

No. 1, Miracle & Revelation

THE DEFINITION OF THE WORD MIRACLE

In the N.T., the Holy Spirit employs two main Greek words with respect to the miraculous acts of God. One of these words is *dunamis*. It is used 120 times in the N.T., and is translated in various ways -- *power, mighty work, strength, might, mighty, virtue* and then, of course, *miracle*. In 77 of its occurrences, it is translated "power", thus revealing its basic significance when translated *miracle* -- the word signifies the power or ability by which miracles were wrought, especially indicating that the power was divine not human in origin.

The other word for "miracle" is *semeion*, used 77 times in the N.T. It is translated *miracle* 23 times, but in the majority of instances, it is translated *sign*. Thus, a miracle is a sign in the sense that it is a token of the authority by which the miracle is wrought -- divine authority. Thus, when we combine the significance of these two main words for "miracle" in the N.T., we may define a miracle as a supernatural act wrought by the power of God and signifying the authority of God.

THE PURPOSE OF THE MIRACLE

It is vital that we get to this point at once, for a true understanding of the purpose of the miracle will go a long way to destroy the empty claims made by so many with regard to claims concerning "miracles" so-called. Thus, at this juncture we wish to try to establish why God ever employed miracles. He certainly did, as Scripture shows, but we must be clear on the purpose for His doing so.

To put it succinctly -- God's purpose in the use of the miracle was that of *revelation*. Therefore, the miracle was not an end in itself, it was not an arbitrary use of divine power, nor was it for the purpose of dazzling people and merely filling them with wonder -- though often they were filled with wonder and amazement. Rather, by means of the miracle, there was the imparting of *revelation* or *knowledge* -- this is the true & basic purpose of the miracle. See John 3: 2 -- Nicodemus uses the word *semeion*; he refers to the plurality of miracles that Christ had wrought in Jerusalem, see ch. 2: 23; but the vital point to note is that to Nicodemus, the miracles conveyed revelation or knowledge -- in this instance that Christ had come from God and that God was with Him. Thus, the foundational reason or purpose of the miracle was to bring revelation & give knowledge.

THE NATURE OF THE REVELATION TO WHICH THE MIRACLE BELONGS

The word "revelation" has a double sense or usage in the field of Biblical or theological study. It is used of Christ's second coming. See 2 Thess 1: 7 where Paul informs us that one day Christ will be "*revealed from heaven*." The Greek word for *revealed* has the basic sense of unveiling what has been unseen or hidden, in this case the glorified and exalted Christ.

On the other hand, the word "revealed" signifies the knowledge that God gives to His creatures, especially His self-disclosure or self-revelation, which includes the revelation of the way of salvation. See 1 Cor 2: 10 where the word *revealed* is essentially the same word as in 2 Thess 1: 7, but in this case it is used with respect to the revelation of knowledge or truth. As we will discover, it is to this realm of the giving or disclosure of knowledge by God to His creatures that the miracle actually belongs.

TWO KINDS OF REVELATION

As we have just noted, the "miracle" in Scripture belongs to the realm of God's self-disclosure or self-revelation. However, in discussing the subject of the disclosure of knowledge by God, we find that there are two types of revelation:

(a) General or Natural Revelation -- God has revealed Himself in the works of creation, thus the expression *natural revelation*, a revelation that was first made to Adam before the fall. It is also called *general revelation* because this revelation of Him in nature is accessible to all men without distinction or exception, Acts 14: 17 in which the word *witness* refers to the disclosure of knowledge and is used of natural creation. See also Psalms 19: 1, which shows that *natural revelation* is still operative. However, the blinded mind of fallen man is incapable of perceiving and interpreting that revelation.

See Rom 1: 20, which is an important verse with regard to natural creation. The clear sense of this text is that the revelation or self-disclosure that God gave in creation could be interpreted & understood. As far as unfallen man is concerned, Adam had the power to see and interpret the natural revelation aright. However, by his own sin, fallen man has blinded himself, has deprived himself of the ability to understand the book of nature so that he cannot come to know God -- and, of course, man is responsible for this situation, in that he has wilfully & deliberately "put out his own eyes" by his disobedience. Therefore, he is without excuse and his sin must be judged.

Moreover, natural revelation had nothing to say to man before the fall about salvation *for he did not need it*. Therefore, natural revelation still has nothing to say about salvation, thus it is inadequate to lead a sinner to a saving knowledge of God. Note again that this inadequacy does not stem from any deficiency in natural revelation. It was perfect for its God-ordained purpose for man in his unfallen state. However, its inadequacy arises from the fact that man because of sin occupies a different position, and has very different needs, from unfallen Adam. Due to sin, fallen man's position and needs are altogether different from Adam's. Thus, if man is to be saved the Lord must intervene to disclose that way of salvation to him.

(b) Special Revelation -- it is called "special" in the sense that if man is to be saved, a special revelation is necessary in order to bring to sinners the message of grace that he needs. As noted, general revelation has no reference to redemption or salvation, but special revelation does. Special revelation is the revelation by God of His redemptive purposes for sinful & fallen men, and it is within the framework of this special revelation that the miracle is to be discussed and understood. Special revelation comprises the Scriptures of truth, and the miracle was involved in the giving of this special revelation. See Heb 1: 1-3 -- this is a clear reference to the giving of the Scriptures, both the Old & New Testaments, the theme of which is redemption through Christ. Now see Heb 2: 3, 4 where the Apostle, still referring to this special revelation, clearly mentions "*signs and wonders, and...divers miracles...*" as God's means of verifying that special revelation. We will look at these matters in more detail in our next study, God willing.