

SIGNS, WONDERS, MIRACLES

PART I

HISTORY OF SIGNS, WONDERS, AND MIRACLES

By Arlen L. Chitwood

The manifestation of *signs, wonders, and miracles* in Scripture is inseparably connected with two things:

- 1) *The Nation of Israel.*
- 2) *The Kingdom.*

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*), a manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles — as seen throughout parts of the Old Testament, the gospel accounts, and the Book of Acts — cannot exist.

In this respect, any purported appearance of signs, wonders, and miracles *apart from Israel and the kingdom being in view can only be false*, for such an appearance would be out of line with the reason for the existence of this supernatural phenomenon in Scripture.

And, in order to properly understand the manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles during time covered by the gospel accounts and the Book of Acts, 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* will he be in a position to understand various, necessary things about this supernatural phenomenon.

Signs, Wonders, and Miracles in the Old Testament

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 pertaining to 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, pertaining to 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 place of death in the sea [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 it 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 came anywhere close to reaching the heights which God had intended. The theocracy reached its greatest heights during the days of David and his son Solomon (though, again, 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, moving even farther away from that which God had commanded.

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, with the signs themselves, by their very nature, setting forth a message (like Christ using Jonah as a sign, which foreshadowed a miraculous deliverance of God's two firstborn Sons — Christ and Israel — from the place of death [cf. Matt. 12:38-40]).

Through a manifestation of supernatural powers accompanying the message, Israel was to recognize that the Messenger had been sent from God; and, accordingly, the people were to heed the combined message set forth by the manifested signs and that proclaimed by the messenger (Ex. 4:1-9, 29-31).

The people of Israel though failed to heed this 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 New Testament

After moving through almost 1,500 years of Jewish history and seeing signs, wonders, and miracles manifested during only two different periods by only five different men within these periods (by Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha), things suddenly

changed. *Israel's Messiah* (following the ministry of His forerunner, John the Baptist) appeared to Israel 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, Christ 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 had 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 pertaining to 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, by their very nature, set forth a message themselves; and these signs, as well, authenticated the message being proclaimed by the Messenger 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 understand not only the message set forth by the signs but that the Messengers were God-sent, carrying God's message for His people. Then, believing and understanding the message which they had both seen (through the signs) and heard (from the Messengers), they were responsible for carrying this message 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 both the signs and the Messengers*; and they, in their unbelief, then sought to *subvert the message and discredit the signs and the Messengers* in the presence of the Jewish people (Matt. 12:14-32).

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

The Scribes and Pharisees *had rejected the signs and had sought to discredit Christ 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.)

The Scribes and Pharisees, the main body of religious leaders in Israel, controlled, more than any other group (by their very numbers), the religious life of the nation. And these religious leaders had "shut up the kingdom of the heavens against men [*lit., '... in the presence of men' — i.e., among those in Israel*]" (Matt. 23:13). These religious leaders had no interest in entering the kingdom, and they were doing all within their power to prevent others from entering as well.

And all of this had its end result in Israel's *rejection* of both the message and the Messenger, *the removal* of the kingdom of the heavens from Israel, *the crucifixion* of Israel's Messiah, and *God bringing into existence* a separate and distinct entity to be the recipient of that which had been offered to and rejected by Israel. Israel had 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. 21:18, 19, 33-43; cf. I Peter 2:9-11).

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, beginning at the time of the inception of the Church (Acts 2:1ff). 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 relative to the kingdom of the heavens 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).

Then, when Gentiles began to be added to the body of Christ, they were manifested within Churches comprised mainly of saved Gentiles, such as the Church in Corinth (I Cor. 12-14). And a manifestation of supernatural works in the Church after this fashion could only have been 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.