

SIGNS, WONDERS, MIRACLES

PART I

HISTORY OF SIGNS, WONDERS, AND MIRACLES

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Signs, wonders, and miracles in Scripture have to do with two things: 1) *Israel*, and 2) *the kingdom*. And both *Israel* and *the kingdom* must be in view *at the same time* for signs, wonders and miracles to exist. If there is an absence of either one (either *Israel*, or *the kingdom*), signs, wonders, and miracles, as seen throughout the gospel accounts and the Book of Acts, *cannot* exist.

And, in order to properly understand the manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles in the New Testament, a person must have a correct foundation upon which to build. A person must begin in the Old Testament and trace the history of this supernatural work into the New Testament. Only then is he in a position to understand various, necessary things about this supernatural phenomena.

SIGNS, WONDERS, AND MIRACLES IN THE O. T.

Signs, wonders, and miracles, performed *through individuals*, were manifested only on *two occasions* in all of the Old Testament.

They were manifested by Moses and Aaron surrounding Israel's deliverance from Egypt, with a view to the nation's entrance into the land of Canaan; and they were manifested by Moses' successor, Joshua, surrounding Israel's subsequent entrance into the land of Canaan (Ex. 4:29-31; 7:10ff; Deut. 6:22, 23;

Joshua 3:7ff; 10:12-14).

That was the first occasion. The second was a manifestation by Elijah and his successor Elisha, some five hundred years later (I Kings 17:1ff; II Kings 2:13ff).

Outside of these two occasions there is not *a single reference* to an individual being empowered to perform signs, wonders, and miracles throughout all of the Old Testament Scriptures. Numerous miracles are recorded in these Scriptures (*e.g.*, the burning bush which was not consumed [Ex. 3:2], the sun being moved back ten degrees on the dial [Isa. 38:7, 8], the three Israelites being protected in the fiery furnace [Dan. 3:19-25], or Jonah being raised from the dead [Jonah 1:17-2:10]), but these were miraculous works performed *directly by God*, not by individuals whom God had empowered to perform them.

Note that the manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles during the days of Moses, Aaron, and Joshua was in relation to *Israel and the kingdom*. Supernatural manifestations of power occurred *relative to Israel being removed from Egypt and being established in the land of Canaan, within a theocracy*.

Thus, *a first-mention principle* was set forth at this point in Scripture, establishing an unchangeable pattern: Any future manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles of the nature seen at the time of the Exodus *must be brought to pass with Israel in view, and they must have to do with the kingdom*.

During the days of Elijah and Elisha the people of Israel had been established in the land, within a theocracy, for about five hundred years. But, because of continued disobedience on the part of the people, the theocracy never reached the heights which God had intended. The theocracy reached its greatest heights during the days of David and his son Solomon (though far from the heights which God had intended); but after that, following the division of the kingdom, things began to go in another direction entirely. And it was

during these days that Elijah was called forth (with Elisha finishing his ministry) to call the nation to repentance.

The manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles accompanying their ministry pertained to *Israel and the kingdom*. They had to, for a first-mention principle had previously been established; and any future manifestation had to be *exactly in accord* with the way matters were set forth at the beginning.

These signs, wonders, and miracles were simply *the credentials* of those manifesting them in Israel's presence. Through a manifestation of supernatural powers accompanying the message, Israel was to recognize that the messenger had been sent from God; and the people were to heed the message accordingly (Ex. 4:1-9, 29-31).

The people of Israel though failed to heed the message; the nation didn't repent. And the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities followed (722 B.C. and 605 B.C. respectively).

"The times of the Gentiles" began with the Babylonian captivity, has lasted to the present day, and will last until the end of the Tribulation. This is simply a prolonged, uninterrupted period of time — lasting about 2,600 years — during which Israel must dwell apart from a theocracy and remain scattered among the Gentile nations. And the Gentiles, among whom Israel dwells, will hold the sceptre throughout this time.

SIGNS, WONDERS, AND MIRACLES IN THE N. T.

After moving through 1,500 years of Jewish history and seeing signs, wonders, and miracles manifested at only two different points within that history, things suddenly changed. Israel's Messiah (following the ministry of His forerunner, John the Baptist) appeared with a message pertaining to the kingdom of the heavens; and this message was accompanied by numerous signs, wonders, and miracles (Matt. 4:17-25; 8:1ff).

Then, in conjunction with and very early in His ministry, Christ called twelve disciples to help carry this message; and they were empowered to perform signs, wonders, and miracles in connection with their ministry as well (Matt. 10:5-8).

(Also, Jesus later “appointed” seventy others to go “before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come” — though very little is said about them in the gospel accounts — and He empowered them to perform signs, wonders, and miracles as well [Luke 10:1-19].

Thus, at this time, there was a manifestation of supernatural signs in the camp of Israel *unlike anything* heretofore seen in the history of the nation.)

Christ had been sent *only* to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24), and Christ sent the disciples whom He called *to Israel alone* (Matt. 10:6). Both Christ and His disciples went to Israel with *the same message and the same accompanying manifestation of supernatural powers*. It was a message surrounding the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to the nation, attended by a manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles of an unprecedented nature.

Whether it was Jesus or His disciples proclaiming the proffered kingdom, signs, wonders, and miracles accompanied their ministry and formed the credentials of those carrying the message. These manifestations of power were *supernatural events which authenticated their message as being true and from God* (John 3:1, 2; Acts 2:22; cf. Ex. 4:1-9).

The religious leaders in Israel were to see these signs, wonders, and miracles and know, from these, that the Messengers were God-sent. Then, believing and understanding the message which they had heard, they were responsible for carrying it to the people of Israel (cf. Ex. 4:29-31; Num. 13:1-26).

However, exactly the opposite occurred.

The religious leaders *refused to believe* the message, *rejecting the accompanying signs*; and they, in their unbelief, then sought *to subvert the message and discredit the Messengers* in the presence of the Jewish people (Matt. 12:14-32; 23:13).

(This is why Christ, near the end of His earthly ministry, condemned the actions of the Scribes and Pharisees — the fundamental religious leaders of that day — in no uncertain terms [Matt. 23:1ff]. They *had heard* the true message, and they *had seen* the accompanying miraculous powers, authenticating the message; but they *had rejected* the message and had sought to do away with the accompanying supernatural powers, mainly through attacking the Messenger.

The Scribes and Pharisees had sought *to discredit the Messenger* in the eyes of the people, bringing about *reproach on the Messenger and casting doubt on His message* [e.g., Matt. 9:27-34; 12:22-24; cf. John 12:10, 11]. And, whether by word or deed, this resulted in their bearing a *false witness* to the people of Israel [Matt. 23:13].)

And all of this had its end result in Israel’s *rejection* of not only the message but the Messenger as well, *the removal* of the kingdom of the heavens from Israel, *the crucifixion* of Israel’s Messiah, and *the bringing into existence* of a separate and distinct entity to be the recipient of that which had been offered to and rejected by Israel. Israel failed to bring forth fruit in relation to the kingdom of the heavens, and the “one new man” *in Christ* was called into existence to be accorded the opportunity to bring forth fruit in this realm (Matt. 21:33-43).

But, though the kingdom was taken from Israel and the Church was called into existence to be the recipient of this offer, there was a reoffer of the kingdom to Israel. And, if for no other reason, this is evident because of *the*

continuance of signs, wonders, and miracles.

That would be to say, if God had terminated His dealings with Israel at or before the time that the Church was called into existence, signs, wonders, and miracles would have ceased to exist. These supernatural manifestations of power had nothing to do with the “one new man” *in Christ* (who is “neither Jew nor Greek” [Gal. 3:28]). They had to do with *Israel alone* (I Cor. 1:22), and they had to do with *Israel in relation to the kingdom*.

These were *supernatural works, manifested through empowered individuals as they carried the message to Israel* (Acts 2:4; 3:1ff; 4:29-33; 5:12ff; 6:8ff); and when Gentiles began to be added to the body of Christ, they were manifested within Churches comprised of saved Gentiles, such as the Church in Corinth (chs. 12-14). And a manifestation of supernatural works in the Church after this fashion was centered around the thought of *provoking Israel* “to jealousy” (Rom. 10:19; 11:11, 14). That is, God was using those whom Israel considered *Gentile dogs* to manifest supernatural powers which naturally belonged to Israel *in order to provoke the nation to jealousy*.

And, between a segment of the “one new man” *in Christ* carrying the message to Israel and another segment seeking to provoke the nation to jealousy — all being done through a manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles — the Jewish people were dealt with in what might be considered a *maximum manner*.

In one respect, God pulled out all stops (cf. Luke 10:13-24; 11:29-32); but the religious leaders in Israel would still have nothing to do with the message. Thus, the nation continued in unbelief.

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