

SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORD



by Bruce Woolard



WONDER 6: MIRACULOUS SIGNS

The miraculous has been God's method in Old and New Testament times to confirm His power and validate His servants as divine instruments and messengers. It cannot be denied that miraculous demonstrations abounded during our Lord's earthly ministry and the period covered by the book of Acts. Some hold that all true believers today do possess the miraculous powers of Pentecost, since our Lord, in His **"great commission,"** explicitly said: *"And these signs shall follow them that believe."* (**Mark 16:17,18**). Others believe that certain people are granted the power to work miracles, especially miracles of healing. However, God is not bestowing miraculous powers upon men today. If the "great commission" with its Pentecostal signs were indeed being carried out today, there would be no question about miracles, for saved and unsaved alike were compelled to acknowledge the mighty miracles of the Pentecostal era (**Acts 3:11, 4:14,16, etc.**).

As to alleged evidence of the supernatural powers of present day miracles, the Roman Church, the Unity movement, Christian Scientists, and others who claim healing powers can present "evidences" fully as convincing. Are their powers, then, also God-given?

MIRACLES AND SPIRITUALITY

The usual reason given for the absence of these powers is lack of faith and spirituality. If only we had the faith of the early believers, we are told; if only we were as spiritual as they, we too would possess these miraculous powers.

It is not denied that even the most consecrated believer falls far short of God's standard of spirituality, but this does not explain their inability to perform miracles. Such an argument would be answered by the case of the Corinthians alone. Paul called them 'unspiritual babes' (**I Cor. 3:1**) and sternly rebuked them for their carnality, for their "envying, and strife, and divisions" (**I Cor. 3:3**), for their immorality (**I Cor. 5:1**), for their dishonesty and oppression of each other (**I Cor. 6:7, 8**), for their unfaithfulness in giving (**I Cor. 9:11-14**), for their selfishness and pride (**I Cor. 11:21,22**) and exclaimed to them: "And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned!" (**I Cor. 5:2, cf. 4:18**). Yet this same Corinthian church, at this same time, abounded in miraculous gifts (**I Cor. 1:7, 12:8-11, 14:12,18,26**). The absence of these miraculous powers in the church today must, therefore, have another explanation.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIGNS

First the general fact should be noted that in Old Testament history, miraculous demonstrations prevailed in times of great crisis as, for example, in the cases of Moses and Aaron and of Elijah and Elisha.

Doubtless the call to Israel to repent, from the time of John the Baptist to Pentecost, and the presentation of Christ to Israel for her acceptance, was the greatest crisis in Israel's history up to that time.

Secondly, it had been predicted by the prophets that miracles would abound at the Messiah's coming (**Isaiah 35:5,6, etc.**). This is why we read in **Matt. 8:16,17**:

"When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND BORE OUR SICKNESSES.'"

This, also, is why Peter declared at Pentecost:

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know--"
Acts 2:22

Thus, Paul writes to the Romans that "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision ... to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (**Rom. 15:8**).

In the third place, we should remember that these miracles had a special significance in connection with the casting out of Satan, having been the prince of this world for so long (**John 12:31**), and the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."
1 John 3:8

Thus, in His attack on the kingdom of Satan, our Lord said:

"If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."
Matthew 12:26,28

In accordance with this, the Lord also commanded the seventy to declare in each city the significance of the miracles they performed there:

*"And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" **Luke 10:9***

In Acts it is the same, for this is what the Lord Jesus continued to do and to teach after His resurrection (**Acts 1:1,2**). The miracles of the Pentecostal era were wrought by the risen Christ, so that Peter, referring to one case, declared:

*"Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. (**Acts 4:10**)"*



And as Christ had been "approved of God" by miraculous signs, so we are told in **Hebrews 2:3,4** of the "great salvation" -

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, GOD ALSO BEARING WITNESS BOTH WITH SIGNS AND WONDERS, WITH VARIOUS MIRACLES, AND GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, ACCORDING TO HIS OWN WILL? (Hebrews 2:3-4)

And so God confirmed our Lord's Messiahship with mighty signs and wonders, both during His earthly ministry and after His ascension into heaven.

MIRACLES AMONG THE GENTILES

What, then, was the reason for the miraculous gifts among the Gentiles, especially under Paul's ministry? Even these were associated indirectly with the Messianic kingdom.

We must not forget that Paul, though entrusted with another commission and "the gospel of the grace of God," nevertheless confirmed Peter's message and proclaimed and proved to the Jews everywhere that "Jesus is the Christ," for the offer of the kingdom, made at Pentecost, was not officially withdrawn until **Acts 28:28**. Hence it is not strange to find these miraculous confirmations of Christ's kingdom rights continued until that time.

We must also remember the inspired declaration that "the Jews require a sign" (**I Cor. 1:22**). The way they could tell that the new programme was of God was that Paul had all "the signs of an apostle" (**II Cor. 12:11,12**) and the Gentile believers also possessed miraculous powers. Even before Paul went to the Gentiles, Peter was sent to the first Gentile household to witness the beginnings of the new programme. **Act 15:12, Acts 15:7, Acts 10:27**.

MIRACULOUS GIFTS WITHDRAWN

But with the setting aside of Israel there was no longer any need of this, and the latter epistles of Paul do not even recognize such gifts as being in order. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle made it clear that their miraculous powers were to be withdrawn:

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.
1 Corinthians 13:8

As to the healing miracles: those who were healed by the Lord and His followers would doubtless have entered into the kingdom and have gone on living, had the kingdom been established, but now that Israel rejected Christ and His reign, all those healed died. So, it was not because our Lord had failed that those, He healed did not remain alive and well; it was because the kingdom was refused and "this present evil age" settled down upon the world. **Acts 3:19-21** – Condition.

"For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body"

Romans 8:22,23

"For in this [tabernacle] we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven"

2 Corinthians 5:2

"Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day"

2 Corinthians 4:16

"There was given to me a thorn in the flesh ... lest I should be exalted above measure"

2 Corinthians 12:7

"And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling"

1 Corinthians 2:3

"Through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first"

Galatians 4:13

"Epaphroditus . . . was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him"

Philippians 2:25-27

"Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick"

2 Timothy 4:20

"Who is weak, and I am not weak?"

2 Corinthians 11: 29

"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities."

1 Timothy 5:23

In Paul's early letters there is abundant proof that the gift of healing was already being withdrawn.

TAKING PLEASURE IN INFIRMITIES

The gift of healing, then, was being withdrawn as Paul wrote his early epistles. God, however, was replacing it with something better, for we are

"Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3)

He assures us that God's grace is sufficient for us because we will find strength in God when we are at our weakest. Thus these afflictions become blessings in disguise and serve to draw us closer to God. This is why the Apostle Paul says the following in **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**:

DECEPTION

1 Tim. 4:1-2, 2 Thess. 2:9-12, Acts 20:27-31.

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