

No. 9, The Ministry of the Apostles

It has been my objective in these studies to show that the miracles that are recorded in the Scriptures were not mere isolated events that took place without any connection with the great work of God in revealing Himself to men. Very obviously, as we have noted, Biblical miracles were one of the means or modes by which God revealed Himself.

Therefore, we have come to see that there is a framework within which we may answer the question as to whether miracles in the Biblical sense actually continue. The framework is this: miracles recorded in Scripture were wrought as a mode of God's revelation of Himself to men; therefore, if that revelation is complete or finished, then the Biblical miracle has ceased – there is no further need for the miracle. The point is in fact, that Scripture by stressing its own absolute sufficiency testifies clearly that special revelation has ceased. In doing so, it also underlines that the Biblical miracle has ceased as well.

The *Sufficiency of Scripture* is, therefore, a most important feature of the entire Doctrine of Scripture, a point recognised & underlined by our Protestant & Reformed forefathers. They drew their support for the sufficiency of Scripture right from the N.T. itself, where, in many passages, it is revealed that all that the Church requires for faith & practice is set forth in the Scriptures. Moreover, we have noted that in Christ Himself, we have the epitome of supernatural and divine revelation. Christ is God's final word to men, thus nothing by way of revelation is to be expected after Christ. Indeed, no greater revelation could even be found than that which revolves around the person & work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, the importance of these facts with regard to the Biblical miracle is clear – since the miracle in Scripture was a mode of divine & special revelation and such revelation has ceased with Christ, then the Biblical miracle has also ceased.

Before we proceed in this study on the general subject of *The Miracle in Scripture* it is necessary to say a word about the ministry of the Apostles. If Christ is God's final word & in Him supernatural revelation comes to a close, how do we account for the place of the Apostles whose ministries continued on for some time after Christ ascended to heaven? I am sure that you will see the relevance of dealing with the apostolic ministry. The Apostles were miracle-working men, men through whom special revelation was given, so how can we say that Christ was God's final word? Let us consider this matter of the ministry of the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. THEIR MINISTRY WAS AN EXTENSION OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

The ministry of the apostles was but the extension of the ministry of Christ. Therefore, the truths they taught and the miracles they wrought were the same in nature as seen in the ministry of Christ.

Acts 1: 1-4 – the narrative speaks of what Christ “began to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up.” The inference is that what He began to do & teach was carried on by others; i.e., the Apostles. Hence, note how the Scriptures essentially proceed here to speak of the apostolic ministry as being the continuation of the ministry of Christ.

(a) They were commissioned – v.2 refers to the commandments that Christ gave to the Apostles. These were their “marching orders”; their being commissioned to carry on the work that Christ commenced – thus, their ministry was an extension of His. Cf. Mark 16: 19, 20 where we are told specifically that when the disciples went forth the Lord worked with them. Their labour was in His name, for His sake, was a promotion & extension of His ministry.

(b) They were convinced – v.3 refers to the “many infallible proofs” that He was alive; see 1 Cor 15: 5-8, verses which refer to a number of times when Christ appeared to the disciples after the resurrection. These were some of those *infallible proofs* and undoubtedly there were others of which we are not told. By this means the Apostles were convinced of the reality of the resurrection in order to the pursuit of the ministry Christ gave them – they could only pursue that work when convinced that the Christ they represented was alive. Note in the book of Acts the constant emphasis on the risen Christ & the witness that He was extending His ministry through the Apostles – Acts 2: 32-36; Acts 4: 33.

(c) They were clothed – i.e., clothed with the power of the Spirit, v.4, for the great work of carrying on the ministry of Christ. This was the baptism of the Spirit, v.5; their reception of power, v.8, in order to be witnesses unto Christ and extend His ministry to the uttermost parts of the earth.

II. THE OTHER MAIN WORK OF THE APOSTLES WAS TO INSCRIPTURATE THE NEW TESTAMENT

I referred in a previous study to this aspect of apostolic ministry – writing Scripture. Not all of the Apostles wrote New Testament Scripture. However, the point is that the N.T. was written either by men who were apostles – Matthew, John, Paul, Peter, James, Jude; or by men who were contemporaries & intimately associated with the apostles – Mark, Luke. Such a qualification has most certainly never belonged to any person after apostolic times.

Thus, the writing of the N.T. was in a very real sense the great work of the apostolate, a vital fact with respect to the nature of the ministry of the Apostles: they were given the solemn task of leaving with the Church an inspired and infallible record of the person & work of Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant. Note how the N.T. record opens, Matt 1: 1 – the words “*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ...*” are certainly a reference to the genealogy given here by Matthew. But surely they point to what the N.T. is all about – it is the record of the person & work of Christ. To produce such a record was the magnum opus of the school of the Apostles.

(a) They were given the Spirit to do so – see 2 Pet 1: 21 where the words “*in old time...*” may also be read “at any time.” Thus, the Apostles are included in this assertion by Peter that the Scripture is given by the Spirit's inspiration and is not of any private origin, which is the sense of v.20. Cf. 2 Tim 3: 15. Thus, the penmen of Scripture were given words by the Spirit; they were infallibly guided in the choice of the words, 1 Cor 2: 13.

(b) The content of the N.T. is the mind of Christ – see John 14: 26. This promise was specifically given to the Apostles – the promise of the Spirit, the Comforter. We certainly know that when the Spirit came He brought blessing to all believers, both then and since. But in a particular way he was sent for the benefit of the Apostles. Note from v.v. 16, 17 that He is named “*the Spirit of truth...*” a title that signifies one great purpose of His descent – to inspire truth and move the Apostles to write it. V.26 then is a direct promise to the Apostles. The Holy Spirit was given to the Apostles to “teach you all things.” This is a reference to revelation that Christ would have His apostles bring to the church at that time not known to the apostles. Then He would also “bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” The point is clear – the N.T. is the record of what Christ taught the apostles when with them and further revelation that He wished them to present to the Church.

(c) The N.T. Scriptures were marked by infallibility. See 2 Pet 1: 16-19 – in these verses Peter asserts that while he & the other apostles were eye-witnesses of Christ in the glory of His transfiguration, yet the Scripture was more sure, v.19; and to it people should take heed for it is infallible, final, & authoritative. Note 2 Pet 3: 1, 2 – Peter puts the N.T. on the same level as the Old.