

No. 4. *The Occurrence of the Miracle in Scripture*

In our studies thus far on this subject of *The Miracle in Scripture*, we have established that the miraculous events as recorded in the Word of God belong to the realm of special revelation. In Scripture, along with *theophany* & *prophecy*, the *miracle* was a mode by which the Lord gave His special revelation to men. That special revelation became necessary due to the Fall and the consequent inability of man to interpret and understand *natural* or *general revelation*. Moreover, since *natural revelation* had been originally presented to man before the Fall, it did not address him as a sinner, thus it did not contain the redemptive message that man needed after the Fall if he were to be saved. Thus, for this reason also, if sinful men were to be delivered from sin, a special revelation became necessary, a necessity graciously met by God in the unfolding of redemptive truth and comprised within the Scriptures of the Old & New Testaments.

As already noted, the giving of that special revelation was through these three modes of theophany, prophecy and miracle. Therefore, we must always view the miracle in Scripture from that perspective of being one of the means by which God revealed to sinners His great purpose of covenant redemption. This fact is foundational to any correct understanding of the miracle in Scripture, a fact that will guide us our own minds in dealing with the subject and will serve to guard us against error in this realm.

THE OCCURRENCE OF THE MIRACLE IN SCRIPTURE

At the outset of considering this point, I would suggest to you that it would be helpful to consider again the nature of a miracle. The Hebrew & Greek words for *miracle* indicate that a miracle was a supernatural act wrought by the power of God, signifying the authority of God. Thus, it is correct to see the miracle in Scripture associated with divine power.

However, because of its association with the power of God, sometimes we all use the word *miracle* loosely as a synonym for God's power. For example, divine power is constantly effected in creation, Col 1: 17, Heb 1: 3. In the realm of nature, we see the evidence of divine power -- the production of crops, the birth of a child etc. Thus, we speak of the 'miracle of springtime' or 'the miracle of birth'. Such observations are acceptable with respect to poetic language, for these events are the results of the operation of God's power. However, strictly speaking, they are not miracles in the Biblical sense but are His providential acts. Birth, springtime, harvest -- these events are truly the effects of God's power, but to be accurate we must refer to them as acts of providence rather than miracle.

Thus, to put it precisely, a Biblical miracle was an uncommon act of divine power in the physical realm in which the ordinary laws of nature were suspended. For example, Christ with a word calmed the storm. Ordinarily, that storm would have ended by the violent movements of the elements gradually subsiding to a calm. However, on that occasion the Lord set aside His ordinary natural laws and ended the storm abruptly.

In relation to this point, it is not correct to say that divine miracles were *violations* of natural laws. Though in many features, the miraculous act of God was above & beyond the forces that He ordinarily employed, yet the miracle was not in conflict with normal providential power. A miracle simply marked an interruption of God's normal pattern of operating by employing the extraordinary act.

However, to come to this point -- how frequent was the occurrence of the Biblical miracle? Many make the claim that "*the Bible is full of miracles...*" the purpose of such a claim being that of seeking support for their own acclaimed miracles. Thus, the occurrence of miracles in the Scripture is worthy of study to determine whether the above claim is correct. The outcome of such a study is surprising.

1. There are about 165 specific miracles recorded in Scripture.

The number varies since some people refer to certain events as miracles, while others do not make the same judgment. Thus, it is safe to say that there are less than 200 others in all of Scripture but how irresponsible to state that there are innumerable miracles in the Bible. The situation is that it is more accurate to say that there are *relatively few miracles* in the Biblical account.

2. This relatively small number of miracles occurred over a long period.

The first recorded miracles in Scripture occurred in the days of Moses, the last being found in the times of Christ and the Apostles, a period of 1,400 years. Thus, over a protracted span of fourteen centuries less than two hundred miracles occurred. Moreover, they were not evenly spaced out but took place in concentrated outbursts at specific times. They were often centuries apart, with long periods when not one miracle took place.

3. Scripture records seven main periods of miraculous activity.

Miracles occurred in the days of *Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Elijah/Elisha, Daniel, Christ, and the Apostles after Pentecost*. Apart from these seven seasons, the Scripture is silent on the occurrence of the miraculous. Some may assert that there would have been other miracles at other times, though not recorded in Scripture. However, my response is that since the miracle was mode of special revelation then all such miracles would have been recorded in the Scripture. Consequently, the silence of Scripture with respect to any miracles in addition to those recorded indicates that there weren't any. Only those recorded ever took place.

Some might point to John 20: 30, 31 -- John tells us there were many other signs or miracles performed by Christ not recorded "in this book." Does this reference lend any support to the contention that miracles were occurring all the time but were not recorded in "this book"? Some say it does give such support, contending that "this book" refers to the whole canon of Scripture. However, this contention is wrong for a number of reasons.

First, the canon of Scripture was not yet complete, thus John writes of his own Gospel. Second, in the Gospel of John there are only eight miracles recorded. However, in the other Gospels there is the record of the "many other signs" that Christ performed. John does not record them, so the natural conclusion is that he refers to them in this statement not to other miracles never recorded in any of the Gospels.

In the third place, while the word "signs" can refer to miracles, is it used in that sense here? The answer to that question is gained by noting that the word for *signs* also means *mark* or *signal*. Thus, the word "sign", even in the sense of a

miracle, indicates the concept of providing evidence or token. In addition, the context here in John 20 should be noted -- the immediate context is that of Christ proving to his disciples that He was truly risen by giving them signs, tokens, evidence, to that end, v.v. 20, 25, 27. Thus, I am suggesting to you that it is to these signs that He was risen that John refers in v. 30.

In this connection, note also the pertinent words -- "*many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples.*" The signs referred to were given in the presence of the disciples only, while His signs in the sense of miracles were wrought before the public in general. Moreover, there were many other signs of His resurrection given by Christ to His disciples only, not recorded by John. This fact would serve to verify that the reference here to "signs" is to the evidences that He had truly risen from the dead. Consequently, this verse cannot be used to sustain the notion that there were many other miracles performed in Bible times though they are not recorded.

Thus, we conclude that the occurrence of miracles in Bible times was confined to those that are actually recorded for us in the periods listed; and that they must be regarded as belonging to the realm of special revelation.

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