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Signs, Miracles, & Wonders

Many people are under the impression that God has been throughout history continually engaging in performing the miraculous in and around humanity. While God is certainly engaged in the miraculous behind the scenes throughout history, His overt, visible miraculous manifestations have been few and far between. For example, I'm certain that God can and does miraculously heal people today—do not think I am denying that, I'm not--but I am equally as certain it is not done through faith healers in public displays. How does the Bible explain signs, miracles, and wonders? Are they something we should be expecting today? Let's begin by defining the terms sign, wonder, and miracle. There are other words used in this context such as work, mighty work, portent, proofs, and power, but we will look at these three.

σημεῖον (sign) 1. A sign or distinguishing mark whereby something is known; sign, token, or indication. 2. An event that is an indication or confirmation of intervention by transcendent powers; miracle or portent. According to this second definition, signs refer to miracles that reveal and have a divine purpose and bear witness of a person's claims. Signs are to point people to God.

It is obvious from the definition that context must rule when considering the meaning of the word sign; this word does not have to refer to the miraculous. For example, circumcision was the sign of the covenant; it was a promise to remember in the Jewish community. It signified one's membership in that covenant group of people; it had nothing to do with the miraculous.

Genesis 17:11 ¹¹“And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.

For Abraham personally, circumcision was a sign and seal of the righteousness he had prior to his circumcision, but it was still not a miraculous sign.

Romans 4:11 ¹¹and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised,

An example of the use of “sign” that highlights the divine purpose of a sign is when Jesus fed the 5,000 by multiplying five barley loaves and two fish.

John 6:14 ¹⁴Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

ση (oth) a sign, signal, mark, or miracle. It is used most often to describe awe-inspiring events.

Exodus 4:8 ⁸“If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign.

Δύναμις (miracle) 1. The potential for functioning in some way; power, might, strength, force, or capability. 2. The ability to carry out something; ability or capability. 3. A deed that exhibits ability to function powerfully; deed of power, miracle, or wonder. 4. Something that serves as an adjunct of power; resource. 5. An entity or being, whether human or transcendent, that functions in a remarkable manner; power. 6. The capacity to convey thought; meaning.

Obviously, this word has a wide range of meaning beyond just meaning a miracle. A miracle is defined by Unger as a supernatural manifestation of divine power in the external world, in itself a special revelation of the presence and power of God; they are manifestations of the power of God (Merrill F. Unger).

Τέρας (wonder) 1. Something that astounds because of transcendent association; prodigy, portent, omen, or wonder. Wonders attract attention and cause amazement.

מוֹפֶת (mopheth) a wonder, sign, portent, or token. It is often used to describe the display of God’s power. It is also translated miracle.

Exodus 11:9 ⁹Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not listen to you, so that My wonders will be multiplied in the land of Egypt.”

What is the purpose of signs, miracles, and wonders? They do have a definite purpose and Scripture clearly reveals that purpose. But first, let me suggest what these supernatural phenomena are not. They are not events to give us super spiritual experiences and to make us feel extra-spiritual and especially blessed by God. It is not about us. It is not about our feelings. It is not about our experiences. It is all about Jesus Christ. Therefore, the purpose is this: signs, miracles, and wonders serve to authenticate the messenger and his message and, further, the truly miraculous always points to God. So then the question may be asked, What differentiates the truly miraculous from the false miraculous? False miracles are still real, true miracles; they are false because they point to the wrong person, that is, they point to Satan and not to God. We will examine the doctrine of false miracles in more detail further on.

At the burning bush, Moses doubted God and God empowered Moses to have his staff turn into a snake and back to a staff, to turn his hand leprous and back, and to turn the water of the Nile into blood. During the course of those instructions, God specifically stated the purpose of those signs.

Exodus 4:5 ⁵“that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

The Bible is full of examples that define signs, miracles, and wonders. As we go through all these Scriptures note the purposes written for the signs.

Isaiah 38:7 ⁷“This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that He has spoken:

The sign was to be the assurance to King Hezekiah that the Lord would do what He said He was going to do. It was the miracle of the shadow going backwards on the staircase ten steps.

Jeremiah 44:29 ²⁹‘This will be the sign to you,’ declares the LORD, ‘that I am going to punish you in this place, so that you may know that My words will surely stand against you for harm.’

This was a prophecy against the people of Judah who disobeyed God and fled to Egypt after Judah fell to Babylon. The sign was confirmation that the Lord’s words were true and that the judgment He said was going to inflict upon them would indeed happen and it did.

Ezekiel 24:24; 27 ²⁴‘Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you; according to all that he has done you will do; when it comes, then you will know that I am the Lord GOD.’ ”... ²⁷‘On that day your mouth will be opened to him who escaped, and you will speak and be mute no longer. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.’ ”

Ezekiel’s lack of mourning over the death of his wife was to be sign to the early captives in Babylon that the Lord was going to carry out the destruction of Jerusalem.

John 20:30–31 ³⁰Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

The signs written in the gospel of John were for a purpose and that purpose was to authenticate that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. The signs are also meant to authenticate the Lord to all those who read the book but who never saw the Lord perform the signs and there were far more signs performed than are written down anyway. The purpose for signs, miracles, and wonders is not diminished by the passage of time. Jesus is just as authenticated as the Messiah today as He was when He performed the signs in the first place. We don’t need the signs; we need the Scriptures that tell us of the signs and that point to Jesus. All those who believed the message, then and now, through the signs that authenticated Jesus as the Messiah would be granted eternal life based on that belief.

Acts 2:22 ²²‘Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—

The Jewish people should have known who Jesus was because He was attested to by the signs and miracles and wonders that God performed among them and that the Jewish Scriptures clearly said would identify Him when He came. These people knew Jesus did miracles in their midst and that should have been sufficient authentication of who He was but they rejected Him. Therefore, we can safely assume that signs, miracles, and wonders, in and of themselves, do not cause anyone to believe. They point to the object of belief and they authenticate the truthfulness of that object of faith but they do not make anyone believe anything.

2 Corinthians 12:12 ¹²The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

The signs, miracles, and wonders performed by the apostles during the time of the early formation of the church marked them out as true apostles and authenticated their message; therefore, people should have believed.

Hebrews 2:4 ⁴God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

The author of Hebrews heard the truth from those people who actually heard the Lord, referring to the apostles, and the apostle's words were authenticated by signs, various miracles, and wonders.

An easily identifiable example of this authentication purpose is found in Luke 2 concerning the birth of the Lord in Bethlehem. An angel gave the shepherds a sign concerning the birth that would serve to authenticate the angel's message. After the sign was verified, the shepherds told other people.

Luke 2:11-12, 17 ¹¹for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²"This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."...¹⁷When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.

If the sign had not been verified or had been found to be false, then the whole episode would have been untrue and the shepherds should not have believed that this baby was Christ the Lord as the angels said He was.

The Scriptures clearly tell us that the Messiah would be identifiable by the signs He would perform. The Jewish people, especially the leadership, knew that, they should have been looking for it, and they should have recognized it when that prophesied Messiah was working those signs in their midst, but they didn't. They even acknowledged that great signs had happened but they still did not believe the message or the messenger the signs authenticated. Isaiah foretold these authenticating signs the Messiah would perform.

Isaiah 35:5–6 ⁵Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. ⁶Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy....

When John the Baptist wondered whether or not Jesus was the Promised One, Jesus sent him a message about His identity and Jesus quoted this Isaiah passage as proof that He was the Messiah.

Matthew 11:4–5 ⁴Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.

In effect, Jesus was telling John that He was doing the predicted miracles of the Messiah and those miracles authenticated the prophet Isaiah and His message and identified and authenticated Him, Jesus, as the fulfillment of those Messianic prophecies.

Throughout history and after the miraculous creation of all that exists in Genesis 1 & 2, there have been only four periods of particularly public manifestations of God's miracle working power. The first was with Moses and the Exodus. This occurred about 1300 B.C. or about 2,700 years after Genesis 1 and lasted for about 40 years. Obviously the flood and the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel occurred in this period and they were certainly miraculous events, but there was no period of concentrated miraculous activity during this 2,700 year period of time. There were other miraculous events in history such as Daniel in the lion's den, the three Jewish men in the furnace and the mental illness of Nebuchadnezzar, but no sustained periods of the miraculous outside of these four periods. Somewhat

over 400 years after Moses, the miraculous activities of the prophets Elijah and Elisha took place over a period of about 80 years. Once their ministry was finished, it was over 800 years before Christ Jesus began His public ministry and performed the miracles that authenticated His claim to be the Messiah. Upon Christ's death, the apostles continued their miraculous activity for only 60 years at the most. Since that time, we have had nearly 2,000 years without these intense periods of miraculous episodes. The Bible does inform us there will be one more period of miraculous activity that is yet to come and we will talk about that in a moment. The Bible also seems to indicate that the Millennial Kingdom will be a period of signs, miracles, and wonders for the entire reign of King Jesus but that is truth beyond what we will be able to explore today.

We are going to examine each of these five periods—the four historical periods and the one to come--in order to see that the miraculous activities of God did, or will, indeed authenticate the message, the messenger, and point to God just as intended.

When Moses and Aaron performed the signs before the Israelites, the Jewish people believed. The signs therefore accomplished their stated purpose.

Exodus 4:30–31 ³⁰and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. ³¹So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.

Not only were the signs performed to authenticate the message to the Israelites in Egypt, but they were to authenticate the message to the Israelites throughout their generations up to and including today and because they are recorded for our edification as well, they perform the same function for us. It is deadly to the Christian faith and to God's purposes for signs, miracles, and wonders to try to explain the miracles of Moses and the Exodus in naturalistic ways. People try to explain the miracles of Moses in terms of natural phenomena, but they were not! They were true God-given miracles. The miraculous events of Moses and Aaron in Egypt, because they are recorded in the Word of God, still serve to authenticate the messenger and his message and point to God today.

Exodus 10:1–2 ¹Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, ²and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.”

Through Moses, God clearly told Pharaoh that the purpose of the miraculous plagues was to prove God’s identity and power to that pagan, Egyptian king. The signs achieved their stated purpose of authenticating the message and the messenger, but authentication does not insure compliance and belief.

Exodus 9:13–16 ¹³Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. ¹⁴“For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. ¹⁵“For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. ¹⁶“But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.

Pharaoh completely understood that the signs were from God but he refused to heed them anyway. After the first miracle (water into blood), Pharaoh “didn’t even take this to heart” (Ex. 7:23) but after the second miracle (frogs) he began to understand that God was talking to him through Moses, Aaron, and the signs (Ex. 8:8). After the third plague (gnats), Pharaoh’s magicians believed the signs were the work of God (Ex. 8:19). After the fourth plague (flies), Pharaoh acknowledged God (Ex. 8:28). Some of Pharaoh’s officials believed the signs; they moved their livestock indoors to avoid the seventh plague (hail) (Ex. 9:20). After the hail, Pharaoh acknowledged his sin and he called God “the Righteous One” (Ex. 9:27-28). After the eighth plague (locusts), Pharaoh again acknowledged his sin (Ex. 10:16-17). After the tenth plague (death of the firstborn), Pharaoh allowed them to leave to “worship the Lord as you have asked” (Ex. 12:31).

The parting of the Red Sea was an amazing miracle that authenticated Moses as the Man of God and authenticated his message, “Let My people go,” and pointed the people to Almighty God, the God of the miraculous deliverance.

Exodus 14:13, 21-22, 29-31 ¹³But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever.... ²¹Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. ²²The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.... ²⁹But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ³⁰Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.

The signs, miracles, and wonders served their true purpose; they authenticated Moses and Aaron as prophets of God, they confirmed the message, “let My people go,” and they revealed God not only to Pharaoh, but to the Israelites, and to all the Egyptians both in the King’s court and throughout the land. The Bible confirms that Moses performed miraculous acts on behalf of the Lord in order to authenticate the Lord’s message to Pharaoh, to Egypt, and to the Israelites.

Exodus 7:3, 5 ³“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.... ⁵“The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.”

Deuteronomy 34:10–12 ¹⁰Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, ¹²and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

The miracles performed in Egypt and on into the Exodus not only authenticated the message and the messengers in Egypt, but they served the same function in Canaan. The signs identified Almighty God to the pagan Canaanites and they were terrified. Rahab confessed this truth to the spies in Jericho.

Joshua 2:8–13⁸Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof,⁹and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. ¹⁰“For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹“When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. ¹²“Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father’s household, and give me a pledge of truth, ¹³and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.”

Numbers 21:34³⁴But the LORD said to Moses, “Do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand, and all his people and his land; and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon.” [God’s defeat of Og referring to the miraculous defeat of Israel’s enemies to which Rahab referred].

Let’s examine Elijah and Elisha and consider whether or not the miracles of these prophets fulfilled their stated function of authenticating the message and the messenger and pointing to God. What was their message? Their message was worship God; turn from idolatry and if the Jewish people refused to repent, God was going to cast them into exile as punishment.

Elijah resuscitated a widow’s son. As a result, she recognized that Elijah was a man of God and that he was a truthful representative of the Lord.

1 Kings 17:21–24²¹Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD and said, “O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child’s life return to him.” ²²The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child

returned to him and he revived. ²³Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." ²⁴Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

On Mount Carmel, God miraculously burnt the prophet's sacrifice and showed the people that He was, in fact, the God of Israel and Elijah was His servant.

1 Kings 18:36–39 ³⁶At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. ³⁷"Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again." ³⁸Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God."

This is interesting because Elijah specifically prayed that the people would realize the miracle revealed God to be the God of Israel, that the people would turn their hearts back to Him, and that they would know that Elijah was a true prophet of God. The miracle served its stated purpose.

Elisha healed Naaman the captain of the Aramean army and as a result this pagan soldier believed in the God of Israel.

2 Kings 5:8, 10, 14-18 ⁸It happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent word to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." ... ¹⁰Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean." ... ¹⁴So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean. ¹⁵When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before

him, he said, “Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now.” ¹⁶But he said, “As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing.” And he urged him to take it, but he refused. ¹⁷Naaman said, “If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules’ load of earth; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. ¹⁸“In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter.”

The next period of miracles was during the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ message was the kingdom is at hand. He was offering the Jewish people of the nation of Israel the Messianic Kingdom and He was offering Himself as King. His miracles were performed to authenticate Himself and His message that He was the King. The Jewish people should have known these things from the Scriptures.

Mark 2:10–12 ¹⁰“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, ¹¹“I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.” ¹²And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”

The raising of Lazarus caused many people to believe.

John 11:45 ⁴⁵Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him.

The Jewish leadership knew full well the implications of the signs Jesus was doing in Israel and especially the sign of resuscitating Lazarus. They didn’t believe but they recognized the signs and their significance.

John 11:47–48 ⁴⁷Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸“If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

John 12:37 ³⁷But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.

Another miraculous resuscitation performed by Jesus also resulted in the authentication of Himself and His message.

Luke 7:11–17 ¹¹Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. ¹²Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. ¹³When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.” ¹⁴And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise!” ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. ¹⁶Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and, “God has visited His people!” ¹⁷This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

After the death of Christ, God continued to work signs, miracles, and wonders through the apostles. Their message was that Jew and Gentile together were being formed into the body of Christ.

Acts 2:6–8, 43 ⁶And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸“And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?... ⁴³Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

Acts 8:6–8, 12-13 ⁶The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. ⁷For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸So there was much rejoicing in that city.... ¹²But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. ¹³Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he

continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

God allows false teachers to perform signs, miracles, and wonders. It is commonly thought that such things are fakes and tricks and they might be but they don't have to be. The Bible lets us know the difference because it differentiates between magic and miracles. Unbelievers, as agents of Satan, can and will perform real miracles. The miracles of antichrist and the false prophet during the Tribulation will be real supernatural miracles. They are false miracles only in the sense they point to Satan and not to God and/or (either one) they are otherwise unscriptural. This twofold test is the only criteria to apply that will identify signs, miracles, and wonders as false. Do they point to God or to Satan? Are they in accordance with biblical truth or not? You must understand that God can and does use false miracles as a test of faith.

Deuteronomy 13:1–4 ¹“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ²and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ ³you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ⁴“You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.

There is biblical evidence that unbelieving pagan sorcerers can perform miraculous deeds. This is nothing new.

Exodus 7:11–12, 22 ¹¹Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. ¹²For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs....²²But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

There are limits beyond which the purveyors of false signs, miracles, and wonders are unable, or not allowed by God, to go.

Exodus 8:18–19¹⁸The magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast. ¹⁹Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

We know from Job 1 & 2 that Satan is allowed to exercise a certain amount of power in this world because God has given him the authority to do so but that God has set boundaries on the exercise of that power. Certainly, some of the things Satan brought against Job have to be classified as miraculous works.

Job 1:11–12¹¹“But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.” ¹²Then the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

Job 2:6⁶So the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”

This brings us to the fifth period of signs, miracles, and wonders and these will be performed by the antichrist and the false prophet during the Tribulation period.

2 Thessalonians 2:9–10⁹that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

Revelation 13:13–14¹³He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. ¹⁴And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.

Jesus said the miracles performed through the evil of Satan would be real miracles; therefore, who are we to argue with that? God will give Satan the authority to do these things and if God gives Satan the authority to perform supernatural miracles then we have to assume he can do them. It seems that

during the Tribulation Satan's authority to perform miraculous deeds will be almost unchecked.

Matthew 24:24 ²⁴“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

During the Tribulation, God will be testing mankind with all these miracles both those that are His and those that are Satan's. Through the Word of God, people should be able to tell the difference.

Revelation 3:10 ¹⁰“Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

It is important to note that these Satanic Tribulation signs point not to God but to the image of the beast and to Satan. There is a twofold problem here: people are deceived because they do not know the Word of God and they also willingly embrace the deception. Isn't it interesting how easily people will believe the lie and refuse the exact opposite which is the truth? People reject the true God in favor of this false god because they are willingly deceived and purposely rebellious against Him and isn't that just the way it has always been? Paul wrote the following words almost 2,000 years ago.

Romans 1:18–19 ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

Just as Israel was to exercise biblical discernment concerning the purveyor of signs, miracles, and wonders, so too is the Bible based Christian expected to test the Spirits. We are not to simply accept miracles at face value; our experiences can be deceiving. Everything, including the miraculous, must be held up to the scrutiny of the Word of God.

1 John 4:1 ¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Nothing is to be believed, not even the miraculous, if it contradicts or is otherwise not in accordance with the Word of God. Apart from the Word of God, we are totally susceptible to deceit and lies by means of our experiences.

The resurrection of the Lord may well be the greatest sign of all and Jesus will ultimately use this sign to point us to the Word of God. The resurrection was clearly meant to be a sign to the Jewish people.

Matthew 12:38–40 ³⁸Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” ³⁹But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; ⁴⁰for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

What we will see, however, from the very words of the Lord Himself is that all the signs, miracles, and wonders are useless if we don't know the Word of God. Even the sign of the resurrection is insufficient to convince people of the truth apart from the Word.

Luke 16:29–31 ²⁹“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰“But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ ³¹“But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

How often have you heard someone say, “If I could just see a miracle or see someone come back from the dead, I would believe?” No, they wouldn't. Apart from the Word of God they won't believe. Even the disciples did not believe after Mary Magdalene and another Mary told them Jesus had risen because they didn't believe the words of the Lord when He taught them these things.

Mark 16:11 ¹¹When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it.

Luke 24:11 ¹¹But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.

Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and people still refuse to believe.

After the resurrection and the miracles on the Day of Pentecost, the Jewish leaders acknowledged the great miracles that had been performed in their midst but they refused to submit to the authority of the God behind the signs.

Acts 4:16 ¹⁶saying, “What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.

Why didn't Jesus present Himself to the Jewish leaders and to the people after His resurrection by appearing to them in the Temple and other very public places? He could have marched right up to the High Priest and shown him the marks of His crucifixion, but He didn't go there. He could have said, “Look! Look at the wounds in My wrists and in My side and on My heels! You killed Me and you buried Me but I have come back to life and I live forevermore. I have conquered death, hell, sin, and the grave. I am your King. I am your Messiah. Believe in Me!” He could have said that; He could have done that, but He didn't. Why not? It was because they were not willing to believe the Law and Prophets; therefore, Jesus knew they would not believe even though He had risen from the dead and even if He had appeared in their midst they would not have believed because they didn't believe the Scriptures. And still today, people do not believe even though Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead because they don't believe the Word of God. It is through the Word of God that people come to faith.

Romans 10:17 ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Along the same lines, Why did Jesus prevent the two disciples from recognizing Him on the road to Emmaus? He was hidden from them, from two people who should have known Him, because they didn't know the Word and as a result they didn't understand all that had happened. The Lord rebuked them for not knowing the Scriptures. They should have understood it all but they understood nothing. He hid His identity from them until they understood the Scriptures.

Luke 24:16, 25-27, 32 ¹⁶But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.... ²⁵And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶“Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.... ³²They said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”

The key for us today is not signs, miracles, and wonders; the key for us today is the Word of God. Jesus is telling us that it is not about the miraculous in this age; it is about glorifying Him with our knowledge and use of the Word of God which clearly reveals Him and authenticates Him to be the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Certainly, God can do miracles anytime He chooses to do so but we have seen that He chooses to do visible, public displays of His miraculous powers in only a few circumstances throughout history using only a few people some of whom are, or will be, deceivers and false prophets and false teachers, wolves in sheep's clothing. Today we are guided by the providence of God and by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit as He guides us into understanding the Word of God. The providence of God is a separate issue from the miraculous works of God. For example, if you have a divine appointment anytime anywhere to meet a person to tell them about Christ Jesus, God will insure you make that divine appointment and what you tell them will be based on the Scriptures as they are illuminated and brought to mind by the Spirit. These things won't be evident at the time, you probably won't realize you are being led to a Spirit directed appointment; they will just happen, but we can often look back and say, “Wow that was a God thing that happened there.”

Proverbs 1:23 ²³“Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

This Scripture is a clear indication that a major ministry of the Holy Spirit is to illuminate the Scriptures, that is, to make them known to the inquiring believer. Please understand, however, that you have to be an inquiring believer. The Holy Spirit won't just give you the understanding of the Scriptures apart from serious study and the leadership of godly, knowledgeable pastors and teachers. Your responsibility is to know the

Scriptures well enough that the Holy Spirit has something to work with in His ministry of illumination. If you don't know the Bible, there is nothing for the Holy Spirit to illuminate. After the convicting ministry of sin and the Spirit baptizing ministry of placing a believer into the body of Christ, illuminating the Scriptures to believers seems to be the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit in this dispensation. The Holy Spirit applies the Word of God to our minds and guides our thinking into conformity with that Word so that we are transformed in thought and in deed and empowered to act and glorify the Lord. The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit is not to bring about a public display of the miraculous; it is to illuminate the truth of the Scriptures to us. As Christ clearly revealed to us in Luke chapters 16 and 24, He expects us to know the Scriptures. It is our responsibility and it is our duty.

But please do not fear or be discouraged if you don't know the Scriptures well at this time; we all start out knowing nothing. Twenty years ago I did not know the beginning of the Bible from the end of the Bible—but I do now. You can do that the same thing. Submit yourself to study so that you may learn and grow. It takes time and it takes diligence. It doesn't happen overnight but it is never too late to get started. In this assembly, you have a man of God, a pastor-teacher, who stands in this pulpit every Sunday morning and every Wednesday evening and who exegetes the Scriptures exceptionally well; sit at his feet and learn from him. Be here! Listen to his lessons on the computer. Take advantage of the opportunity you have to absorb his knowledge, to learn from him, and to understand the Word of God rightly divided.

It is also well for us to remember that Satan masquerades as an angel of light. Satan is an expert at placing false teachers into the pulpits of our churches.

2 Corinthians 11:14 ¹⁴No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

If Satan can use false teachers to divert attention from the Word of God with phony signs, miracles, and wonders, then he has accomplished his purpose; he has diverted attention away from God and to himself. Sadly, it is Satan's greatest victory that he has been so successful in attacking, undermining, and destroying the Word of God in the minds of so many people. If he can place people in pulpits and in church classrooms and in Bible colleges and in

seminaries who emphasize the miraculous rather than the Scriptural, Satan has won the battle in that place. The Lord emphasized the Word of God. It is the Word that brings us absolute truth and it is the Word that reveals Him to us. Isn't that where our focus should be?

It wasn't too many years ago, and it still exists, that within Christian charismatic circles there began a signs and wonders movement. Given what the Word of God has revealed to us here today, is such a thing even biblical? Are we to be constantly on the lookout for the miraculous? Are we to be actively seeking such things? Or are we to be immersed in the Word of God? Are we to just go about our daily lives observing the world around us being alert to opportunities to glorify the Lord and to tell people about Jesus Christ? If we are seeking such opportunities, the providence of God will see to it that they come about and our knowledge of the Word will shine forth. I want you to know that as Christians it is our solemn obligation and duty to know the Word, but to know it rightly divided because false doctrine is useless and leads us away from the truth and away from God. It is our obligation to study the Word and to teach the Word, fathers, especially to your children (you must know the Word well enough to lead and teach your family). And it is our privilege to live the Word. The Word of God is our infallible guide to living the Christian life and to serving and glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not signs, miracles, and wonders that are to be given the place of priority; it is not super spiritual experiences that we are to seek; but it is the infallible, inerrant, revelatory Word of God that is to be front and center in our walk with and for the Lord Jesus Christ.

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