ("This is the disciple who bare witness of these things, and who wrote these things, and we know that his witness is true"), a different author of the Gospel has been contended for, because of 19:35: "And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true: and *he* knows that he says true, that ye also may believe". Here the "he" (ἐκεῖνος) in "he knows" is considered to be an appeal to the beloved disciple for confirmation of his witness by the author, and therefore to imply that the apostle John is not the author of the Gospel. But a good while ago now a simple solution of this question was proposed by Dr. Zahn and commended itself to others: it is based on the very characteristic and repeated use of the pronoun "he" (lit. "that one") by John in his First Epistle, without any definition from the context, on the assumption that his readers would understand that he meant the Lord (see 1 John 2: 6; 3: 3, 5, 7, 16; 4: 17 for this emphatic use of ἐκεῖνος). The Evangelist, having made an emphatic assertion of the essential truth of his testimony in 19:35, lifts his heart to heaven and claims confirmation from his living Lord!

Bishop Lowth, in a Preliminary Dissertation to his lectures on *Isaiah* (1778), tells of his discovery that it is not metre or rhyme but "parallelism", that supplies the key to the form or method of Hebrew poetry. He says: "The correspondence of one verse or line with another I call parallelism. And words or phrases answering one to another in the corresponding lines I call parallel terms". An instance is Isa. 55: 6, "Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found, Call ye upon him while he is near." An Irish bishop,

John Jebb, carried this principle of parallelism a stage further in his *Sacred Literature* (1820), extending it from the correspondence of a couple of lines or sentences to the grouping of a number of lines into paragraphs. This meant his discovery of what he called introversion. Introversion is rightly so called from there being a turning inwards from pairing items at opposite ends towards a central pair of two corresponding items. It is to be noted that the later lines corresponding with the earlier occur in the opposite order to them so that the parallel to the first line comes last, that to the second last but one, and so forth. Thus the subjects are repeated in introversions, i.e. from opposite ends. A well known Old Testament instance is Isa. 6:10, "Make the *heart* of this people fat, and their *ears* heavy, and shut their *eyes*; Lest they see with their *eyes*, and hear with their *ears* and understand with their *heart*." The most remarkable instance of this single line or sentence in the New is furnished by the *Benedictus* (Luke 1:67-79) where the parallel terms are very clear, beginning with "visited" at both ends. John 5: 8-11, in the story of the healing of the impotent man, has long been known as an introversion. What has been called Hebraic parallelism is an eastern structural arrangement. I have seen it illustrated in Western China both as regards the single pair and the group of pairs. On the door-posts of a house could be seen "The root (foundation) of the nation is in the family. The root of the family is in the individual." And as regards the group of pairs I have seen it in the hanging of pairs of scrolls as given on the occasion of a wedding or a child's hundred days ceremony. After the first pair is hung on the wall the members of a second pair are not hung together on the same side of the first but one member of it on one side of the first pair, the other on the other side of it; a third pair's members are also hung on the same side of those already hung but again, one on this side, the other on the other side. So with the members of a fourth pair, a fifth pair. Always the two members take the outside positions. The result is an introversion without those simple people's having any idea of such an arrangement. It is just a natural arrangement, though such an arrangement may not have seemed so to us westerners!

What has been said so far only concerned pairs of *single* lines or sentences (as in John 5:8-11). But in 1824 was published the Rev. Thomas Boys' *Tactica Sacra*, dealing with a further extension of parallelism, which he calls by the more homely word Correspondence. And it has been said that by his *Tactica Sacra*

“it was reserved for Thomas Boys to lift the whole subject of the literary parallelism between words and lines; and to develop it into the correspondence between the subject matter and truth of the Divine Word”. A correspondence of divisions, subdivisions and sections can be shewn. And though the single line correspondence can be seen in St. John’s Gospel I believe that outside the Prologue with its correspondences, a preface to the whole, the whole Gospel can be shown to have the form of an introversion. This involves many passages corresponding to each other being *separated* from each other — a phenomenon which has been held to be a ground for seeing dislocations in this Gospel, for believing that some such separated passages with their like subjects were originally together.

In 1908, there was published a book of mine entitled *The Eight Signs of St. John’s Gospel*, according to the number then generally believed to be narrated in it. They were treated as four pairs of corresponding signs, and though the book attracted little attention, the parallel terms, at least four in each pair, were not called in question; and the parallel terms as well as the subject of the narratives proved that they formed an introversion.

Since I was busy through the years of missionary service in China evangelizing and teaching the Scriptures, it was not till my retirement that I took up again the subject of the signs, and later of the plan of the *whole* Gospel of John, a much more difficult subject. I came to believe that we are meant to find in St. John’s Gospel *ten* sign-records and to see them as the foundation of the plan of the whole book. For surely the narrative of the sign of signs, the death and resurrection of Jesus, should not be omitted, and to it can be shewn to correspond that of the cleansing of the Temple, itself a sign. The action of cleansing the Temple was to be justified by the resurrection, proving that Jesus held as Messiah authority for doing it: “Destroy (lit. loose) this temple [of my body] and in three days I will raise it up.” Further we have 2:22 and 20:8, 9 so evidently referring to each other: “When he was *raised from the dead*, his disciples remembered that he spake this; they *believed the Scripture* [Ps. 16:10, 11] and the word which Jesus had said” (2:22) — “And he [the disciple whom Jesus loved] saw and *believed* [the evidences in the tomb]. For as yet they knew not the *Scripture* that he must *rise again from the dead*” (20.8, 9). I have long thought of this “he came, he saw, he believed” as greater than Caesar’s “I came, I saw, I conquered”! And when the sign-narratives are seen as ten,

then they, together with the conversations and controversies that lead up to them or out of them in the contrasted progress of faith and unbelief, are seen as the foundation of the structure of the whole Book.

In the Preface to his Commentary on *The Gospel of St. John* in the Expositors' Bible Dr. Marcus Dods said: "In the whole range of literature there is no composition which is a more perfect work of art, no paragraph, sentence or expression out of its place. Part hangs together with part in perfect balance". This may seem an exaggeration in view of modern criticism; but I believe it proves to be perfectly true. A plan which shows this balance may, without discounting western scholars' plans or dividings of the book, perhaps be called eastern, as being an extended application of Hebraic parallelism. The proof of it lies both in the parallelism or correspondence of subjects, and in the "parallel terms" (the same or like words, expressions, phrases to be found in the parallel parts) discoverable therein. The parallel terms have not been seen, not because they are not there, but because they are not obtruded. There is in the whole book, to use Alexander Pope's words, "grace beyond the reach of art" and this is an example of it. Without the key, and especially when one is not looking for them, seeing the parallel terms may be like finding needles in a bottle or hay! But they are there none the less.

To prove that the Gospel of John has the form of introversion, even as Thomas Boys set out whole epistles as forming introversions, is of course much more difficult than to show that the sign narratives taken out of their settings form such. But I started with parallelism of subjects, and erasing, correcting, rewriting — writing over and over again as one new pair of parallel or corresponding terms after another was gradually discovered, so being enabled to fix more correctly the limits of divisions, subdivisions and sections than as always or generally accepted—I have come to the conviction that the book, outside of the Prologue, does have the form of an introversion. Surely if the theory of parallel terms was wrong one would have failed to find them in the book as a whole. But the opposite has been the case, supporting the belief in the wonderful design of the Book, "part hanging together with part in perfect balance".

As to any prejudice against a plan as interfering with the liberty of inspiration, think of what a help to the memory such was in the days when there was little or no paragraphing or punctuat-

ing of manuscripts! Without claiming a special gift of memory the writer has come to have in mind divisions, subdivisions and even sections for large part, in their proper order, through having come gradually to recognize more and more of design in St. John's Gospel—"All things double one against another" (Ecclesiasticus 42: 24).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A division or subdivision parallel to another, while corresponding to it, usually advances a stage beyond it (compare John 6:15-24 with John 6:1-14).

## THE TEN SIGNS OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL

### 1: 19-2: 11. A SIGN FOR THE DISCIPLES

- A<sup>1</sup>** c. 1: 19-34. The witness of John the Baptist to Jesus, "Behold, the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world". And seeing the Spirit descending and abiding on Jesus, he said, "I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God".
- b. 1: 35-51. Two of his disciples follow Jesus after John's again saying, "Behold, the Lamb". Andrew and Peter. "And going forth into Galilee Jesus finds Philip, and says to him, 'Follow me'." Philip directs Nathanael to Jesus.
- a. 2: 1-11. *The First Sign*: The water made wine at a Galileean wedding feast. Jesus intervening upon failure ('no wine')—a sign specially affecting the disciples. "This beginning of his signs did Jesus and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed on him."

### 2: 12-20: 29. SIGNS FOR THE NATION

- B<sup>1</sup>** 2: 12-22. *The Second Sign*: The cleansing of the temple. The Jews: "What sign do you show us for doing this?" Jesus: "Destroy this temple (of my body) and in three days I will raise it up." The resurrection scripture [Ps. 16: 10 f.] referred to.
- C<sup>1</sup>** 4: 43-54. *The Third Sign*: Capernaum official's sick son, so nigh to death, revived. On learning it was at the very hour of Jesus' word, "Go thy way; thy son lives", spoken from afar, "that the fever let his son go", he himself and whole house believed.
- D<sup>1</sup>** 5: 1-18. *The Fourth Sign*: A 38 years' impotent man made to walk at the Pool of Bethesda on a sabbath, taking up his pallet. Jesus finds him for his warning: "Sin no more, lest worse befall thee." The Jews persecuted Jesus for acting on a sabbath. But he said, "Even until now my Father works, and I work".
- E<sup>1</sup>** 6: 1-14. *The Fifth Sign*: Five thousand men fed with five loaves and two fishes at Jesus' first descent from the mount, a symbol of redemption by blood at the First Advent (cf. 6: 33, 41, 51). Philip and Andrew doubted the sufficiency of what the lad had, but 12 baskets of fragments remained over. The people: "This is the prophet who is to come!"
- E<sup>II</sup>** 6: 15-24. *The Sixth Sign*: The walking on the sea to deliver the storm-tossed perishing disciples after the people's failure to take Jesus by force and make him king, a symbol of redemption by power at the Second Advent. ~~Jesus drawing near said: "Be not afraid: I Am" (cf. Ex. 3: 8-14)~~

When <sup>he</sup> ~~rie~~ was welcomed, the boat was <sup>at</sup> ~~was~~ once at the land.

D<sup>II</sup> 9: 1-38. *The Seventh Sign*: The beggar born blind given sight on being anointed and sent to wash at the Pool of Siloam, whence he returned seeing. The Jews, calling Jesus a sinner for having acted on the sabbath, reviled and cast out the man for saying that Jesus was a prophet and that never before was such a wonder seen. Jesus finds him and leads him to faith in Himself.

C<sup>II</sup> 11: 1-46. *The Eighth Sign*: Sick Lazarus, four days dead and buried, raised up after being let die in spite of sisters' appeal. They met him on the way to the tomb and said: "If you had been here my brother would not have died." Jesus to Martha thinking but of last-day resurrection said, "I am [now] the resurrection and the life". At the tomb He said: "Lazarus, come forth!" Then, "Loose him, and let him go!"

B<sup>II</sup> 20: 1-29. *The Ninth Sign*: Four evidences of the death and resurrection. (1) Mary Magdalene ran and told Peter and John of the empty tomb. When they ran thither, Peter arrived last, entered first and saw the linen cloths lying and head-napkin rolled up apart; then John entered, saw and believed. For as yet they knew not the resurrection scripture. (2) Jesus appears to Mary. (3) That night He appears to the disciples and shows them His hands and side; breathes on them (cf. Gen. 2: 7; Ezk. 37: 9, LXX) and says: "Receive ye holy spirit (new life and power)". (4) Eight days after He appears again to the disciples and bids Thomas (not present before): "Behold my hands and thrust thine in my side". Thomas: "My Lord and my God!"

20: 30 f. Conclusion as regards signs for the nation done in the disciples' presence, "that ye (Jews) may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and have life through his Name".

A<sup>II</sup>

#### 21: 1-24. A SIGN FOR THE DISCIPLES

a. 21: 1-14. *The Tenth Sign*: The miraculous draught of great fishes, Jesus intervening after the disciples, led by Peter, had toiled all night and caught nothing. The command "Bring (or 'bear'; cf. 2: 8) of the fish caught" revealed the greatness of the miracle. This was the third time Jesus was manifested to the disciples after His resurrection.

b. 21: 15-23. Two representative disciples following at the end. Peter, man of action, commissioned to lead in preaching the resurrection and, intervening about John, bidden: "Follow thou me; if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

c. 21: 24. This (the disciple whom Jesus loved) is the one who (in this Book) witnesses to and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true (say Ephesian elders or other disciples).

End of Book.

21: 25. Many other things did Jesus, which if all written, the world's books could not contain them.